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### The Sound of Translation: Godot in a Translator's Anatomy

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**The Sound of Translation: *Godot* in a translator's anatomy**

**The Strange Case of Mr. Beckett**

When delivering the first Annenberg Lecture at the University of Reading's Beckett Archive in May 1993, Billie Whitelaw, the Winnie of *Happy Days*, observed of *Not I*: "I very much had the feeling that it was a work in progress." This observation pretty much summarises the way in which Beckett wrote, translated and directed his texts: through an on-going process of revising, which "can be considered as symptomatic of a very particular artistic impulse that views a text as fluid and incomplete, as necessary failure; a linguistic construct that perpetually seeks its most complete form of enunciation" (Batty, "Beckett, Translation, *Mise en Scene* and Authorship" 63). Beckett seems to have made his life motto what is actually the cornerstone of translation practice: continuous revision. In fact, when asked once if he saw anything new in his plays when he returned to them he replied: "Yes. Mistakes." (Quoted by Clancy Signal in Mc Millan and Fehsenfeld 1988:182).

His case is examined here before moving on to the Greek translations of *Waiting for Godot* in particular, for three main reasons. First of all, Beckett revised his texts, not in order to improve the linguistic structures as such, but in order to emphasise the thematic needs of the play's dramatic substance, i.e., the dramatic economy of the text which would highlight the play's ideas in the best possible way. Secondly, it is crucial to investigate how his close contact with the directors who staged his plays and his practical experience as director himself informed his attitude to his writings as permanently 'under construction' and shifted his focus from what is said to how it is meant to be performed. This brings us to the third point: if Beckett's texts have been so meticulously revised according to his theatrical experience as to incorporate elements of their actual stagings, to what extent is a translator to diverge from a text which has already been tested against the reality of the stage?

Beckett may be notorious for not allowing other directors to take any liberties while directing his plays, yet he is equally notorious for insisting on re-writing his texts, when he felt that they veered towards a loose collection of lines and dialogues rather than constituting a tight, dramatic structure. This became evident from the first rehearsals of the French production of *Waiting for Godot* directed by Roger Blin: "in his acceptance of Blin's cuts, Beckett was recognising not only the dramatic potentials of this one text (and how they needed to be released from stifling inadequacies of the written text), but also accepting a new authorial position in relation to that text that was to inform his developing dramatic language" (Batty 65). Learning from Blin, Beckett strove in his re-workings of his plays not to simply improve by adding or omitting the linguistic elements of the texts, but to do so in order to stress the thematic currents and dramatic motivation available to actors and directors (Connor 2014: 28). Knowlson gives us the example of a two page cut in Act One of *Waiting for Godot* in which Pozzo was trying to explain that he can't be sure if Lucky will actually carry out his orders or not. This part was cut because in this way Lucky's speech comes right after his dance and thus dramatic tension is intensified (*The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett-'Waiting for Godot'* 38). When Beckett directed the performance at Schiller-Theater in Berlin in 1975, he also removed a

five-line conversation following Pozzo's "The Net. He thinks he's entangled in a net" (Knowlson 130-131), his purpose again being to discard any piece of language which would serve as a stylistic device rather than provide fertile ground for its theatrical enunciation.

His re-workings did not only concern dramatic dialogue but stage directions as well as a means of emphasising the themes of the play in terms of their performance potential. On March 9, 1964 –less than one month before the scheduled opening of *Play* in London (7 April 1964) and while the published version of the play was about to appear in Britain– Beckett wrote to British director George Devine: "The last rehearsals with Serreau [Beckett was at that time working in Paris with the French director Jean-Marie Serreau on staging the French text, *Comédie*] have led us to a view of the *da capo* which I think you should know about. [...] We now think it would be dramatically more effective to have it express a slight weakening, both of question and of response, by means of less and perhaps slower light and correspondingly less volume and speed of voice."<sup>1</sup>

At first sight, the urgency permeating Beckett's letter does not seem to match the content – changing the light sounds like a minor detail. However, it is in such details that Beckett's symmetrical world of sound and image is hidden, and therefore such changes become "thematically potent" especially if we consider that light often functions as a character on the Beckettian stage (Gontarski, "Staging Himself: Performance as Text in Samuel Beckett's Theatre" 5).

This "correcting" process, as he liked to call it, extended to the translations of his plays. In the case of *Godot*, Beckett's English translation, which he started in the early summer of 1953, was literally "mediated." First of all, he already had the experience of working with Elmar Tophoven, who in 1952 had undertaken the translation of *Godot* into German on his own student initiative using the Minuit 1952 French edition as the basic text (Dukes, "Englishing *Godot*" 522). Secondly, it was the French production of *Godot* by Roger Blin in January 1953 which influenced Beckett's subsequent English translation of the play; it is not a coincidence that the subtitle for *Godot* 'a tragi-comedy in two acts' was a deliberate addition by Beckett for his translation of the first English editions stemming from the basic simplicity and balance between comedy and tragedy established in Blin's original production (Calder, "The Author as Practical Playwright and Director" 82). Finally, Beckett had attended the Berlin premiere of *Wir warten auf Godot* in September 1953 before he started re-working on the first version in English that he had completed during the summer. Testimony to his revising the work can be found in a typewritten letter to Loly Rosset addressed from Paris, but written in Ussy on 20 November 1953, in which Beckett says, "I am glad you have decided to bring out *Godot* in Spring. [...] I am beginning now to revise my translation and hope you will have the definitive text next month." (Dukes 522). Taking the whole picture into consideration, Beckett's final translation of *Godot* in English was produced under the combined influence of the French prototype, Beckett's meticulous supervision of Tophoven's German translation, Blin's French production, and the 1953 Berlin performance of the play.

There are also various examples of the changes Beckett brought to elements of humour, musicality and rhythm in his careful redrafting of Tophoven's German translation, when in 1975 he reconsidered the play as director for actual production at Berlin Schiller-Theater. By then, Beckett had the experience of his own translation

<sup>1</sup> The letter is published in facsimile in *New Theatre Magazine: Samuel Beckett Issue*, XI 1971, 16-17.

of the play into English and of Blin's cuts. Ruby Cohn gives a brief overview of the changes Beckett incorporated in his text, which is worth quoting in full:

“Beckett’s main changes in the text were cuts. He pared away much of Pozzo’s Act 1 business with pipe and whip, as well as his conversation about Lucky’s burdens, dancing, and rebellion. The puzzling ‘knook’ disappears, as well as the music-hall joke about the weak and sound lungs. In Act 2, when all four characters lie on the ground, Didi and Gogo lose a few lines, and when they prop Pozzo up, they no longer discuss evening and friendship. In contrast, Beckett made one remarkable addition to the dialogue. When Didi in Act 2 asks the Boy whether Mr Godot’s beard is fair or black, the German question becomes: ‘Blonde or . . . *he hesitates* black . . . *he hesitates* or red?’ Thus Mr Godot is pointedly related to Gogo’s smutty story about the Englishman in the brothel, juxtaposing—as so often in *Godot*—the physical and metaphysical, the vulgar and ethereal [...].”

(*Beckett’s German Godot* from *Journal of Modern Literature*, Volume 22, Number 1)

Apart from the corrections described above, Beckett further revised Tophoven’s text by rewriting the name-calling sequence for humour and euphony,<sup>2</sup> and turning several of Tophoven’s variant phrases into exact repetitions. The result was that the German translation was “a tighter, much reduced and more refined dramatic study of waiting” (Batty 66), which means that Beckett succeeded in highlighting dramatically the fundamental themes of the play.

Many intellectuals, writers and scholars have been fervent supporters of this line of thought, namely that a work of art is never finished; yet the case of Beckett is different. What perplexes the task of his future translators is that he not only held this view in theory, but actually put it into practice.<sup>3</sup> The plays we have in our hands today are mostly the transcriptions of his stage experience, the written record of a direct theatrical process. If it was left entirely up to Beckett, there would be no “final” version of his plays today, for even when a text was established for publication, soon afterwards Beckett would come up with a revised “performance text” as a result of his direction. It was pressure from the publishing world and the demands of the market that made it possible for us today to have ‘final’ published plays to refer to.

### **The Other Side of the Coin: Beckett as Director**

This fastidiousness with both linguistic elements and stage directions is evidence of what Beckett gradually realised: that text is performance and the form *is* the content. The reason why Beckett’s status as director is discussed in greater detail is that by

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<sup>2</sup> The short exchange between Vladimir and Estragon after the latter’s “That’s the idea, let’s abuse each other” will be discussed in greater detail later with reference to humour and abusive language.

<sup>3</sup> His actors, too, recall his firm belief in constant revisions based on the demands of the stage in different socio-cultural settings. Herbert Blau recalls the differences in the performance of *Waiting for Godot* in San Quentin and the United States to conclude that “Beckett taught us before theory that paratextuality is built into the language, and, as with the gospels derided by Didi and Gogo, no text is sacred” (Lois Oppenheim *Directing Beckett* 73).

being on such intimate terms with the text to be dramatised, Beckett facilitated an “effective flowback where what the artist learns as director returns to inform his work as writer/translator” (Batty 68). It is therefore critical to investigate the perspective which shaped his directing viewpoint and consequently formulated his translation approach towards his plays.

Over the years, Beckett developed a commitment to the idea of text as performance. This in practice meant that he could not decide on the finality of a play unless he had first rehearsed its function on stage.<sup>4</sup> I'm convinced, however, that I am not doing injustice to Beckett's original theatrical genius if I point out that there must be yet another factor which cultivated his dramatic sense to the extent that he valued the performance realisation of a text more than its literary nature. What was the decisive factor which shaped the development of such performance perspective in Beckett, especially since it is Beckett himself who is reported to have said: “I have no understanding of the theatre, I know nothing about it, I never go, it's appalling”?

Perhaps it should be pointed out that Beckett's absolute statements, such as the above, should not be taken at face value, since it is part of his obscure and laconic persona that gave rise to infinite interpretations and insights into his works; what is of interest here is that Beckett really was not at all familiar with the codes of drama writing. At the time of writing *Godot* (1948), he admitted his lack of theatre experience, immersed as he was in the conventions of fiction: “messy”, and “not well thought out,” he has said of *Waiting for Godot*. Roger Blin observes: “Beckett knew nothing about the theatre. His play is a wonderful piece of theatre, but all his instructions, silences, pauses, and so on [...] actually address to readers. One silence has to be relative to others. You can't say in advance how long they should be—that one is half a second, that one eight seconds, seven and a half seconds” (McCarthy, “Emptying the Theatre: On Directing the Plays of Samuel Beckett” 43-44). In conclusion, Blin argues that “the director has to determine the pace of the play from the rhythm and, from this pace, incorporate the silences to make them as meaningful as possible or sometimes ignore them or sometimes move them a bit” (McCarthy 44).

Serving what I dare call an apprenticeship next to Roger Blin, Beckett evolved from playwright to director. He realised that the principal problems in theatre are problems of performance, not of interpretation, and that it is the actor's body and mental experience on stage which composes the forms of life and thought, not the other way round. In this way, he approached the direction of his plays –and his subsequent translations– in search of balance between speech and gesture. As his theatrical experience grew and he started having more confidence in himself as director, Beckett treated a play (both the text and stage activities) as if it were a musical score and attempted to bring out the melody and rhythm of the text, by defining the pace of acting and speaking as if conducting a ballet (Libera, *Directing Beckett*). In order to avoid any misunderstanding here, I should refer to Walter Asmus, Beckett's assistant director in *Godot* and many other productions, who clarifies that the use of terms such as *choreography*, *ballet* and *musical score* does not mean that Beckett

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<sup>4</sup> His long-time cameraman and technical assistant, Jim Lewis comments on his commitment to performance, sometimes becoming too overwhelming even for Beckett himself: “If you want to compare this production [of *Was Wo*] with the others for television, there's one major difference. And that is his concept was not set. He changed and changed and changed. . . I've never experienced that with him before. You know how concrete he is, how precise he is. Other times we could usually follow through on that with minor, minor changes; but this time there were several basic changes and he still wasn't sure”. Martha Fehsenfeld, “Beckett's Reshaping of *What Where* for Television,” *Modern Drama*, XXIX 1986, 236.

wanted his actors to move like ballet dancers; it simply indicates that there was an exact design in the blocking that had a meaning (McCarthy 48). In order to make his point, he describes a typical piece of direction in his rehearsal diary: “Beckett walks on the stage, his eyes fixed on the ground, and shows the movement as he speaks Estragon’s lines [...] Always a step then the line. Beckett calls this step-by-step approach a *physical* theme [my emphasis] (Oppenheim *Directing Beckett*).

If Beckett as director paid such great attention to symmetry and exactness in the interaction between language and movement, it is only natural that he transferred them onto the page, when he revised his written work after the staging of his plays. As a result, the translator should bear in mind that in Beckett’s symmetrical universe the delicate balance between verbal and visual images, even the number of dots in a phrase, are not merely linguistic word-games but functional units on stage which are so constructed as to give particular meaning to the actor’s speech and movement. Pauses marking a falling silence are distinctively different from pauses that mark a change of tone or topic. It is not like the case of realistic theatre where a different translation may create a temporary misunderstanding on the part of the audience; in Beckett a different translation will most likely result in a different performance, because of the playwright’s constant revisions against the workings of the stage.

### **Dangerous Ground**

Danger lurks, though, in Beckett’s case. On the one hand, the constant revision process he undertook throughout his career as playwright and translator stands as a paradigm for the pursuit of the best theatrical enunciation of a written text. What is more, it reflects his lifelong belief in the necessity of change as a natural part of evolution. On the other hand, however, there are numerous cases of Beckett exercising his authorship or even resorting to legal action in order to ban productions which diverged from his intentions; the very existence and activity of the Beckett Estate, which defends Beckett’s personal vision, stands proof for this. Because Beckett’s written texts contain the patterns and frameworks for their performance texts, it has been argued that “to work against these is an act of either ignorance or arrogance, let alone disrespect which rarely anyway holds any currency in the theatrical contract” (Batty 71). The implications of this paradox for the translator are obvious: if certain productions were banned because the director’s vision was different from the playwright’s, to what extent is the translator allowed to take liberties with a text whose very performance potential has been realised and returned to the page by the playwright himself? Could this “revision process’ actually be the drama translator’s golden cage?

In order to answer these questions, let us return to Beckett. It is true that in his very first letter to Alan Schneider, his American director and close friend, Beckett states that he is not averse to a director’s “changing an odd word here and there or making an odd cut,” but also would like to have “the opportunity of protesting or approving.”<sup>5</sup> In his article “I Can’t Go On, Alan. I’ll Go On” (January 31, 1999) Robert

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<sup>5</sup> It is true that within a few years, he was replying to Schneider’s questions with the now legendary phrase “Do it the way you like, Alan, do it any way you like,” but this does not mean that Beckett granted such freedom to all his collaborators. Schneider paid homage to the Irish playwright in a way that few others did.

Brustein presents a letter from Beckett to his American publisher, when he had just completed *Krapp's Last Tape*: "I'd hate it to be made a balls of at the outset and that's why I question its being let out to small groups beyond our control [*sic*] before we get it done more or less right and set a standard of fidelity at least." Apart from pointing out Beckett's true desire for 'fidelity,' Brustein also chronicles several cases of the playwright's active protest against certain productions: he attempted to stop the tour of Andre Gregory's troupe presenting *Endgame* in the States ("My work is not holy writ but this production sounds truly revolting & damaging to the play"); he refused to grant permission for an all-female *Endgame*; he raved over "a scandalous parody of *Godot* at the Young Vic;" he even refused Ingmar Bergman permission to film *Waiting for Godot* because he didn't want the play to be "Bergmanised." There were also severe objections when in 1984 the director Joanne Akalaitis set a production of *Endgame* in an abandoned subway station; as a result, a codicil was put in Beckett's will insisting on control of future productions. Brustein concludes that the playwright still haunts contemporary productions of his plays: "Recently, a theater in Washington was threatened with court action by the Beckett Estate after reports that members of its black cast had introduced some hip-hop interpolations into a production of *Waiting for Godot*. Only through the intercession of Beckett's nephew Edward was the production permitted to proceed."

All this might be true, but a small piece of information is missing. It may well have been for reasons of fidelity that Beckett initially undertook to direct his own plays, yet it was from that time onwards that he started revising himself in the way discussed above. After this point, he re-wrote and reinvented himself as an artist, redirected his creative vision and looked carefully into his own texts to discover the performance possibilities they were hiding. Gontarski is absolutely right when he claims that "at fifty-two years of age, having had two major plays staged in two languages and having completed his first radio play, Samuel Beckett discovered theatre" (*Revising Himself: Performance as Text in Samuel Beckett's Theatre*).<sup>6</sup> From then on, Beckett's entire work revolves around the issue of the text's theatricalisation and constantly returns to his earlier original writings and translations to effect changes in terms of the play's performance potential. During his nineteen-year directing career, from 1967 to 1986, Beckett staged (or videotaped) over twenty productions of his plays in three languages: English, French, and German. Gontarski remarks that "each time he came to reread a script to prepare its staging, he usually found it wordy, encumbered, and incompletely conceived for the stage, and so he set about 'correcting it', exploiting fully the potential for further development that directing afforded. He never stopped this process of self-redefinition and self-exploration, which actually followed the course of his life. Walter Asmus observes that when Beckett directed the San Quentin Drama Workshop production of *Godot* in 1984, the entire atmosphere of the play was different –the second act alone, for example, was

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<sup>6</sup> Gontarski observes that *Krapp's Last Tape* seems to have been the watershed", as Beckett realised that the creation of a dramatic text was not a process that could be divorced from performance, and that mounting a production brought to light recesses previously hidden, even from the author himself. In his letter to Rosset (April 1, 1958), Beckett expressed the clarity of his pre-production vision of *Krapp*: "I see the whole thing so clearly (apart [*sic*] from the changes of *Krapp's* white face as he listens) and realise now that this does not mean I have stated it clearly, though God knows I tried." For more on a detailed account of Beckett's change of viewpoint and ponderous look into his correspondence with publishers, producers and directors see Knowlson, James, *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett. Waiting for Godot*. New York: Grove Press, 1994.

some fourteen minutes longer than in the Berlin production— because Beckett himself had changed: he was seventy-eight then, i.e. ten years older, and his own rhythm of life was entirely different (Lois Oppenheim *Directing Beckett*).

The challenge for Beckett's translator, therefore, does not lie in the realm of fidelity to the writer's original spirit but in his lifelong struggle to provide a written text that would not let its literary value overshadow its performance dynamics. He allowed *how* a text speaks to inform *what* it speaks and shaped the written text on the basis of the dramatic event rather than the other way round (Batty 68). Through a process which he called a "continuous organic growth" (Calder 10), Beckett tried to establish a rhythm of performance which would highlight the thematic axes of the play. Statements such as "all my plays should be played light and fast. I don't want to dwell upon their seriousness [...] my plays shouldn't be ponderous" are not the writer's whims, but practical observations of a theatre professional.<sup>7</sup> His close collaboration with the world of the theatre informed him of the way actors lend their voice and body to inhabit a text and transmute it into stage action. His three-fold quality as playwright, director and translator placed Beckett "as author in-between written text and performance text, facilitating a filtering of the impulses of the one into the fabric of the other and tailoring according to the specific circumstances of each theatricalisation" (Batty 68). What never changed is Beckett's vision of the aesthetic shape of his work, his painstaking efforts to create a form which *is* the meaning. This is the reason why he constantly revised his plays. This is also the reason why in June 1997, Peter Hall stated: "Beckett never stopped tinkering with the play, so we now have the benefit of all his later thoughts— tiny cuts and additions made for various productions. There is nothing remaining that is unclear, nothing pretentious, nothing finally baffling. If our production has any obscurities in it, it is our fault, not the text's" (*Beckett: A Study of His Plays* 64). And, above all, this is the thread which unites Beckett's practice with the future translator of his plays.

Apart from the theatrical perspective, however, which Beckett fervently supported, the cultural parameter should not be ignored. Let us not forget that drama translation is one of the "re-writings" or rather "re-stagings" of human activity and like all re-writings, it is never innocent. Yet, it's not the kind of "guilt" that the translator should apologise for. On the contrary, it has been proven that re-writing is the only way in which a piece can live, like a virus which has to mutate and adapt to a new environment in order to survive. And, maybe this is what can guarantee the eternal value of a dramatic text; its ability to be ephemeral. As Vitez puts it, the greatest part of the pleasure of theatre is what is inscribed in people's memories; when one sees a performance of *Le Misanthrope*, one can compare it with another performance one remembers, and this offers pleasure. He goes on to claim that the same is true for translation; translation must of necessity be redone. In this light, the different drama translations in the present thesis will be considered, not in terms of how "close" they are to the original, but in terms of what purposes they serve by being different and to what extent their translators were equally concerned with Beckett about the problematics of their staging. In other words, the different drama translations will be discussed in terms of their *performability within particular socio-cultural norms*.

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<sup>7</sup> Alan Schneider, 'Any Way You Like, Alan', *Theatre Quarterly*, XIX. p. 31.



## Sound in Godot

In drama, which is meant to be spoken and heard rather than written and read, the aspect of sound becomes a clear mirror of the socio-cultural parameter. By sound we mean all elements whose combination produces the musicality of a dramatic text: rhythm,<sup>8</sup> rhyme,<sup>9</sup> speech patterns and cadences, silences as well as language structures based on sound associations such as onomatopoeia, alliteration and assonance. Early Greek writings on drama translation highlight the significance of sound; in a discussion about the translation of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Sideris quotes a statement by translator Nikolaos Poriotis: "I always try to transfer in our language not only the words of the foreign text in the sense of their meaning but also their sound harmony using the same or similar rhythm" (*Φωτισμένοι και Στείροι Μεταφραστές* 110-111). Wittgenstein was also among the first to emphasise the effect of sound; in his letter to Ficker in 1914 commenting on the poems of Trakl, whom he was supporting at the time, he says: "in fact, I don't understand them, but their tone fascinates me. It is the tone of genius" (*Wittgenstein's Ladder* 10).

It is precisely because of this momentous significance of sound why Beckett relies on it so much in his attempt to deconstruct form and create a new language, and therefore a new way of communication. The sense of music in his plays has been celebrated by numerous critics and theoreticians. "Whether read aloud or silently, Beckett's careful words resemble elements of a musical score, coordinated by and for the ear, to sound and resound" underlines Mary Bryden (*Samuel Beckett and Music* 2). She goes on to claim that Beckett's insistence of tonal and temporal details does not mean that he restricted in any way the perception of the utterance's meaning (*ibid.*:44); this point is reinforced by Ruby Cohn who comments on *Godot's* musical repetitions only to conclude that "Beckett never sacrifices meaning to sound, but as in his complex fiction he often intensifies meaning through sound" (*Back to Beckett* 133). In the same frame of mind, Anne C. Murch<sup>10</sup> echoes Pavis' verbalisation of the stage when she states that "the semiotic aspect of the dialogue as sound against its semantic dimension" finds its perfect realization in Beckett's plays (*Quoting form Godot: trends in contemporary French Theatre*), while Hugh Kenner advises against the use of Beckett's printed text as a reading matter and suggests that we look at it as "the score for a performance [where] like music, Beckett's language is shaped into phrases, orchestrated, cunningly repeated" (*A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett* 39).

Another aspect of sound thoroughly analysed in Beckett is silence. In his plays, the presence and absence of sound are equally important and add to the communication with the audience. Colin Duckworth points out the significance of silences as "an undercurrent of every dramatic situation, becoming a pattern of gaps almost visible to the audience" (*Angels of Darkness* 31) whereas Ian Hamilton describes Vladimir and Estragon's dialogues as "a mere masquerade of silence, for their replies form a succession rather than a sequence; each character's thought follows to a large ex-

<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of the present paper, rhythm is defined as "the perceived regularity of prominent units in speech, i.e. stressed vs. unstressed syllables as in English, or long vs. short syllables as in Latin." (Crystal, *The Penguin Dictionary of Language* 290)

<sup>9</sup> Rhyme is defined as "a correspondence of syllables, especially at the ends of lines in verse." (Crystal, *The Penguin Dictionary of Language* 290)

<sup>10</sup> See [www.english.fsu.edu/jobs/num09/Num09Murch.htm](http://www.english.fsu.edu/jobs/num09/Num09Murch.htm).

tent its own set pattern and inner rhythm [...] while they utter words that are pregnant with silence” (*The Critical Response to Samuel Beckett* 239-240). Hamilton also brings into focus what he calls Beckett’s ‘anti-language’, i.e. the tension between what is uttered and what is not, which in his opinion best delivers the writer’s message to the audience (236). All the above shed light on the impact of sound in translation, summarised by Antonia Rodriguez-Gago:

“Great stylists and great poets are almost impossible to translate. For Beckett, who belongs to both categories, the translator’s major challenge is to recreate a style of poetic intensity and linguistic economy that approximates his and to find an accurate rhythm, pace and sound for his voices.[...] Since no two languages are equivalent in anything except the most simple terms, the task of the translator consists mainly of finding, in his/her own language, an equivalent system of relationships between meanings, linguistic structures, rhythms and sound patterns to reproduce in the translated text the sense and effects of the original work as accurately as he/she can” (*Beckett Studies* 437).

Apart from investigating how critics and theoreticians received Beckett’s management of sound, it would be even more interesting to look into the playwright’s own comments on his work –let us not forget that he was the first translator of *Godot* from French to English and thus the first to cope with problems of such nature. His most-quoted remarks to Andre Bernold ‘J ai toujours écrit pour une voix’ [I’ve always written for a voice] (*L’Amitié de Beckett* 107) and to Alan Schneider “My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) [...] scatology and eschatology are identical, since both are concerned with the final issue of things. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin”<sup>11</sup> reflect his near-obsession with the sound of language. His focus on sound is also described by Martin Esslin: “once, after the Football World Cup, Beckett told me: ‘Have you seen those Brazilians, their play is sheer music’” (*Who’s Afraid of Samuel Beckett* 182) and runs through Beckett’s famous German letter of 1937 with its yearning, “to feel a whisper of that final music or that silence that underlies All” (*Beckett’s Godot in Berlin: New Coordinates of the Void* 65).

Apart from sound, another aspect of Beckett’s musicality is rhythm. In terms of *Godot*’s stage performance, comprehending the sense of rhythm inherent in the text sheds new light on the interpretation of the play. Gerry Mc Carthy goes as far as to say that “if the actor and director can preserve their creative alliance in the pursuit of the textual rhythm, then the Beckett play suddenly becomes extraordinarily negotiable (“Emptying the theatre: On Directing the Plays of Samuel Beckett” 89). When staging his plays, Beckett himself took extreme care in transmuting the rhythm of the text into a rhythmical pattern of movements which should constitute the performers’ acting code. Walter Asmus, Beckett’s associate director for the Schiller *Warten auf Godot* production, describes in great detail the steps Beckett followed

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<sup>11</sup> Letter of 29 Dec. 1957, quoted in Ruby Cohn (ed.), *Disjecta* (London: John Calder, 1983), 109. Beckett also wrote to Jean Reavey in August 1962: “I never write a word without saying it out loud [...] Drama is following music.” Beckett in the Theatre The Author as practical Playwright and Director Volume 1: From Waiting for Godot to Krapp’s Last Tape, Dougald McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld John Calder (eds.), London Riverrun Press-New York, 1988, p. 16.

in his efforts to match the form/meaning problem with regard to the dialogue and movements on stage:

“Approaching a play (both the text and stage activities) as if it were a musical score. Perceiving everything in formal categories. Establishing how many times a given theme, word or gesture reoccurs. Insuring that all types of repetitions are like echoes, refrains—that is, seeing to it that they are performed in exactly the same or a very similar manner. Bringing out the melody and rhythm of the text [...] the pace of the acting and speaking. (*allegro, presto*)” (Antoni Libera, *Directing Beckett* 134).

The majority of such observations are based on the rehearsal diary Asmus kept on Beckett's work with the German company in order to achieve the carefully structured performance set forth in the *Regiebuch*, as well as on two notebooks Beckett had prepared for his 1978 Schiller Theater production of *Spiel (Play)*. Gontarski comments that “Beckett's notebooks not only comprise a motif index to his plays, they constitute as well a remarkably detailed external record of the artist's internal processes and struggles. They document Beckett's continued aesthetic and stylistic development” (*Editing Beckett* 201). A further source of study was offered by Beckett's English-language publishers Faber and Faber and Grove Press in the series entitled *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, which contains the theatrical notebooks Beckett kept for a particular work, published in facsimile, transcription, translation (where necessary), and annotations along with the revised texts. These revised texts form “something like a post-modern performance text, with an emphasis on process and transformation, which traces and documents Beckett's post-publication creative process [...] not a definitive or uncorrupted or static text, the telos of the creative process, but rather a processive text” (ibid.: 202), which sheds new light on the play's reading and performance potential. For the actors who had the experience of working with Beckett as director, his particularity with sound and rhythm was common knowledge. David Warrilow recalls the rehearsals of *Ohio Improptu*, where ‘the issue was tone and tempo, because the way the author hears that piece is somewhat different from the way it lies in [his] being’ and highlights the importance of ‘tuning-in’ with the music of the text: “If I get it right, if I sing it ‘on key’, ‘in tune’, it's going to vibrate properly for somebody else” (Jonathan Kalb, *Beckett in Performance* 224). In her autobiography, Billy Whitelaw observes that “working on *Play* was not unlike conducting music or having a music lesson [...] where I had to understand the rhythmic import of such requests as: ‘Will you make those three dots, two dots’” (*Billie Whitelaw...Who He* 77-78), which required concentrated practice, while Aideen O'Kelly says of *Happy days* that “the whole play is like a musical score” (Ben-Zvi, *Women in Beckett* 40).

In light of the above, what exactly is the translator's task in terms of sound? The challenge lies in the fact that sound is connected with meaning thus creating and at the same time being created by its lexical representation. Duff points out how intricately interwoven sound and meaning are by asserting that “it should never be assumed that no meaning is conveyed through the sound of a language” (*The Third Language* 95), while Korzeniowska illustrates this point with reference to nursery rhymes: “the choice of words, with their own specific melody which simply flows when uttered, is the reason why they are still loved today. In fact not many people, young or old, dwell much on the actual meaning of the rhyme” (*Explorations in*

*Polish-English Mistranslation Problems* 72). Nursery rhymes, nonsense poetry, folk songs are all evidence of an aspect of language we often overlook, namely that the sound of the words and the effect it evokes defines their quality and helps us create an image, so that we can “as the recipients, associate with certain words and the melody those words can create” (ibid.:76). Taking this into account, the difficulty for a drama translator boils down to the fact “in the process of translation the original sound is lost. Therefore, the associations evoked by the sound are lost as well” (Jonna Janecka, *The Power of Sound* 55). This problem together with Crystal’s observation that “languages vary greatly in their basic rhythmic types” (*The Penguin Dictionary of Language* 290) implies that the translator has to find a way to reproduce the sound patterns of the original in such a way as to evoke the same string of associations in the minds of the target audience. Since every language has its own, unique sounds “which are uttered in certain combinations to express the feelings and emotions of the writer/poet” (Korzeniowska, *Explorations in Polish-English Mistranslation Problems* 81), the translator has to make use of the rhyme and rhythm of the target language in order to produce new sounds which in turn will create a new set of associations, yet similar to the original one. What the translator therefore needs to have is a good sense of the so-called semantic or discourse prosody<sup>12</sup> (quoted by Mohammed Albakry *Translation Journal and the Author* 2004) so that the correlation of sounds in the two languages will create a similar impression. In this perspective, it becomes evident that if the sound is not successfully reproduced, the target text may end up being incongruous with the writer’s intentions or difficult to communicate to the target audience: “once the music goes the meaning goes as well,” Alan Duff maintains (*The Third Language* 95).

In order to avoid this, the translator should be capable of “listening in wise entropy [...] and possess the ability both to hear the conversations on the page and to read speech,” as Professor Ruy Vasconcelos de Carvalho from the Department of Social Studies and Communication in the University of Fortaleza, Brazil comments.<sup>13</sup> As recently as in 2004, de Carvalho reinstated the issue of sound, this time defining it as the tone of a language and relating it to syntax as the visual representation of tone in terms of the written word. De Carvalho’s conviction that tone, in other words the sound patterns of a language, is constructed and expressed by the word order echoes the American poet George Opeen who argued that “if someone wants to move to a new experience, syntax is needed, a new syntax. A new syntax is a new cadence of uncovering, a new cadence of logic, a new cadence of music, a new structure of space” (*Selected Letters* 97). It remains to be seen to what extent Greek translators handled Beckett’s pursuit for a new order of things through sound.

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<sup>12</sup> Semantic or discourse prosody is defined as “the position of a lexical item through its repeated association with other items in the language (Baker, p.24) or “a feature which extends over more than one unit in a linear string” (Stubbs, p. 65).

<sup>13</sup> Since tonal sensibility changes from one language to the other, de Carvalho creates the profile of the translator as one having a fine sense of balance: “It is a matter of an equilibrium that few translators know how to apprehend in its minimal equivalence, in its complex subtlety—which demands that he be not only an intellectual but also—and above all—an artisan, a practical man, who knows how to listen to everything from the radio to conversations in the elevator, by way of political speeches, sports reporting and impassioned harangues”. For more see *Translation Journal and the Author* 2004.

22) EnST: ap-palled

FrST: epouvante

Translator's Name	Greek Translation
Manthos Krispis	Τρομάρα... με τρομάζει
Eleni Varika	Τρομαγμένος
Minos Volanakis	Μια φρίκη... μια φρικίαση
A. Papathanassopoulou	έν-τρομος
Odysseas Nikakis	Φρίκη
Dimitris Dimitriades	έν-τρομος
Commedia	ΤΡΟ-ΜΑ-ΓΜΕ-ΝΟΣ
Bald Theatre	Απέχθεια.

23) EnST: Stop!

FrST: Arret!

Translator's Name	Greek Translation
Manthos Krispis	Σι!
Eleni Varika	Στάσου!
Minos Volanakis	Σί!
A. Papathanassopoulou	Αλτ!
Odysseas Nikakis	Στοπ!
Dimitris Dimitriades	Στάσου!
Commedia	Στάσου!
Bald Theatre	Στοπ!

24) EnST: Calm yourself Calm... calm... The English say cawm.

FrST: Du calme. Calme... calme... Les Anglais dissent.

caaam. Ce sont des gens caam.

Translator's Name	Greek Translation
Manthos Krispis	Έλα τώρα. Έλα τώρα... Έλα... Όλοι οι άνθρωποι λένε έλα, έλα...
Eleni Varika	Ήσυχα
Minos Volanakis	Έλα τώρα. Έλα τώρα... Έλα... Όλοι οι άνθρωποι λένε έλα, έλα...
A. Papathanassopoulou	Κάλμα... κάλμα... Οι Εγγλέζοι λένε κάααμ.
Odysseas Nikakis	Έλα τώρα, ησύχασε! -Ήσυχα, ήσυχα... Οι Εγγλέζοι λένε κάαλμ
Dimitris Dimitriades	Κάλμα.-Κάλμα...Κάλμα... Οι Άγγλοι λένε κάααμ. Είναι άνθρωποι κάααμς.
Commedia	Κάλμα, Κάλμα. Κάλμα (ηδονικά) Οι Άγγλοι λένε κάαμ!
Bald Theatre	Ηρέμησε, ηρέμησε. Όλοι οι Γάλλοι λένε ηγέμησε.

25) EnST : It's the rope.  
It's the rubbing.  
It's inevitable.  
It's the knot.  
It's the chafing

FrST: C'est la corde  
A force de frotter  
Qu'est-ce que tu veux  
C'est le neud  
C'est fatal

Translator's Name	Greek Translation
Manthos Krispis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Είναι από το σκοινί.</li> <li>-Απ' το γδάρσιμο.</li> <li>-Αναπόφευκτο.</li> <li>-Απ' τον κόμπο.</li> <li>-Τρίψε τρίψε.</li> </ul>
Eleni Varika	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Είναι απ' το σκοινί.</li> <li>-Είναι απ' το γδάρσιμο.</li> <li>-Δέρμα είναι αυτό, τι να σου κάνει.</li> <li>-Είναι και ο κόμπος.</li> <li>-Αναπόφευκτο.</li> </ul>
Minos Volanakis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Απ' το σκοινί.</li> <li>-Το δάρσιμο.</li> <li>-Αναπόφευκτο.</li> <li>-Απ' τον κόμπο.</li> <li>-Τρίψε- τρίψε.</li> </ul>
Papathanassopoulou	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Απ' το σκοινί.</li> <li>-Απ' το τρίψιμο.</li> <li>-Τι περιμένεις;</li> <li>-Απ' τον κόμπο.</li> <li>-Απ' το γδάρσιμο.</li> </ul>
Odysseas Nikakis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Είναι από το σκοινί.</li> <li>-Είναι από το τρίψιμο.</li> <li>-Αναπόφευκτο!</li> <li>-Είν' από τον κόμπο.</li> <li>-Απ' το γδάρσιμο.</li> </ul>
Dimitris Dimitriades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Το σκοινί.</li> <li>-Απ' το πολύ τρίψιμο.</li> <li>-Αυτά είναι.</li> <li>-Η θηλειά.</li> <li>-Μοιραίο είναι.</li> </ul>
Commedia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Είναι από το σκοινί.</li> <li>-Από το γδάρσιμο.</li> <li>-Δέρμα είναι αυτό.</li> <li>-Τι να σου κάνει!</li> <li>-Είναι κι ο κόμπος.</li> <li>-Είναι μοιραίο.</li> </ul>
Bald Theatre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Είναι το σκοινί.</li> <li>-Είναι το τρίψιμο.</li> <li>-Είναι αναπόφευκτο.</li> <li>-Είναι ο κόμπος.</li> <li>-Είναι το τρίψιμο.</li> </ul>

26) EnST: makes my heart go pit-a-pat.

FrST: fair batter mon coer.

Translator's Name	Greek Translation
Manthos Krispis	Κάνει την καρδιά μου να πάει τικ-ι-τάκα, τικ-ι-τάκα
Eleni Varika	Φέρνει ταχυπαλμία.
Minos Volanakis	Κάνει την καρδιά μου να πάει τικ-ι-τάκα, τικ-ι-τάκα
A. Papathanassopoulou	Μου φέρνει χτυποκάρδι.
Odysseas Nikakis	Μου φέρνει ταχυκαρδία
Dimitris Dimitriades	Μου φέρνει ταχυκαρδία
Commedia	Αυτό μου προκαλεί ταχυπαλμία
Bald Theatre	Κάνει την καρδιά μου να πάει τικ-ι-τάκα, τίκ-ι-τάκα

27) EnST: I took a knook.

FrST: J'ai pris un knouk.

Translator's Name	Greek Translation
Manthos Krispis	Πήρα στη δούλεψή μου έναν κνούκο.
Eleni Varika	Πήρα στη δούλεψή μου έναν κνούκο.
Minos Volanakis	Γι' αυτό προσέλαβα έναν κνούκο.
A. Papathanassopoulou	Γι' αυτό λοιπόν πήρα και γω ένα νούκο.
Odysseas Nikakis	Γι' αυτό κι εγώ πήρα ένα κνόδαλο.
Dimitris Dimitriades	Πήρα λοιπόν ένα νούχο.
Commedia	Τότε λοιπόν πήρα ένα νουχ.
Bald Theatre	Ένα κνουκ.

28) EnST: Oh tray bong, tray tray tray bong

FrST: Oh très bon, très très très bon.

Translator's Name	Greek Translation
Manthos Krispis	Ώου, βέρυ γκουντ, βέρυ γκουντ.
Eleni Varika	(ξενική προφορά) Πολύ καλός! Πάρρα πολλύ καλλός!
Minos Volanakis	Ώου, βέρυ γκουντ, βέρυ γκουντ.
A. Papathanassopoulou	Ώ, βέρυ γκουντ, βέρυ βέρυ γκουντ.
Odysseas Nikakis	Ώου, βέρυ γκουντ, βέρυ βέρυ γκουντ.
Dimitris Dimitriades	ω, πολύ καλόν, πολύ πολύ πολύ καλόν.
Commedia	(με ξενική προφορά) Πολύ καλλός! Πάρρα πολύ καλός!
Bald Theatre	ω tres bon, tres, tres, tres bon

29) EnST: No, I was never in the Macon country. I've puked my puke of a life away here, I tell you!  
Here in the Cackon country!

FrST: Mais non, je n'ai jamais été dans le Vaucluse ! J'ai coule toute ma chaude-pisse d'existence ici, je te dis ! Ici ! Dans la Merdecluse !

(The Cackon country: an imaginary land of idleness appearing in the folk songs which formed the source of the popular work *Carmina Burana*. As Judith Lynn Sebesta describes in *Carmina Burana*, it is a name derived from the Old French word *cockaigne*, which means 'land of cakes', while she goes on to elaborate that "Cucany remained in the poetic imagination down through the seventeenth century as the country where houses were built of cake, roast geese wandered through the streets, larks fell already cooked and buttered from the sky, and rivers and fountains ran with wine".)

Translator's Name	Greek Translation
Manthos Krispis	Στο Βωκλίζ εγώ; Ποτέ! Σου λέω: σ' όλη μου τη ζωή σερνόμουνα εδώ, σ' αυτό εδώ το κοπροτόπι.
Eleni Varika	Εγώ στο Βωκλίζ; Ποτέ, σου λέω. Εδώ την πέρασα όλη μου τη ζωή. Εδώ. Στο Σκατοκλύζ.
Minos Volanakis	Εγώ στο Βωκλίζ; Ποτέ, σου λέω. Εδώ την πέρασα όλη μου τη ζωή. Εδώ. Στο Σκατοκλύζ.
A. Papathanassopoul	Όχι, δεν έχω πάει ποτέ στη Βωκλούζη! Όλο το ξέρασμα που λέγεται ζωή μου το έβγαλα εδώ! Στη Χαβούζη!
ou Odysseas Nikakis	Ποτέ! Δεν πήγα ποτέ στο Μείσον! Όλο το ξερατό που ήταν η ζωή μου, στο είπα, το έχω ξεράσει εδώ, στο Σκατέισον.
Dimitris Dimitriades	Τι είναι αυτά που λες, ποτέ δεν ήμουν στην Βωκλύζ! Πέρασα όλη την ουραίμια τη ζωή μου εδώ, σου λέω! Εδώ! Άκου την Βωκλύζ!
Commedia	Όχι, ποτέ δεν ήμουν στην Βωκλύζ. Εδώ πέρασα όλη τη ξεφτίλα τη ζωή μου. Εδώ. Στο Σκατοκλύζ.
Bald Theatre	Όχι, δεν ήμουν ποτέ στο Βωκλίζ. Ξέρασα όλη μου την εμετική ζωή εδώ, σου λέω. Στο Σκατίζ-Κουραδίζ.

30) EnST: Bye bye bye bye

FrST: Do do do do do

Translator's Name	Greek Translation
Manthos Krispis	Λα Λα Λα Λα
Eleni Varika	Λα Λα Λα Λα
Minos Volanakis	Νάνι νάνι νάνι νάνι να
A. Papathanassopoulou	Νάνι νάνι νάνι νάνι να
Odysseas Nikakis	Λα Λα Λα Λα
Dimitris Dimitriades	Ντο ντο ντο
Commedia	Νάνι νάνι νάνι
Bald Theatre	Bye bye bye bye



31) EnST:

FrST: [Echange d'injures]

Ceremonious ape!

Punctilious pig!

...

Moron!

...

Moron!

Vermin!

Abortion!

Morpion!

Sewer rat!

Curate!

Cretin!

Crrritic!

Translator's Name	Greek Translation
Manthos Krispis	Γονόκοκκε, σπειροχαίτη! Αγύριστο κεφάλι! [...] Σβαρνιάρη! [...] Βλαμένε! Σκουληκόσπερμα! Έκτρωμα! Σκορπιέ! Πόντικα! Κρυφομούμια! Ξόανο! Κριτικέ!
Eleni Varika	Έλα να βριστούμε! Ανταλλαγή ύβρεων.
Minos Volanakis	Γονόκοκκε, σπειροχαίτη! Έχουν και τα γουρούνια πρωτόκολλο! [...] Έκτρωμα! [...] Μαμουδόκολε! Σκουληκόσπερμα! Ξόανο! Σκορπιέ! Τυφλοπόντικα! Κρυφομούμια! Κρετίνε! Κριτικέ!
A. Papathanassopoulou	Πανηλίθιε! Κουτορνίθιε! Σίχαμα! Έκτρωμα! Λιμοκοντόρε! Νεωκόρε! Απόβρασμα της κοινωνίας! Κριτικέ λογοτεχνίας!
Odysseas Nikakis	Γονόκοκκε, σπειροχαίτη! Πεισματάτικο μουλάρη! [...] Ηλίθιε! [...] ηλίθιε! [...] Βρωμιάρη! Έκτρωμα! Σίχαμα! Μίξα! Απόβρασμα!

	Κουράδα! Κριτικέ!
Dimitris Dimi- triades	Κοπρίτη! Τομάρι! Ανταλλαγή ύβρεων.
Commedia	Γονόκοκκε, σπειροχαίτη! [...] Άθλιε! [...] Βλαμένε! Παράσιτο! Έκτρωμα! Μούμια! Αρουραίε! Παπάρα! Κρετίνε! Τεχνοκριτικέ!
Bald Theatre	Γονόκοκκε, σπειροχαίτη! Τελετουργικό πίθηκε! Τυπολατρικό γουρούνι! [...] Βλαμένε! [...] Βλαμένε! Παράσιτο! Εξάμβλωμα! Σκορπιέ! Αρουραίε! Διάκονε! Κρετίνε! Κριτικ

The terms which Beckett supplied in the text of the first English editions in the abuse game were determined by the repetition of sounds and cadences and by the meanings of the paired couplets. This exchange of insults culminates in a normally neutral occupation which has been transformed into a term of abuse.” (Dougald McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theatre: The Author as practical Playwright and Director*, 76)

To conclude, first and foremost, a comparative analysis of the different translation versions with regard to the text's sound effect underscores the fact that tonal sensibility changes from one language to the other. In this light, translators seem to favour the following approaches:

- Reproducing the sound of the original in an attempt to relate the words' verbal overtone with their conceptual content and re-create similar associations in the minds of the target audience (‘Σι!’, ‘έν-τρο-μος’, ‘τικ-ι-τάκα’, ‘λα λα’).
- Reducing translation to sense by allowing the word's semantic meaning to shine through without the implications its sound brings along (‘Στάσου’, ‘έλα έλα’, ‘ταχυπαλμιά’).
- Omitting the sound utterance and summarising its semantic meaning (‘ησύχασε’).
- Adjusting and assimilating the text into the conventions of the target language and culture, especially in cases where there is reference to a third language and culture and the element of foreignness has to be emphasised (“Ολοι οι Γάλλοι λένε ηγέμησε” “Ωου, βέρυ γκουντ, βέρυ βέρυ γκουντ”, ‘(με ξενική προφορά) Πολύ καλλός! Πάρρα πολύ καλός!’)
- Retaining the rhyming effect of the verbal exchange and the rhythm of the utterance in terms of the alternation between stressed vs. unstressed syllables (examples 25, 29, 31).
- Preserving the exotic element of the source text by transferring its sound effect verbatim without any interference on part of the translator even at the expense of comprehensibility/clarity of expression (‘ντο ντο ντο’, ‘bye bye bye’). The case of ‘I took a knook’ is worth mentioning here, since it is an utterance purely used on account of its sound impact, which nevertheless fails to be transposed into the Greek language as all translations merely preserve Beckett's sound neologism, yet without being able to reproduce an equivalent rhyming effect of the phrase as a whole.

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## Summary

**Penny Fylaktaki**

### **The Sound of Translation: *Godot* in a translator's anatomy**

An overview of one of the most translated Anglosaxon plays into Greek from a socio-political and cultural perspective and the way translation is a two-way reflection of the linguistic and social milieu of every era.