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## SHAKESPEARE'S IMPLICIT STAGE DIRECTIONS IN POLISH TRANSLATIONS OF *HAMLET*

Richard Flatter, Shakespeare scholar and translator into German at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was one of the first to draw more attention to theatrical aspects of Shakespeare's plays. In his by now classic book, *Shakespeare's Producing Hand. A Study of His Marks of Expression to be Found in the First Folio* (1948), Flatter presents numerous problems he has encountered as translator of texts written by Shakespeare to be performed. He perceives pauses, metrical gaps, irregular stresses, simultaneousness, line-division, and other peculiarities of diction as *stage-directions, wrought into the text itself* (1948:10). As an introduction let us look at a simple example from Flatter's book. When Ophelia comes to Polonius to tell him about Hamlet's frightening visit in her closet, she concludes her hasty report with a line in the middle of which one stressed syllable is missing:

*My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,  
Lord Hamlet with his doublet all unbraced,  
No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,  
Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle,  
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,  
And with a look so piteous in purport  
As if he had been loosed out of hell  
To speak of horrors – he comes before me. (II. i. 80–82)<sup>1</sup>*

The metrical gap is an implied stage direction because, being open to theatrical realisation, it marks the place which is crucial in the performance of this speech. The delayed explanation of Ophelia's fright contributes to the emotional force of the passage when, typically of a fear-stricken person, she first

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted after *Hamlet Prince of Denmark*, P. Edwards (ed.), The New Cambridge Shakespeare, 1997. The Folio has a colon instead of a dash in the incomplete line.

reports in detail on what she has seen and only then explains what actually happened.

The purpose of this paper is to observe how Shakespeare's implicit stage directions are modified in translation and what effect it has on theatrical potential of his dramatic texts. In order to do this a contrastive textual analysis is presented of passages from *Hamlet* and their Polish renderings by Stanisław Barańczak, Maciej Słomczyński, Jarosław Iwazkiewicz and Roman Brandstaetter.<sup>2</sup> The ontological status of drama as a work of art involves duality: drama belongs as well to literature, as to theatre. This duality makes translation of dramatic texts a substantially different activity than prose or poetry translation, an activity that requires methods and approaches which consider the fact that, in any dramatic text, verbal elements imply information about non-verbal ones (Link 1980:24–25). A method of analysing the theatrical dimension of plays, on which the textual analysis in this paper is based, is called by Brown (1996:vii-viii) *theatrically conscious reading*. This kind of reading leads to understanding *how writing for performance governed what Shakespeare wrote*.

### **Unity of speech and action in drama translation**

In the light of the coexistence of verbal and non-verbal elements in a play, what is drama translation? As dramatic dialogue becomes an active element of the theatrical realisation, drama translation does not aim at *creating a chain of equivalent items but at creating a dramatic unity of action and speech*<sup>3</sup> (Snell-Hornby 1984:113). The unity of speech and action has been variously defined in theoretical studies on drama translation. Bassnett (1991;1998) uses the term *gestic text* based on the concept of subtext developed by Stanisławski (1954:87). Subtext, or the inner, indirect level of drama, is to be decoded from the playtext by the actors developing their roles and realised in performance. The non-verbal structure of gestic text cannot be similarly decoded by the translator from the source text and encoded again in the target text. While actors present an interpretation, an act of completing the dramatic text by theatrical elements, translation must render the dramatic text with all its incompleteness. Therefore, Bassnett (1991:111) concludes that translation does not require looking for gestic text, but involves *close engagement with the text on page and the need to find solutions for a series of problems that are primarily linguistic ones*.

Pavis (1989:36) discusses the unity of speech and action in terms of his *verbe-corps* concept. He starts from the premise that every act of enunciation is

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<sup>2</sup> The translators' initials will be used further in the paper.

<sup>3</sup> Translation mine.

connected in a given culture with a range of its gestic and vocal realisations. The *verbe-corps* is defined as a culture-specific union between language and gesture. Pavis perceives translation of dramatic texts as recreating the *verbe-corps* inscribed in the source text by the culture of the given time and place and confronting it with the *verbe-corps* of the target culture. Theatre translation *involves the transfer of a culture, which is inscribed as much in words as in gestures* (Pavis 1989:41–42).

The model of theatrical potential of the dramatic text formulated by Totzeva (1995;1999) defines the speech/action relationship as:

*[...] the capacity of a dramatic text to generate and involve different theatrical signs and demonstrates how the various structural characteristics of a dramatic text stimulate and regulate the integration of theatrical signs* (Totzeva 1999:82).

Theatrical potential involves a number of factors that result form the duality of the dramatic text, such as complex contextualisation, coexistence of interior and exterior communication, the specific dramatic economy of speech, the relation between oral and written language, and the relation between main text and stage directions.

### **Main text and stage directions**

The relation between main text and stage directions is different across centuries, dramatic and theatrical conventions, and the work of various playwrights. Reduced stage directions, characteristic to Shakespearean drama, shift the burden of generating meaning entirely or almost entirely to the main text (Totzeva 1995:155). According to Totzeva's model, such dramatic texts have particularly high theatrical potential as the implicit non-verbal signs are quite precisely determined by the main text without being made explicit.

The proportion between implicit and explicit stage directions in all Shakespeare's plays has been estimated as nearly three thousand to three hundred respectively (Smith 1953:311). A theatrically conscious reader of Shakespeare must learn to recognise and interpret the *hidden imperatives of the dialogue*, as Pasternak-Slater (1982:1) calls the implicit stage directions. It is supposed that the convention of including in the main text information about stage movement, properties, figures' appearance, face expression or gesture has its source in the construction of the Elizabethan theatre and the arrangement of its stage. Smith (1953:311) claims that they are *descriptions for those spectators who could not be expected at the moment to see clearly the action on the stage of the Elizabethan public playhouse*. What was then a simple technical necessity is today an integrated part of the texts we inherited as Shakespeare's plays and part of what appeals to modern recipients as their specific character and beauty.

Thus, it is justified to study implicit stage directions as part of the challenge Shakespeare's dramatic texts constitute to their translators.

While Flatter concentrates mainly on versification, this paper adapts a broader framework of stage directions. Both explicit and implicit stage directions inform the theatrically conscious reader about non-verbal elements of the dramatic text (its theatrical potential) such as gesture, movement, properties, visual and aural effects, time and space. Implicit stage directions are hidden in a number of textual aspects analysed below: 1. versification, 2. syntax, 3. vocabulary, 4. poetic imagery, 5. patterns of turn taking and speech distribution, 6. deictic expressions, 7. repetitive structures.

## Textual analysis

Polish versions of the above quoted example read:

*Gdy w mej komnacie szylam, książkę Hamlet  
W rozpiętej szacie, bez nakrycia głowy  
Zbliża się ku mnie. Jest w brudnych pończochach,  
Nie podwiązanych, które jak okowy  
Do kostek spadły. Błady jak koszula.  
Drżące kolana zginają się pod nim  
I ma w spojrzeniu tak żałosny wyraz,  
Jakby go właśnie wypuszczono z piekła,  
Aby o jego potwornościach prawil.* (R. B.)

*Szylam w swym pokoju,  
Wtem wpada Hamlet. W rozpiętym kaftanie  
I z gotą głową. Pończochy mu spadły.  
Nie podwiązane, do pięt... Z twarzą bladą  
Niby koszula, kolana mu drżały –  
Taki zmieniony i taki był smutny,  
Jak gdyby z piekła uszedł wypuszczony,  
By opowiedzieć jego okropności.  
Zbliżył się do mnie.* (J. I.)

*Panie mój, kiedy szylam w mej komnacie,  
Wszedł książkę Hamlet w rozpiętym kaftanie,  
Bez kapelusza, z głową obnażoną,  
W brudnych pończochach, które mu spadały  
Do kostek prawie, gdyż brakło podwiązek,  
Błady jak płótno, a kolana drżały  
Tak, że na nogach trzymał się niepewnie.  
W oczach miał wyraz żalości niezwykłej,  
Jakby go z piekła właśnie wypuszczono,  
By opowiadał o sprawach straszliwych.* (M. S.)

*Siedziałam u siebie*

*I szylałam, a tu nagle książkę Hamlet  
Staje przede mną – w rozchełstanej kurtce,  
Bez kapelusza, z błotem na północachach  
Opadłych mu do kostek jak kajdany:  
Twarz od koszuli bielsza, nogi pod nim  
Drżały i wygląd miał taki żalony,  
Jakby się wyrwał z piekła i próbował  
Opisać jego grozę.* (S. B.)

The first striking feature of the translations is their metrical regularity. Each line has eleven syllables, the meter often used by Polish translators of Shakespeare. The lack of metrical gap is compensated by Iwaszkiewicz and Barańczak by means of punctuation marks: dots and dashes. These are, however, not metrical, but punctuation pauses and reflect the translators' interpretation of the emotional content, and thus the theatrical potential of the speech. Iwaszkiewicz marks topic changes in this way. The description of Hamlet's clothes is separated by the dots from the description of his face and body movements which in turn are separated by the dash from the description of his emotional state.

Apart from the metrical irregularity, syntactic structure of the passage also carries an implied stage direction concerning Ophelia's intense emotions. The verb (*comes*) is separated from the subject (*Lord Hamlet*) by an attribute extended to seven lines. To reduce this distance the speaker adds the pronoun *he*. The pronoun becomes the actual subject of the explanatory *he comes before me*, a clause necessary for successful communication. The translations show various modifications of the original syntax. Instead of one complex sentence, there are five (J. I.), two (M. S.) or one sentence divided in the middle by a colon (S. B.). In all the translations Ophelia reveals at once the reason of her fear with the result that the clause *he comes before me*, which in the original completes the report, becomes redundant in translation. In Iwaszkiewicz's version, it has been rendered as an additional sentence, *Zbliżył się do mnie*, which is both interpretation and specification.

Another way of compensating for the lack of metrical gap is a variety of lexical items chosen to render the verb *comes*. While the original locates most of the emotional content of Ophelia's report in her description of Hamlet, the translators – with the exception of Słomczyński who uses the neutral verb *wszedł* ('entered') – put more emphasis on how Hamlet entered the room. Expressions such as *wtem wpada* ('suddenly comes running') (J. I.) or *nagle* ('suddenly') (S. B.) describe his appearing as sudden, unexpected, hasty, and *zbliża się* ('approaches') (R. B.) specifies the movement and distance between the figures.

The next example involves an implicit stage direction which is relatively easy to detect in the text. It depends on repeated poetic imagery and carries visual signals about Hamlet's dark costume. First Gertrude rebukes her son:

*Good Hamlet cast thy nighted colour off* (I. ii. 68) and then Hamlet speaks about himself: *'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother, / Nor customary suits of solemn black [...] That can denote me truly. [...] But I have that within which passes show – / These but the trappings and the suits of woe'* (I. ii. 77–86). Our first and lasting impression of Hamlet is connected with *the darkness of both clothes and mood* (Edwards 1997:86). The tensions of the whole tragedy that are being unveiled for us in this scene are suggested visually as *an immediate glimpse of the constraint between a glittering social ensemble and a single black-garbed outsider* (Rosenberg 1992:37). Hamlet's mourning is metaphorically compared to clouds that continually gather in the sky covering the sun. His sadness is also referred to as clothing, as if sorrow was a costume he has put on and insists on wearing to the irritation of Claudius and Gertrude.

In translation it turned out difficult to build a metaphor "mood can be taken off like clothes", so the translators concentrated on the mood: *Nie bądź ponury jak noc* (R. B.), *skończ z tą mroczną miną* (S. B.) or resigned from both mood and clothes as in *porzuć mroki nocy* (J. I.) which suggests that Hamlet prefers night to day. Only the phrase *odrzuć barwę nocy* (M. S.) comes close to the metaphor of taking off dark clothes when one ceases to mourn. The key word is the noun *barwa* ('colour'), because it may be used to describe the colour of one's clothes. In the original the adjectives denoting blackness are mentioned three times (*knighted, inky, black*) while the translations use only one adjective (*crazy*) and often substitute "coloured" adjectives by less concrete descriptive phrases that imply blackness but do not name it explicitly, e.g., *strap zdawkowy / Pysznej żałoby* (R. B.), *mroczne szaty* (M. S.), *przepisowa, solenna żałoba* (S. B.). But on the whole the visual potential of the text is retained.

A fundamental means of inscribing implicit stage directions into the discourse of dramatic text is deixis. According to Elam, *deixis allows the dramatic context to be referred to as an 'actual' and dynamic world already in progress* (1980:140). The next example is from III. i., known as the nunnery scene. Ophelia has been forced into the role of decoy for Hamlet while her father and the king hide to spy on the Prince. She tries to give him back some gifts:

*My lord, I have remembrances of yours  
That I have longed long to re-deliver.  
I pray you now receive them.*

And although Hamlet protests: *No, not I, / I never gave you aught*, she insists: *Take these again [...] There my lord* (III. i. 93–103).

Let us study this passage in terms of gesture and properties involved. The properties are not specified (Ophelia mentions generally *remembrances*) and in productions they are usually letters or jewels, or both (Rosenberg 1992:505). Neither is it specified how Ophelia is holding them or out of what she takes them and when. Only the gesture of giving, of holding an object out towards

someone is unambiguous. It is implied by the lexical items *re-deliver* and *I pray you*, by the grammatical form of verbs (imperative): *now receive them, take these*, and – most conspicuously – by the deictic *them, these, there my lord*. Hamlet's reaction also includes an implicit stage direction: the line is two feet shorter and this pause may be used by the actors to act out Hamlet's lie and Ophelia's reaction to it. It is open for theatrical realisation whether Hamlet accepts the gifts (in which case the gesture of giving is completed) or not and what role the properties play later in the scene. For example, if they are rejected by the Prince, torn into pieces or scattered on the floor, they may later be picked up by the broken-hearted Ophelia (Rosenberg 1992:505). How are the identified implicit stage directions rendered in translation?

*Ofelia* *Pamiętki, które mam od ciebie, książę,  
Od dawna pragnę wszystkie ci je zwrócić.  
Zechciej je przyjąć.*

*Hamlet* *Nie, nie ja... Ja nigdy  
Nic nie dawałem.*

*Ofelia* *[...]  
Weź je. [...]  
Tu są, mości książę. (R. B.)*

*Ofelia* *Panie, mam tutaj parę twych drobiazgów,  
Pamiętek, które dawno oddać chciałam.  
Proszę cię, zabierz.*

*Hamlet* *Ależ to nie moje!  
Ja ci nie dałem nigdy nic!*

*Ofelia* *[...]  
Zabierz je z powrotem,  
[...]  
Zabierz je, panie. (J. I.)*

*Ofelia* *Panie mój, mam tu upominki twoje,  
Które od dawna pragnęłam ci oddać,  
Proszę cię, przyjmij je teraz.*

*Hamlet* *Nie, nie ja.  
Nigdy niczego nie dałem ci.*

*Ofelia* *[...]  
Odbierz je. (M. S.)*

*Ofelia* *Książę, już od dawna  
Chciałam ci zwrócić tych parę drobiazgów,  
Które mi dałeś na pamiątkę. Weź je.*

*Hamlet* *Nie, ja ci nigdy w życiu nic nie dałem.*

*Ofelia* *[...]  
weź je z powrotem  
[...]  
Weź, proszę. (S. B.)*

In the three translations the *remembrances* are rendered as *pamiątki* and *drobiazgi*. Słomczyński prefers *upominki*, which would not be the best choice if letters were to be used. In Ophelia's first sentence in the original there is no direct deictic reference to the properties, so no gesture is yet involved. This is not the case in the translations: *mam tutaj parę twych drobiazgów* (J. I.), *mam tu upominki twoje* (M. S.), *chciałam ci zwrócić tych parę drobiazgów* (S. B.). In this way the attention is drawn to the properties right from the start and the gesture is more conspicuous. The sentence equivalent in Brandstaetter's translation: *Pamiątki, które mam od ciebie, książkę* implies that Ophelia is handing the gifts to Hamlet right as she starts talking about them, as if she wanted to have the painful encounter behind her as soon as possible.

Analysing the gestic potential of Ophelia's words, it is important to assess the intensity of her insisting on Hamlet's accepting the gifts. The tools of insisting are the imperatives and deixes referring to the gifts and the act of giving (mainly pronouns), e.g., *zechciej je przyjąć, weź je, tu są* (R. B.), *zabierz* and *zabierz je* (J. I.), *weź* and *weź je* (S. B.), *przyjmij je* and *odbierz je* (M. S.). Słomczyński does not translate the last gesticly rich clause: *There my lord* and thus makes his Ophelia less insisting and more passive. In Iwaszkiewicz's translation the attention is additionally drawn to the properties when Hamlet exclaims: *Ależ to nie moje!* Such exclamation implies that Hamlet takes the gifts from Ophelia or at least looks at them. In the original, as well as in the three other translations, these are optional gestures and Hamlet may as well ignore the objects Ophelia is handing to him.

Finally, let us analyse another scene where there is a lot of action inscribed in grammar, vocabulary and speech distribution. After the play, Hamlet is summoned to the Queen's room. Gertrude's resolve to rebuke Hamlet collides with his determination to speak openly with her. When Gertrude, unable to endure Hamlet's reproaches, tries to leave: *Nay, then I'll set those to you that can speak*, he forces her to stay: *Come, come and sit you down, you shall not budge. / You go not* (III. iv. 17–19). In terms of stage business the imperatives imply that Gertrude resolves to leave and Hamlet prevents it. What does he do that frightens the Queen so that she cries: *What wilt thou do? thou wilt not murder me? / Help, help, ho!* (III. iv. 21–22). Stage business is implied but not specified and three possibilities are most common: bolting the door, using physical means to force Gertrude down onto a seat, and threatening her with a sword or a dagger (Habicht 1998:54–57). Further on, after the killing of Polonius, we find more suggestions as to Gertrude's behaviour:

*Hamlet*            *Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger. –*  
                          *Leave wringing of your hands. Peace! Sit you down.*     (III. iv. 34–35)

She is making gestures of despair, wants to say something or cry for help, she is definitely no longer sitting. Stage directions are implied by speech distribution (Hamlet dominates the conversational floor, does not let Gertrude take over the



turn and silences her while the dash marks the place of turn change when Hamlet changes the recipient from Polonius to Gertrude); by the syntax and grammar (short, imperative sentences) and by vocabulary describing Gertrude's gestures and movements. Polish translators render the implied action in the following way:

- Królowa* *Dosyć! Przyślę tutaj takich,  
Którzy potrafią z tobą się rozmówić!*
- Hamlet* *Nie odchodź! Usiądź! Tutaj pozostaniesz  
I stąd nie wyjdiesz [...]*
- Królowa* *Co chcesz uczynić?! Chcesz mnie zamordować?!  
Na pomoc!  
[...]*
- Hamlet* *Wiedz, że zbytnie wścibstwo  
Jest niebezpieczne.*
- do Królowej* *Przestań łamać ręce!  
Zamilknij! Usiądź! (R. B.)*
- Królowa* *Poczekaj, jeszcze ktoś pomówi z tobą.*
- Hamlet* *Zostań tu. Usiądź! Nie ruszaj się z miejsca.  
Nie wyjdiesz [...]*
- Królowa* *Co chcesz uczynić? Zabić mnie? Na pomoc!  
[...]*
- Hamlet* *Widzisz, niedobrze wszędzie wsadzać nosa!  
Nie łam ręk! Nie płacz! Siądź z powrotem! (J. I.)*
- Królowa* *Sprowadzę innych, by mówili z tobą.*
- Hamlet* *Nie, nie drgniesz nawet i kroku nie zrobisz,  
[...]*
- Królowa* *Cóż chcesz uczynić? Zabić mnie? Na pomoc!  
[...]*
- Hamlet* *Odkrywasz teraz, że zbytnia gorliwość  
Jest niebezpieczna. – Ręk już nie załamuj,  
Spokój, siądź. (M. S.)*
- Królowa* *Lepiej zawołam kogoś, kto potrafi  
Z tobą rozmawiać.*
- Hamlet* *Nigdzie nie idź; siadaj.  
Nie zrobisz kroku [...]*
- Królowa* *Co ty robisz? Nie chcesz  
Chyba mnie zabić? Pomocy!  
[...]*
- Hamlet* *Nietrudno się na coś  
Nadziać, gdy pchamy się tam, gdzie nie trzeba. –  
Dość tych lamentów, siadaj, nie łam ręk; (S. B.)*

Various potential of Gertrude's action is inscribed in her trying to cut the conversation with Hamlet. In Brandstaetter's version the Queen is more decided

and her anger is emphasised by the exclamation marks and the use of the exclamatory *Dosyć!* ('That will do') for *Nay then*. Whether Gertrude tries to leave the room while saying these words depends on the rendering of the verb in *I'll set those to you*. Three versions include a verb suggesting action: *przyślę* (R. B.), *sprowadzę* (M. S.), *zawołam* (S. B.). Iwaszkiewicz's version is a threat, it does not imply, however, that the person to speak with Hamlet is going to be fetched immediately. Thus, the implication that Gertrude actually tries to leave the room comes only with Hamlet's command *Zostań tu* ('Stay here'). The translations differ also in terms of the position Gertrude is to assume in this scene. In Słomczyński's version Hamlet does not order Gertrude to sit down, what is more, his threat *kroku nie zrobisz* ('you shall not make a step') suggests that she is standing. The important point is whether she fulfils the order to sit down or whether Hamlet physically forces her to do so, because when he comes up to her and touches her might be the instance when she feels endangered and cries for help. In Słomczyński's version, where there is no command to sit down, this might be the more frightful as Gertrude indeed does not know what Hamlet is approaching her. In Iwaszkiewicz's translation she must have been sitting and sprung to her feet because Hamlet asks her to sit down again (*Siądź z powrotem*).

The shift from Polonius to Gertrude is also rendered variously: the dash is retained (M. S. and S. B), the place is unmarked (J. I.) or an explicit stage direction *do Królowej* (to the Queen) is inserted (R. B.). Brandstaetter's translation separates the two recipients additionally by the suggested volume: there are exclamation marks when Hamlet speaks to Gertrude and no exclamations when he addresses Polonius. Another aural aspect are sounds uttered by Gertrude. Because the exclamation *Peace!* is ambiguous, two translators resort to specification (Gertrude is asked not to cry (J. I.) or not to lament (S. B.)), and two have Hamlet ask her to be quiet (R. B. and M. S.).

## Conclusions

The theatrical potential of Shakespeare's dramatic text as manifested in implicit stage directions is variously modified in translation. Compensation is frequent in that the implied information is retained but shifted to a different aspect of the text, as in the first example. Quite often the potentiality of implicit stage directions is sacrificed for different reasons and the strategy of specification is used, which is especially the case with vocabulary. In the analysed material there is only one example of inserting an explicit stage direction, which reflects our readiness to accept and cherish today the old dramatic convention. As it is not possible in translation to be absolutely faithful to the implications of the original, each rendering constitutes a fascinating dramatic text of its own.

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