

Syntactic restructuring and poetic effects in Chinese and Hungarian translations of Tagore's *Stray Birds*

Hanying Cheng

Xi'an International Studies University, Xi'an, China

chenghanying@xisu.edu.cn

Abstract. This study examines syntactic restructuring in the Chinese and Hungarian translations of Rabindranath Tagore's *Stray Birds* and explores its effects on poetic expression. A qualitative comparative analysis is conducted on selected poems in which the syntactic organization of the English source text is substantially reorganized in one or both target texts. The analysis focuses on changes in clause structure, coordination, predicative organization, and the expression of logical relations. The findings show that the Chinese and Hungarian translations adopt different syntactic solutions in reconstructing the English source. These changes affect not only grammatical organization but also rhythmic segmentation, the configuration of poetic images, the dynamic or static presentation of metaphor, and rhetorical emphasis. The comparison further suggests that syntactic restructuring results from an interaction between cross-linguistic structural differences and translators' choices within the target languages. The study therefore argues that syntax in poetry translation functions not merely as a grammatical means of conveying propositional meaning, but also as an important formal resource for reconstructing poetic effects.

Keywords: *Stray Birds*, syntactic restructuring, poetry translation, Chinese translation, Hungarian translation

1. Introduction

Poetry is a literary form in which linguistic structure and aesthetic expression are closely intertwined. Poetic meaning is conveyed not by lexical content alone: rhythm, grammatical organization, imagery, and other formal features also contribute to the way a poem is perceived and interpreted. Boulton's discussion of poetic form, rhythm, repetition, logical sequence, and imagery demonstrates the importance of formal organization to poetic expression [1]. Changes in linguistic form during translation may therefore alter not only how meaning is grammatically encoded but also how a poem unfolds aesthetically.

This issue becomes particularly relevant when poetry is translated between languages that differ substantially in their grammatical resources. English, Chinese, and Hungarian organize grammatical information in different ways. English makes extensive use of syntactic structure and function words, Chinese is predominantly analytic, while Hungarian is strongly agglutinative and encodes a considerable amount of grammatical information morphologically. Such cross-linguistic variation means that equivalent meanings may be realized through different structural resources [2]. Translating among these languages may consequently require the reorganization of syntactic relations rather than direct formal reproduction.

The concept of translation shifts provides a useful theoretical point of departure. Catford defines translation shifts as departures from formal correspondence in the process of translation [3]. Baker further points out that languages differ in their grammatical categories and structural resources, so grammatical meanings and relations cannot always be reproduced through formally corresponding structures in the target language [4]. In literary translation, these structural choices are particularly significant because stylistic meaning is inseparable from the formal linguistic features through which a text is constructed. Boase-Beier identifies the formal linguistic characteristics of style and their contribution to textual meaning as central concerns in translation [5].

In this study, syntactic restructuring is used to refer to the reorganization of syntactic structure between the source and target texts. The term has also been used in translation and interpreting research to describe structural reorganization between languages with different syntactic patterns [6]. The present analysis focuses on four representative forms observed in the selected poems: changes in clause organization, predicative structure, coordination, and the expression of logical relations.

Rabindranath Tagore's *Stray Birds* provides suitable material for such a comparison. Its poems are generally short and highly condensed, allowing a limited amount of linguistic material to carry concentrated imagistic, rhythmic, and philosophical functions. The present study uses Zheng Zhenduo's Chinese bilingual edition and Bartos Zoltán's Hungarian bilingual edition as its textual sources [7, 8]. The presence of the English text alongside the two translations enables direct comparison of the same poetic lines across the three languages.

Existing studies on the translation of *Stray Birds* have largely focused on English–Chinese translation or comparisons among different Chinese versions, addressing issues such as literary translation criticism, translation poetics, translator style, and poetic imagery. Wu Linna compares the translations of Zheng Zhenduo and Feng Tang from the perspective of literary translation criticism [9]; Li Yuelin examines three Chinese translations from the perspective of translation poetics [10]; and Wang Yulin focuses specifically on the translation of poetic imagery [11]. Studies on Tagore in Hungary have also addressed the translation and reception of his works [12]. However, comparative studies involving English, Chinese, and Hungarian remain relatively limited.

The present study therefore conducts a comparative analysis of four selected poems in which the syntactic organization of the English source is noticeably reorganized in one or both translations. The cases involve changes in clause organization, coordination, predicative structure, and the expression of logical relations. Rather than attempting to establish general grammatical tendencies for the complete Chinese and Hungarian translations, the analysis examines how particular syntactic choices function within specific poetic contexts.

2. Syntactic restructuring in the Chinese and Hungarian translations

Example 1. Poem 22

English: That I exist is a perpetual surprise which is life.

Chinese: 我的存在,对我是一个永久的神奇,这就是生活.

Hungarian: Folytonosan meglep, hogy vagyok; ez az élet.

The English source is organized as a complex sentence. That I exist functions as a subject clause, while which is life appears after a perpetual surprise as a relative clause. The two subordinate structures are therefore incorporated into a single syntactic unit.

The Chinese translation reorganizes this clause relationship. "我的存在" (my existence) remains the main entity around which the statement is organized, but "这就是生活" (this is life) no longer functions as an

embedded relative clause. Instead, it is presented as a relatively independent statement linked to the preceding part by punctuation. The hierarchical organization of the English sentence is thus loosened, giving the final judgment greater syntactic independence.

The Hungarian translation involves a further change in predication. Instead of preserving the copular structure of the English source, it organizes the first part around the verb *meglep* ("surprises"), with *hogy* *vagyok* expressing "that I exist". The final phrase *ez az élet* ("this is life") is separated from the preceding clause by a semicolon. Despite their different grammatical realizations, the Chinese and Hungarian translations therefore share one important feature: both detach the final judgment from the more tightly integrated structure of the English sentence.

This restructuring also changes the rhythmic organization of the line. In the English source, which is life remains grammatically attached to the preceding construction. In both translations, the corresponding statement acquires greater syntactic independence. The stronger boundary before the ending creates a more perceptible pause and gives the concluding judgment greater prominence. Here, syntactic restructuring affects not only clause organization but also the rhythm and rhetorical weighting of the line.

Example 2. Poem 183

English: The evening sky to me is like a window, and a lighted lamp, and a waiting behind it.

Chinese: 黄昏的天空,在我看来,像一扇窗户,一盏灯火,灯火背后的一次等待。

Hungarian: Úgy rémlik nekem az esti égbolt, mint a nyitott ablak égő mécsessel s mögötte várakozás.

The English poem presents three images—a window, a lighted lamp, and a waiting behind it—through repeated coordination. The repetition of *and* forms a polysyndetic coordination, which tends to add emphasis and rhetorical weight to the series [13]. In the poem, it also gives the sequence an additive rhythm, with the three images emerging successively.

The Chinese translation retains the three main images but does not reproduce the repeated conjunctions. "窗户" (window), "灯火" (lamplight), and "等待" (waiting) occur in direct succession and are linked primarily through punctuation. Their relationship remains intelligible, but the recurrent additive pattern created by *and* disappears. The images consequently follow one another more compactly, and the sequence relies more strongly on direct juxtaposition.

The Hungarian translation restructures the relationship among the images more substantially. In a *nyitott ablak égő mécsessel* (an open window with a burning lamp), *mécsessel* is the instrumental-comitative form of *mécses* (lamp). The window and the lamp, which appear as separate coordinated elements in the English source, are therefore integrated into a single syntactic and visual unit. The following *mögötte* (behind it) then places *várakozás* (waiting) behind this combined image.

The three versions consequently configure the poetic imagery in different ways. The English source develops an additive sequence in which the three images emerge one after another. The Chinese translation largely preserves their succession while removing the repeated conjunctions. The Hungarian translation, by contrast, transforms part of the original coordination into an internal spatial relation by combining the window and lamp before positioning "waiting" behind them. Syntactic restructuring in this case therefore changes not merely the form of connection but also the way the images are related within the poetic scene.

Example 3. Poem 283

English: Love is life in its fulness like the cup with its wine.

Chinese: 爱就是充实了的生命,正如盛满了酒的酒杯。

Hungarian: A Szeretet úgy tölti meg az életet, mint bor a kupát.

The English source uses a copular construction to relate love to life in its fulness. The accompanying comparison, the cup with its wine, likewise presents the second image primarily as a state. The Chinese

translation broadly preserves this stative organization. "爱就是充实了的生命" (Love is life in its fullness) maintains an identificational structure, while "盛满了酒的酒杯" (a cup filled with wine) similarly presents the cup in a filled state.

The Hungarian translation, however, reconstructs the metaphor through verbal action. The phrase *tölti meg az életet* (fills life) turns the relation between love and life into a dynamic process, while *mint bor a kupát* (as wine [fills] the cup) forms a parallel elliptical construction in which the verb is understood from the preceding clause. What is expressed largely as two corresponding states in the English source is therefore reorganized as two corresponding actions.

The restructuring changes the manner in which the metaphor unfolds. In the English and Chinese versions, the relation is presented mainly through state and equivalence. In Hungarian, it becomes dynamic and process-oriented: love fills life as wine fills a cup. The parallel verbal relation also sharpens the structural correspondence between "love—life" and "wine—cup". Predicative restructuring therefore contributes both to the dynamization of the image and to the formal parallelism of the comparison.

Example 4. Poem 184

English: He who is too busy doing good finds no time to be good.

Chinese: 太急于做好事的人,反而找不到时间去做好人。

Hungarian: *Aki nagyon serénykedik, hogy jót tegyen, nincs érkezése, hogy jó legyen.*

In the English source, the paradox depends primarily on the semantic contrast between doing good and be good. No overt adversative marker is used to signal this reversal. The Chinese translation introduces "反而" (instead), explicitly marking the reversal between "做好事" (to do good deeds) and "做好人" (to be a good person). The basic paradox remains unchanged, but its logical relation is signalled more directly and the admonitory force of the statement becomes more immediately perceptible.

The Hungarian translation follows a different strategy. It does not introduce an adversative marker. Instead, the two ideas are expressed through parallel *hogy*-clauses: *hogy jót tegyen* (to do good) and *hogy jó legyen* (to be good). The repetition of *hogy* and *jó*, together with the similar endings of *tegyen* and *legyen*, reinforces the formal correspondence between the two parts. The semantic opposition is thus supported by syntactic and phonological parallelism rather than by an added adversative expression.

This example shows that syntactic restructuring does not necessarily involve a complete reorganization of clause hierarchy. It may also concern the formal realization of a logical relation that remains implicit in the source text. The Chinese translation makes the reversal more explicit, whereas the Hungarian translation foregrounds the structural parallelism between the contrasting ideas. Different structural choices therefore produce different forms of rhetorical emphasis.

3. Discussion

The four cases show that syntactic restructuring in the Chinese and Hungarian translations operates at several interconnected levels. It may involve clause hierarchy, coordination, predicative organization, or the formal realization of logical relations. More importantly, these changes are not confined to grammatical adjustment. They affect the segmentation of the poetic line, the relationships among images, the dynamic or static presentation of metaphor, and the distribution of rhetorical emphasis.

The selected Chinese examples do not indicate a single uniform strategy. In Poem 22, an embedded relation in the English sentence is reorganized so that the final judgment becomes more independent. In Poem 183, repeated conjunctions are omitted and the images are placed in more immediate juxtaposition. In Poem 184, by contrast, a semantic reversal that remains formally implicit in the source is made explicit through "反

而" (instead). The examples therefore caution against reducing the Chinese translation to a simple tendency toward either implicitness or structural looseness. Different kinds of syntactic restructuring serve different rhetorical and poetic functions.

The Hungarian examples likewise display several forms of reorganization. In Poem 22, the source construction is recast around the verbal predicate *meglep*. In Poem 183, morphological marking contributes to the integration of the window and lamp into one syntactic and visual unit. In Poem 283, a copular relation is reconstructed through the dynamic predicate *tölti meg*, creating two parallel actions. In Poem 184, parallel *hogy*-clauses strengthen the formal correspondence underlying the semantic contrast. Hungarian grammatical resources thus provide multiple possibilities for reorganizing the English source, but the specific solutions adopted by the translator cannot be treated as grammatically predetermined.

This distinction between structural accommodation and translator choice is central to the analysis. Some degree of restructuring is expected when translation takes place between languages whose grammatical systems differ. A source-language construction may not be reproduced naturally in precisely the same form in the target language. Yet the existence of structural difference does not make every observed shift obligatory.

Poem 283 illustrates this point particularly clearly. Hungarian grammar does not require the English stative construction to be transformed into the dynamic expression built around *tölti meg*. This is one possible way of reconstructing the metaphor rather than a necessary grammatical response. Similarly, the addition of "反而" (instead) in the Chinese translation of Poem 184 is not demanded by Chinese grammar; it is a translational choice that makes the paradoxical relation more explicit.

Syntactic restructuring in poetry translation can therefore be understood as the outcome of an interaction between cross-linguistic structural conditions and translational choice. The target language provides a range of grammatical resources, while the translator selects among possible forms in reconstructing the poetic line. Since syntax participates in rhythm, imagery, and rhetorical organization, these selections may have aesthetic consequences even when the basic propositional meaning remains broadly stable.

The comparison further demonstrates the value of examining more than one target language. If only one source–target pair were considered, a particular structural change could too readily be attributed to the grammatical characteristics of the target language. The Chinese and Hungarian versions show that different solutions can be adopted in response to the same English structure. In some cases, the translations move in a similar direction, as in the greater independence given to the final statement in Poem 22. In others, particularly Poems 183 and 283, they reconstruct the syntactic and imagistic relations in markedly different ways.

A multilingual perspective therefore makes it possible to distinguish more carefully between structural motivation and individual translational choice. It also shows that poetry translation does not consist simply of replacing a source-language structure with a formally equivalent target-language structure. Rather, it involves reconstructing relationships among clauses, predicates, images, and logical units within the grammatical and stylistic possibilities available in the target language.

4. Conclusion

This study has examined syntactic restructuring in selected Chinese and Hungarian translations of *Stray Birds*. The analysis identifies changes in clause organization, coordination, predicative structure, and the expression of logical relations. Across the selected cases, the Chinese and Hungarian translations frequently reorganize syntactic relations in the English source rather than reproduce them directly.

These changes also participate in the reconstruction of poetic effects. Clause restructuring may alter rhythmic segmentation and increase the prominence of a concluding statement; changes in coordination may

reshape relationships among poetic images; predicative restructuring may transform a static metaphor into a dynamic one; and different ways of expressing logical relations may modify rhetorical emphasis. Syntax in poetry translation therefore functions not only as a grammatical framework for conveying propositional meaning but also as a formal resource through which poetic effects are recreated.

At the same time, the analysis indicates that syntactic restructuring cannot be explained solely by structural differences among English, Chinese, and Hungarian. Some adjustments are closely related to the grammatical resources of the target language, whereas others represent choices among several possible formulations. The interaction between structural accommodation and translator choice is therefore important for understanding how grammatical change participates in poetic reconstruction.

The study is limited to four selected poems and does not seek to establish general syntactic tendencies for the complete Chinese and Hungarian translations of *Stray Birds*. A larger corpus would be required to determine whether the patterns observed here recur systematically. Nevertheless, the cases examined demonstrate the value of a multilingual comparative perspective for investigating how syntactic restructuring participates in the reconstruction of rhythm, imagery, and emphasis in poetry translation.

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