



## Rhythm in Translations

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### Abstract

This research is an attempt at the elucidation of the significance of rhythmic in translations. According to Eugene A. Nida's functional equivalence, the comprehensive effect which the receptors of the versions get should be the same as the one the readers of the original get, and since rhythm is an integral part of the style, rhythm should be realized in translations.

**Keywords:** Rhythm, Translations, Functional equivalence, Rhythmical equivalence

### 1. The significance of rhythm

Rhythm is significant because it is an integral part of the style in languages. It is obvious that rhythm plays an active role in different feet and meters in English poetry, such as iambic pentameter, trochaic tetrameter and anapestic trimeter, etc., among which the iambic pentameter is most frequently used. Rhythm often functions as primary rhythm and secondary rhythm in English articles. Everyone knows poetry is the complexity of content and form, with the help of the form, the meaning is conveyed; so loss of the form, loss of the meaning. As far as the forms in poetry are concerned, rhythm is the most important one. There is no doubt that rhythm is a necessary part of the translation due to the great role it plays in various styles of languages, especially in poetry. Ezra Pound also states that "rhythm must have meaning". But unfortunately, while some translators notice the importance of rhythm in translation, others do not pay enough attention to it.

### 2. Functional equivalence

The aim of translation, unquestionably, is to comprehend what the original says and represents it in the target language, in other words, a translator needs to convey all the possible meaning of the source language to his or her readers, and a translation needs to complete the communication which the original conveys. Just as Nida says "translation means communication," translating is a kind of process to complete the communication, and "this process depends on what is received by persons hearing or reading a translation." Generally speaking, whether the communication succeeds or not determines the adequacy of a translation. And although the adequacy of a translation depends on a great many different factors, no matter how many factors the adequacy of translations depends on, "it is best to speak of 'functional equivalence' in terms of a range of adequacy, since no translation is ever completely equivalent".

Since it is an important part of style in languages, rhythm is certainly an important factor which affects the meaning of the original. Hence it affects the communication in translating and translations. Therefore, rhythm should be paid enough attention in translating and translations not only in poetry, but also in essay, drama, and so on. Moreover, the form of rhythm may also be helpful for conveyance of the communication, so it should also be concerned while in translating and translations. Otherwise, the communication may not be complete. In one word, functional equivalence of a translation might as well include rhythmical equivalence. That is to say, without rhythmical equivalence, functional equivalence will not be fully accomplished. For this reason, rhythm should be taken into consideration in translating and translations.

### 3. Rhythm in translations

#### 3.1 *Rhythm and Its Significance in Literary Representation*

It is universally acknowledged that rhythm, which can be all regular recurrent happenings in time, exists in all living things and all natural changes. Rhythm can be observed in nature, for example, one can see the rhythm in the flight of a

bird, hear it from a piece of music. Rhythm is also represented by the beating of a man's heart, the ticking of a clock and the shifting of the four seasons in a year. Besides, it is also determined in the revolutions of the moon and the earth, and the rising and ebb of the tide, so on and so forth. It can be said that there is almost no place in universe that one cannot find rhythm. It is, therefore, possible to say that there is no doubt that rhythm is the law of the nature. Furthermore, the civilization of the world, to some degree, comes from the learning of rhythm.

As a general rule, rhythm is also the main feature of music. It consists of everything pertaining to the forward movement of music in time. For example, the regular melody in a certain pattern always satisfies the expectation of the listeners. As a matter of fact, rhythm also governs the movements of the body in dance. Usually dancers act in quite various way based on different rhythmic sense. No one can deny that it is rhythm that creates harmony and beauty of universe.

Besides, rhythm is an essential feature of all the arts, particularly in languages. When speaking, people often take it into account, such as the stressing of the important words of the statements and the reducing of the less important words. Rhythm has a profound effect on how people can easily understand one when one speaks. This is because native speakers of the language expect the material to be presented in a certain way and when one's stress and rhythmic patterns meet the listener's expectations, everything is fine, but when one does not, people will be distracted or misunderstand one. The pleasure of rhythm comes from whether the expectation (which is a rhythmical pattern psychologically) is met or not.

And what is rhythm in languages? Rhythm is created by the regular recurrence of particular items. It is "regular succession of weak and strong stresses, accents, sounds or movements in speech, music, dancing, etc." Halliday believes that "rhythm is carried along by a succession of beats, occurring at more or less regular intervals."

### 3.2 Rhythm and foot, caesura, "Dun" and "Dou" in rhythm

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Owing to the differences in the characteristics of languages, it is obvious that each language is of its own distinctive features, and the same cases are with rhythm in various languages. Since English and Chinese are definitely dissimilar, and therefore rhythmical patterns in them are also different. Take English for instance. The basic tendency of English speech rhythm is that the stressed syllables in a given tone-group follow each other at roughly intervals of time. In other words, language can be split into segments which, to some degree, are of equal duration, such as rhythm in English. It is based on the regular succession of stressed syllables, with unstressed syllables filling in the intervals between them. That is to say, utterance stresses serve as a basis for the rhythmical organization of speech and segment the speech flow into units of more or less equal length. It is a feature of English that the utterance is delivered as a series of close-knit rhythmic groups, which are named as rhythmic units. A rhythmic unit is either one stressed syllable or a stressed syllable with a number of unstressed ones grouped around it. To put it another way, one might say that a rhythm group consists of one or more syllables closely connected by sense and grammar, but containing only one strongly accented syllable. And regular patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables are called meters (or measures). When meters are identified, the syllables in a line are divided into groups of two or three, each of which is called a foot, which is actually the smallest rhythmic unit or span of stressed or salient syllables together with unstressed syllable or weak syllable(s), and repeated to form a metrical pattern. In short, rhythm in English depends on the foot. And "all feet tend to be of roughly the same length—which means, of course, that the syllables must vary in length, since a foot may consist of varying numbers of syllables". Therefore, rhythm in English is foot-timing (commonly called stress-timing) rhythm.

There is no doubt that foot also exists in Chinese. It is considered as "the smallest unit, which can be used independently in prosody, consists of a stressed syllable and one unstressed syllable at least". Generally speaking, there are mainly three types of foot — degenerate foot, standard foot and super foot --- in Chinese, among which standard foot is composed of two syllables; degenerate foot, of only one syllable; and super foot, of three syllables. Other combination which is beyond three syllables must be the combination of two feet, or the combination of a basic prosodic word — a standard foot and a super foot, While distinguished from the syllables in English, all the syllables in Chinese tend to be of roughly the same length whether they are stressed or not. So in this case, although rhythm in Chinese depends on the foot which is based on the syllable (or a sub-syllabic unit, the mora), it is considered as syllabic rhythm, or syllable-timing rhythm. In a word, Chinese is syllable-timed and English is stress-timed.

A foot usually tends to appear as a sense group in sentences both in English and Chinese, and it is the main way that weighs a lot in the division of the rhythm. A sense group is a series of syllables that express a comparatively complete idea and can be uttered in one breath. It may be a short sentence or a part of a sentence. Sense group can be used as a common term in describing a meaningful unit both in English and Chinese. It can also be viewed as the same thing as information unit. Usually a sense group is a measure in Chinese, and the rhythm focus is the information focus.

Another technical term caesura which is related with rhythm should be mentioned here. Usually a break within a line in English is a caesura. Caesuras are worth noting because they can have marked effects upon a poem. Three effects of caesuras should be concerned: “the way they shape the emotional life of a poem, the humor they can help to create, and the way they can dramatize a poem’s close.” Caesura marks the pauses in one’s thought, as if one stops to think. It also marks a change in the emotions of a poem, and it may be considered as a kind of marker of topic-shift in discourse. Caesura is also used in Chinese, and usually it is divided by the sense groups. In other words, the pause between the sense groups can be considered as a caesura, so caesura in English can be called “Dun” or “Dou” in Chinese. In general, a sense group is a caesura in Chinese. The frequency of the appearance of caesuras may stand for certain rhythmical patterns. A good case in point is that when a narrator in a basketball match speaks fast with many caesuras, which would definitely make people feel the tense atmosphere in the field; while delivering a recitation, people always recite in a smooth and swift way with few caesuras, such as the description of the beauty of the nature. It is common that people often speak in measured tones with caesuras to express their excited feelings and emotions. Thus caesuras revealing the quickness or the slowness of the rhythm might express different meaning.

For the above reasons, foot and caesura are the important parts of rhythm, but with distinctive difference between them. Foot is composed of the stressed syllables and the unstressed syllables, while caesura is a break or a pause between the different feet. There may be one foot or several feet in one caesura.

And it is necessary to use “Dun” to convey the meaning of the rhythm instead of syllables or feet. It sounds that if the translation has the same syllables as the original version, the feet would be the same, and therefore the rhythm must be the same. But it is not necessarily the case due to the different characteristics among languages. Sometimes it is so hard to translate one language into another in exactly the same rhythm with syllables in feet or caesuras as many as that of the other language. By using “Dun” or “Dou” in Chinese to convey the meaning of rhythm in the original text, rhythmical effect could be attained whether the numbers of syllables between the source text and the target text are identical or not. What we want the version to be rhythmically equivalent with the original is to be rhythmically equivalent in functional effect. As a matter of fact, it is very difficult to communicate what the source language values to the target language both in meaning and form due to the distinctive characteristics among different languages. And this is just the reason why “Dun” is employed in E-C translation to transfer what the meter hints both in form and meaning.

### *3.3 Rhythmical Equivalence in Translating and Translations*

Eugene A. Nida, a famous American translation theorist, puts forward translation criteria which are accepted by more and more translators, that is functional equivalence. Rather than attempting to defend literal or free translating or trying to reconcile the two by aiming at a compromise, it is very wise for him to focus on a different perspective which is functional effect. Functional equivalence means that the comprehensive effect which the receptors of the versions get should be the same as the one the readers of the original get. That is to say, no matter how perfect a method or the process is used in translation, the aim of a translation is, most important of all, to communicate all the values that the source language contains to the target text, or to reproduce the functional effect which the receivers get from the original version to the receptors’ one. So what a translation concerns is not only its meaning and form but also its effect, to be more specific, functional equivalence.

As far as functional equivalence is concerned, a minimal realistic definition of functional equivalence, according to Eugene A. Nida, could be stated as the readers of a translated text should be able to comprehend it to the point that they can conceive of how the original readers of the text must have understood and appreciated it. And for a maximal, ideal definition of equivalence could be stated as the readers of a translated text should be able to understand and appreciate it in essentially the same manner as the original readers did.

As one of the most important factors to convey the meaning, it is certain that rhythm should be cared about in translating and translations. So whenever functional equivalence is discussed, rhythmical equivalence might be a part of it.

## **4. Conclusion**

This thesis, first of all, tries to demonstrate the importance of the rhythm in translation, and it is necessary for the translators to take the rhythm into account in translating and translations. Because of its great significance, rhythmical equivalence is a necessary part of functional equivalence in translation. As one of the most important factors that a complete translation depends on, rhythm is surely a necessary part of the functional equivalence, that is to say, in translating, rhythm as well as other factors should be taken into account such as rhyme, grammar and rhetoric, etc. With the same or similar rhythmical patterns, readers could comprehend the versions in the way that the readers comprehend the original ones.

In the second place, rhythm could be realized by distinct rhythm both in source texts and target texts in the form of feet, caesuras and “Dun or “Dou” in Chinese.

Thirdly, flexibility, which is an essential factor for all genres of languages, should also be mentioned here, because whether in source texts or target texts, rhythm always needs to be flexible. Everyone knows only the dullest of poems keep strictly to a set meter. Swell and cadence are always the vitality for a good sentence.

What's more, as a necessary part, the rhythm not only should be taken into consideration, but could be employed as one of the standards to judge or evaluate whether a version is perfect or not. As a necessary part of functional equivalence, rhythmical equivalence weighs a lot. If rhythmical equivalence is taken into consideration, many of the translations would not be viewed as just the explanations or brand-new versions in another language.

And it is worth mentioning that, just as all grammar rules leak, rhythm does not necessarily mean that rhythm in the version must be exactly the same as that of the original. An adequate reason is that languages are different although they have something in common. Take English and Chinese for example, their form, sound, grammar, rhetoric, cultural background and the way of thinking are different. It is, therefore, natural that their characteristics of the rhythm differ from each other. But trying to imitate the original rhythmic way of the original is very necessary for the translators. That is to say, whatever the author expresses in the original poem, it is better for a translator to try to convey what he or she intends to express, and it is best to convey in the similar rhythm or to convey the rhythmical sense as close as possible to the original text.

In a nutshell, rhythm is not only significant in translations, but also valuable to be a standard for judging or evaluating the translation works. Rhythm can be realized by various rhythmical patterns in both English and Chinese, and it is a necessary part of functional equivalence. But no matter how important it is, the purpose of rhythm is all for communication, without its conveyance of meaning, it will surely lose its weight.

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