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Rhythm in Black & White:

HELPING L2 ENGLISH WRITERS HEAR AND SPEAK
ON THE PAGE

For ten years I have run a creative writing workshop as an advanced English language course for students at the University of Helsinki. I avoid lectures on language topics and focus instead on the language as a playing field where learners develop fluency and invest emotional depth in their L2 English. Workshop participants' English is at level B2 or C1 on the CEF scale, and they have done some English academic writing. These learners from the various academic faculties, who have come for the writing or for a fresh way to work on their English skills, produce some very good fiction and poetry. Liberated from narrow academic style, provided with opportunities for ambition and excellence, they discover joy here in doing the work.

The challenge is for the creative writer's visible words alone to elicit powerful response or participation from the reader. Considering this goal in our discussions of craft, I find my L2 learners need more guidance on English rhythm from a writer's perspective, so that they master norms and even go outside norms when they desire, with knowledge of *how* their writing might become audible from the page.

RHYTHM FOR WRITERS

Detailed, concrete coverage of rhythm in writing pedagogy is often restricted to discussion of metrical verse. There, rhythm is recognized as a kind of distilled essence from spoken language or from prose. Textbook discussions of prose and free verse rhythm, on the other hand, offer few specifics beyond suggesting a contrast between short, choppy sentences/lines and long, flowing ones.

Rhythm in literary language is a more integrated and concrete whole than most descriptions allow for, and I believe the rhythm of speech as abstracted in writing, both in prose and poetry, should be viewed from a common base. Such a perspective is especially relevant when creative writing's genre boundaries are as porous as they are now. The beat, the center of traditional descriptions of poetic rhythm; the breath, a much-disputed unit in discussing free verse; and grammatical rhythms, abstractions embodied in sound and essential to prose editing: these three rhythmical means are all at work in any spoken, or speakable, piece of language.

It may be true that native speakers need no schooling in the everyday rhythms of the language. According to Robert Pinsky,

Every speaker, intuitively and accurately, courses gracefully through subtle manipulations of sound. We not only indicate ... where the accent is in a word like "question," but also preserve that accent while adding the difference between "Was that a question?" and "Yes, that was a question." It is almost as if we sing to one another all day. (Pinsky 1998, p. 3)

But the foundation for this intuitive grace comes through the experience of infancy, an extended time when the language washes over us and through us as a kind of music, as a set of patterns to which we gradually attach or match meanings. When we come to a second language later, even just a few years later in school, we meet it with emphasis on immediate denotational accuracy and structural consistency. We miss the experience of coming to the rational through the musical. Admittedly, our intuition is still at work, and learners who love their L2 dive into it and learn more than they are taught. These learners pick up much of the language's sound on their own and may join native speakers in singing to one another.

In creative writing's vast expressive range, we need a sure grasp of the language's rhythmic identity. Robert Frost claimed that "the surest way to reach the [reader's] heart is through the ear," and essential to that goal is the writer's ability to

...choose and arrange words in a sequence so as virtually to control the intonations and pauses of the reader's voice. By arrangement and choice of words . . . effects of humor, pathos, hysteria, anger, and in fact, all effects can be indicated. (Frost 2007, p. 301)

L2 writers have insufficient confidence in taking control of the voice by rhythmical means. When accessing and communicating emotion, even advanced L2 learners struggle with the different rhythmical identities of English and of their L1 language. This identity results partly from the uniqueness of each language's features and partly from each

language's speakers attending differently to these features. For 9 of 10 learners in my workshop, the L1 is Finnish, a highly inflected language where syllables are perceived as relatively equal in length, where a doubled letter is heard as occurring twice, and where word stress always falls on the first syllable. Finnish also has far fewer small function words like the articles and prepositions of English. The two languages possess very different rhythmical features.

At university, Finnish students write academic texts in English; along the way, they meet English rhetorical devices with rhythmical consequences, such as end-focus. If these concepts catch their imagination, they may move towards hearing well-crafted sentences as balances of rhythmic chunks. But for many learners such concepts remain dry rulebook principles, and connections to the movement of thought go unheard. These learners should listen to how the visible flow of words across a page opens up to hearing an imagined oral version that can guide it. Creative writing uses this imagined oral rhythm more fully than academic or professional writing. The narrator and all other voices in a literary text become distinctive individuals mainly through the differing flow of their words.

In a creative writing course, all the language's expressive and communicative capacities are in play. Learners refresh their ideas of themselves as writers: they are nudged toward a voice of their own, toward using writing conventions not just to fit in, as they do in academic writing, but to make a distinctive sound. Ben Yagoda, in *The Sound on the Page*, speaks of this aim:

Anyone who puts pen to paper can have a prose style. In almost every case, that style will be quiet, sometimes so quiet as to be detectable only by you, the writer. In the quiet, you can listen to your sound in various manifestations; then you can start to shape it and develop it. (Yagoda 2004, p. 241)

Yagoda elaborates on the “quiet” of this voice to remind us that the result, while always individual, need not make every writer stand out like James Joyce or Virginia Woolf. It was Woolf who wrote, “Style is a very simple matter: it is all rhythm” (Woolf 1977, p. 247). She went on to suggest that rhythm “goes far deeper than words” and begins as a “wave in the mind”. In working with L2 creative writers, I have come to agree with Woolf in equating style and rhythm; perhaps, though, she went too far in claiming that this equation makes style a simple matter.

WHAT IS LINGUISTIC RHYTHM?

In reviving the claim that style is rhythm, I need to clarify what I mean by rhythm. Linguistic rhythm, broadly defined, consists of perceived patterns that can repeat and vary, occurring mainly across time through auditory means. To grasp how it works, we should listen to a linguistic unit made up of smaller units: since rhythm is a pattern of repetition and variation across time, there must be a multiplicity within which it can occur.

If we begin with a sentence, we hear it delivered through a speaker’s action in time: it is a stream of sound and, si-

multaneously, a series of interacting signs and structures recognized through their sound and sequence. Rhythm is the pattern-like perception of the sentence as the sounds, signs and structures follow one another in delivery. Meaning is the sentence's rational after-image; the sentence may isolate a single, specific meaning or may, instead, indicate meaning less paraphrasably and more incompletely, overabundantly, or ambiguously. In either case, the after-image is strongly colored by the sentence's delivery, including its rhythms.

I draw two conclusions from this. First, rhythm involves more than the patterning of the language's arbitrary or musical elements, its phones, stresses, tones, durations and pauses. Rhythm stretches deep into the morphological and syntactical choices speakers make as they navigate along the stream of speech. Second, these two types of rhythm, which I call ear-rhythm and grammatical rhythm, are inevitably entwined. Unfortunately, verse commentators often limit themselves to ear-rhythm and prose commentators to grammatical rhythm.

It is habitual to segregate ear-rhythm in an abstract category apart from meaning. While this separation is problematic, it is maintained because a message stripped down to its ear-rhythm alone no longer contains a single denotation. D.W. Harding's example of "it's enthralling" and "it's appalling," two phrases with identical rhythms but opposed meanings, illustrates the point (Harding 1976, p. 140). But, despite Harding's skepticism, the rhythms in both cases appear to tell us something *about* the meanings as the statements are delivered. These eager expressions of emotion demonstrate similar energies, supported

by strongly stressed beats falling on the first and third syllables. If we change the rhythm by removing contracted forms, so that the phrases become “it is enthralling” and “it is appalling,” we sense a different energy, a more reflective or reasoned relation to the meaning, now that stresses are on the second and fourth syllables. Through their energies, then, these rhythmic examples participate in making their meanings.

It must be granted that, in examples with less emotional charge, the contrast is not heard as clearly. For example, the phrase “on the weekend,” with stresses on the first and third syllables, contrasts with its rhythmic opposite, “on Saturday,” stressed on the second and fourth syllables, but the difference is not dramatic.

How much dramatic force a writer can draw from awareness of these phrase-rhythm differences depends not only on the language’s intensity but also on how the phrases are confined by punctuation, line breaks or natural pauses. We can lose much of the energy we observed in “it’s enthralling” if we throw it amid a long string of words, as follows: “My opinion about whether it’s enthralling could be influenced by the weather.”

Poetry arranged in lines has an abundance of confines, a fact which pressurizes the language, amplifying stresses and keeping the reader attuned to each syllable throughout a poem. In prose, we seldom want to maintain such tight control over perception for a long passage, but words or phrases near punctuational confines, such as sentence beginnings and endings, as well as brief asides, benefit from appropriate stressing rhythms of attack or finality or undertone.

With phonology's progress in the twentieth century, a gap opened between perceived rhythm and scientific measurements of rhythm. Some phonologists have even maintained that everyday speech in English is irrhythmic (Cauldwell 2013, p. 142), partly because we tend to speak in short chunks with little opportunity for rhythm to be established. This fact should remind us that all coherent writing is a refined construction of the language. Even in plain prose, sentences are full grammatical units with clear confines that significantly heighten the sense of rhythm. Many L2 writers whose English is at a low B2 level find this rhythmical prominence a problem if they do not hear when their sentences in a series are too uniform in length and rhythm, with the principal variation provided by joining statements with "and.". Such obvious, monotonous rhythmical patterns will take too much of the reader's attention and interfere with determining the meaning. We must recognize and master rhythm in any confined use of language, and yet we need to use it not too insistently, unless we want its possible incantatory or humorous effects to overpower the sense.

Musical rhythm can supply useful comparisons to linguistic rhythm, but with at least two reservations. First, rhythm in Western musical notation is more strictly governed: the score explicitly tells us much about the music's performance. In language, sounds and words can be produced in a tremendous variety of ways, and our written representations are approximate, with nothing more than punctuation and italics to graphically represent prose's rhythmical features. This gap can be felt in casual written correspondence. A message's sender intends a particular

tone, but the receiver misreads because the key to that intended emotion cannot be found in the written words. Because of this loss, we have now added crude but useful emojis to our text messages. The artist, though, is one who arranges the words themselves to overcome the tonal silence, who can, in Robert Frost's words, "control the intonations and pauses of the reader's voice." The writer brings us Pinsky's idea of singing to one another from the written page.

Second, it must be remembered that, when musical and linguistic rhythm are joined, as in songs and performance poetry, the musical rhythm overpowers the natural linguistic rhythm. Thus, I do not here address language performed to a *musical* beat, but rather language for which the performance or reading is the recreation of a text that any reader can reproduce in explicitly or implicitly oral mode. I also limit myself to an English considered standard in the areas Kachru has defined as the Inner Circle (Kachru 1985), though this constantly evolving standard is not the only kind of English that can be caught in writing.

EAR TRAINING IN THE CLASSROOM

An introductory workshop meeting weekly for fourteen sessions cannot spare many hours exclusively on rhythm. Each of our sessions includes about 100 minutes of workshoping participants' own writing and only 35 minutes of theoretical discussion and writing prompts. In our first sessions, we discuss fiction-related topics, while poetry-related topics are discussed in the later sessions. I have placed

rhythm in the middle and expanded its coverage to four successive sessions.

I draw no line between the rhythms of prose and poetry in these sessions. Such a line is difficult to draw, since, for over a century, hybrid genres have flourished, artistic prose has undergone countless experiments, and poetry has become “poetries.” I urge learners to experience the elements of rhythm themselves, so they can apply them in texts however they choose.

We listen first to the shortest unit of perceived rhythm, the beat heard in *stresses*. We then move to tone and its interconnectedness with stress. The third area covers breath and its relation to phrasing or chunking the stream of words. Finally, we leap to rhythm perceived through syntactical patterns, with parallelism as the ear’s entryway to that perception. Altogether, a couple of hours must suffice for progressing from stress to the movement of thought in a long sentence.

I devise exercises meant to facilitate perception of language flow. Older exercises in stress and intonation tended to have learners imitate the teacher in orally reproducing phrases. I would like, instead, to elicit responses that build on what learners already know and feel. I am asking learners to listen and, with only a little guidance, define for themselves what they hear. The experience of rhythm is firstly a bodily one, and that bodily experience is more important than any terminology or theory attached to it.

THE BEAT AND STRESS

We start with the beat, a single pulse or wave of sound from the speaker's chest. In spoken English, the beat is perceived as *stress* heard in a single syllable. Stressing syllables is as natural as breathing for us, so we tend to assume the concept is simple. It turns out that this physically produced phenomenon is made up of at least four different parts, in constantly varying proportions: pitch, loudness, length and quality.

The first rhythm-related exercise I give my learners is a list of words with familiar stress patterns and, without telling them about the constituent parts of stress, I ask them to describe what their voices do in the stressed syllables. Since this is an exercise with individual words, learners generally overlook pitch change, but I am happy to save intonation for later. Learners usually note loudness/force and clarity/fullness of articulation. As we then launch into further exercises, I let stress be defined as what participants hear it to be. I ask them to listen, and I try not to tell them what to hear, because the felt experience is most important for the learner.

The smallest units of rhythm involving repetition and variation are groups of two or three syllables in which one is stressed. English-speakers tend to hear stressed syllables as delivered at approximately the same rate, no matter how many unstressed syllables are between, so English is called a stress-based language, as opposed to Finnish, a syllable-based language where stressed and unstressed syllables are heard as having relatively equal duration. Such perceived time measurement is impossible to pin down

mathematically, and phonologists would remind us that both languages have some stress-based and some syllable-based features; nevertheless, the contrasted terms are useful in describing perceived differences, what speakers are listening for.

Stress in English provides a musical rhythm to string meanings on, but it also helps us distinguish between meanings, between “cóntent” and “contént” as well as between “cómedy” and “committee”, words which would sound alike if both were given a Finnish-style stress on the first syllable. Learning word-stress patterns in newly acquired vocabulary is a familiar activity for learners of English.

However, when speaking, my L2 learners have difficulties detecting and using phrasal or sentence stress. So, we examine the meeting-point of word stress and phrasal stress in short prose sentences. We look at them almost as if they were poetry, although without using traditional terminology for poetic rhythm.

We start from a simple, four-word statement: “He set a record.” We hear its pattern of stresses on “set” and “rec-”, and how the unstressed vowels in “a” and “-ord” shrink into indistinguishable schwas; we guess whether “he” is stressed more than, or less than, “set,” and our guesses depend on the context we imagine. In order to discuss the pattern, I introduce three marking system alternatives, beginning with a graphic oppositional system that shows less-stressed syllables as “x” and more-stressed as “/”. Corresponding to this pattern is a spoken representation of less-stressed syllables as “ti” and of more-stressed as “Tum,” allowing us to talk about the rhythms aloud without Greek-derived vocabulary. We also use a third system to demonstrate more

complexity in levels of stress, showing a numbered scale from the weakest as “1” to the strongest as “4”. Using the oppositional and the scaled system simultaneously helps learners sense how our perception both simplifies and relativizes the swings between stressed and unstressed. Here is the reading we agree on for the sample sentence as a plain piece of information:

1. He sèt a récord. →

As opposition: x/x/x

ti-Tum ti-Tum-ti

As a scale: 24141.

Working together, my learners and I find two more possible stress patterns for speaking the sentence:

2. Hé sèt a récord. → //x/x

Tum Tum ti-Tum-ti

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3. Hé set a récord. → /xx/x

Tum ti-ti Tum-ti

42131

In example 2, we apply stress at every opportunity for an emphatic result, like an enthusiastic sports announcer just after the action has occurred. Two stresses in a row (*hé sèt*) slow down the line. It sounds like the speaker, while excited, is also absorbing the achievement. To get a reader to see this reading in a longer prose passage, a writer would need to establish the context of a loud, excited speaker.

In examples 1 and 3, the two first words (“he set”) have a hierarchy: one has been given more stress than the other. Both words are important, but we observe the *relative* level of stressing. The two stress patterns produce two different meanings. Example 3 stresses the “he” who did it, suggesting that the speaker is pointing out the record-setter: “*That* guy, over there”. Thus, to elicit this rhythm, a writer would need to establish a context in which the speaker is identifying the record-setter.

Example 1 has the plainest rhythm for delivering the information, with stress on the verb and the object displaying the whole action. The rhythm swings evenly from an unstressed to a stressed syllable and back again. I tell learners to pay attention to this swing, to look for it in other sentences, but I do not mention the word *iambic*: I do not want to turn the hearing into an abstraction yet. Classical terminology is useful in discussing such phenomena, but the experience of stress is physical, bodily. As soon as it has been felt, as soon as its patterns are familiar, poetic and phonetic terminology can become useful. But now we need, like a child, to simply hear the language as part of the music of the surrounding world.

Some years ago, I tried putting learners in a childlike listening mode by bringing in nursery rhymes, which are fabulous rhythmic concoctions. However, I found that many university students felt these were “childish” and beneath them. It has been more effective to let learners find their musical receptivity without necessarily noticing the childhood connection.

After working with a plain sentence to establish our notation systems, I present a series of intense, four-syllable

statements, all with similar messages but different rhythms. I then provide a rhythmic phrase from music, in this case the famous opening chords of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, and ask learners to match it with one of the statements. Which one matches best rhythmically?

- 1 *Hand it over*
- 2 *The pencil, please*
- 3 *Please give me that*
- 4 *Give it to me*
- 5 *Give that to me*
- 6 *Give me that pen*

Because of the difference between language and music, there is more than one possible answer, though I like number 6. But the point is that, in weighing these phrases' equivalence to music, we are pushed not only to consider stress as force or loudness, but also as affected by duration, syllable-shape, sound quality, and intonation.

After trying to match the musical phrase, we work out the rhythms of all six verbal phrases. I think it's interesting that those with a *Tum-ti-Tum-ti* rhythm sound more commanding and ruder than those with a *ti-Tum-ti-Tum* rhythm. Even when pronounced forcefully, the latter rhythm sounds like someone following protocol. I often challenge learners to come up with a rude and commanding equivalent phrase with the rhythm of *ti-Tum-ti-Tum*. That's a difficult task.

I must usually skip a five-syllable exercise and move to six syllables. I begin by singing the refrain of the Beatles' "I Wanna Hold Your Hand" and asking students to find an equivalent rhythm in one of the following lines.

- 1 *Call for the cavalry*
- 2 *and the cavalry comes.*
- 3 *Call the riders jokers*
- 4 *and clowns on horses come:*
- 5 *Clowns, horses and their tails.*

Once we agree that the fourth line possesses the same pulsing rhythm as the old song, though at a different intensity, we move on to determine the rhythms of the other lines:

- 1 /xx/xx
- 2 xx/xx/
- 3 /x/x/x
- 4 x/x/x/
- 5 //xxx/ or //x/x/

Then I tell learners they have experienced the range of micro-units of stress in English: the three most common (x/ , /x , xx/), two less common (/xx , x/x), as well as a pair of stresses jammed together and a possible resulting compound (// , xx//)

Readers of metrical poetry will recognize the common units as iambic, trochaic and anapestic, the less common as dactylic and amphibrachic, the jammed stresses as spondaic and the compound as ionic, but once learners and I are accustomed to *ti-Tum* and *Tum-ti*, it is more fruitful for us to continue recreating the rhythms in syllables as we refer to them.

I am developing further similar exercises for my learners to work with on their own time: they range from four-syllable to ten-syllable statements and aim to familiarize learners

with the alternating units of stress and the range of rhythmic expressiveness within the small scope of a phrase or clause that also matches the lengths of many poetic lines.

What we have looked at so far is generally thought of as poetic rhythm, because the line unit characteristic of poetry is a confine that regularly intensifies the pressure on the stress alternation in the rhythm. Short syntactical prose units confined by punctuation also bring such stress patterns closer to the foreground, while longer, open sentence patterns tend to display fewer prominent stresses, leading us to look at them in a different way, as prose rhythm. There we tend to hear the relative length of breaths and the pattern of syntactical choices.

But all levels of rhythm work simultaneously. The heard beat even plays a role in structural choice: for instance, in the different contours between phrases that begin with infinitive forms of one-syllable verbs and those that begin with participle forms. The infinitive, beginning with unstressed “to”, is heard as *ti-Tum*, as in Tennyson’s “Ulysses”: “*To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield,*” (Tennyson 1898, p. 96) a rhythm picked up by the makers of *Star Trek* a century later: “*to boldly go* where no man has gone before.” The infinitives’ rhythm here indicates actions that require effort, time or planning. In contrast, the active participle form from one-syllable verbs, when beginning a statement, plunges us into an action with a *Tum-ti* rhythm, where readers may feel like they have put their foot through a hole before realizing it. The very title of Adrienne Rich’s poem “*Diving into the Wreck*” has this quality, as does the participle at the beginning of the second line below, before the voice returns to a more deliberate *ti-Tum* in the third line:

“the ribs of the disaster
curving their assertion
 among the tentative haunters.”
 (Rich 2016, p. 370)

Specific meanings cannot be pinned to the different energies we hear behind *Tum-ti* and *ti-Tum* here: we cannot expect rhythm alone to take us to denotations. But the contrast is important, and perhaps especially for learners coming to English from Finnish. The *ti-Tum*, corresponding to iambic rhythm, is detectable in Chaucer’s work in the 14th century and forms the mainstay of meter in English poetry from the 16th to the 20th century. And it is the loose net within which much free verse moves even today. The *Tum-ti*, in contrast, corresponds to trochaic rhythm, the governing pattern for most Finnic folk poetry. It’s interesting to hear how poems are translated rhythmically from one language to the other. Take this Emily Dickinson poem, number 1030 (or number 1019 in the Johnson edition), and a recent Finnish translation by Merja Virolainen:

My Season’s furthest Flower –
 I tenderer commend
 Because I found Her Kinsmanless –
 A Grace without a Friend.
 (Dickinson 1999, p. 423)

Auliimmin kiitän viime kukkaa
 keskellä marraskuuta:
 ei sillä ole perhettä,
 loistolleen todistajaa muuta.
 (Dickinson 2004, p. 31)

While we cannot claim that one language is inherently iambic and the other inherently trochaic, we can see how difficult it is to maintain the opposite rhythms in either language. The nineteenth-century poet Longfellow unintentionally demonstrated this difficulty in *Hiawatha*, a book-length American poem that imitates Finnish Kalevala meter. The poem's trochaic hammering can be thrilling for a few lines, even for a page or two, but ultimately cannot reach many of the tones and energies of natural English speech. It would be worth studying whether this opposition of default rhythms has been a hindrance for language learners in both directions.

INTONATION

Intonation, a large topic, has been in the background as we looked at stress. Mastering English intonation is particularly difficult for my Finnish-speaking learners, who are accustomed to using a more limited pitch range in speaking. Changes in actual speaking habits are not tackled here, and I do not expect my learners to *perform* these intonational patterns. However, I would like them to listen to and *hear* them. Writing is a good way to apply their new attention, because in writing they have time to consider the patterns as they use them.

The printed page is often likened to a musical score, but the score's central feature, the pitch of the notes, is unrepresented in writing: we cannot *see* intonational patterns on the page. Nevertheless, the foundation for a practical understanding of English intonation is simple musically: we

can start with just three tunes. I demonstrate these three for my learners.

The first of them, the falling tune, begins on a relatively high tone, which slides lower as the sentence progresses, then falls to low on the last significant stress, where it stays for the remaining syllables. I place a downward-sloping slash to illustrate the shift:

But she couldn't hear him give the présen\tation.

This falling tune is used for definite statements, commands, and question-word questions, and it frequently connotes finality or certainty.

The second, rising tune begins fairly high and slides downward through the sentence but then rises on the last significant stress, staying high through any remaining syllables. I place an upward-sloping slash to illustrate the shift:

Could she hear him give the présen/tation?

The rising tune is used for questions that begin with an auxiliary verb and for doubtful statements; it usually connotes incompleteness or uncertainty.

In the third, fall-rise tune, the sentence progresses as in the other two until the last significant stress, which demonstrates a fall and then a rise on the same stress, which I mark with two successive slashes:

She couldn't hear him give the présen\//tation.

[*implying* "...but she heard his summary version later."]

The fall-rise tune is most often used for statements implying a further continuation or clarification, so that either the speaker continues or the listener is left in suspense.

Since these tunes account for much of what is said in English, the complexities of splitting, repeating, and combining the tunes make this a topic we could spend a lot of time on. But my goal is to set these learners on the path of listening with just enough tools for *recreating* the spoken language in writing, so we use only a few exercises as ear-openers. Here's the first:

Situation: A and B have arrived in a foreign city to stay for a few days. Lacking reservations, they step into an establishment offering “rooms”.

Task: Working with a partner, create a short conversation of 5-7 speaking turns that includes the following question in one of the intonational variations below. Then create a second conversation, embedding a different tonal variation of the question within it.

Dó you wánt to stáy /**hére**?

Dó you wánt to /**stáy** here?

Dó you /**wánt** to stay here?

Dó /**yóu** want to stay here?

After writing these dialogues, give them to another pair to read to see how they interpret the intonation in context.

Other simple dialogue situations can be set up. Questions are particularly efficient sentences for these comparative exercises, since there are clearly differing implications in differently toned questions with the same wording. We can, for instance, practice distinguishing an official or ob-

jective question (“Whát is your \n~~á~~me?”) from a curious or friendly version of the same question (“Whát is your /n~~á~~me?”), or a yes-no question asked straightforwardly (“Háve you dóne the /d~~í~~shes?”) from the same question asked in an assertively or in rebuke (“Háve you dóne the \d~~í~~shes?”)

Here is an exercise with the fall-rise tune that follows from the exercise above:

Situation: C and D have received a postcard from A and B, sent from the city they were visiting. C badly wants to travel to the same city.

Task: Working with a partner, create two versions of a short conversation of 5-7 speaking turns that includes C’s wish, quoted below. In one version, the wish develops into a plan. In the other version, the wish is recognized as unachievable. Which intonation pattern fits the first, and which the second?

I’d lóve to Vgo!

I’d lóve to /go!

With these exercises, we can see on a basic level some ways to indicate tone and emotional direction in phrases or sentences without stopping to explain the tone to the reader.

CHUNKING: BREATH AND THOUGHT

Now we move to the chunk, an informal-sounding term for a unit almost universally recognized but difficult to

draw boundaries for (*see* Sinclair and Mauranen 2006). A chunk is part of a sentence consisting of a word or word-group with a provisional meaning that allows the speaker to pause briefly without causing comprehension difficulties for the listener. In fact, chunking pauses often help the listener absorb and integrate information as well as prepare for more.

A sentence itself can be viewed as one large chunk; as such, it is rhythmically connected to the human body, accommodating the length of an exhaled breath. In experiments in which people read aloud (cited in Włodarczak and Heldner 2017), at least 90% of sentences were equivalent to one breath. In spontaneous speech, where speakers constantly decide what to say next, the figure was closer to 70%—still a large majority.

Breath and thought go hand in hand, then, but just as spontaneous speakers more often need time to plan their continuation in mid-sentence, so listeners need time to process the information arriving in a stream. Apparently, the brain, too, processes information most efficiently when there are regular pauses (*see*, e.g., Ghitza and Greenberg 2009). And now, in addition to the need for breath, we start to consider elements of choice in chunking. Where would it be non-problematic, and even helpful, for a speaker to pause? Teachers of presentation skills have long touted such effective chunking as an essential skill in getting a message across to an audience.

A chunk, then, besides ending with a speaker's inbreathing, can instead end with a mere pause in outbreathing, with the next chunk beginning after a brief silence but on the same breath. Such a pause is a choice by the speaker,

most often to clarify or emphasize meaning, or sometimes to create drama by suspending meaning momentarily. The results of chunking have consequences for ear-rhythm, in the perceived relative lengths of chunks and of pauses.

When we turn to the written language, the reader makes the choices about where to chunk, and the writer's minimum responsibility is to make the multiple affordances for these choices work well rhythmically. The spoken stream in time has now become a printed string across space, and the reader's brain's convenience becomes the main criterion for the lengths and boundaries of chunks. The breath, however, still hovers more than metaphorically in the background in reading. This fact becomes clear when a writer has employed an exceptionally long sentence and readers find that even a silent reading leaves them out of breath:

For an hour the doctor could think of nothing worth doing and no reason to rise from his chair, so he sat in a corner of the coffee shop in downtown Minneapolis, four blocks away from the hospital, with the newspaper's sports section spread out in front of him, unread, the evening traffic outside going by with the characteristic hiss of tires on wet pavement, a sibilant personal sound like whispering.

Charles Baxter, "Sloth" (Baxter 2015, p. 151)

Despite the sensation of breathlessness evoked here, Baxter's sentence is not an example of authorial sloppiness; on the contrary, the physical effect has been put to literary use. In this case, it turns out that the doctor has reasons to delay turning to the topic that he cannot escape, the possibly malpractice-related downturn in a patient's condition

earlier in the day. The reader of the sentence meets many low-level chunk boundaries at the commas, but they never seem strong enough for a new breath, and so one breath is stretched and stretched. The rhythm is ascribed to the character's drifting thoughts, and this perception pays off when readers learn about the as-yet unmentioned problem and feel that they have witnessed the doctor's avoidance or denial in this stretching.

While many aspects of chunking seem to be shared across languages, the L2 learners that I teach in various courses have difficulty with chunking when speaking or reading aloud in English. Their pausing sometimes falls after function words such as *the* or *on*, even though these advanced learners are not often stuck without a way to continue the sentence. I see this as a rhythmical difficulty which can only be remedied by listening and, ultimately, hearing. So, we listen to sentences together.

I use a sample sentence like the one below to show how I mark the natural affordances for pausing: I add two word spaces around the punctuation or add underlining where there is no punctuation between chunks. Punctuation almost always entails a pause; other pauses are available options for a speaker or reader:

Biologists __ as well as philosophers __ have suggested that the universe , and the living forms it contains , are based on chance , but not on accident.

Jeremy Campbell, *Grammatical Man* (Campbell 1982, p. v)

I ask learners to identify what would make effective cues for pausing when reading a text aloud. Learners list these:

(1) a punctuation mark, (2) completion of a whole SV or SVO structure, (3) insertion of a signpost word or phrase and (4) the speaker's need for a breath. Less self-evident are two more cues: (5) completion of the subject before beginning the predicate and (6) any key noun, even one followed by modification. When we add these together, we find that a majority of "chunks" in plain prose end on a noun. In fact, it is usually unnatural to pause after a verb in the middle of a structure, unless it is (7) a verb whose object or complement is consciously withheld for suspense, as in "The winner is __ number three!" And, in unusual circumstances, every item in a phrase can be paused if the phrase is (8) a succession of intensely stressed words.

Readers' performances of chunking—that is, finding a clear and natural oral phrasing—can vary greatly, though mostly along a scale from the fewest to the most opportunities taken. The next example, the famous first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen 2003, p. 1), shows a range of possible chunkings:

Five chunks:

It is a truth __ universally acknowledged , that a single man __ in possession of a good fortune , must be in want of a wife.

Three chunks:

It is a truth universally acknowledged , that a single man in possession of a good fortune , must be in want of a wife.

Four chunks [with a consciously dramatic pause in the verb]:

It is a truth universally acknowledged , that a single man in possession of a good fortune , must __ be in want of a wife.

The commas found in the first edition of 1813 show the punctuation mark was used to signal the ends of two chunks. In contemporary English, the chunk boundaries remain, even though the commas would no longer be accepted there.

The next example, from Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel*, shows how readers' chunking can uncover writers' occasional awkward rhythms. Readers in my workshop usually chunk the sentence as follows:

Most historians __ do not think of themselves as scientists __ and receive little training __ in acknowledged sciences __ and their methodologies. (Diamond 1999, p. 421)

The third chunk ends on a key noun, "training," and seems to fit a pattern of 2- or 3-beat chunks, but a pause after "training" suggests, if only for a moment, that historians are entirely uneducated. A reading which surely brings out the author's meaning better would be the following:

Most historians __ do not think of themselves as scientists __ and receive little training in acknowledged sciences __ and their methodologies.

However, this reading produces an unwieldy third chunk

for the voice. Thus, the ideal solution would be for the author to rewrite the sentence. Such awkward sentences are not rare in L2 writers' work, and they demonstrate why all writers should listen to the text they write before leaving the final chunking up to readers.

After exploring some examples, I give learners 40-70-word sentences from contemporary fiction. I set them the task of chunking. Next, I give participants just the first 15-20 words of another long sentence, such as these:

"I celebrated the difficult-to-assemble outdoor table (one leg still too short) on my balcony and..."

[from a 63-word sentence in Gary Shteyngart's "Lenny Hearts Eunice"] (Treisman 2010, p. 380)

"She told him about the year they had spent living in Tejgaon, after having to leave the building called..."

[from a 51-word sentence in Nell Freudenberger's "An Arranged Marriage,"] (Treisman 2010, p. 148)

I ask participants to continue a sentence with their own invention until they have reached approximately the same word-count as the original. The need for extending sentences beyond the lengths they are used to spurs learners to try new structures and to do so by ear. We then listen together to the rhythms of learners' sentences and finally to those of the full original sentences for comparison.

PARALLELISM

So far, we have listened to sound patterns of beats and tones and varied lengths of flow and pause. Now we cross from ear-rhythm to a more abstract grammatical rhythm. As we saw when comparing participles and infinitives, ear-rhythm helps highlight grammatical rhythm. Grammatical rhythm depends on the structure of a sentence, starting from a base made up of subject plus predicate, with or without an object or complement. As we read from sentence to sentence, we know that these grammatical categories embodied in words will almost always repeat. They are then elaborated with adjectives, adverbs, prepositional phrases and many other additions. From among the various types of added branching, we hear the message affected by sidetracking pauses: introductory delay, interruption *in medias res*, added afterthought. We hear the contortions and aggregations of inverted and coordinate structures. In all these, we observe the play of variations across a core message-bearing structure.

A key crossroads for ear-rhythm and grammatical rhythm is parallelism, the repetition of identical or similar structures in a series of phrases, clauses or sentences. Parallelism is recognized as having rhythmic effects and consequences that often motivate speakers to choose such a structure. To view parallelism itself as a rhythmical device is not, however, common among linguists, for whom this identification is like peering into the wrong end of the telescope. Linguists favor seeing parallelism first as a structural device. In fact, linguists tend to view even poetic meter, the quintessential topic in English literary rhythm, as “parallelism on the phonological level.” (Preminger 1993, p. 877)

The metaphor of parallelism as structure is drawn from the spatial realm and fits the text on the page with graphically underlined parallel features. In contrast, the metaphor of rhythm turns to the realm of time, to a sentence unfurling in speech. Focusing on the rhythms that underlie structural choices helps the writer re-create or re-mould time through the reader's ear. The meaning the writer is carrying in the stream of speech is framed and interpreted through the time warp of its rhythm.

Parallelism is a good introductory example for encouraging L2 writers to hear grammatical rhythm, because its echoing is prominent, easy to recognize. Nor does it require a great deal of grammatical sophistication to use effectively. In the Hadley example below, a sentence is held together by a series of three negative contractions, which tumble out in a way that displays a character's pent-up embarrassment about her mother.

Other people's mothers didn't stoop their heads down in the broken way that theirs did, hadn't given up on completed sentences or consecutive dialogue, didn't address ironical asides to their soup spoons as they ate.

Tessa Hadley, "Buckets of Blood" (Hensher 2015, p. 661)

I introduce several kinds of parallelism to my learners: providing a few examples of (a) anaphora/repetition, (b) antithesis/contrasting pairs, (c) other matched pairs or lists, and (d) ellipsis/omitted repetition. Finally, I mention deliberately broken parallelism as a way of taking advantage of the pattern by breaking it. I am content to bring in the classical terms here, since these are abstract structures where

classification carries less risk of clouding our senses than it did with the physical experience of stresses and tones. Still, it is important to recognize that many real-world uses of parallelism are hybrids or mutations of textbook varieties.

I first let my learners try their hand at parallelism:

1. Imagine a situation for the following sentence beginning, and then take 3 minutes to extend the sentence to at least 40 words in length. Use one or both of the following devices in your sentence: (a) repeated words or phrasal beginnings and (b) contrasting, or otherwise matched, pairs or series.

“At first I glanced away, but then I stared back, at ...”

2. Read the sentence aloud to your partner.

Then I introduce the long source sentence from a recent short story:

3. Read the following sentence. After reading for chunking and meaning, find (a) repeated structures, words and word-forms, and (b) opposite or matched pairs of words and phrases:

“At first, I glanced away, but then I stared back, at the haughty silkiness of the weave that fell to her shoulders in loose curls, the kind of extension called Brazilian Hair and paid for in dollars at Victoria Island hair salons; at her fair skin, which had the plastic sheen that comes from expensive creams; and at her hand, forefinger bejewelled, which she raised to wave a magazine hawker away, with the ease of a person used to waving people away.”

“Birdsong”, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Treisman 2010, p. 3)

At first reading, Adichie's sentence provides objective information about the woman observed, along with an idea of the narrator's attitude, and from the reading we probably recall the three "at" phrases, extending the narrator's gaze. But we are generally unaware of how so much description has been lodged in our consciousness. When we examine the sentence, we see a plethora of repetition and balance. Below, I lay out eight different repeating or matching elements, left and right. Most paired elements are completed before the next pair begins, but the three governing "at" structures each contain elements of other pairs within them:

At first	→	but then
I glanced away	→	I stared back
at (#1) ↓		
the haughty silkiness	→	the kind
called	→	and paid for
at (#2) ↓		and at (#3) ↓
her fair skin ↓		her hand ↓
which had	→	which she raised
to wave a magazine hawker away	→	to waving people away

The sentence begins with two opposing sequential actions marked by antithesis ("At first" *versus* "but then", "I glanced away" *versus* "I stared back"), packed tightly enough to work even at the stress level: "At first, I glanced away" (x/, x/x/) with regular *ti-tums* indicating 'no big deal,' *versus* "but then I stared back" (x/x/) speeding up without a comma and ending with two consecutive stresses, as if to say, 'Now she got my attention.' We sense the eye lingering

on the other woman's hair when an appositive beginning with a repeated "the" ("the kind of extension") stretches the gaze. The matched verb pair "called" and "paid for" move us into obsessive gazing, with both socioeconomic information about the other woman and attitudinal testimony about the narrator.

Only now do we reach a semicolon, realize we are not finished, and encounter the second "at", shifting from hair to skin, which the narrator handles quickly: "plastic sheen" and "expensive creams" could qualify as another matched pair, their near-rhyme suggesting the narrator's mental association, telling us the narrator knows intimately how this kind of beauty is achieved.

Now we reach "at" #3, with the "and" signalling that it is the last in the series. We turn from textures of hair and skin to a "hand", forecasting movement—the observed woman has been kept still while the narrator provided background—and then we zoom in on one detail, the "fore-finger bejewelled"—the crowded feel of this phrase comes from that strong stress starting it, with another fairly strong stress right after, and the crush of consonantal sounds *f-f ng-b-j-w-l-d* working the lips, teeth and palate. Finally, the hand moves, haughty and dismissive, its habitual nature mirrored in the sentence's final repetition, "waving people away."

We have partly unpacked the sentence to see parallel elements working in movement *through* the sentence, not only to see them peppering the page as visible structure. After taking learners through this sentence, I have them look back at their own sentences and tell each other what effects they hear in them. I reassure them that I am not ex-

pecting the equivalent of Adichie's 82-word sentence. Who knows how many months it took her to twist and turn that sentence into its published shape?

I try to squeeze in another sentence with my learners: I give each pair a different sentence from a piece of recent fiction and ask them to identify repeated and matched elements and to talk about the way these elements shape the sentence's experience and meaning. Here are two sentences I use, the first one of a length I urge my students to attempt in their writing, the second one a thing to wonder at:

He has seen their lights around the ship at night, the green glow of their underwater torches, and he imagines them hovering in the water-worn doorways, their mouths red with the flesh of men, their wrists braceleted in seaweed, singing, weaving moonbeams into their hair.

Téa Obreht, "Blue Water Djinn" (Treisman 2010, p. 295)

But I did not stop at these torturous, intimate scenes, scenes that, could my father momentarily suspend his sense of shame, he might have acknowledged as reflecting less on him than on the universal plight of growing old and facing one's death—I did not stop there, but instead took his illness and his suffering, with all its pungent detail, and finally even his death, as an opportunity to write about his life and, more specifically, about his failings, as both a person and a father, failings whose precise and abundant detail could be ascribed to him alone."

Nicole Krauss, "The Young Painters" (Treisman 2010, pp. 182-183)

CONCLUSION

We have listened to the rhythm of stress and tone, the rhythm of breath and phrasing, and the rhythm of syntax. In any sentence, all these elements work simultaneously in the flow of speech. Listening to each strand separately slows down the language in the way that athletes review slow-motion footage of their physical performance. But the parts we examine in this way must work well when integrated at normal reading speeds, where readers are equivalent partly to sports spectators, seeing the action go by while focusing on the game, and partly to the players, combining instinct and quick thinking to act and react at each turn within the game.

A natural next step would be to step into the prose mainstream, listening to series of sentences, making more concrete the common advice to vary one's sentence lengths. Another possibility would be to step into poetry's mainstream, introducing the confines of the poetic line and listening to what it does to sentences' rhythms. For the study of rhythm in poetry, this might be a better sequence than proceeding historically from English-language poetry in meters on to free verse and prose poems. But once I have provided what I hope is just enough assistance to set my learners on a promising path, I must leave the subsequent steps to my learners' ears and imagination and listen to their take on these issues as they produce their own work and comment on others' in the remaining sessions of the workshop.

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