Abstract: The article examines Polish translations of the Derridian term *différance*. Polish philosophical discourse uses the following renditions of *différance*: *róż(ni(c) ość* by Bogdan Banasiak, *różNICa* by Tadeusz Sławek, *gra-na-zwökę-o-różnice* by Stanisław Cichowicz and the most popular: *różnia* by Joanna Skoczylas. Should a mistake be deliberately committed in Polish, as it was done in the original? Or should it be corrected, and if so – how to explain the correction? The suggestion to translate the controversial concept by means of a Polish neologism, the neographism *róznica*, may be productive and such a solution may be open to a number of interpretations. Thanks to its ambivalence, *róznica* introduces a majority of Derridian motifs and may generate new ideas and concepts. Moreover, it allows a successful critique of logocentrism and phonocentrism of Western philosophy as well as a subversion of binary oppositions, a fixed and solid subject and desire for self-presence. Finally, the misspelled *différance* may be viewed as an example of grammatical alterity.

Keywords: deconstruction, Derrida, *différance*, *różnia*, *róznica*, spelling mistakes in translation

The discussion concerning Polish translations of the Derridian *différance* was at its peak in the 1990s and accompanied the publication of Polish versions of Derrida’s work, but it seems to have lost its impetus. Still, it is only now, when one does not need to fear the rejection and marginalization of the very idea of deconstruction, that the time is ripe for a reflection on the following question: is it possible that in their attempt to explain and bring

---

1 Whenever the relationship between the French original and its Polish translations is discussed, the original French *différance* is used; otherwise, for reasons presented in the article, the ungrammatical “differance” is employed instead of the French borrowing, the solution advocated e.g. by Spivak (translator’s note).
closer the French term the individual translations of *différance* have in fact obliterated its proper meaning and, even more importantly, have deprived it of its subversive and dynamic potential? I will start my discussion with the analysis of the existing translation proposals (by Bogdan Banasiak, Tadeusz Sławek, Stanisław Cichowicz and Joanna Skoczylas) and move on to consider the possibilities of rendering into Polish the term *différance* with its inherent spelling mistake, which could play on incorrect Polish versions of the term as *różnica* or *rużnica*. In order to do that I will look at the Derridian *différance/différence* through the lens of iterability, i.e. resemblance that is pervaded by displacement and alterity. I hope to demonstrate what consequences and what interpretive perspectives may be generated by a translation proposal that stresses the notion of iteration. I also ask whether the mistake made deliberately by the French philosopher should be corrected in the Polish critical thought and whether the correction is justified. At the same time, I investigate whether such an atypical, alternative translation matches other terms coined by Derrida, e.g. “supplement,” “pharmakon,” “deferral,” “espacement,” “trace” or “dissemination.” I am convinced that on the basis of the misspelling inherent in differance it is possible to outline the way in which grammatical alterity stands the chance of entering the order of language.

The initial plurality and prolific originality of the first Polish translations of *différance*, favouring one or two characteristic features of the controversial term, has already been limited and standardized. The choice has been made on the strength of the philosophical *usus* that at the moment is inclined towards the proposition of Joanna Skoczylas (her *różnia*) or alternatively towards the seemingly neutral and therefore relatively attractive original French term. Indeed, it is possible that the notion of differance, of paramount importance to deconstruction, will share the fate of the Heideggerian *Dasein*, which, after many futile translation attempts, has been accepted in the Polish academic practice as an untranslatable term that can always be explained and discussed.²

Bogdan Banasiak, who translated *Of Grammatology*, suggested in his preface to the Polish version of Derrida’s work that *différance* should be translated as *różnicość*, a word which could take a double form of *róż(nic)ość* or *różni(coś)c* and therefore embrace both *nic* (nothing) and *coś* (something). This proposal seems to articulate quite convincingly the

² Note such Polish equivalents as e.g. *jestestwo* (being) coined by Bogdan Baran or *byt przytomny* (conscious being) used by Krzysztof Michalski.
undecidable oscillation between turning into nothing and becoming something: these two antagonistic tendencies coexist with each other, as neither would be able to prevail.

This twofold term seems to refer with every single reading to an entirely different scope of meaning (nothing/something), which allows it to enter the space of ambivalence, of scintillating activity. The complicated \( r\dot{\acute{z}}(ni(c)o\acute{s})\dot{c} \), that is and at the same time is not, proves an interesting translation project in keeping with the spirit of Derrida, as it strives to avoid the reduction to either presence or absence. Unfortunately, it does not seem to be a construction open enough or, above all, meaningful enough to allow for an unimpeded display of all the philosophical issues typical of deconstruction which should, according to Derrida himself, be evoked by the term.

Another, quite intriguing, idea was \( \dot{r}\dot{o}\dot{\acute{z}}N\dot{I}Ca \)³ coined by Tadeusz Sławek, the first Polish translator that paid attention to an entirely different set of features connected with the notion of differance. He was very much aware of the fact that differance is not only a new word with an unheard-of meaning, but also a neographism. The difference between the two resides in the very graphic tissue of the word that is tied directly to print and not to a new logos that is made present and would be carried over by a neologism meant to have an intellectual life of its own. Sławek is basically the only translator that notices and makes use of the fact that \( \dot{r}\dot{o}\dot{\acute{z}}N\dot{I}Ca \) is inaudible to the human ear and that it mocks the metaphysics of presence. Still, despite all its merits his translation proposal is not free from imperfection. First of all, the very use of the capital letters which serves here to expose the difference seems to fall short of Derrida’s intention, as he himself would claim that differance “governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any authority. It is not announced by any capital letter” (Derrida 1982: 22). Another drawback of the proposition is the emphasis its author puts on the monstrously exaggerated, monumental NIC (NOTHING). On the one hand, this peculiar graphic operation provides an excellent indication that \( \dot{r}\dot{o}\dot{\acute{z}}N\dot{I}Ca \) is nothing present and even more so, it can never become completely present, as it remains silent. On the other hand, this kind of notation unintentionally throws the whole deconstructionist endeavour into the abyss of non-presence. By invoking nothingness with all its explicitly

³ Sławek’s proposal was appropriated, among others, by Jacek Kochanowski, who used it in his book *Fantazmat z\( \dot{r}\dot{o}\dot{\acute{z}}N\dot{I}C\)owany. Socjologiczne studium przemian tożsamości gejów* (A Differentiated Phantasm: A Sociological Study of the Changes in Gay Identity.)
Derrida derives from the Platonic dialogues means a beneficial cure and a deadly poison in one. Because of its ambiguous power, writing appears as both dangerous and seductive, as it is connected with a sense of irreducible doubleness. Surrendering unequivocity for the sake of unpredictable lability makes us forsake the territory of the same and open ourselves to marginalized otherness and uncontrollable plurality. That is why, from the perspective of the metaphysics of presence, an act of introducing the doubleness of rz into the term różnica (difference) may seem to be tantamount to opening Pandora’s box. The Polish letter ź present in the word różnica functions here as a keystone or a seal creating a sense of security and strengthening the metaphysical status quo with all its binary oppositions, logos, phonocentrism, unitary, solid subject and the insatiate desire for self-presence. Derrida does not conceal the advantages stemming from such an opening, but he realizes the hidden dangers of writing: “Within the chain of supplements, it was difficult to separate writing from onanism. Those two supplements have in common at least the fact that they are dangerous. They transgress a prohibition and are experienced within culpability” (Derrida 1998: 165).

It turns out that there is no path that would lead to differance otherwise than through writing; but one can arrive there only by erring; more than that, one can never reach the destination straightforwardly and unmistakably (Derrida 1982: 8). Translating Derrida’s controversial term with the Polish neo-plasm, or neographism, róznica does stand a chance of becoming an exceedingly prolific idea open to a plurality of interpretations: these in their endless profusion may induce well-justified anxiety in the lovers of unity. The proposed Polish rendering of différence does not only allow for a successful critique of logocentrism and phonocentrism but, owing to its equivocality, introduces the majority of Derridian concepts: supplement, pharmakon, the end of man, deferral, spacing, iterability, alterity, trace, dissemination, clinamen and numerous other so far unacknowledged.

trans. Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik

Bibliography


**Andrzej Marzec** is a philosopher and lectures at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland, and the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. His research interests include hauntology, deconstruction, Lacanian film theory, posthumanism, queer and gender studies.