Retained in Translation: Rhythm and Pitch Structure of A. Pushkin's 'Eugene Onegin' Translated by James Falen

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the narration of Pushkin's novel (in translation into English by James E. Falen) by Stephen Fry and Rafael Corkhill.

The aim was to analyse the actors' oral performance in terms of prosodic invariants as compared to the Russian original recited by two professional actors. An attempt was made to measure the 'authenticity' of the translation by application of cluster analysis.

The audio files were analysed with the help of *Praat* program, and the measurements were processed within *Statistica* package. They included crosscorrelation of durational and F0 patterns of verses within and between speakers with cluster analysis to follow which was based on the correlation coefficients.

The results obtained suggest a significant correlation between the declamation of English stanzas by the British actors and corresponding Russian verses spoken by native speakers.

Keywords: poetic translation, prosody, phonetic similarity, declamatory phonetics, cluster analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

James E. Falen, the professor of Russian at the University of Tennessee, published his revised translation of *Eugene Onegin* in 1998. He carefully preserved the rhyme patterns now called *Onegin stanza* or *Pushkin sonnet*. According to Russian critics and translators, this translation is claimed to be the most faiththful one to Pushkin's spirit.

For Douglas Hofstadter who also tried his hand in translating *Eugene Onegin*, James Falen's version "is consistently clear as a bell, not only in meaning but also in ease of reading aloud. … Mr. Falen, by contrast, is nearly unfailingly graceful and limpid…" [7].

James Falen comments that "Russian and English poetry do not look, sound, or behave very much alike; and by choosing to work on Pushkin's poem, in which the sheer beauty of sound is so vital a part of its effect…, the translator may find himself casting an uneasy eye at Robert Frost's cautionary definition of poetry as 'what gets lost in translation'. J. Falen adds that the metre, iambic tetrameter, is hardly in itself alien to the English poetic tradition [12].

The theory of poetic prosody is an ongoing process although the interpretation of poetry in terms of phonetics is becoming less common in literary studies [1].

Statistical differences between languages are instrumental in specifying prevailing metres in versification. Numerous translator's tasks involve taking into account both word and syntactic structure frequencies of occurrence, not to mention rhyme schemes and semantics [6].

The metric pattern of a poem does not necessarily specify the declamatory rhythm and melody. It is by specific analysis of a poetic text that the reciter should choose the acceptable options of its oral interpretation. An analysis like this could be facilitated by creating a specified theory of vocalized poetry [2].

Some researchers of poetry speak about a specific poetic intonation, special vocal cadence at the end of each line. Apart from sentences and phrases, poetic speech has its own commensurable units such as lines or verses. It would appear reasonable to suggest that these phenomena are language-specific and should be taken into account when studying the artistic means of translating poetry into a target language.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

The analysis is based on the audio files from audiobooks *Eugene Onegin* narrated by the British actor Stephen Fry (F) and voice actor Raphael Corkhill (C) as well as two male Russian speakers I. Smoktunovsky (S) and V. Gaft (G), recognised actors [8-11]. All speakers conform with the national standards of pronunciation.

The Onegin stanza consists of 14 lines which are rhymed as AbAbCCddEffEgg where the capital letters stand for feminine rhymes and small letters represent masculine rhymes. The seven stanzas for the study were chosen from different chapters and included descriptions of nature and social life and Onegin's letter to Tatiana.

As reported in many papers, speech perception is focused on vowels, since they are 'energetic' and

take longer to pronounce than most consonants. Vowels may carry accent and signal whether a syllable is strong or weak [4, 5, 13].

By applying the *Praat* program, the audio files were manually processed for identifying vowel segments with the aid of auditory feedback and visual cues (oscillograms and spectrograms) [3].

Pauses and vowel segments were located and measured as precisely as possible. The accuracy of measurements was within 5 – 15 ms per vowel segment. The fundamental frequency was averaged instrumentally over vowel segments.

By this means the whole stanzas in question were transformed into strings of vowel absolute durations and rows of F0 values averaged over vowels.

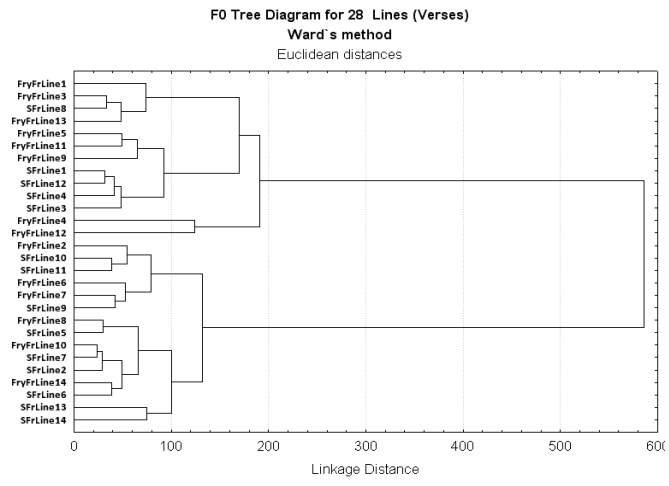
Statistical processing which implied both parametric and rank correlation was used for clustering analysis carried out with *Statistica* package [14].

More than 40 correlation matrices were calculated and examined in terms of rhythmic and pitch patterns. The correlation matrices between isolated lines and whole stanzas realised by all the speakers provided the basis for cluster analysis. It was found that Ward's dendrograms were most adequate for our needs when comparing patterns within and between speakers.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As the graph suggests, the shortest distances in terms of frequency and timing patterns are observed between the lines recited by the same speakers, e.g. in Fig. 1: lines S1, S12, S4 and S3; S10 and S11; lines Fry5, Fry11 and Fry9 or in Fig. 2: lines G2 and G11; G4, G7 and G8.

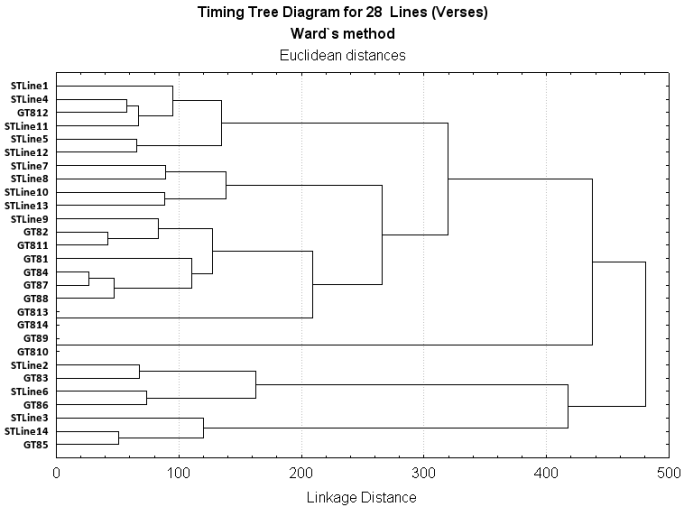
Figure 1: The cluster diagram of pitch contours of the stanza lines (Onegin's letter) narrated by Fry (Fry) and Smoktunovsky (S).



At the same time the close agreement of temporal and tone structures of some verses (lines) performed by the British (Fry) and Russian (S) actors are not uncommon at all, e.g. in Fig. 1: lines 3 and 8; 7 and 9; 8 and 5; 10 and 7; 14 and 6.

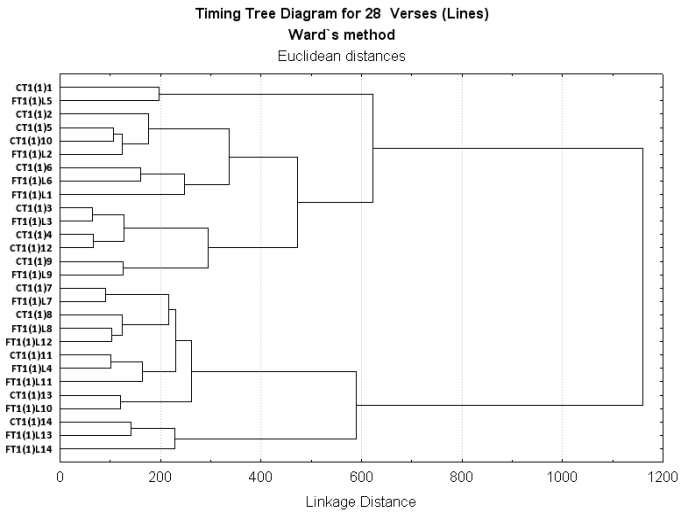
As is clear from Fig. 2, the other Russian speaker G sticks to the underlying rhythmic sequence and correlates linewise perfectly within his own performance, e.g. lines 13 and 14; 9 and 10 coincide in ordinal segmental durations. This may be well attributed to the idiosyncratic style of oral performance.

Figure 2: The cluster diagram of vowel segmental timing of the stanza lines (Onegin's letter) narrated by Gaft (G) and Smoktunovsky (S).



It is worth noting that there is a marked invariance in timing pattern agreement (linewise) between the English speakers.

Figure 3: The cluster diagram of vowel segmental timing of the stanza lines (Ch. 1-1) narrated by Corkhill (C) and Fry (F).



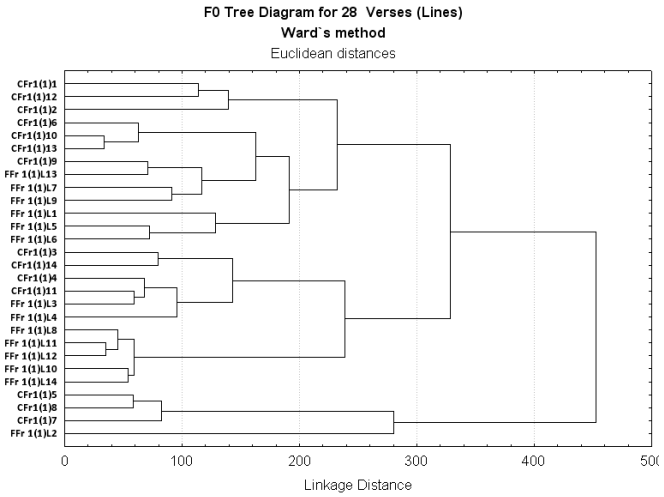
As Fig. 3 suggests, these are lines 6, 3, 9, 7, 11, 14. This may provide evidence that the English speakers are fairly sensitive to the underlying rhythmic structures of the verses which are realised with high consistency.

Figure 3 also presents the results obtained by comparing temporal structures of stanza Ch. 1-1, realised by the British actors. It can be seen that they correlate closely, interpreting lines 6, 3, 9, 7, 8 as well as lines 1 and 5; 4 and 12; 13 and 14. These data testify to the fact that the British reciters stick to the rhythmic pattern conceived by the translator through semantic and syntactic means.

Reference to Fig. 4 shows that the British speakers' melodic arrangements of stanza Ch. 1-1 represent almost disjoint subsets. This indicates convincingly that the pitch modulation is subject to individual (idiosyncratic) interpretation of the poetic text by the narrator.

When considered individually, rank correlation analysis has revealed a significant (up to $\rho = 1.0$) relationship between the temporal structure of lines within stanzas for both British and Russian subjects.

Figure 4: The cluster diagram of pitch contours of the stanza lines (Ch. 1-1) narrated by Fry (F) and Corkhill (C).



Pearson correlation between temporal structures of stanza as a whole produced by speaker F was found statistically significant ($r = 0.33$, $p < .01$) as well as correlation between F0 contours ($r = 0.26$, $p < .01$).

The timing correlation of lines within stanzas realised by speaker C is statistically significant as well ($\rho = .58$, $p < .05$) and the metrical rhythm tends to be more rigid than that between the Russian actors ($\rho = .37$, $p < .05$). However, the Russian speakers tend to agree much better in realising F0 contours of lines in the stanza ($\rho = .45$, $p < .05$).

Russian actor S lends more attention to the pausal segmentation of stanzas as an expressive device than other performers. That's why his temporal patterns of verses sound more dramatic and idiosyncratic. In general terms the pausal segmentation of stanzas should be investigated in more detail.

4. CONCLUSION

The method of cluster analysis appears to be well efficient for evaluating the adequacy of poetic translation in terms of rhythmic and melodic patterns. Dendrograms allow to deal with abundant numerical data and serve to visualise the similarity degree of various oral performances.

The study into the rhythm and melody of the Pushkin's novel in verse translated by professor James Falen has revealed a statistically significant similarity of oral performance of the novel by the British actors with the narrations of the original by Russian actors.

It is encouraging to note that James Falen's translation lends itself well to an adequate prosodic declamation which has much in common with the authentic performance in Russian by the native speakers.

Both Russian and British actors seem to follow their idiosyncratic modes of verse declamation within an acceptable range of variation.

These results count in favour of two tendencies in the poetic speech – on the one hand, the necessity to distinguish between the intrinsic elements of the language format and, on the other hand, the individual recitation mode of a piece of poetry by a narrator.

Poetics as the theory of verbal art needs not only a descriptive, function-orientated theory of written poem but also the theory of vocalic (phonic) verse interpretation or the *theory of declamation*. Thus, it is only in phonic recitation that a poetic work is fully embraced as a piece of art.

Although in the present study the parameter of intensity has not been considered, there are good grounds to believe that it may contribute an additional valuable measure of phonic similarity.

5. REFERENCES

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