

Meter and Performance

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LSA Metrics Symposium
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Outline

- 1 **Broad metrics**
- 2 Hausa songs (Schuh 1995)
- 3 Shakespeare's dramatic meter
- 4 Dylan Thomas

Roman Jakobson

The metrical structure of a text is independent of how it is recited or sung. Therefore metrics must distinguish between:

- verse design (metrical system)
- verse instance (metrically parsed text)
- delivery instance (recitation, song)

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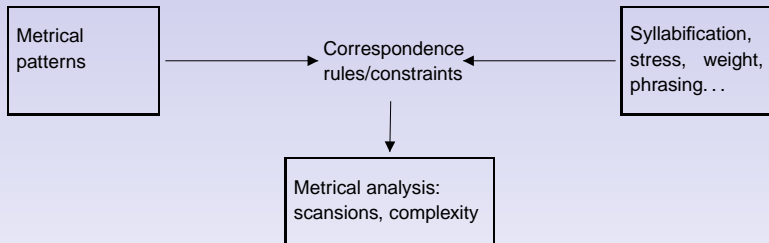
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- Generative metrics has turned Jakobson's distinction into an exclusion. Delivery (recitation and text-setting) is not considered to be in the province of metrics.
- This is an undesirable and unnecessary move.

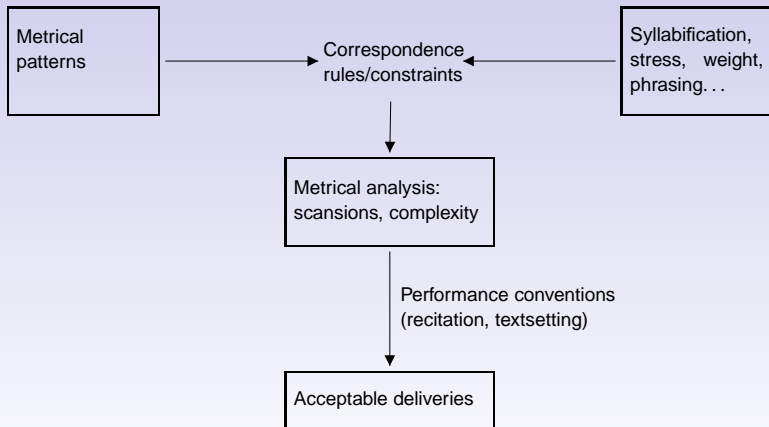
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Narrow metrics



Broad metrics



Virtues of broad metrics

- Explanatory: predominant metrical systems and recitation/singing practices in a poetic tradition are mutually accommodated and causally connected (Kiparsky 1975).
- Descriptive: performances can be “tilted” to reflect meter, hence their interpretations must be relativized both to meter and to performance conventions.
- Conceptual: idealizations are useful in very complex domains, but serve no good purpose in metrics.

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Hausa meter (Schuh 1995)

Eight positions, grouped into four (W S) feet

(1	2)	(3	4)	(5	6)	(7	8)
(<u> </u>	-)	(<u> </u>	-)	(<u> </u>	-)	(∪	-)

Weight is neutralized in final and initial syllables:

- Final $C\check{V}$ counts as heavy as required by the meter ($\check{V} = -$).
- Initial $C\bar{V}$ counts as light when required by the meter ($C\bar{V}C\check{V} = \omega$).

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Russell Schuh. (1995). The metrics of three Hausa songs on marriage by Dan Maraya Jos.

<http://www.linguistics.ucla.edu/people/schuh/Papers/>

Empty positions

- One or more empty positions may occur allowed at the beginning of the line and (more rarely) at the end.
- There must be at least one empty position wherever the singer changes voice (male/female) in the middle of a line.
- The empty positions are part of the meter and performed as empty beats.
- After the empty positions, the text continues according to the regular alternating weight pattern.

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	×		×	×	×		×
×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Sai	kàr	ji	dai	mǎ	taĩ	gi	dā
		Tā	cê				
	“Mā	lām	yà	yā	zā	à	yì”

Empty positions

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Tā ca	nè	masà					
“Wan	nàn	àbu	mài	sau	ƙī	kù	wa
Bàri	zân	jē	can	kò ci	kin	gi	dā’
		Tā	kō	mǎ	can	gi	dā
		Jǎ	wō	kwai	lā,	sà	yaĩ
	Jǎ	wō	bō	kiti	mā,	sà	yaĩ
		Tà ta	raĩ	tā	mī	ƙà ku	đin
An	kai	wā	bō	kā	nan	dà	nan
		Bō	kā	ya	tat	tà	rē
		Bō	kā	ya	han	dà	mē
Jē ki	Al	lāh	zāi	manà	mā	gà	nī

Performance is key to the meter

The empty beats are obvious in performance but *can't be parsed from the text alone*. The meter can be characterized perspicuously only via the performance conventions.

- *Argument 1*: Grid-building (Fabb & Halle 2009) would have to be *both* left-to-right (for lines ending with empty beats) *and* right-to-left (for lines beginning with empty beats).
- *Argument 2*: Medial empty beats occur just when the singer changes character, a salient event in performance but *not a formal property of the text*.
- *Argument 3*: Sequences of empty beats need not be constituents. They can consist of 3 or 5 syllables. So they can't be characterized by allowing unary feet or dipods at the left and right edges. But they are realized and easily heard in performance.

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Meter serves performance norms

- Shakespeare's dramas have a highly complex meter,
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The freedom of Shakespeare's meter

- 1 Stressed monosyllables OK in Weak positions (no Stress Maximum Principle)

Than are / *dreamt* of / in your / philo/sophy (*Hamlet*)

- 2 Reduced syllables OK in Strong positions

Not Her/mia / but He/lena / I love (*MND* 2.2)

- 3 Long lapses OK

Deserve / such pi/ty of / him as / the wolf
Does of the shepherds (*Cor.* 4.6)

- 4 Special licenses for function words

- Radical enjambment (later plays)

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Actors use this metrical freedom

Or that the resolute acting of your blood
 Could have attained the effect of your own purpose,
 Whether ^S / YOU hăd / not sŏme/time ^S in / your lĭfe
 Erred ^S in / THIS pŏint / which nŏw / YOU cĕn/sure HĭM, (*M for M*)

Meter and interpretation

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- English blank verse presents more interpretive options.

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Than are DREAMT of in YOUR philosophy

Than ...are DREAMT of in your philosophy

Adrian Lester dreamt of in YOUR philosophy



Than are DREAMT of in our philosophy

Than are . . . dreamt of in YOUR philosophy

Than are dreamt of in your ... “PHILOSOPHY”

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Many meters

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Poem in October

Each stanza has the same pattern.

- Ten lines.
- Fixed number of syllables: 9/12/9/3/5/12/12/5/3/9
- Fixed number of stresses (dolnik feet): 4/5/4/1/2/5/5/2/1/4
- Fixed pattern of slant rhyme: ABACABDBAC
- Alliteration within and across lines.
- Rhymes repeat to group stanzas.
- Final stanza marked off by slightly different syllable count.

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- Some lines have a missing stress.
 - All such lines are followed by a line with an extra stress.
 - All such line pairs are strongly enjambed.
 - Thomas's recitation separates these lines with a smaller break (about half a beat).
 - Analysis: the poem has two concurrent lineations.
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Two concurrent lineations

It was my thirtieth year to heaven
Woke to my hearing from harbour and neighbour wood
And the mussel pooled and the heron
Priested shore
The morning beckon
With water praying and call of seagull and rook
And the knock of sailing boats on the net webbed wall
Myself to set foot
That second
In the still sleeping town and set forth.

Dylan Thomas, *Poem in October*, Stanza 1

Two concurrent lineations

My birthday began with the water-
Birds and the birds of the winged trees flying my name
Above the farms and the white horses
And I rose
In rainy autumn
And walked abroad in shower of all my days
High tide and the heron dived when I took the road
Over the border
And the gates
Of the town closed as the town awoke.

Dylan Thomas, *Poem in October*, Stanza 2

Two concurrent lineations

A springful of larks in a rolling
Cloud and the roadside bushes brimming with whistling
Blackbirds and the sun of October
 Summery
 On the hill's shoulder,
Here were fond climates and sweet singers suddenly
Come in the morning where I wandered and listened
 To the rain wringing
 Wind blow cold
 In the wood faraway under me.

Dylan Thomas, *Poem in October*, Stanza 3

Two concurrent lineations

Pale rain over the dwindling harbour
And over the sea wet church the size of a snail
With its horns through mist and the castle
Brown as owls
But all the gardens
Of spring and summer were blooming in the tall tales
Beyond the border and under the lark full cloud.
There could I marvel
My birthday
Away but the weather turned around.

Dylan Thomas, *Poem in October*, Stanza 4

Two concurrent lineations

It turned away from the blithe country
And down the other air and the blue altered sky
Streamed again a wonder of summer
 With apples
 Pears and red currants
And I saw in the turning so clearly a child's
Forgotten mornings when he walked with his mother
 Through the parables
 Of sunlight
 And the legends of the green chapels

Dylan Thomas, *Poem in October*, Stanza 5

Two concurrent lineations

And the twice told fields of infancy
That his tears burned my cheeks and his heart moved in mine.
These were the woods the river and the sea
Where a boy
In the listening
Summertime of the dead whispered the truth of his joy
To the trees and the stones and the fish in the tide.
And the mystery
Sang alive
Still in the water and singing birds.

Dylan Thomas, *Poem in October*, Stanza 6

Two concurrent lineations

And there could I marvel my birthday
Away but the weather turned around. And the true
Joy of the long dead child sang burning
In the sun.

It was my thirtieth
Year to heaven stood there then in the summer noon
Though the town below lay leaved with October blood.

O may my heart's truth
Still be sung
On this high hill in a year's turning.

Dylan Thomas, *Poem in October*, Stanza 7