

A Phonological Study of Rhythm in Thomas Gray's Poetry

دراسة الايقاع الصوتي في قصائد منتقاة للشاعر الانكليزي تومس كروي

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Abstract:

This paper deals with a phonological analysis of rhythm in Thomas Gray's poetry. As such, the current study attempts to answer the following questions: a. what are the rhythmic patterns in Thomas Gray's poetry? b. what is the role of rhythm in the construction of the poetic value in Thomas Gray's poetry? Accordingly, this study aims to (1) identify the rhythmic patterns in Thomas Gray's poetry; and (2) explicate the role of rhythm in the construction of the poetic value in Thomas Gray's poetry. To achieve the aims of the study, the following procedures are adopted: a. reviewing literature on rhythm in phonological and poetic studies; b. using a model developed by this study to analyze the data under scrutiny which are represented by two poems randomly selected from Thomas Gray's ones. It has been concluded that rhythm in Gray's poetry is characterized by variation and effectiveness since it is not limited to one metering flow of feet. Additionally, deviations of stress in poetic rhythm are related to the general theme of the poem and the literary objective of the poet himself. This reflects changes in the mood of the poem.

1. Introduction

This paper deals with a phonological analysis of rhythm in Thomas Gray's poetry. As such, the current study attempts to answer the following questions:

- a. What are the rhythmic patterns in Thomas Gray's poetry?
- b. What is the role of rhythm in the construction of the poetic value in Thomas Gray's poetry?

Accordingly, this study aims to (1) identify the rhythmic patterns in Thomas Gray's poetry; and (2) explicate the role of rhythm in the construction of the poetic value in Thomas Gray's poetry. To achieve the aims of the study, the following procedures are adopted:

- a. Reviewing literature on rhythm in phonological and poetic studies.
- b. Using a model developed by this study to analyze the data under scrutiny which are represented by two poems randomly selected from Thomas Gray's ones.
- c. Discussing the results of analysis.

This study is hopefully supposed to be of value for phonologists, literary critics, poetic discourse analysts, teachers of poetry and applied linguists.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Rhythm

When we say that a language is rhythmical, we mean that it has a repeated occurrence of some prosodic processes in an interval of speech which is relatively described as organized. As such, rhythm can be defined as the relative interplay of stressed and unstressed syllables in connected speech with a given duration of movement (Roach, 2000: 134). Phonetically speaking, rhythm can be said to be the determining factor of the length of the pause between phrases (Ladefoged, 2001: 98). Similarly, Crystal (2003: 400-401) utilizes the term to refer to the perceived organization of prominent units in the overflow of speech. This rhythmicality regulation can be explained in terms of syllable type, stress or pitch patterning in language. Collins and Mees (2008: 282) views rhythm as the "patterns of the timing of syllables in speech, in some way similar to rhythmic patterns in music".

Nooteboom (2008: 1) points out that rhythm is part of the study of prosody or suprasegmental phonology. The word 'prosody' comes from ancient Greek, where it was used for a "song sung with instrumental music". In later times the word has become to be used for the "science of versification" and the "laws of metre", governing the modulation of the human voice in reading poetry aloud. In modern phonetics, the word 'prosody' and its adjectival form 'prosodic' are most often used to refer to those properties of speech that cannot be derived from the segmental sequence of phonemes underlying human utterances. Examples of such properties are the controlled modulation of the voice pitch, the stretching and shrinking of segment and syllable durations, and the intentional fluctuations of overall loudness (Cf. Curzan and Adams, 2009: 134).

Earlier, Nooteboom (2008: 48) has argued that two different utterances may share a common, underlying, property, called the same “rhythm”. Intuitively, this can be brought to awareness by imitating the rhythmical pattern of an utterance with nonsense syllables, as “The MAN in the STREET” (where capitalized words are accented), imitated with “daDAadaDA”.

In this stance, Nespor et al. (2010: 117) state that rhythm characterizes most natural phenomena: heartbeats have a rhythmic organization, and so do the waves of the sea, the alternation of day and night, and bird songs. Language is yet another natural phenomenon that is characterized by rhythm.

Moreover, rhythm is hierarchical in nature in language, as it is in music. According to the metrical grid theory, i.e. the representation of linguistic rhythm within Generative Grammar is manifested by the element that “establishes order” in the flow of speech: i.e., stress. Universally, stressed and unstressed positions alternate at different levels of the hierarchy (Ibid.).

The smallest structural unit in rhythm is ‘foot’. The term foot has been used to refer to the unit of rhythm in poetry (poetic metre), in phonology (language metre) and in music. The term is taken from ‘the movements of the human foot in its simplest form of progress, i.e. its progressive raising and lowering. As such, it could be applied to a minimal binary contrast either in the sphere of music or language. Since its function is that of ‘beating time’ to manifest a prosodic pattern (rather than formless succession), a foot must involve alternation (contrast) and cannot be a single element. It also cannot be a succession of two equally strong elements, since those would not involve contrast either; in this sense, a spondee cannot be a foot on its own (see Dziubalska-Kołaczyk, 2001: 79).

2.2 Types of Rhythm

There are two basic types of rhythm: stress-timed and syllable-timed. The former refers to tendency of a language to compress syllables to yield isochronous feet, while the latter means “the tendency of a language to make syllables the same length” (Asu and Nolan, 2000: 2). Similarly, Yavas (2011, 260) affirms that stress-timing is a term used to indicate rhythm in which stressed syllables occur at approximately equal intervals, whereas syllable-timing is employed for rhythm in which each syllable has equal duration and weight.

Concerning English, Ladefoged (2001: 99) argues that one may infer a conspiracy that it maintains a regular rhythm. Nevertheless, this conspiracy is not strong enough to fully predominate the irregularities caused by variations in the number and type of unstressed syllables. For instance, in the following sentence:

- **The *red *bird flew *speedily *home.**

The interval between the first and second stresses will be far less than that between the third and fourth. This means that such a regular occurrence is not a must in all patterns of English phonology. As such, one can conclude that the interval between stresses is highly influenced by:

- a. The number of syllables within the stress group.
- b. The number and type of vowel and consonant sounds in each syllable.
- c. Other factors such as the variation in emphasis that is given to each word. (ibid)

Another point which is worth mentioning concerns the nature of language variety. For example, it cannot be said that English is always a stress-timed rhythmic language since a variety like American English is stress-timed, while Hindi English is a syllable-timed variety (Jenkins, 2000: 43).

2.3 Rhythm in Poetic Prosody

In poetics, rhythm in a more flexible way is associated with the effect of the harmonious (but not necessarily regular nor conventionally determined) combination of stressed and unstressed syllables within an utterance. Thus one can say that traditional verse is ruled by rhythm patterns according to the foot combinations that shall be described presently, based on two- or three-syllable sequences; whereas prose or seemingly irregular verse may also have a rhythm, but as the result of non-predetermined sound sequences. The absence of any predetermined metre which may help to open a frame of expectations and readings does not necessarily involve the absence of prosodic coherence; only, that it can be established by other, perhaps less conventional means. In all cases rhythm is still the result of artificial choices (Roads, 2001: 22).

Most English poetry, and certainly all classical English poetry, has rhythm as one of the basic formal constituents. What critics do not agree on is the way rhythm should be analyzed in order to make its description as accurate as possible. It should be considered that poetic rhythm is the simplified and conventional adaptation of a variety of intonation, stress

and sound patterns of different qualities which are at work when a poem is read aloud. Hence, a need arises to answer the majority of the problems one may face when analyzing a poetic text, especially a classical or traditional poem, where prosodic conventions have been applied more or less consciously and deliberately by the author.

Poetic rhythm is based on the alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables according to certain pre-established and conventional patterns (ibid). For instance:

- a- When the words are monosyllabic:
 - i. All open-class words (nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, etc.) are naturally stressed.
 - ii. All closed-class words (articles, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, etc.) are unstressed.
- b- When bisyllabic, rhythmic stress will fall on the more strongly stressed syllable ('willow', 'about')
- c- When tri- or polysyllabic, they may have more than one, depending on the metrical needs ('discontent', 'humanity')
- d- In general, we should not place a natural stress on a syllable whose vocalic sound corresponds to a schwa.

In Abrams' (1990) Glossary of Literary Terms, examples of the four most common feet are presented as follows:

1. **Iambic (the noun is *iamb* or *iambus*):** a lightly stressed syllable followed by a heavily stressed syllable (U /)

e.g.:

U / U / U / U / U /

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,

U / U / U / U / U /

The lowing herds wind slowly o'er the lea.

2. **Anapestic (the noun is anapest):** two light syllables followed by a stressed syllable (U U /)

e.g.:

U U / U U / U U / U U /

The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold

U U / U U / U U / U U /

And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold.

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3. Trochaic (the noun is trochee): a stressed followed by a light syllable (/ U)

e.g.:

/ U / U / U / U / U

"There they are, my fifty men and women."

4. Dactylic (the noun is dactyl): a stressed syllable followed by two light syllables: (/ U U)

e.g.:

/ U U / U U

"Éve, with her basket, was

/ U U / U U

Deep in the bells and grass."

Metric lines are named according to the number of "feet" in them. If a line has four feet, it is tetrameter. If a line has five feet, it is pentameter. If it has six feet, it is hexameter, and so on.

2.4 Literary Characteristics of Rhythm

According to Sacks (2007: 35) the following literary characteristics of rhythm are suggested:

- A. **Regularity.** Rhythmic series consist of perceived signals occurring at intervals that are either regular or are close enough to being regular to create and constantly reinforce the expectation of regularity. In reading a text, the mind is continually making rapid predictions about what is likely to be perceived on the basis of what it has just perceived (and still holds in short-term memory); if the expected signal is delayed or missing, the mind will often supply it. An experience of rhythm will not arise if the time lapse between signals is too great; this, however, is not likely to happen in the case of poetry, except in a very unusual style of performance. When regularity is marked, and the expectation of regularity is strong, the signals are perceived as *beats. (It has been argued, e.g. by Couper-Kuhlen, that this happens in spoken Eng. as well as in verse.)
- B. **Repetition.** In order for a rhythm to be perceived, the successive stimuli must be experienced as the same stimulus occurring over and over again. In poetry, the rhythm is based on identifiable linguistic units: stressed syllables, syllables, or mora (irrespective of the phonetic

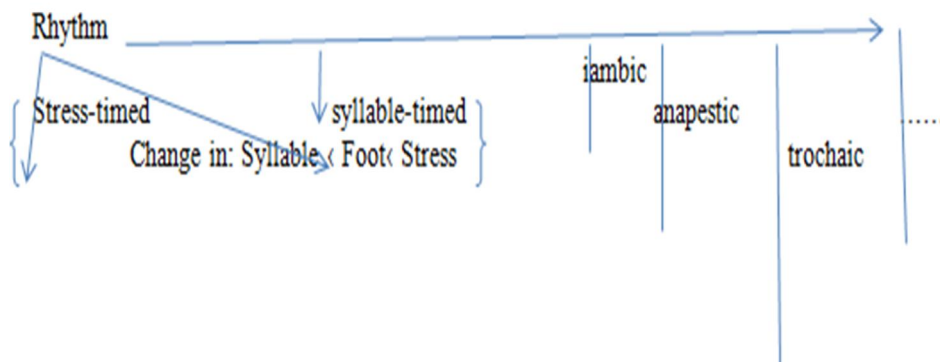
differences that occur as these units are repeated). Again, expectation plays a large role in the perception of rhythmic stimuli: having heard a number of repeated signals, we are likely to interpret further stimuli as more of the same.

C. Variation. Exact repetition is usually felt to be monotonous, however, though the precise point at which pleasurable repetition becomes tedious is not easily specifiable. Variation is thus crucial to the enjoyment of rhythm, but if the signal varies too greatly from what is expected, the pattern will be perceived as unrhythmical - or as the beginning of a new rhythmic series.

D. Hierarchy. The repeated stimuli that create a regular rhythm are usually perceived as possessing some further organization, rather than being understood as a simple series. The fact that we hear a clock's "tick-tick tick-tick" as "tick-tock-tick-tock" is one of the most familiar examples of this tendency: in this case, an exactly repeated stimulus is interpreted as an alternation between a stronger and weaker signal. This interpretation produces a hierarchy: over and above the rhythm of the repeated sounds, we hear a more widely spaced rhythm made up of the "stronger" sounds. If we were asked to tap on one out of every two sounds, we would find ourselves tapping on those we hear as "ticks" rather than those we hear as "tocks."

3. Model of Analysis

On the basis of the previous discussions, the model of analysis can be developed as illustrated by the following figure:



Change of Mood: love, sadness, anger...etc.

Here, the model starts with determining the type of rhythm as proposed by poetic prosody (iambic, trochaic...etc.); then, it identifies whether the rhythmic interval is stress or syllable timed. The deviation of the flow of the given rhythm will decide the change in the mood of the poem to express hope, love, anger, sadness and so on.

4. Data Analysis, Results and Discussion

The data is represented by two important poems composed by the poet Thomas Gray. The analysis is conducted by means of the model developed in the previous section. The analysis will be as follows:

Analysis of Poem (1):

Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

The Curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.
Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;
Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tow'r
The moping owl does to the moon complain
Of such as, wand'ring near her secret bow'r,
Molest her ancient solitary reign.

(Web source: 1)

This poem is based on an iambic pentameter rhythmic meter (U/); it is reflected by a stress-timing phonological rhythm:

The *Curfew *tolls the *knell of *parting day

In the first stanza, this iamb is not deviated by any change in the occurrence of stressed and unstressed syllables. This seems to be caused by the purpose of the poet to pave the way or set the scene for the rest of the poem. Here, there is no shift or motive for a new mood in the emotionality of the poem. In the second stanza, there is a shift in the mood of the poem since the poet wants to present the case of the dead people and how their lives are stopped by the fate. The third line starts with a stressed syllable, although it is supposed to be unstressed:

*Save where the *beetle *wheels his *droning *flight,

In the first line of the last stanza, the same situation is repeated:

*Save that from *yonder ivy-*mantled *tow'r

In this line, the poet seems to motivate the sorrow mood and passion of the main theme of the poem which concerns death and elegy for the dead people who have been poor in their life. He emphasizes the first part of the line by a stressed syllable in order to call the hearer to listen to the sound of towers in the ringing of sadness from the peaks of churches. This is a signal for the mourning of those dead people.

Analysis of Poem (2):

Ode On The Spring

Lo! where the rosy-bosom'd Hours,

Fair Venus' train appear,

Disclose the long-expecting flowers,

And wake the purple year!

The Attic warbler pours her throat,

Responsive to the cuckoo's note,

The untaught harmony of spring:

While whisp'ring pleasure as they fly,

Cool zephyrs thro' the clear blue sky

Their gather'd fragrance fling.

Where'er the oak's thick branches stretch

A broader, browner shade;

Where'er the rude and moss-grown beech

O'er-canopies the glade,

Beside some water's rushy brink

With me the Muse shall sit, and think

(At ease reclin'd in rustic state)

How vain the ardour of the crowd,

How low, how little are the proud,

How indigent the great! (Web source: 1)

Again, this poem is structured according to an iambic pentameter rhythmic meter (U/); it is reflected by a stress-timing phonological rhythm:

Lo! *where the *rosy-*bosom'd*Hours,

However, the number of feet varies since the poet intends to vary the mood and effective emotion and passion of his poem. He likes to avoid monotony and boredom in the evaluative impact of his poem on the reader/hearer. For instance, the following line is composed of three basic feet:

A broader, browner shade

Besides, some lines witness some kind of deviation where there is a succession of unstressed syllables:

Res*ponsive*to the *cuckoo's *note,

The untaught harmony of spring:

In the first line above, (to) is deviated in either way: if it is unstressed, it will be a succession of unstressed syllables; or, if it is stressed, it will deviate the rules of stress as it emphasizes function words. In such a case, it may be seen as a necessary deviation to keep the flow of the rhythmical metering of the poem, or to emphasize the responsivity to the sound of the bird.

Conclusions

On the basis of the data analysis, the present study has arrived at the following conclusions:

1. Rhythm in Gray's poetry is characterized by variation and effectiveness since it is not limited to one metering flow of feet.
2. Deviations of stress in poetic rhythm are related to the general theme of the poem and the literary objective of the poet himself. This reflects changes in the mood of the poem.
3. The recurrent motivation of rhythmical variations and shifts in Gray's poetry is highly reflected by variation and intensiveness of emotionality and passion. Sorrow and death are main reasons of rhythmical change in his poems.
4. Generally, it can be said that rhythmic change starts in second stanzas since they confront shift in emotional and poetic mood.
5. The model developed for analyzing rhythm in poetry which mixes poetic and phonological aspects of rhythm is workable and successful in the analysis of data under scrutiny.

ملخص البحث

تتناول الدراسة تحليل الايقاع صوتيا في قصيدتين للشاعر الانكليزي تومس كري واثار ذلك على النسق الاسلوبي للقصيدتين، علاوة على ذلك تركز الدراسة على كشف ووصف انواع الايقاع المستخدمة في بناء القصيدتين. استخدم الباحثان نمطا مناسباً للتحليل لغرض تحقيق اهداف البحث وقد اظهرت النتائج الى ان الشاعر وظف الايقاع على نحو قاد الى التنوع والتاثير على المستوع العام لنسق القصيدتين كون الشاعر قد استخدم اكثر من تفعيلة في البيت الشعري، فضلا عن ذلك كشف البحث بان هيمنة انزياحات (النبر) او التشديد في الايقاع الشعري ترتبط ارتباطا وثيقا بموضوع القصيدتين والغايات الادبية المنبثة في ثنايا النص، على ذلك يتغير المزاج العام للقصيدة

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Web source:

- <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/ode-on-the-spring/>