Mountain Language was first performed at the National Theatre on 20 October 1988. The cast was as follows:

YOUNG WOMAN     Miranda Richardson  
ELDERLY WOMAN    Eileen Atkins       
SERGEANT         Michael Gambon      
OFFICER          Julian Wadham       
GUARD            George Harris       
PRISONER         Tony Haygarth       
HOODED MAN       Alex Hardy          
SECOND GUARD     Douglas McFerran     

Directed by Harold Pinter    
Designed by Michael Taylor

A Prison Wall

A line of women. An elderly woman, cradling her hand. A basket at her feet. A young woman with her arm around the woman's shoulders.

A Sergeant enters, followed by an officer. The Sergeant points to the young woman.

Sergeant

Name!

Young Woman

We've given our names.

Sergeant

Name?

Young Woman

We've given our names.

Sergeant

Name?

Officer (To Sergeant)  
Stop this shit. (To Young Woman) Any complaints?

Young Woman

She's been bitten.
Who?

Pause.

Who? Who's been bitten?

**YOUNG WOMAN**
She has. She has a torn hand. Look. Her hand has been bitten. This is blood.

**SERGEANT (TO YOUNG WOMAN)**
What is your name?

**OFFICER**
Shut up.

_He walks over to elderly woman._

What's happened to your hand? Has someone bitten your hand?

**The woman slowly lifts her hand. He peers at it.**

Who did this? Who bit you?

**YOUNG WOMAN**
A Dobermann pinscher.

**OFFICER**
Which one?

Pause.

**SERGEANT steps forward.**

**SERGEANT**
Sir!

**OFFICER**
Look at this woman's hand. I think the thumb is going to come off. (To elderly woman) Who did this?

**She stares at him.**

Who did this?

**YOUNG WOMAN**
A big dog.

**OFFICER**
What was his name?

Pause.

What was his name?

Pause.

Every dog has a name! They answer to their name. They are given a name by their parents and that is their
name, that is their name! Before they bite, they state their name. It's a formal procedure. They state their name and then they bite. What was his name? If you tell me one of our dogs bit this woman without giving his name I will have that dog shot!

Silence.

Now – attention! Silence and attention! Sergeant!

Sergeant

Sir?

Officer

Take any complaints.

Sergeant

Any complaints? Has anyone got any complaints?

Young Woman

We were told to be here at nine o'clock this morning.

Sergeant

Right. Quite right. Nine o'clock this morning. Absolutely right. What's your complaint?

Young Woman

We were here at nine o'clock this morning. It's now five o'clock. We have been standing here for eight hours. In the snow. Your men let Dobermann pinschers frighten us. One bit this woman's hand.

OFFICER

What was the name of this dog?

She looks at him.

YOUNG WOMAN

I don't know his name.

SERGEANT

With permission sir?

OFFICER

Go ahead.

SERGEANT

Your husbands, your sons, your fathers, these men you have been waiting to see, are shithouses. They are enemies of the State. They are shithouses.

The Officer steps towards the Women.

OFFICER

Now hear this. You are mountain people. You hear me? Your language is dead. It is forbidden. It is not permitted to speak your mountain language in this place. You cannot speak your language to your men. It is not permitted. Do you understand? You may not speak it. It is outlawed. You may only speak the language of the capital. That is the only language permitted in this place. You will be badly punished if you attempt to speak your mountain language in this place. This is a military decree. It is the law. Your language is forbidden. It is dead. No one is allowed to
MOUNTAIN LANGUAGE

speak your language. Your language no longer exists.
Any questions?

YOUNG WOMAN
I do not speak the mountain language.

Silence. The officer and sergeant slowly circle her.
The sergeant puts his hand on her bottom.

SERGEANT
What language do you speak? What language do you speak with your arse?

OFFICER
These women, Sergeant, have as yet committed no crime. Remember that.

SERGEANT
Sir! But you're not saying they're without sin?

OFFICER
Oh, no. Oh, no, I'm not saying that.

SERGEANT
This one's full of it. She bounces with it.

OFFICER
She doesn't speak the mountain language.

The woman moves away from the sergeant's hand
and turns to face the two men.

YOUNG WOMAN
My name is Sara Johnson. I have come to see my husband. It is my right. Where is he?

OFFICER
Show me your papers.

She gives him a piece of paper. He examines it, turns to sergeant.

He doesn't come from the mountains. He's in the wrong batch.

SERGEANT
So is she. She looks like a fucking intellectual to me.

OFFICER
But you said her arse wobbled.

SERGEANT
Intellectual arses wobble the best.

Blackout.
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Visitors Room

A PRISONER sitting. The ELDERLY WOMAN sitting, with basket. A GUARD standing behind her.

The PRISONER and the WOMAN speak in a strong rural accent.

Silence.

ELDERLY WOMAN

I have apples –

The GUARD jabs her and shouts.

GUARD

Forbidden! Forbidden forbidden forbidden! Jesus Christ! (To PRISONER) Does she understand what I'm saying?

PRISONER

No.

GUARD

Doesn’t she?

He bends over her.

Don’t you?

She stares up at him.

PRISONER

She’s old. She doesn’t understand.

GUARD

Whose fault is that?

He laughs.

Not mine, I can tell you. And I’ll tell you another thing.

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MOUNTAIN LANGUAGE

I've got a wife and three kids. And you're all a pile of shit.

Silence.

PRISONER

I've got a wife and three kids.

GUARD

You've what?

Silence.

You've got what?

Silence.

What did you say to me? You've got what?

Silence.

You've got what?

He picks up the telephone and dials one digit.

Sergeant? I'm in the Blue Room... yes... I thought I should report, Sergeant... I think I've got a joker in here.

Lights up. The sergeant comes in.

SERGEANT

What joker?

Blackout.

ELDERLY WOMAN'S VOICE
The baby is waiting for you.

PRISONER'S VOICE
Your hand has been bitten.

ELDERLY WOMAN'S VOICE
They are all waiting for you.

PRISONER'S VOICE
They have bitten my mother's hand.

ELDERLY WOMAN'S VOICE
When you come home there will be such a welcome for you. Everyone is waiting for you. They're all waiting for you. They're all waiting to see you.

Lights up. The sergeant comes in.

SERGEANT

What joker?
Voice in the Darkness

SERGEANT’S VOICE
Who's that fucking woman? What's that fucking woman doing here? Who let that fucking woman through that fucking door?

SECOND GUARD’S VOICE
She's his wife.

Lights up.

A corridor.

A HOODED MAN held up by the guard and the sergeant. The young woman at a distance from them, staring at them.

SERGEANT
What is this, a reception for Lady Duck Muck? Where's the bloody Babycham? Who's got the bloody Babycham for Lady Duck Muck?

He goes to the young woman.

Hello, Miss. Sorry. A bit of a breakdown in administration, I'm afraid. They've sent you through the wrong door. Unbelievable. Someone'll be done for

MOUNTAIN LANGUAGE

this. Anyway, in the meantime, what can I do for you, dear lady, as they used to say in the movies?

Lights to half. The figures are still.

Voices over:

MAN’S VOICE
I watch you sleep. And then your eyes open. You look up at me above you and smile.

YOUNG WOMAN’S VOICE
You smile. When my eyes open I see you above me and smile.

MAN’S VOICE
We are out on a lake.

YOUNG WOMAN’S VOICE
It is spring.

MAN’S VOICE
I hold you. I warm you.

YOUNG WOMAN’S VOICE
When my eyes open I see you above me and smile.

Lights up. The hooded man collapses. The young woman screams.

YOUNG WOMAN
Charley!
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The sergeant clicks his fingers. The guard drags the man off.

SERGEANT

Yes, you've come in the wrong door. It must be the computer. The computer's got a double hernia. But I'll tell you what - if you want any information on any aspect of life in this place we've got a bloke comes into the office every Tuesday week, except when it rains. He's right on top of his chosen subject. Give him a tinkle one of these days and he'll see you all right. His name is Dokes. Joseph Dokes.

YOUNG WOMAN

Can I fuck him? If I fuck him, will everything be all right?

SERGEANT

Sure. No problem.

YOUNG WOMAN

Thank you.

Blackout.

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Visitors Room

GUARD, ELDERLY WOMAN, PRISONER.

Silence.

The prisoner has blood on his face. He sits trembling. The woman is still. The guard is looking out of a window. He turns to look at them both.

GUARD

Oh, I forgot to tell you. They've changed the rules. She can speak. She can speak in her own language. Until further notice.

PRISONER

She can speak?

GUARD

Yes. Until further notice. New rules.

Pause.

PRISONER

Mother, you can speak.

Pause.

Mother, I'm speaking to you. You see? We can speak.
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You can speak to me in our own language.

*She is still.*

You can speak.

*Pause.*

Mother. Can you hear me? I am speaking to you in our own language.

*Pause.*

Do you hear me?

*Pause.*

It's our language.

*Pause.*

Can't you hear me? Do you hear me?

*She does not respond.*

Mother?

**GUARD**

Tell her she can speak in her own language. New rules. Until further notice.

**PRISONER**

Mother?