

The Problem of Generality in Models for Translation Criticism

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1. Introduction

The question I would like to address here is translation quality assessment in poetry. To put it more specifically: I would like to discuss to what extent a model designed for assessing translation quality within one literary genre or text type might also be applicable to works of other types.

The reason why I take an interest in the generalization problem connected with such models is that, some time ago, I carried out a comprehensive study of the style and metrics of Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*. One of my objectives then was to establish the relative importance of a number of stylistic and metrical characteristics of this famous work, so as to be able to propose a set of suitable criteria to be integrated in a model for assessing the quality of available translations into Swedish of this highlight in the history of Western literature. Having designed such a model, I set out to apply it to seven translations from different periods, a project which led to a book on the subject, whose title in English is "Translation Quality Assessment and Aesthetic form" (Heldner 2008)¹.

However, an important result of this project – so it seemed to me – was an increasing awareness of the need for deeper reflection on conditions to be imposed on models of translation critique in general. After all, it seems reasonable to assume that a single model applicable to any kind of text would be totally inadequate. To begin with, it should be obvious to anyone that even the differences between prose and poetry are important enough to call for more specific models.

Nevertheless there is at least one condition that must be put on all target texts, whether they belong to the factual (non-literary) category,

¹ Heldner (2008) is supplied with an English Summary in pp. 287–297.

to fictional prose, or to poetry – metrical or free verse. What I have in mind is a close correspondence between source text and target text on the semantic level. But when choosing to focus on literary works, the semantic aspects are decidedly not the only ones to consider for the translator. Another factor of capital importance is aesthetic form.

What I will do here is leave prose aside in order to test the model designed for *The Divine Comedy* – an Italian 14th century text of the category narrative poetry – on a limited sample of lyric poetry by an English 16th–17th century poet, William Shakespeare, whose *Sonnets* now exist in a new Swedish translation by Eva Ström published in 2010.

It goes without saying that I will not be able to perform complete, systematic analyses of all relevant parameters of the type I carried out on the *Divine Comedy* and its translations. There is simply not space enough, even though I have chosen to work on a relatively small corpus. Instead, I shall have to make do with a number of – hopefully – well-informed observations based on the texts under study.

2. The Corpuses

In trying to assess Eva Ström's Swedish interpretations by means of the afore-mentioned model I have used three corpuses corresponding to different subparts of Shakespeare's suite of 154 sonnets.² One of them – Corpus A – consists of 13 sonnets selected from three thematically distinct sequences of poems. The first group consists of Sonnets 1–4 of the so-called "Procreation" sequence (1–17), the theme of which is to strongly advise the handsome young nobleman they are addressing to "procreate", in other words to stop directing his love toward himself and instead get married and have children, thereby gaining a kind of eternity for his remarkable beauty.

The theme of the second group (sonnets 18–33) could be described as a sort of "honeymoon" between the same young man and the poet who now seem to be on exceptionally good affectional terms. Harmony

² In the following, when I quote Eva Ström's translation, the number of the sonnet is followed by the number of the line, for example (40:5).

reigns in the relationship and eternity is supposed to be bestowed on the young man through the immortal writing of the poet. Sonnets 18–22 have been selected from this group.

In the third group, the reader is confronted with an open crisis in the relationship. The young nobleman has taken over “the Black lady”, i.e. the mistress of the poet who, consequently, has lost both his female love and – which seems to be worse in his eyes – his male friend, benefactor, and (possibly) lover. The poet’s mental equilibrium is seriously affected by the double loss. From this group, which consists of sonnets 34–43, I have selected sonnets 40–43.

Hence, this first corpus consists of 182 verse lines corresponding to those 13 sonnets out of the 154 that constitute the entire suite. It was designed for my study of rhythmic variation (cf. section 7 below), an important hypothesis of mine being that in excellent poetry variations of rhythm are often indicative of significant contrasts on the semantic or narrative level. It was also used for my checking of communicative equivalence (cf. section 5).

However, my study of conformity to metrical standards (cf. section 6) is based on a corpus of 980 lines – Corpus B – consisting of sonnets 1–70; the reason being, of course, that a larger corpus is needed for quantitative observations to really stand out. The same thing holds for my study of lexical variation in rhymes and of rhyme quality, which actually takes into account the entire suite of sonnets – Corpus C (cf. section 8). In practice, it consists of the 2 x 2155³ words in a rhyming position, in both source and target text.

3. The Model

The equivalence criteria proposed in my model for translation quality assessment do not all have exactly the same scope. On the most general level they concern *semantic equivalence* between source text and target text and are in principle valid for any kind of source text–target text

³ It should be noted that while a regular sonnet consists of 14 lines, sonnet 99 is made up of 15 lines and n° 126 only of 12.

pair. In this context I will leave semantic equivalence aside, since the necessity for such a criterion is too evident to need any further justification.

On the same level, approximately, we find *communicative equivalence*. This criterion has been formulated as a condition on the target text, so as to guarantee its conformity to the norm system in force within the linguistic community a given translation is destined for, the properties aimed at being such as sufficient naturalness and idiomaticity without sacrifice of either complexity or nuances of style inherent in the source text. In other words, this criterion concerns communicative qualities in the target language, given that a minimum of semantic equivalence has been assured. I suggest this criterion, too, should be considered as being of general validity⁴.

A third criterion used in my model is *formal equivalence*, which should be thought of as a collective designation of a whole series of linguistic, stylistic, and metric features that cannot be seen as constitutive of just any text but only of a specific text category or literary genre. Clearly, this is where the need for generic adaptations of the model may come in. For evident reasons, I shall have to leave out several types of literary discourse. Hence, nothing will be said here about fictional prose, nor about free verse poetry. Before discussing those aspects of the problematic, one would need a proposal of a set of concrete criteria to be integrated in the assessment model. Instead I will concentrate on poetry characterized by consistent metric patterns and rhymes, as in Dante's work. But the criteria will now be applied to the Shakespearean sonnet, in order to establish whether they allow being used on other texts as well.

What, then, were the evaluation criteria of formal equivalence chosen to use on the Swedish Dante translations⁵? The set can be divided into two groups the first of which is intended to cope with large scale units. Based on the source text, it formulates constraints for the target text on such things as the total number of canticas, of cantos per cantica, of

⁴ For a strict definition of the general equivalence criteria, see Heldner (2008:223–227).

⁵ For a brief account in English of the elicitation procedure, see Heldner (2008:295); for a more explicit one in Swedish, see *ibid.*, chapters 12.3.–4.

stanzas per canto, and lines per stanza. Those constraints obviously lack relevance in the Shakespearean case, since his collection of sonnets represents a large number of short poems of a fixed form, and not a large, unitary epos in hendecasyllables, as Dante's comedy does. So these criteria will have to be replaced by a detailed description of the metrical rules for the English variety of the sonnet (see below, ch. 6)⁶.

As for the second group of criteria, they belong to what might be called the micro-structure of the poetic text. Among the features showing up here we find lexical variation in rhyme words (including distribution of recurring items), degrees of semantic "fullness" in frequent rhyme word types⁷, and phonetic variation in recurring rhyme sequences (including distributional patterns).

Such features may be observed anywhere in the text. But there is also a category of features – like sound symbolism – that can only be observed locally and established through careful distributional studies. Whenever they are connected to semantic structures in the passage located, I have used the term "content-based over-determination" to designate them, but if they only involve form (as with patterns of alliteration or assonance) I have called the over-determination "form-based".

4. Design of the present investigation

What I will do here, more exactly, is to apply some of the criteria from my Dante-generated model on Eva Ström's translation of the Shakespearean sonnets, starting with the criterion of communicative equivalence, and pursuing with three criteria of formal equivalence. The first form criterion to be examined will be equivalence in terms of conform-

⁶ The English sonnet goes back to an Italian verse form which originated in 13th century Sicily, from where it was brought to Tuscany and used by poets like Guittone d'Arezzo, Dante Alighieri, Guido Cavalcanti – and, first and foremost, Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374). For the metrical rules of the English sonnet, see for instance Henrikson (1982:150–152). For the Italian sonnet and a historical background, see Dardano & Trifone (2001:652–665).

⁷ By semantic fullness is usually meant richness in lexical content, as manifested by pairs like "katt – att", or "free – be" where the second member of each opposition is a grammatical item with a rather thin content as compared to the first.

ity to relevant metrical standards. The other two are equivalence of respectively rhythmical variation and of lexical rhyme variation, which will include “semantic fullness” in frequent types of rhyme words (but not phonetic variation). Each one of these criteria will be commented on in the appropriate section below.

It will not be possible in this context, however, to include an examination of the phenomena of over-determination, and still less of the degree of semantic equivalence between the texts under examination. It should be pointed out though that, intuitively, Eva Ström’s interpretation of these sonnets seems to be very competent, difficult as the task may be.

5. Communicative equivalence

The parameters selected for evaluating communicative equivalence in my study of the Dante translations included syntactic and morphological features, as well as lexical ones. Since, in the case of modern Shakespeare translations, there is probably no urgent need for any checking of morphology or lexicon, I will content myself here with a syntactic investigation involving a group of phenomena I have chosen to call “poetic word order”. When reading older poetry in Swedish, you usually find them up to the period of the Second World War. This type of syntax tends to leave an impression of quaintness on the contemporary reader, who may perceive it as somewhat old-fashioned or conventional, and even impairing to the communicative quality of the language.

Among the most spectacular cases of this type of word order in Swedish is when, in declarative sentences, the word order SOV (subject–object–verb) is used instead of the unmarked basic word order SVO. The designation O should here be taken to admit at least one or two constituents functioning as objects or adverbials, as in (40:5): “Om [du]_s [för kärleks skull]_o [min kära]_o [tar]_v”, which contains one noun phrase, “min kära”, and one prepositional phrase, “för kärleks skull”, before the verb. At times, the object shows up as a pronoun, as in (42:9): “Om jag [dig]_o mister, då kan hon [dig]_o få”. In contemporary standard

Swedish, of course, we would instead expect formulations such as “Om jag mister dig, då kan hon få dig”.

A related case is when some constituent (here referred to as X) other than the subject appears sentence-initially. Then the finite verb may show up immediately after the subject (i.e. XSV) instead of before it (i.e. XVS), as it should in modern Swedish. Here is an example where “trots din plikt” corresponds to X, “min älskling” to S and “lever” to V: “Så gör ditt värsta, Tid, och [trots din plikt]_X / [min älskling]_S [lever]_V evigt i min dikt” (19:13–14). The standard word order, of course, would be ”trots din plikt lever min älskling [för] evigt i din dikt”.

Those two word orders may also be intertwined as in the following example, which moreover includes an antiquated verb form (“stjäler”): “och [själva himlakupan]_X [man]_S [till dikten]_O [stjäler]_V” (21:8).

Today, such constructions seem to be inexistent in poetry (cf. Heldner 2008:148–149)⁸. However, they may still be found in translations, particularly in translations of poetic texts from earlier centuries, like Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* or Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. It might be, of course, that their presence in such contexts reveals an archaizing intention on the part of the translator. But if the originator of the source text did not choose to give his own text this kind of touch, such an ambition in the translator might at least be questioned, even if, in the end, the choice remains a matter of taste.

Now let us look at some statistics. In the following table we can see the number of SOV- and XSV-constructions used by Eva Ström in Corpus A, where the average number of slightly antiquated constructions is 2.8 per sonnet:

⁸ See also Algulin (1969:15–21) for a background on the general characteristics of Modernism in Swedish Poetry.

Table 1. Communicative equivalence in the target text: the frequency of SOV and XSV-constructions in Corpus A

Sonnets	S1	S2	S3	S4	S18	S19	S20	S21	S22	S40	S41	S42	S43
SOV	1	2	1	3	3	2	1	2	2	6	–	2	2
XSV	–	1	–	–	1	1	1	2	1	1	–	1	–
Total	1	3	1	3	4	3	2	4	3	7	–	3	2

However, such a result is interesting only if we start from a point where no use at all of such constructions is admitted. As long as we have nothing to compare with, these figures tell us little of the general properties of the target text as a whole. Are we witnessing here an excessive use of the “poetic word order” or is it more common in other translations? And, considering the insignificant size of the corpus, how representative is this selection of sonnets for the rest of the collection?

For lack of time and space I will not be able to give a full treatment to these questions here, I will just confront the results obtained with two other types of information concerning poetic word order: a) its frequency in a single sonnet – number 18 – in seven Swedish versions⁹; b) its frequency in seven Swedish translations of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*.

Table 2. Poetic word order in seven Swedish translations of Sonnet 18¹⁰

Sonnet 18	SOV	XSV	Total
Carl Rupert Nyblom (1871)	5	2	7
K. A. Svensson (1964)	2	1	3
Erik Blomberg (1965)	5	2	7
S. C. Swahn (1981)	1	–	1
Lena R. Nilsson (2007)	2	–	2
Eva Ström (2010)	3	1	4
Sven Bjerstedt (2010)	1	1	2

⁹ Number 18 was chosen to make it possible to confront the results with the analyses presented in Bjerstedt’s [www] article (cf. note 9).

¹⁰ The last translation has been taken from an article by Sven Bjerstedt [www] entitled ”Jämförelser av fem svenska tolkningar av Shakespeares sonett nr 18”.

As can be gathered from Table 2, there is a growing tendency – with one exception – of avoiding at least the two types of poetic word order described here, the closer we get in time to today’s situation. In poetry it has completely disappeared, as noted above. And, what this data seems to indicate is that, since World War Two, it is definitely on its way out also in translations of poetry, the conspicuous exception being Erik Blomberg.

Against this background, it is interesting to note, though, that poetic word order has not disappeared completely in the translation context. A plausible explanation might be the problem encountered by translators charged with the extremely difficult task of rendering an original text of the classic category in contemporary Swedish, without neglecting either the demands of content or of form in the sense of meter, rhythm, and rhyme. To them, it might seem attractive to have at their disposal a wider choice of possible word orders.

As a matter of fact, more or less the same observations can be made when having a look at our Swedish Dante interpreters, even though, once again, we meet with a conspicuous exception: S. C. Bring’s translation which was published as early as 1905.

Table 3. Poetic word order in seven Swedish translations of a subcorpus of Dante’s Divine Comedy¹¹

Swedish translations	SOV	XSV	Total
Nils Lovén (1856–57)	128	53	181
Edvard Lidforss (1903)	123	83	206
S. C. Bring (1905)	15	5	20
Arnold Norlind (1921–1930)	121	57	178
Aline Pipping (1915–1924)	105	47	152
Åke Ohlmarks (69–1966)	80	38	118
Ingvar Björkeson (1983)	25	5	30

¹¹ The data of table 3 has been taken from Tables 1 and 2 in Heldner (2008:150, 152).

What this table shows, after all, is that the frequency of more or less obsolete word orders – and other kinds of out-dated ways of expression, whether lexical, syntactic or morphological – should perhaps be seen more as the result of a conscious choice on the part of the translator to adopt a more or less antiquated mode of expression, than as a linguistic necessity imposed on a translator.

6. Conformity to metrical standards

The standard to conform to in this case is that of the sonnet, which was introduced to England from Italy in the early 16th century. The original Petrarchan sonnet had 14 iambic verse lines with 11 syllables each, the last one of which unstressed. The English verse line variant is usually made to shift at irregular intervals between 10 and 11 syllables¹². Furthermore, the sonnet always follows a strict rhyme scheme which, however, varies a great deal. The usual scheme in Shakespeare's work is *abab, cdcd, efef, gg*.

How, then, do the sonnets in Eva Ström's translation compare with those of Shakespeare? Let us start with the global number of lines. Judging from Corpus C, i.e. all the 154 poems of the suite, we can see that the standard 14 lines of the sonnet appear in the target text to the same extent as they do in the source text. As far as I can see, there are only two exceptions, the first of which can be found in Sonnet 99, which has got 15 lines in both texts. The second one shows up in Sonnet 126 which, in Shakespeare's version as well as in Eva Ström's, is made up of 12 lines. So conformity here seems to be perfect: whenever Shakespeare deviates from the scheme, so does Eva Ström.

Next, I should like to comment on the ratio between two types of verse lines I have elsewhere called A1 and A2 (see Heldner forthcoming). A1 is a designation for the default verse in a Shakespearean sonnet which is made up of five consecutive iambs (the so-called *iambic pentameter*), the iamb being a metric foot consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by one carrying the stress. The A2 type is simply a var-

¹² Even though English poetry is not supposed to be syllabic, as Italian poetry usually is.

iant involving an extra unstressed syllable after the fifth iamb. What this means is first of all that while A1-lines have 10 syllables, A2-lines have 11. More importantly, it means that the rhyme is masculine in the A1-line (as in, for instance, “rage” – “age”) and feminine in the A2-line (as in “graces” – “faces”). It should be noted incidentally that only feminine rhymes are allowed in the Italian sonnet, whose verses invariably consist of 11 syllables (*hendecasyllables*).

Comparing the use of these two types of verse in the source and target texts, we find in Shakespeare a marked preference for the A1-type, while the frequency of the A2-type in the Swedish translation is approaching one third of the whole set of lines:

Table 4. Frequency of A1-lines and A2-lines in Corpus B

Corpus B:	A1-lines, number	Per cent	A2-lines, number	Per cent	Total number
Shakespeare	902	92 %	78	8 %	980
Eva Ström	710	72 %	270	28 %	980

What this result reflects is perhaps that resorting to A2-lines may afford a convenient way of resolving specific rhyme problems. In fact, having a choice at the end of the verse between a word ending with a masculine rhyme and one ending with a feminine rhyme should be of a certain importance to the translator, considering the difficult task he or she is faced with.

Let us finally have a look at the number of syllables actually used per line. Keeping to Corpus B (sonnets 1–70) one can see that there are practically no departures from the rule 10/11 syllables in Shakespeare’s poems. An apparent mistake in Sonnet 43:8 is simply due to a misquotation in the Lind & Co edition: there should be no “the” in “When to [the] unseeing eyes thy shade shines so!”. Another error in the same edition concerns the word “me” which is missing in sonnet 27, line 1, making it irregular: “Weary with toil, I haste [me] to my bed”.

Apart from that, I have only been able to detect two possible “errors”: 1) line 4 in Sonnet 15, where Eva Ström herself remarks (Shake-

spere 2010:49) that since Shakespeare has written a six-foot line here (“Whereon the stars in secret influence comment”), she will do the same; and 2) line 8 in Sonnet 66 which seems to have got only 9 syllables, a fact that cannot be attributed to a misquotation of the original’s “And strength by limping sway disabled”.

However, one may easily get the impression in other cases, too, that a given A1-line has less – or more – than 10 syllables. But this is usually a mistake due to the fact that certain pronunciation variations were allowed at the time, such as for instance the elision of a vowel in certain words. One example is “And having climbed the steep-up heavenly hill” (7:5), where “heavenly” could be pronounced “heav’nly”. In Corpus B there are 24 cases of this type.

Another way of adapting the number of syllables to the needs of the scheme is the choice to pronounce two contiguous vowels as a single one¹³. This situation occurs 10 times in the corpus, such as in the following example: “As thou being mine, mine is thy good report” (36:14), where “being” should thus be pronounced as a one-syllable word. But this reading could probably also be applied to “influence” in Eva Ström’s six-foot line above.

A third situation occurs when an extra position is needed to complete the verse. In fact, it happens 16 times that the past participle ending *-ed* must be pronounced [id] instead of [d] or [t] in order for the line to have the right number of syllables. An example would be line 11 from Sonnet 30: “The sad account [sic!] of fore-bemoaned moan” (Italics added). And in my “erroneous” example above a four-syllable pronunciation of “disabled” might have been acceptable.

All in all, exceptions seem to be more or less non-existent in the source text. The situation in the target text is not quite analogous. It is true that this text contains no more than 12 deviations from the norm of 10/11 syllables (according as the line belongs to the A1 or the A2-type). But only two of them can be justified by referring to some pronunciation

¹³ In Italian metrics the phenomenon is called “sinalèfe” (see Dardano & Trifone 2001:656). Fundamentally, it is a matter of speech rate and can therefore easily be resorted to in Germanic languages as well.

convention or to speech rate as in the examples from the source text: “jag hoppas dock din goda *intelligens* / med kläder ska förse den *i alla fall*” (26:7–8). Here we have two cases of contiguous vowels – *a-i* and *i-a* – that admit of being produced as a single syllable. However, all the other 10 instances seem to be outright violations of the sonnet standard, like the following:

(3:1)	Se dig i spegeln och säg åt den du ser	(11 syllables)
(10:9)	Ändra din tanke, så kan jag ändra min	(11)
(15:4)	en illusion som styrs av stjärnors kommentar	(12)
(18:9)	Men din sommars skönhet vissnar ej	(9)
(21:8)	och själva himlakupan man till dikten stjäl	(13)
(29:7)	någons förmåga, en annans huvudknopp	(11)
(33:5)	Men snart ses lägsta molnen glida	(9)
(45:5)	När dessa kvicka element har hastat så	(12)
(47:8)	och delar kärlekstankarna på vänskaps sätt	(12)
(70:9)	Du undslapp ungdomsfarors bakhåll	(9)

In some of these cases it would have been simple to adjust the line to make it more conform, as for instance in:

(10:9)	Ändra din tanke, [och jag ändrar] min	(10 – A1) ¹⁴
(18:9)	Men [se!] din sommars skönhet vissnar ej,	(10 – A1)
(29:7)	[ens] förmåga, en annans huvudknopp	(10 – A1)
(33:5)	men snart [ser man de] lägsta molnen glida	(11 – A2)(45:5)
	När dessa [kvicka] element har hastat så	(10 – A1)
(10:9)	Du [som] undslapp ungdomsfarors bakhåll	(10 – A1)

¹⁴ Notice that syllable 10 of the A1-line is stressed while syllable 11 in the A2-line carries no stress (cf. 7.1. below).

In other cases, changes intervening in several lines might be necessary. As an example: here is a reformulation of lines 5–8 from sonnet 21. While better conforming to the metric pattern, it has both the advantage of being closer to the source text semantically¹⁵ and of getting rid of the obsolete verb form “stjåler”. On the other hand, it also introduces the somewhat unusual expression “diktens stycken”:

I stolta ordalag jämförs [en kvinna],
 med sol och måne, [jord och hav, och smycken]
 [och vårblommor man i april kan finna],
 [ja,] själva himlakupan [ryms i] dikten[s stycken].

And here is the original translation, where line 8 has 13 syllables:

I stolta ordalag jämförs en dam
 med sol och måne, stjärnor och juveler,
 med vårens första blomst, med sällsynt kram
 och själva himlakupan man till dikten stjåler.

Establishing the presence of such departures from the metrical standard is one thing, however. Another thing, of course, is whether they should be considered as justified or not. But that is a completely different discussion which will have to be held somewhere else. I should only like to add a single comment in this context which seems reasonable to me: the way to judge non-conformity to a certain norm system in a target text should be connected to the degree of non-conformity observed in the source text.

7. Rhythmical variation

How, then, do the sonnets of the target text compare with those of the source text when it comes to rhythm¹⁶? To discuss this issue, we first need to define the typical rhythm patterns appearing in the Shakespearean sonnet. In doing so I will concentrate on those which may be

¹⁵ [...] making a couplement of proud compare / with sun and moon, with earth and sea's rich gems, / With April's firstborn flowers, and all things rare / That heaven's air in this huge rondure hems.

¹⁶ NB: not meter, which was discussed in section 6!

observed in Corpus A. It should be noted to begin with that the “canonical” rhythm as defined by the perfectly regular iambic pentameter corresponds to either of the two patterns represented in the figure below, where “●” indicates a syllable carrying stress and the unfilled circles indicate unstressed syllables.

Figure 1. Distribution of stressed syllables in regular iambic pentameters

Syllable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Foot	1	2		3		4		5		6	
A1	From	fai-	rest	crea-	tures	we	de-	sire	in-	crease	
1:1	◦	●	◦	●	◦	●	◦	●	◦	●	
A2	A	wo-	man's	face	with	na-	nature's	own	hand	paint-	ed
20:1	◦	●	◦	●	◦	●	◦	●	◦	●	◦

7.1. Variation patterns in the Shakespearean sonnet

My classification involves seven simple categories, the first two of which are the canonical types A1 and A2, as we have just seen. A frequent variant of the regular type involves a modification in the first foot. It consists in a *trochee* being substituted for the iamb (types A1a, A2a). More exactly, this means that a sequence of one stressed and one unstressed syllable replaces the iamb.

Figure 2. Iambic pentameter with initial inversion

Syllable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Foot	1	2		3		4		5		6	
A1a	<i>Pi-</i>	<i>ty</i>	the	world,	or	else	this	glut-	ton	be	
1:13	●	◦	◦	●	◦	●	◦	●	◦	●	
A2a	<i>Mine</i>	<i>be</i>	thy	love,	and	thy	love's	use	their	trea-	sure
20:14	●	◦	◦	●	◦	●	◦	●	◦	●	◦

In a second variant involving the first foot, the iamb is replaced by a *spondee* – a metrical foot consisting of two successive syllables, both of which are stressed (types A1c, A2c).

Figure 3. *Iambic pentameter with an initial spondee*

Syllable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Foot	1		2		3		4		5		6
A1c	<i>All</i>	<i>mine</i>	was	thine,	be-	fore	Thou	hast	this	more.	
40:4	●	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	

But such inversions may also occur verse internally in any of the feet 2, 3 or 4 (types A1b, A2b), as the trochee in syllables 5 and 6 of sonnet 1:14:

Figure 4. *Iambic pentameter with an internal trochee*

Syllable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Foot	1		2		3		4		5		6
A1b	To	eat	the	world's	<i>due</i>	<i>by</i>	The	grave	and	thee	
1:14	○	●	○	●	●	○	○	●	○	●	

The same thing holds true for spondees, which may occur inside the verse as in foot 3 of the following line (11 of sonnet 1):

Figure 5. *Iambic pentameter with an internal spondee*

Syllable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Foot	1		2		3		4		5		6
A1b	With-	in	thine	own	<i>bud</i>	<i>bur-</i>	iest	thy	con-	tent	
1:11	○	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○	●	

There also exists a less frequent type of metrical foot – called *pyrrhic* – consisting of two unstressed syllables (types A1e, A2e). Corpus A contains no example of an initial pyrrhic. However, there are several cases of verse internal ones (types A1f, A2f), but only in combination with other deviations from the basic metric scheme.

In the following, a distinction will be made between *complex lines* (characterized either by a single verse internal deviation – b, d, f – or by multiple ones), and *simple lines* which include all perfectly regular iambic pentameters (i.e. A1 or A2 alone) and those where some modification occurs in the initial foot (i.e. A1 or A2 in combination with a, c, or e). Here is an example of a complex verse line from Sonnet 19, where some modification or other intervenes in four consecutive feet.

Figure 6. A complex variant of the iambic pentameter

Syllable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Foot	1	2		3		4		5		6	
1adfd	<i>Pluck</i>	<i>the</i>	<i>keen</i>	<i>teeth</i>	<i>from</i>	<i>the</i>	<i>fierce</i>	<i>ti-</i>	<i>ger's</i>	<i>jaws.</i>	
19:3	●	○	●	●	○	○	●	●	○	●	

As can be seen above, the line is labelled 1adfd, meaning that it has got ten syllables and starts out with a trochee followed by a spondee and a pyrrhic and, finally, another spondee before the final iamb.

7.2. Confronting source text and target text: results

How, then, have all these rhythmical patterns been used by Shakespeare himself – and by Eva Ström? In the following, we will first be looking at frequency data and then, finally, comment briefly on the poetic functions of these variational features¹⁷.

As can be gathered from Tables 5 and 6, perfect regularity in rhythm prevails in both texts, even though there is more of it in the target text

¹⁷ Unfortunately, there is not room enough for an examination and discussion of distributional data.

than in the original. More specifically, while in Shakespeare we find it in less than half the cases (or 48.4 %), the proportion of completely regular patterns in Eva Ström's translation amounts to 58.3 %.

Table 5. Simple and complex patterns: number and frequency in William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare Corpus A	Simple verses						Complex verses			
Types	A1	A2	A1a	A1c	A2a	A2c	b	d	multiple	
Number of occurrences per type	71	17	36	12	10	1	7	10	18	182
Corpus A, all occurrences	88		59				17		18	182
Corpus A, per cent	48.4 %		32.4 %				9.3 %		9.9 %	100 %
	80.8 %						19.2 %			100 %

Table 6. Simple and complex patterns: number and frequency in Eva Ström

Eva Ström Corpus A	Simple verses						Complex verses			
Types	A1	A2	A1a	A1c	A2a	A2c	b	d	multiple	
Number of occurrences per type	75	31	32	5	21	2	4	3	9	182
Corpus A, all occurrences	106		60				7		9	182
Corpus A, per cent	58.3 %		33 %				3.8 %		4.9 %	100 %
	91.3 %						8.7 %			100 %

To my mind, this is quite an interesting result. The reason why I think so is my background in research on Dante's *Divine Comedy*, where rhythmically regular lines constitute 48 % of the entire corpus to be compared with Shakespeare's 48 %.

As for the various target texts, on the other hand, there is a lot of diversity. While Eva Ström's perfectly regular lines constitute more than 58 % of the total number, the corresponding figures for the seven Swedish Dante translations vary between 69 % and 94 % (cf. Heldner 2008:113, Table 44).

How, then, are we to interpret the fact that source texts tend to be more irregular, as far as rhythm is concerned, than target texts? Starting with poetry in its original version, I would like to point to a hypothesis proposed in Heldner (ibid.:110–111) to account for irregularities. It is based on Lotman's idea of the "law of the third fourth" treated in *Analysis of the Poetic Text* (1976). It says, in short, that in a given text composed of four segments, it seems invariably to be the case that encountering the first two fourths of it creates a kind of structural expectation that the third segment will violate and the fourth and final one will reinstall. The whole concept seems to aim at variation and Lotman believed it to be "almost universal". Extending the idea a little bit, it can easily be applied

to statistical relations between various constitutive structures in a text, such as for instance proportions of distinct rhythmic patterns.

When pursuing this line of thinking we discover that in considering the “almost” regular types A1/A2 a, c as regular variants of A1/A2 and putting them in the same group, we arrive at 80.8 % versus 19.2 % in Shakespeare for Lotman’s distinction $\frac{3}{4}$ versus $\frac{1}{4}$. The corresponding figures for Dante are still closer: 72.4 % versus 27.6 % (Heldner 2008:114, Table 46).

There is nothing like it, though, to be observed in the target texts, where Eva Ström’s proportion of the simple type is 91.3 % versus 8.7 % for the complex one. And, in fact, judging by the Dante target texts, what we find seems to be a systematic avoidance of any “irregularity” in relation to the metrical scheme. Most of them contain as few as 2–4 % of not perfectly regular lines. The translator who “performs best” to my mind has achieved 6.7 % (ibid.:109, Table 43).

But why bother at all about deviation in terms of rhythmical patterns as long as the meter is respected? My point here is the overall importance of variation within the English Renaissance literary paradigm, as pointed out by Eva Ström herself in a comment to Sonnet 4 (Shakespeare 2010:27). On the whole, a fair amount of variation on a large number of stylistic levels seems to have been a prominent feature in poetry, at least since Dante. In fact, one of the main findings of my own Dante research has been the incredibly sophisticated stylistic variation in the *Divine Comedy*, whatever the parameter chosen.

Given these stylistic considerations, how do we explain the evident tendency in translators to keep as strictly as possible to metrical rules, and hence to rhythmic regularity? It might be that translators generally are too occupied trying to render the contents, the rhymes and the metric scheme to pay much attention to the importance of variation in rhythm. An alternative explanation might be effects of a significant change in our literary and stylistic preferences, under way maybe since the 19th century. Among other things, it seems to consist in a generalized devaluation of variation in the linguistic expression as an intrinsical

value, and a simultaneous transfer of focus to other aspects of the literary work, less connected with features of style.

However, an extremely important aspect of variability in the rhythm of the verse line, apart from the wish to avoid monotony, is the ambition to make the rhythm follow or reinforce fluctuations in the narrative or in the emotional status of the particular unit – the verse or stanza or poem, as the case may be.

But such adaptation of the poetical form to aspects of content may also be achieved through rhythmical modifications in the initial foot of the verse, at least partially. Therefore it is a very good sign that in the two most recent translations of Shakespeare and Dante – i.e. those of Eva Ström and Ingvar Björkeson – the proportion at least of this type of verse lines is more or less equal to that of the originator of the text: in Dante and Björkeson the percentage is 24.5b % and 24.2 %, while the corresponding figures for Shakespeare and Ström are 32.4 % and 33 %. An increasing awareness under way, perhaps?

8. Lexical variation and rhyme quality

The last step in my investigation is devoted to assessing the use of rhymes in the target text as compared with that of the source text. The material has been taken from Corpus C (154 sonnets of 14 lines each) and consists of the set of all words in rhyme position. All in all, the examined material contains two times 2,157 word-forms, each figuring at the end of a line. Since lexical variation is a central aspect of rhyming, frequency statistics have been established for items such as word-forms, lexemes, and rhyme pairs. Another important aspect is the quality of the rhymes, which is where we will start.

8.1. Rhyme quality

As has already been observed, the rhymes of a Shakespearean sonnet are organized according to the scheme *abab-cdcd-efef-gg*. In other words, they are presented in pairs, two for each quatrain. Before discussing rhyme quality in source and target texts, let me propose a definition of the “perfect rhyme”, so as to be able to keep track of the data observed.

Most masculine rhyme words only have one syllable, but if they have more, the final syllable carries the stress. I will consider a perfect rhyme to consist of two distinct words showing up a) exactly the same vowel sound – as for quality *and* quantity; b) identity of any consecutive consonant sounds. In feminine rhymes, the same thing is required both from the vowel carrying the stress and the unstressed one coming after it, and from any consonant sounds following the stressed vowel. Any pair of words used as a rhyme will be judged non conform to this standard as soon as one of the conditions is not met.

Turning first to Eva Ström's version of the sonnets we find that out of 1,078 word pairs appearing in the same stanza – each at the end of a line – 974 are perfect rhymes in the above sense, while 104 – or 9.6 % – are deviant in some respect or other.

Let me illustrate with a few examples from each of the subcategories identified. In 15 cases the pair contains twice the same word-form (for instance “mig” rhyming with “mig”)¹⁸. On the other hand, six pairs show no internal resemblance at all (as in “ljud” – “förstör”; “sagan” – “hår”; “dig” – “lever”). All the other categories show some kind of partial conformity, which may amount to an assonance, as in “ha” – “grav”; “man” – “skam”; “sett” – “växt”; “patient” – “känns”; “baldakinen” – “scenografien”; “föraktas” – “kastas”; “förblindar” – “förhindrar”. There are 37 cases of this type, where identity is restricted to the vowel(s). In 46 cases the vowels of the couple are distinct, either as for quality (38) or quantity (8), or both, while the consonant(s) is/are identical. Here are a few selected examples of such consonance: “stegra” – “vägra”; “juveler” – “stjäler”; “lust” – “bröst”; “lort” – “bort”; “vän” – “gren”; “iväg” – “dig”; “blod” – “brodd”; “suveränt” – “monument”. The most frequent type (24 cases) has a clash between [e] and [æ]. It is true that in certain Stockholm dialects – but not in standard Swedish – a word like “stegra” has the same vowel sound as “vägra”, a fact likely to explain the large number of pairs of this type.

¹⁸ 7 ”mig” – ”mig”, 5 ”dig” – ”dig”, 1 ”vara” – ”vara”, 1 ”bort” – ”bort”, 1 ”med” – ”med”.

So, given my rather strict definition, just under 10 % of Eva Ström's rhyme pairs are less satisfactory. But then she might very well have decided to operate with a somewhat more liberal definition than mine. What about Shakespeare then? After all, it would not be such a good idea to demand more from a target text than from a source text.

However, when it comes to judging rhyme quality in the original sonnets we turn into difficulty. The reason is this. Out of the 1,078 word pairs used as rhymes there are, according to Crystal (2011:296), no less than 142 (or 13 %) that either rhyme imperfectly – or not at all¹⁹. According to Crystal, there could be three possible reasons for this. Either Shakespeare was not as good a poet as we have been made to think, at least as for finding rhymes – an idea Crystal chooses to entirely disregard. Or he might have made extensive use of “visual” rhymes, i.e. rhymes that look alike but sound different (as “cough” and “though”). This idea is discarded, too, because of the implausibility of eye-rhymes in a context where no spelling normalization has yet taken place. The only remaining factor to account for the phenomenon, then, is phonological change.

As a matter of fact, there are many reasons to believe that the pronunciation of a great number of English words has changed significantly since the Elizabethan period. A spectacular example is the word “love” which appears 19 times in a pair where the rhyme does not work in Modern English. As any reader will discover directly, there is a clash between this word and for instance “prove”, “approve”, “move”, “remove”, which are pronounced with a long [u]-sound today, while the vowel in “love” is a short [ʌ]. But in Shakespeare's days a rhyme pair such as “prove” – “love”^{*20} worked fine, if we are to believe Crystal, who is an expert in historical linguistics. The same holds true for practically all “defective” rhyme pairs in the sonnets, as in the following examples where the vowel of the second word used to echo that of the first: “song” – “tongue”*, “wrong” – “young”*; “glass” – “was”*; “disarmed”

¹⁹ In reality, Crystal has missed a certain number of clashes, so the number should rather be around 160, which amounts to 15 %.

²⁰ Words pronounced differently in Early Modern English have been marked with an asterisk here.

– “warmed”*, “art” – “convert”*, “there” – “near”*, “break” – “speak”*, “survey” – “key”*, “great” – “defeat”*, “compare” – “are”*, “forth” – “worth”*, “past” – “waste”*, “die” – “memory”*, “thee” – “melancholy”*, “fullness” – “dullness”*, “alone” – “gone”*.

In other words, as for the sound, we seem to have good reasons to believe Shakespeare’s rhymes to have been almost perfect at the time of their creation. The target text does not do quite as well, as we have seen, with just under 10 % of imperfect rhymes. For phonological evidence on this matter the interested reader should consult Kökeritz (1953) and Crystal (2005, 2008, 2011).²¹

8.2. Lexical variation

Next let us turn to word form frequencies. Checking the set of 2,157 rhyming positions we discover that Shakespeare’s text contains 1,035 distinct types. This allows for a good deal of repetitiveness in the rhyme vocabulary, since each word type is liable to appear from one to 48 times. The following list shows the 18 most recurrent word forms in the set of Shakespeare’s rhymes: “thee” (48), “me” (34), “be” (22), “heart” (17), “sight” (15), “love” (14), “eyes” (14), “time” (14), “you” (12), “alone” (12), “away” (12), “night” (12), “show” (11), “so” (11), “part” (11), “day” (11), “still” (11), “will”/“Will” (10). All in all, these 18 types represent 291 occurrences and five of them (“thee”, “me”, “be”, “you”, “so”) belong to the category of grammatical items.

But in the target text there are as many as 1,263 distinct types, which means it has got more of lexical variation than the original. On the other hand, the 18 most frequent types correspond to 278 occurrences: ”dig” (69), ”mig” (58), ”är” (18), ”sig” (13), ”dag” (12), ”ut” (10), ”makt” (9), ”vän” (9), ”se” (9), ”ser” (8), ”bestä” (8), ”bär” (8), ”död” (8), ”kvar” (8), ”slut” (8), ”så” (8), ”till” (8), ”du” (7). Eight of these items (“du”, “dig”,

²¹ An interesting detail to be mentioned in passing is that several Shakespeare plays have been mounted in Britain and the U.S. since 2004 in what is called OP (‘Original Pronunciation’). All the productions were supervised by Crystal as a linguistic expert. It might be worth while trying the same experience on the sonnets!

“sig”, “är”, “så”, “till”, “ut”) belong to the grammatical type carrying a relatively thin semantic content.

So, although Shakespeare makes use of a smaller number of distinct word types than does Eva Ström, his use of frequently repeated grammatical items in the rhyme position is somewhat less prominent than that of his translator.

A related measure is the number of words occurring only once, so called *hapax*. In Shakespeare 32 % of the words (or 688) have a single appearance at the end of a line. All the other word forms show up more or less often, as we have just seen. The corresponding result for Eva Ström is 43 % (or 921), which is a clearly better performance from the point of view of lexical variation.

A similar picture emerges if we compare word forms categorized under their respective lexeme, as for instance when “am”, “art”, “is”, “are”, “was”, “were”, “been”, “being” are all categorized as instances of “be”. While Eva Ström makes use of 1,080 distinct lexemes in her rhymes, there are only 871 in the Shakespearean original.

Such statistics provide one possible measure of linguistic creativity. It might therefore be interesting to see how Dante comes out in the comparison. Keeping only to the Inferno part of the *Divine Comedy*, you will find 4,720 words rhyming in triplets. So for each rhyme there are three word-forms rhyming between themselves. In Dante’s epos 48 % of the rhymes belong to the hapax type. The remaining 52 % only appear between 2 and 10 times, a remarkable difference which, however, will not be discussed here. So while Eva Ström seems to have done better than Shakespeare as far as rhyme word variation is concerned, neither of them can compete with Dante in this respect.

This kind of result is usually accounted for by assuming Italian to afford better facilities for rhyming. This might be true, of course, but it should nevertheless be kept in mind, that all Dante’s rhymes appear by three and that they are all feminine. As we have seen, both Shakespeare and Eva Ström seem to resort to feminine rhymes whenever they come short of masculine ones (cf. the statistics for A1- and A2-lines in Table 4 above).

A last thing to be pointed out here is an unexpected finding presented in Heldner (2008:37). When comparing the set of all rhyme word types in Dante's *Inferno* with that of all the Swedish target texts respecting the rhyme, I found the number of distinct words-forms used as rhymes to be a lot larger in the Swedish texts taken together (5,288) than in the original version of the comedy (3,107). Such a result does not support the assumption of Swedish being a language offering poorer possibilities for rhyming than Italian! One might suspect the same holds for English.

8.3. Rhyme pair frequencies

Let me conclude the assessment of rhymes by showing the ratio of repetitiveness in rhyme pairs. Taking into account all rhymes appearing at least three times we find the following 119 rhyme pairs in the target text:

Table 7. Frequent rhyme pairs in Eva Ström's interpretation (Corpus C)

repeated 11–40 times	repeated 5–10 times	repeated 4 times	repeated 3 times
40 dig – mig	6 ord – jord	se – ge	ut – förut
11 sig – dig	6 mig – mig	bär – är	ser – ger
	5 dig – dig	död – glöd	vän – igen
	5 ut – slut	allt – gestalt	till – Will
		du – nu	blick – fick
		hus – ljus	låga – plåga
		kär – är	

Surprisingly enough, the corresponding result for the source text, is 246 rhyme pairs:

*Table 8: Frequent rhyme pairs in Shakespeare's sonnets
(Corpus C)*

repeated 6 – 23 times	repeated 5 times	repeated 4 times	repeated 3 times	repeated 3 times
23 me – thee	night – sight	time – prime	free – me	mind – find
13 be – thee	time – rhyme	time – crime	sight – might	friend – end
9 heart – part	will/Will – still	alone – gone	sight – (a)right	care – are
9 love – prove	more – score	alone – one	you – true	tell – dwell
8 praise – days	more – store	woe – so	you – new	name – shame
7 heart – art	brow – now	hate – state	away – decay	skill – still
7 eyes – lies	mine – thine	seen – green	away – day	old – told
7 live – give	be – me	face – disgrace	away – stay	argument –
6 see – thee		pleasure – treasure	show – grow	spent
6 youth – truth		verse – rehearse	show – so	Muse – use
		hand – stand	will – ill	
		pen – men	face – place	

What conclusion could be drawn from these observations? Well, over again, Eva Ström performs better than the source text as far as the criterion of lexical variation is concerned: even when applied to rhyme pairs her superiority stands out!

But having a closer look – from a semantic point of view – at the frequently repeated rhyme pairs in the Shakespearean original in Table 8, we discover an interesting feature. Taken together, the most recurrent pairs seem to offer a kind of thematic summary of the whole suite of sonnets. In fact, they sum up some of the most fundamental aspects of the love stories evoked: the relationship between two individuals (“me” – “thee”, “mine” – “thine”), the insistence on feelings of love and admiration – or the opposite – (“love” – “prove”, “heart” – “art”, “pleasure” – “treasure”, “hate” – “state”, “woe” – “so”), on the visual aspects of the situation (“eyes” – “lies”, “see” – “thee”, “sight” – “night”), on the present beauty of the beloved and the passing of Time (“brow” – “now”, “face” – “disgrace”, “youth” – “truth”, “live” – “give”, “time” – “prime”, “time” – “crime”), on apprehensions for the future of the relationship (“friend” – “end”, “heart” – “part”, “alone” – “gone”, “alone” – “one”, “away” – “decay”), and, finally, on the poet’s capacity for offering his beloved a kind of eternal existence (“verse” – “rehearse”, “pen” – “men”,

“name” – “shame”, “mind” – “find”, “skill” – “still”, “argument” – “spent”, “Muse” – “use”).

Very little of all this figures among the most repeated rhymes of the target text. The result is less insistence on the central themes of the sonnets. What we can conclude, of course, is that focussing on the variation parameter must probably be done at the cost of focussing semantic parameters like the fundamental theme of the work. The choice is certainly an important one, but remains a matter of literary taste.

Before concluding this analysis, I should like to evoke Vendler and her excellent book on Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* (Vendler 1997:xiv), where it is pointed out that Shakespeare was a “master of aesthetic strategy” and that it would be “absurd to believe that Shakespeare, the most hyperconscious of writers, was inscribing lines and words in a given sonnet more or less at random”.

Seen in this light, the data observed in section 8 (but not in the preceding ones) might surprise the reader, since Shakespeare does not seem to do as well as could have been expected according to measures of lexical variation (at least when applied to his rhymes). However, a most interesting finding of Vendler’s (ibid.:xiv–xv) is a principle of structuring in the *Sonnets* which she calls the “Couplet Tie”. By this designation she refers to a strategy which consists in reiterating words in the final couplet – words having already appeared in the body of the sonnet, mostly once in each quatrain – thereby creating verbal connections between the parts of the sonnet and insisting on highly significant elements thematically. Clearly, this principle runs counter to the variation principle in favouring a certain kind of reiteration.

9. Concluding remarks

The time has come for a general assessment of the model for translation criticism we have been discussing. As applied to the Shakespearean *Sonnets*, this model – which was originally designed for assessing translation quality in target texts with Dante’s *Divina Commedia* as their source text – has proved to work in most respects, provided macro-structural specifications concerning canticas, cantos, hendecasyllables, and rhyming

be replaced by equivalent specifications for the sonnet. An alternative solution might be to simply state the need of conformity to established standards for the poetic form being used in the work to assess. But even so, those standards have to be spelt out in detail and their application checked for each work under examination.

As we have seen, the criteria of the model seem both relevant and operative as far as communicative equivalence, rhythmical variation, and rhyme quality are concerned. When it comes to lexical variation within the set of rhyme words and rhyme pairs, it certainly remains relevant and operative. However, by not taking account of the role played in Shakespeare's poetics by the reiteration of highly significant words – whether in rhyme positions or in the body of the poem – it tends to overemphasize the importance of the variation parameter at the expense of stylistic effects achieved through certain kinds of repetition. Hence, some adaptation of the model will be necessary in order not to underestimate the significance of such features of style. So much for generality!

Another thing to be remembered when applying this kind of model to some pair of source text–target text is this: the best result to be expected from the target text is being on a level with the source text for all the form parameters examined, given conditions of semantic and communicative equivalence have been previously satisfied. An interesting use of the model, of course, is when several translations of the source text are available and a systematic comparison between them can be made. Since there exists at least five complete translations into Swedish, this would in fact be feasible, even if it has not been possible for me to do so here²². At any rate, I am quite convinced that the actual target text, Eva Ström's translation of the Shakespearean *Sonnets*, would come out extremely well in such a contest.

²² The translations I have in mind, apart from that of Eva Ström (2010), were published by Carl Rupert Nyblom (1871), K. A. Svensson (1964), Sven Christer Swahn (1981), Lena R. Nilsson (2006), and Martin Tegen (2007).

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