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The functions of prosody in Robert Frost's verse 'Fire and Ice' and their reproduction in Ukrainian translations

Abstract

This article entitled 'The functions of prosody in Robert Frost's verse 'Fire and Ice' and their reproduction in Ukrainian translations' by N. Diomova discusses the role of prosody as a way to organize poetic speech in the above-mentioned anglophone verse and its Ukrainian translations by V. Kykot, N. Tysovska, V. Boychenko and V. Marach. The differences in the employment of prosody are analyzed, and the main functions of prosody that have to be taken into account in the process of translating this verse into Ukrainian are defined.

Keywords: prosody, functions of prosody, verse structure, poetic tradition, English-Ukrainian verse translation.

It is a well-known fact that a human mind, especially in the early stages of its development, is very susceptible to speech organized in a certain rhythmic way – hence, lullabies and nursery-rhymes with their distinct mnemonic and suggestive functions always have a peculiar rhythm and structure. But these are just two out of an immense richness of poetry genres utilizing a special way of organization to perform a number of functions. The reason for poetry's greater influence on the human mind and emotions (and also the reason why poetry as a form of creativity appeared earlier than prose) is in its difference or opposition to the natural and usual flow of speech. As it was mentioned by Volodymyr Krekoten, "at the early stages of verbal creativity there was a need for establishing a certain distance between the artistic speech and the everyday one. That was the reason

for rhythmical organization of the artistic speech, for the so-called enforcement" (1978: 5).¹

Thus, the peculiar way of organization ensures many important functions that poetry has been performing since its origin, including, but not limited to aesthetic, magical, mnemonic, suggestive, function of emotional influence, etc. In Literature Studies this way of organizing poetic speech is known as prosody. Let us consult different dictionaries to compare and contrast their definitions of prosody for a better understanding of what the term entails.

According to the *Dictionary of Stylistics* by Katie Wales, prosody has, since the fifteenth century, traditionally been defined as the study or rules of versification, now more commonly known as metrics (2001: 323). Indeed, the *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* defines prosody as "the science of versification: that part of study of language which deals with the forms of metrical composition" (1909: 1492). A similar definition can be also found in the Ukrainian *Literature Studies Dictionary*: "prosody is a branch of Verse Studies, which deals with classification of significant meter-related constituents of poetic diction" (2007: 564) (translation is mine. – N. D.). However, it has to be mentioned that limiting prosody as the study of versification to the metrical or rhythmical aspect only seems unjustified. As is rightly observed in *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, prosody as an art of organization of poetic diction covers characteristics and analysis of the whole verse structure (2008: 393), thus encompassing stanzas organization, rhythm, meter and phonetic means.

It should also be taken into consideration that there is more than one form of prosody. Quoting the well-known American poet and critic Amy Lowell, "all nations have laws of prosody, which undergo changes from time to time. The laws of English metrical prosody are well known to every one concerned with the subject. But that is only one form of prosody. Other nations have had different ones: Anglo-Saxon poetry was founded upon alliteration, Greek and Roman was built upon quantity, the Oriental was formed out of repetition, and the Japanese Hokku got its effect by an exact and never-to-be-added-to series of single syllables. So it is evident that poetry can be written in many modes" (2004: 16). It allows for a conclusion that prosody is important for all types of poems, regardless of the temporal or spatial aspect. The reason for difference in the prosody employment in a particular poetic tradition lies with the conventional usage of a certain prosodic element (or a combination of elements) as a characteristic and a defining formal feature of poetry.

No verse – be it a rhymed piece, visual poetry or a vers libre – can dispense with a special way of its structure organization, even if the key elements and the actual way of organization are quite different for each one of them. Even vers

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¹ Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine - N.D.

libres, while having a different rhythm, length, the way of lines division, etc., for each single piece, still have a common underlying basis. As Amy Lowell indicated, a vers libre is mostly based upon cadence instead of meter in terms of prosody, and strives for a perfect balance of flow and rhythm (2004: 16). Thomas Stearns Eliot expressed a similar thought about "contrast between fixity and flux, this unperceived evasion of monotony, which is the very life of verse" in his 1917 essay "Reflections on Vers Libre" (2004: 107–111). Another American poet, Robert Lee Frost, emphasized that a perfect combination of form and sense in a poetic work – the "sound of sense" as he called it himself – was an important indication of an artistic masterpiece.

In his letter from 4 July 1913, Robert Frost wrote to John T. Barlett: "I alone of English writers have consciously set myself to make music out of what I may call the sound of sense. Now it is possible to have sense without the sound of sense (as in much prose that is supposed to pass muster but makes very dull reading) and the sound of sense without sense (as in Alice in Wonderland which makes anything but dull reading).... The reader must be at no loss to give his voice the posture proper to the sentence. The simple declarative sentence used in making a plain statement is one sound. But Lord love ye it mustn't be worked to death. It is against the law of nature that whole poems should be written in it. If they are written they won't be read. The sound of sense, then. You get that. It is the abstract vitality of our speech. It is pure sound – pure form. One who concerns with it more than the subject is an artist" (2004: 9–10).

It is clear from this letter (and proven by the author's statement about "conscious" decisions to use the "sound of sense" in his creativity), in Frost's own poetry the combination of prosody as a form and inner sense of the verse is of utmost importance and by no means accidental. Let us now consider one of Frost's bestknown verses, 'Fire and Ice', in terms of its key prosodic peculiarities (Frost 1920).

1 Some say the world will end in fire ,	_	_	U	_	U	_	U	_	U	а
2 Some say in ice .	_	_	U	_						b
3 From what I've tasted of desire	U	U	U	_	U	U	U	_	U	а
4 I hold with those who favor fire.	=	_	U	_	U	_	U	_	U	а
5 But if it had to perish twice,	_	U	U	_	U	_	U	_		b
6 I think I know enough of hate	_	_	U	_	U	_	U	_		С
7 To know that for destruction ice	U	_	U	U	U	_	U	_		b
8 Is also great	U	_	U	_						С
9 And would suffice.	U	_	U	—						b

Tab. 1.

A quick exercise in scansion will show that the poem is written in iambus with the length of the lines varying from dimeter to tetrameter, and three out of nine lines are one unstressed syllable longer (which does not make for a separate foot, though). As Thomas Stearns Eliot aptly observed, though, scansion tells us very little (2004: 108). The rhythm in this piece is much more elaborate and complex than the strict and predictable scheme of iambus would allow for. The regular occurrence of spondee at the beginning of lines makes for a strong and slightly slow, deliberated tone. It is softened at regular intervals by the appearance of pyrrhic or a usual iambic foot, and disappears closer to the end – for the sake of short, rhythmic and laconic resolution. The repetition is also present, even though not distinct or highly pronounced, at the phonological level and at the lexical levels. At the phonological level it is necessary to mention alliteration in "some say" and "favor fire", while at the lexical level it is felt mostly in the two central words - "fire" and "ice", which are additionally contrasted as the synonymous to them in this verse "desire" and "hate". This contrast is a central theme for the poetic piece, and is strongly emphasized by the rhyming scheme that Frost chose for this poem: abaabcbcb. As we can see, in the total of nine lines, only three different rhymes are employed. The main theme of the verse is additionally presented as the a-rhyme and b-rhyme contrast, which is slightly softened by the appearance of the cbcb rhyming pattern as the laconic closing conclusion. Moreover, it is interesting to notice that the lines speaking about "fire/desire" all have the same rhyming, which is never used when a line even mentions the contrasting "ice/ hate" motive.

Based on this analysis, we can define the following functions of prosody as key for this particular poetic piece:

- 1. aesthetic as a special way of verse organization prosody ensures its aesthetic value;
- mnemonic rhythm and phonetic means make the poetic text easy to memorize;
- 3. rhythmical through the use of metrical scheme or regularly repeated patterns a certain rhythm is created;
- 4. suggestive a combination of rhythm and sound effects may have an effect, which is slightly similar to hypnotizing, when a certain image (by using onomatopoeia, for example) is deliberately called to mind and either positive or negative associations are invoked;
- 5. stanza-creational is linked to the way sentences are divided into separate lines and then into stanzas, in order to ensure better understanding of the structure of the poem and to facilitate its perception;
- 6. establishing additional associations/sense by the use of rhyme, assonance, consonance, alliteration or positioning certain words in the corresponding or contrasting slots in a line it is possible to establish a certain link

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(comparison, similarity or contrast) between the words unconnected in all the other contexts;

- creating laconic conclusions/aphorisms the closing or initial lines may have a distinct metrical scheme, which (combined with a proper length of the lines and linked by the means of rhyme, for example) will result in a memorable and aphoristic laconic conclusion;
- 8. adding emotional overtones is similar in a way to the suggestive function; prosody may intensify the effect that the verse is supposed to have upon the reader's emotions by using slower or faster rhythm, implementing certain phonetic means or emphasizing the chosen words.

That said, it becomes evident how complicated it is to render this poem into another language. A translator should be aware of the changes that every decision – not only in terms of lexical choices, but in terms of prosody functions reproduction as well – exerts upon the Target Text.

Let us now analyze how the key prosody functions in Frost's poem 'Fire and Ice' have been reproduced into the Ukrainian language by V. Kykot, V. Marach, and N. Tysovska².

Таb. 2. ВОГОНЬ І ЛІД

Переклад В. Кикотя (Frost tr. by Kykot 1994)

1 Хто каже, згубить нас вогонь,	U	_	U	_	U	_	U	_	а
2 Хто каже – лід.	U	—	U	—					b
3 Я знав жар пристрасних долонь,	U	_	_	_	U	U	U	_	а
4 Тому я з тим, хто за вогонь;	U	_	U	_	U	U	U	_	а
5 Та коли б двічі гинув світ –	U	U	_	_	U	_	U	_	b
63 ненавистю теж мавши стріч,	U	_	U	U	U	_	U	_	С
7 Скажу, для знищення і лід	U	_	U	_	U	U	U	_	b
8 Солідна річ,	U	_	U	_					с
9 Й наробить бід.	U	_	U	_					b

² More information on the prosody's aesthetic function and the functions of adding emotional overtone and establishing additional associations/sense, as well as peculiarities of their reproduction into Ukrainian can be found in my article last year on rendering alliteration of W.Shakespeare's drama "The Tragedy of King Richard II" in the Ukrainian translation by Valentyn Strutyns'kyi: Diomova, Nataliya(2012). "Vidtvorennia aliteratsiyi Shekspirovoyi dramy "The Tragedy of King Richard II" v ukrayinskomu perekladi Valentyna Strutynskoho" ("Rendering of alliteration in the Shakespeare's Drama "The Tragedy of Kind Richard II" in the Ukrainian Translation by Valentyn Strutynskyi). In: *Studia Germanica et Romanica: Inozemni movy. Zarubizhna literatura. Metodyka vykladannia* 3/2012. S.181-193.

Valeriy Kykot is well aware of Frost's "sound of sense" approach to poetry, his love of iambus and conversational, informal tone of his poems (2008b). He dutifully follows the rhyming scheme and meter set by the author, but while Frost repeatedly uses spondee in the initial feet of the verse, thus ensuring a strong and deliberate beginning of the four lines (lines 1, 2, 4 and 6) in the beginning as well as in the middle of the piece, the spondee that twice appears in the second feet (lines 3 and 5) of this Ukrainian translation does not have this effect. Instead, the combination of spondee in the third line with the preceding stressed syllable in the first iambic foot considerably crumples the rhythm of this line.

Neither the translation by Kykot, nor any other of those analyzed below has the additional unstressed syllable that the original has in lines 1, 3 and 4. In Frost's verse it appears owing to diphthongs at the end of the line and it serves to avoid excessive predictability of the rhythm and to help establish a peculiar conversational tone. Unfortunately, it is impossible to reproduce this peculiarity in a Ukrainian translation by the same means, and it is also next to impossible to introduce an additional syllable to any of the nine lines without violating the other constraints placed by the poem's laconism, complicated rhyming and rhythm.

The identical rhymes which can be seen in the original in lines 1 and 4 ("*fire*"), as well as in lines 2 and 7 ("*ice*"), were reproduced by Kykot by also using the same words as a rhymed pair. In the Ukrainian language it is known as "tautological" rhyming and while it can be found in some original Ukrainian poetry, it is not common or widespread to the same extent as the identical rhyming in English (6, p.655). That said, owing to the a-rhyme appearing in one more line just before the second part of the identical pair ("*fire-desire-fire*" and "<u>вогонь-долонь-вогонь</u>" in the Ukrainian translation by Kykot) the artistic effect is basically the same both in the original and in the translation, and does not sound tautological even in such a short poetic piece. The same situation is with the b-rhyme extended and encompassing lines 2, 5, 7 and 9, with the identical rhyme appearing in lines 2 and 7 ("*ice-twice-ice-suffice*" and "<u>nin-ceim-nin-6id</u>" in the translation by Kykot).

The aesthetic effect, though, is diminished in the translation if compared to the original piece because of the frequent consonantal clusters: жар пристрасних, коли б двічі, теж мавши стріч, й наробить.

It is also necessary to point out that the collocation "солідна річ" is considerably different from Frost's conversational tone of the verse and therefore is dissonant, clashing with the rest of the lines. Another weak point of the translation is the word "стріч" that seems to be the translator's shortening of the informal word "стріча", which could not be used due to being two-syllabic and feminine gender of this noun. It is obvious that the shortening was done for the sake of rhyming and rhythm.

As to the central opposition of this poem ("*fire/desire*" versus "*ice/hate*"), it was preserved, though slightly diminished in effect by substituting the "desire" part of it for a descriptive phrase "жар пристрасних долонь".

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To conclude the analysis of this translation, the central theme and the key functions of prosody of this verse are reproduced, even if the aesthetic and rhythmical functions as well as the function of establishing additional associations/ sense are at times only partially preserved.

Let us now continue with the analysis of the Ukrainian translation by Nataliya Tysovska.

Таb. 3. ВОГОНЬ І ЛІД

1 Хтось вірить, світ зжере вогонь,	U		U		U		U	_	а
2 Хтось вірить – лід.	U	_	U	_					b
3 Жага й моїх торкалась скронь,	U	_	U	_	U	_	U	_	а
4 Тож я обстоюю вогонь.	U	_	U	_	U	U	U	_	а
5 А двічі світ у млі	U	_	U	_	U	_			b
6 Конатиме – ненависть враз	U	—	U	U	U	—	U	—	с
7 <u>Підкаже: хай нищівний</u> лід	U	_	U	_	U	U	_	_	b
8 Накриє нас,	U		U	_					с
9 Змете і слід.	U		U						b

Переклад Н. Тисовської (Frost tr. by Tysovska 2009)

Tysovska translated this verse as an epigraph to O. Ryda's and K. Pluhatar's translation of a fiction prosaic novel, having chosen to create her own translation instead of using one of the already existing variants.

The rhyming scheme and iambic meter as well as usage of identical rhyming ("вогонь-скронь-вогонь" and "лід-млі-лід-слід" in the translation by Tysovska) are preserved; however the rhythm is violated in line 5, which is unexpectedly one foot shorter than Frost's verse. In the original, the conversational tone is created with the help of using three pyrrhic feet, among other means – even though it is less common for an English stanza than it is for a Ukrainian one due to the short words. Consequently, we can usually see more regular iambic feet and spondees in an English stanza, and more pyrrhic feet in a Ukrainian stanza. While the translation by Kykot discussed above has the same number of pyrrhic feet as the original, in the translation by Tysovska there are only two of them, which is one foot less than in the original, and no spondees at all. This results in a very predictive rhythm dissimilar to Frost's style, and the shortened line 5 does not provide the necessary variety, instead breaking the verse into two parts.

The pyrrhic and spondee feet at the end of line 7 are the result of incorrect accentuation of the word "нищівний". According to the norm of accentuation, the word "нищівний" should have the last syllable accented, while the rhythm

of this translation clearly indicates that the second syllable is accented instead. Thus, the pyrrhic and spondee can be found in line 7 only if the word is accented correctly, and therefore they weren't considered as a part of the metrical scheme in the course of analysis of this translation.

The central opposition of the verse is preserved as an opposition of "вогонь/ жага" versus "лід/ненависть", which fully corresponds to the original. However, some of the lexical choices were clearly made for the sake of rhyming only and either seem illogical ("жага й моїх торкалась <u>скронь</u>") or violate the sense of the verse introducing additional motifs and diminishing the presence of the central theme of "*fire/desire*" versus "*ice/hate*" closer to the end of the verse ("світ <u>у млі</u> <u>конатиме</u>", "<u>ненависть</u> враз <u>підкаже</u>", "<u>хай</u> нищівний <u>лід</u> / <u>накриє нас</u> / <u>змете</u> <u>і слід</u>"). This way, instead of the balanced opposition it is closer to an emphatic call for the icy demise.

To conclude, even if the additional associations between the pairs of "*fire/desire*" and "*ice/hate*" are successfully reproduced by the translator, the central theme of the verse is violated closer to the end of the verse, and the key functions of prosody are rendered properly but for the rhythmical and stanza-creational (due to the difference in length of the lines) ones, which makes rhythm dissimilar to the original.

The next translation to be analyzed is by Valeriy Boychenko.

переклад D. Doиченка (1105) (1. бу Doychenko 1974)										
1 Хто каже – згине світ в огні,		_	U	—	U	—	U	—	а	
2 Хто – у льодах.		U	U	_					b	
3 А вибирати дай мені –	U	U	U	_	U	_	U	_	а	
4 Стояв би я за смерть в огні.	U	_	U	_	U	_	U	_	а	
5 Ану як двічі – смертний шлях?	U	_	U	_	U	_	U	_	b	
6 Ненависть звідавши без меж,	U	_	U	_	U	_	U	_	С	
7 Скажу: загибель у льодах –	U	_	U	_	U	U	U	_	b	
8 Не менший жах,	U	_	U	_					b	
9 Підійде теж.	U	_	U						с	

Таb. 4. ВОГОНЬ І ЛІД

Пе	реклад В.	Бойченка	(Frost tr. b	v Bo	vchenko	1974)
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The first thing to notice here is the violation of the rhyming scheme in the last two lines – instead of the *cb* pattern found in the original they are reversed to the *bc* one. The usage of identical rhyming is still preserved: "огні-мені-огні" and "льодах-шлях-льодах-жах". The conversation tone of the original poem is preserved by using one spondee and two pyrrhic feet as well as rhythmical inversion in the first foot of line 2 (trochee instead of iambus is used). Just the opposite of

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violating the rhythm, rhythmical inversion helps preserve the easy flow of the lines and avoid excessive predictability of iambus.

However, the sense of the verse is considerably changed and the central opposition of the verse greatly violated by introducing rhetorical phrases ("а вибирати дай мені", "ану як двічі – смертний шлях?") and omitting the link of "fire" with the "desire" counterpart, which was also criticised by Kykot in one of his articles (2008a). At the end of the verse Boychenko moves the conflict to the personal space instead of the global one, and makes an over exaggerated emphasis on hate ("ненависть звідавши без меж"), which has even greater effect due to not being balanced with the other part of Frost's central opposition in this poetic piece.

To conclude, in the translation by Boychenko, the central theme of the verse was not at all preserved, while three of the key prosody functions of this poem – the function of establishing additional associations/sense as well as stanzas-creational (due to the difference of rhyming scheme) and the function of adding emotional overtones – are reproduced partially, with violations of the sense of the original or not at all.

The next translation to be discussed is the translation by Viktor Marach.

Таb. 5. ВОГОНЬ І ЛІД

1 Хтось каже: знищить нас вогонь,	U	_	U	_	U	U	U	_	а
2 Аще хтось – лід.	U	_	U	_					b
3 Будь так – хоч, боже, нас боронь! –	U	_	U	_	U	U	U	_	а
4 Я з тими, хто б обрав вогонь.	U	_	U	U	U	_	U	_	а
5 Якщо ж чекать обох цих бід,	U	_	U	_	U	_	U	_	b
6 Тоді прийдеться визнать все ж:	U	_	U	_	U	_	U	_	с
7 Щоб знищить все живе, і лід	U	_	U	U	U	_	U	_	b
8 Підходить теж –	U	_	U	_					с
9 То ж вибрать слід.	U	_	U	—					b

Переклад В. Марача (Frost tr. by Marach 2007)

То start with, the conversational tone is preserved by using four pyrrhic feet. The rhyming scheme as well as the usage of identical rhyming is also preserved: "вогонь-боронь-вогонь" and "лід-бід-лід-слід". However, it is clearly noticeable that some of the lexical choices as well as introduction of the exclamatory phrase were done for the sake of rhyming ("будь так – хоч, боже, нас боронь!" and "<u>То</u> <u>ж</u> вибрать слід", for example). Similar to the previous translation, the central opposition of the verse is greatly violated by omitting the link of "fire" with the "desire". Combined with the added phrases, this results in violation of the sense of the verse.

It is also necessary to point out the mistakes found in the translation: "будь так", "прийдеться", "то ж".

On the whole, in this translation by Marach the central theme of the verse was not at all preserved, while two of the key prosody functions of this poem – the function of establishing additional associations/sense and the function of adding emotional overtones – are reproduced partially, with violations of the sense of the original or not at all.

In a course of experiment and in an attempt to suggest other ways of rendering prosody functions if not by the same means then at least compensating for them, the author of this paper has also endeavored to provide her own variant of the Ukrainian translation for this challenging poem.

Таb. 6. ВОГОНЬ І ЛІД

1 Хтось каже – світ загубить жар,	U	_	U	_	U	_	U	_	а
2 Хтось каже – лід.	U	—	U	—					b
3 Жаги пізнавши жадний жарт,	U	_	U	_	U	_	U	_	а
4 Я знаю – все пожре пожар.	U	_	U	_	U	_	U	_	а
5 Але як ні – і не в огні,	U	U	U	_	U	U	U	_	b
6 З ненавистю знайомий теж	U	_	U	U	U	_	U	_	с
7 Я знаю, що і льоду дні	U	_	U	U	U	_	U	_	b
8 Страшні не менш	U	_	U	_					с
9 I руйнівні.	U	_	U	U					b

Переклад Н. Дьомової

Preserving the meter as well as the rhyming scheme, the translator attempts to render the conversational tone by wider usage of pyrrhic feet (there are five of them in this translation), which also makes it closer to the Ukrainian tradition. Instead of the identical rhyming, for the first case the translator decided to use the full rhyming approach combined with the additional sound repetition: "жар-жарт-пожар" and "жар-жаги-жадний-жарт-пожре-пожар". For the second case the translator combined full and assonant rhymes with the inner rhyming: "лід-(ні)-огні-дні-руйнівні".

To at least partially solve the problem of space limitations placed by the short English words and longer Ukrainian ones, the translator decided to use "жар" and "пожар" as synonymous to the word "огонь", thus also preserving the central opposition of the verse as (жар-пожар-огонь)/жага (лід-льоду дні)/ненависть (the descriptive collocation "льоду дні" was used for the sake of rhyming and rhythm, but incorporates the element of "*ice*/лід" as well).

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On the whole, the central theme and the key functions of prosody of this verse are reproduced, even if the function of establishing additional associations/sense is only partially preserved as the introduction of synonyms slightly diminishes the effect that clear pairs of "fire/desire" and "ice/hate" have.

Summing up the analysis of all the Ukrainian translations discussed in this paper, some peculiarities of 'Fire and Ice', the poetic masterpiece by Robert Lee Frost, are impossible to reproduce in its Ukrainian translations as they are inherently not characteristic of the target poetic tradition or even nonexistent in it – for example, usage of diphthongs and extended usage of spondee to diversify poetic rhythm. Others, like euphony or emphasizing the verse's main theme with the specific sound effects, are next to impossible to reproduce while rendering the actual sense as well. It made the largest impact on rendering of such functions as aesthetic, rhythmical, stanza-creational as well as the function of establishing additional associations/sense and the function of adding emotional overtones, resulting in their omission or partial reproduction at best.

Even though we have to admit that it is practically impossible to reproduce everything in the translation process and some sacrifices are to be made, traditionally, it is prosody that is more often than not chosen for the role of sacrifice. However, not all of the variety of its functions can be sacrificed without a significant negative impact upon the resulting Target Text. The author of this article sees a possible solution in looking beyond the separate and detached elements of prosody, but considering the bigger picture instead. If translators analyze prosodic elements from the point of view of their functions as well as their contribution to the poem's overall meaning and literary effect, it might be possible for them to more often preserve the most distinctive prosody features and functions in a verse by finding if not corresponding then at least compensating means in the Target Language.

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