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ORAL LITERATURE AND THE FORMULA

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ORAL POETRY: SOME LINGUISTIC AND TYPOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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1. *On the Grammatical Nature of the Formula*

Formulaic diction has been extensively studied, but for the most part as a phenomenon *sui generis*. No-one has attempted to compare systematically the phrase patterns of oral poetry with those of ordinary language. Doing this would bring us a step closer to answering the question "what is a formula?," which so far, in spite of numerous attempts to answer it, and at least one attempt to declare it unanswerable,¹ stubbornly refuses to go away. The comparison would presumably show one of two possible things: that the formula has counterparts in ordinary language, or that it is a unique entity confined to oral literature. Either result would be interesting in that it would tell us something about the formula, and also introduce a set of new problems for investigation.² Should we discover that something like the formula does occur in other uses of language, then linguistics could be expected to give some help towards defining it in a useful and accurate way. But we should then be left with an unanswered question on our hands: just what *is* different, then, about the language of oral poetry? And if we, on the other hand, discovered that the formula of oral literature is qualitatively unlike anything else in language, that latter question will have been answered, but linguistics finds itself with a previously undreamt of phenomenon to be accounted for, one which might or might not call for some changes in our views of what language is like.

The statement that all of language is in some sense formulaic is too vague to be really helpful, and attempts to sharpen it run the

¹Nagler (1967, 310): "We are debarred from classification and definition."

²It would also bear on the still disputed question whether there are grammatical differences between literary and ordinary language (see, e.g., *New Literary History*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1973, for several viewpoints on this question).

risk of making it merely wrong. The rules that say how words can be put together into phrases and sentences are framed in terms of general categories (Noun, Noun Phrase, Verb, Transitive, etc.). In a sentence we can normally replace one word by another of the same category and get another good sentence, provided that the new word fits semantically. The same is not true for formulas. The term is usually reserved for groups of words which are combined in particular, restricted ways. The parts of a formula must either be specific words (in some cases even specific inflectional forms of words) or else they belong to some limited class of words (e.g., nouns designating weapons).

It is natural, then, to compare formulas with the *bound expressions* of ordinary language. These are phrases or sentences in which the words function in certain respects like the parts of complex words usually do. There are three properties commonly found in the elements of both complex words and bound expressions: *arbitrarily limited distribution*, *frozen syntax*, and *non-compositional semantics*. It is obvious what they mean in complex words. The elements of complex words usually have arbitrary distributional limitations since very few word-formation processes are fully productive. Nearly all derivational suffixes and stems therefore require special, often item-by-item specifications of how they can be combined. In extreme cases, stems can be unique to just one form, as for example the elements *cran-* and *whortle-*, which have no existence apart from the compounds *cranberry* and *whortleberry*. Non-compositionality refers to the failure of the meaning of an expression to be derivable from the meaning of its parts. Thus, *cloudberry*s have nothing to do with clouds. It is characteristic that even apparent compositionality is usually deceptive inside the confines of a word: *blackberry*s need not be black, nor are all black berries blackberries. The third aspect is frozen syntax: a word is syntactically a fixed unit. Its parts cannot be separately affected by transformational rules (*black berries* and *red berries* \Rightarrow *black and red berries*, but not *blackberries* and *cranberries* \Rightarrow **black- and cranberries*) or separately modified (*very black berries*, but not **very blackberries*).

Bound phrases are syntactic elements which have become lodged in the lexicon and tend to take on these three characteristic features of words. However, none of the features is a necessary property of bound phrases, and each of the three is in principle

independent, although we shall see that there are interesting relationships between them.

Consider first the arbitrary distributional restrictions that show up in bound phrases. One kind of example is provided by the adjectives in the phrases *addled eggs*, *livelong day*, *pitched battle*, *foregone conclusion*. In each case, the adjective is permitted to be used only when it modifies a specific noun, or a specific small class of nouns. For example, *addled* is used primarily of eggs, though by metaphorical extension we get also *addled pate* or *brain*, and by a second extension the adjective can also be applied to *mind*, *wits*, etc. With *livelong*, *pitched*, and *foregone* there is not even this much flexibility: each adjective absolutely requires a certain noun to accompany it. The same sort of binding can work in the opposite direction: in *short shrift*, *high jinks* and (for some speakers) *filthy lucre*, it is the noun that demands a specific adjective with it. Other phrase types exhibit binding as well: there are nouns which must be the objects of specific verbs (*make inroads*, *take umbrage*, *keep tabs on*, *make headway*, *pay heed*) or of specific prepositions (*by dint of*, *for the nonce*).

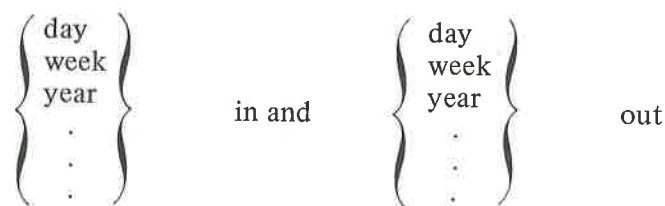
Not very different is the case of words which are arbitrarily restricted to co-occur with a *class* of other words. For example, *arrant* 'utter' qualifies only nouns designating something that is regarded as morally or intellectually reprehensible: *arrant rogue*, *arrant liar*, *arrant hypocrite*, *arrant fool*, *arrant nonsense* (but not **arrant simplicity*, **arrant helplessness*, **arrant despair*, etc.). *Fraught with* 'involving' requires something threatening: *fraught with grave consequences*, *fraught with danger* (but not **fraught with remorse*, **fraught with joy*). A well-known set of cases in this category are 'classifiers' like *brace* (*of pheasants*, *of partridges*, etc.), *pride* (*of lions*, *of peacocks*).

But we shall have to be careful not to include just any kind of restricted distribution under the heading of bound phraseology. There are plenty of words in English which have limited co-occurrence possibilities simply by virtue of what they mean and/or what the real world is like. We must not confuse these semantically and pragmatically motivated distributional restrictions with the arbitrary ones that alone constitute bound phraseology. For example, *prehensile* no doubt is used only with a small number of nouns (*foot*, *tail*, *lips*, perhaps a few others); this obviously is a fact about physiology, not about English phraseology. The

adjective *morganatic* applies only to *marriage, husband, wife* and their synonyms, because of its meaning, which according to *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* is "of or relating to a marriage contracted by a member of a European royal or noble family with a person of inferior rank on the understanding that the rank of the inferior partner remains unchanged and that the children of the marriage do not succeed to the titles, fiefs, or entailed property of the parent of higher rank." Clearly the limited distribution of this word is not a fact about the grammar of English.

There are also set phrases which do not involve absolute distributional restrictions, but merely preferred collocations. For example, *rapt attention* is a relatively bound expression, although *rapt* could also be used alone or with other nouns; *agree wholeheartedly, fuss and bother, occasion surprise, add insult to injury, conspicuous by its absence, to all intents and purposes*. Relatively bound phrases are often felt to be stylistically objectionable (*clichés*), especially those that are confined to written style.

Some bound phrases are *syntactically fixed* in the sense that they must appear in just one surface structure form. The adjective *addled* is syntactically free as long as it is predicated of eggs: we can say *this egg is as addled as the other one; it's those eggs that John claimed were addled; addled though the eggs may be, they will still be used for the school lunch*. If we try the same thing with *foregone conclusion*, we get bad results: **this conclusion is as foregone as the other one; *it's these conclusions that John claimed were foregone; *foregone though the conclusion may be. . . .* Similarly, *to and fro, know full well, leave in the lurch, come a cropper, the nick of time, for the nonce*.³ Syntactically fixed phrases, like flexible ones, can involve classes of words rather than specific lexical items, e.g.,



³ It is possible that there are intermediate steps between fully fixed and fully free phrases, and even that there is a hierarchy of frozenness, as suggested by Fraser (1970). However, the particular hierarchy suggested by Fraser is in my opinion illusory, in part

How is bound phraseology to be accounted for in the framework of a formal generative grammar? This is a question which has received regrettably little attention in linguistics recently. As might be expected, most of the excitement has for some time been around the new ways of investigating productive syntactic (and phonological) processes which generative grammar has opened up. The less productive regularities of language, notably morphology and phraseology, on which generative grammar does not throw nearly so much light, have been treated as sideshows, though interest in them is clearly beginning to revive. The following suggestions are therefore meant to be tentative and should not be taken to represent any kind of established position in linguistic theory.

The entries in the lexicon of a generative grammar consist of a phonological and a semantic representation, and a syntactic classification. The latter specifies both the lexical category (e.g., whether the item is a Verb), and the contextual categories (e.g., whether if a Verb, it is Transitive). There are two possible ways in which bound phrasing could be accounted for in such a grammar: the phrases could be listed as ready-made units in the lexicon, or their parts could be listed separately and provided with contextual restrictions that specify their possible phrase-mates. I should like to propose that both methods must play a role in the grammar, and that the distinction between them accounts exactly for the observed differences between fixed and flexible phrases, respectively.

Thus, we can characterize bound phrases of the flexible type by incorporating into the lexical entry of distributionally restricted words a marking which requires that they be used in construction with (i.e., in a syntactic-semantic relationship to) a given word, or a member of a given class of words. This corresponds exactly to what a practical dictionary does when it glosses, for example, *addled* as '*spoiled*' (of eggs). We can account for relative binding by a natural extension of this device. The contextual marking can be considered *obligatory* in the case of absolute binding, as in *addled*. In relatively bound phrases like *rapt attention*, the

because some of the transformations assumed by Fraser in establishing his hierarchy (such as *ing*-Nominalization) have since been shown to be lexical processes (Chomsky 1972) and in part because of the extreme fluctuation in the relevant judgments of grammaticality that one finds from speaker to speaker, and even in single speakers.

restricted word can be given a variable contextual marking (analogous to variable, or "optional," rules elsewhere in the grammar).

Fixed phrases can then be listed in the lexicon in their surface structure form, and must not be allowed to undergo syntactic transformations. They need, however, not be marked as exceptions to them. We can establish a general convention to the effect that transformational rules apply only to syntactically derived representations, that is, to the output of phrase-structure rules and/or transformations.⁴ This convention is, in fact, the syntactic counterpart of one which is in any case required in phonology (Kiparsky 1973).

We must allow fixed phrases to contain unspecified noun phrases which can either be filled in freely (as in *get x's goat*) or must be coreferential with another noun phrase (e.g., *lose x's marbles*).⁵ Apparently, such unspecified elements can never be verbs or verb phrases.

The reason for adopting this particular grammatical treatment of bound phrases is that it predicts, and thereby explains, a number of the more striking facts about their behavior. In particular, it makes sense of a series of differences between fixed and flexible phrases.

1) It explains the fact that fixed phrases can, and flexible ones cannot, occur in syntactically anomalous shapes: *knight errant*, *malice aforethought*, *come a cropper*, *easy come, easy go*, *like crazy*, *like father, like son*, *monkey see, monkey do*; and, in true idioms: *by and large*, *by and by*, *out of hand*.

Since flexible bound phrases correspond to contextual restrictions specified in the lexicon, they should be syntactically as well-behaved as regular phrases. The fact that *errant* follows *knight* is directly reflected by entering the expression in the lexicon in that form, but this predicts correctly that we shall not be able to say, for example, **the knight was errant*. Conversely, the fact that we can say *the egg was addled* means that *addled egg* cannot

⁴More exactly, if the structural analysis of a transformation is $X-\sigma-Y$, where σ is a string of categories, then no substring of a lexical entry can be analyzed as σ .

⁵Many treatments of idioms have suggested such a device (Fraser 1970, Makkai 1970).

be simply listed in its surface form in the lexicon. This predicts the normal order of the noun phrase. The adjective could not be postposed unless there were a rule postposing non-bound adjectives in modern English, which apparently is not the case (postposed adjective phrases like *a man too frightened to be a revolutionary* are of course another matter).

2) A second fact which this treatment explains is that truly non-compositional semantics is restricted to fixed phrases. Non-compositional phrases (*idioms* in the strict sense) have received more attention recently than any other aspect of phraseology (especially important treatments are Weinreich 1969, Fraser 1970, Makkai 1972). Typical verb phrase idioms are *kick the bucket*, *shoot the bull*, *shoot the breeze*, *bite the dust*, *bite the bullet*, *fly off the handle*, *hit the spot*, *fill the bill*, *shake a leg*, *chew the rag*, *go the whole hog*, *eat your heart out*. Here there is no relation between the meaning of the parts and the meaning of the whole from the viewpoint of the synchronic structure. Although many of them are originally metaphorical, they are no longer necessarily perceived as such (though there is surely some variation among speakers in this respect).

The semantic compositionality of flexible phrases follows from their treatment as syntactically compositional given any of the usual views on how the meaning of sentences is determined. No theory of the lexicon so far proposed allows meanings of words to change in context).

The claim that only fixed expressions are idiomatic is, however, controversial. In recent linguistic writings the term *idiom*, though always defined in terms of non-compositionality, has been in practice applied also to expressions which, in my opinion, are better considered compositional. In particular, expressions with unique or restricted lexical items have been considered idiomatic, e.g., the type *make headway*, *keep tabs on someone*, *pay heed to*, *take care of*, *take advantage of*, *make inroads*. There is no reason why *headway* and similar items should not rather be considered as possessing the appropriate meaning of their own. On this account (which is close to the traditional one) *headway* means something like 'progress,' and is marked in the lexicon as having the syntactic peculiarity that it must occur as the object of *make*. This has the advantage that the ability of such nouns to be modified (e.g., *considerable headway was made*, *the headway that Bill made was*

astonishing) has a straightforward explanation. On the theory that the nouns mean nothing in themselves, it is not clear what the adjectives are doing here.⁶ If the proposed compositional treatment is correct, then such cases are compatible with the proposed restriction on true idioms.

A second large category of alleged idioms which I should like to consider as compositional are metaphorical expressions of the type *give away the show*, *miss the boat*, *break the ice*, *bury the hatchet*, *(fish in) troubled waters*, *(burn the) midnight oil*, *break someone's heart*, *put the screws on*, *throw in the sponge* (or *towel*), *pull some strings*, *crack the whip over*, *pour oil over troubled waters*, *pour oil into the flames*, *spill the beans*, *let off some steam*, *stab someone in the back*, *let the cat out of the bag*, *blow the whistle on*, *pass the buck*, *turn over a new leaf*. It is part of the normal use of language to assign such metaphorical expressions their proper interpretation. In favor of considering them compositional is the fact that they are very easily borrowed from one language into another. *Bury the hatchet* appears in Finnish (*haudata sotakirves*), Swedish (*begrava stridsyxan*), German (*die Streitaxt begraben*) and many other European languages. Such verbatim transfer would be inexplicable if they were treated as unanalyzable expressions whose parts had, in the phrases, no meanings of their own. In addition, their components can be modified under appropriate conditions, that is, when the adjective is pertinent to the metaphorical interpretation (*break the conversational ice*, *break Smitty's poor heart*, *give away the whole show*, *put the big screws on*). Thus these expressions can be considered as conventional metaphors of very much the same type as must in any case be taken into account in characterizing the meanings of single words (see Kiparsky 1970 for further remarks on this point).

3) The proposed analysis sets limits on the syntactic form of both fixed and flexible phrases. It requires that both should be constituents, that is, expressions which are members of one of the following syntactic categories: Sentence, Noun Phrase, Verb Phrase, Adjective Phrase, Prepositional Phrase, in addition to the lexical categories Noun, Verb, etc. That this is the case is confirmed

⁶Cf. Fiengo (1974) for related discussion. The account there proposed draws the correct distinction between the types *kick the bucket* and *make headway* but runs into difficulties with the metaphorical type discussed in the next paragraph.

by the Appendix of Makkai (1972), based on work by A. Healey, where English idioms are classified according to their syntactic function.

Flexible phrases are constrained in a somewhat different way. The words in the phrase must be in construction with each other, that is, linked by syntactico-semantic relations⁷ (verb-object, verb-indirect object, verb-(verb phrase) adverb, noun-attribute, subject-predicate, conjunction): *make headway*, *rapt attention*, *the penny dropped*, *come to grief*, *leave x in the lurch*, *hit the nail on the head*. Hence, the Verb Phrase *rob Peter to pay Paul*, where neither *pay* nor *Paul* are syntactico-semantically related to *rob* or *Peter* in the above sense could not be represented by means of co-occurrence restrictions on lexical items, and must therefore be listed in its surface form, which is the desired result because it is in fact a fixed phrase. Similarly, *before you could say Jack Robinson*, *the straw that broke the camel's back*, *born with a silver spoon in one's mouth*, *in two shakes of a dead lamb's tail*, *between the devil and the deep blue sea*.

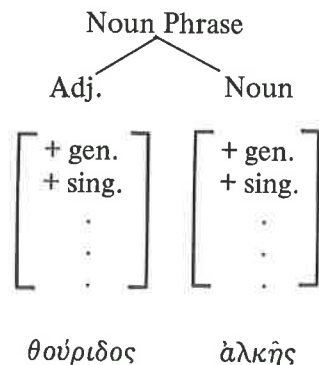
The question is now whether formulas in oral literature can be regarded as special cases of bound phrases, and whether the several categories which we have used to classify bound phrases are also applicable to formulas. If they are, then we may hope that approaching the problem of formulas from the grammatical point of view gives us not merely an appropriate description and classification of them, but the beginning of an explanation for some of the observations that have been made about how formulas work.

The most promising area in which to approach this question is the Homeric poetry, where a vast body of linguistic analysis is already available. In addition to Parry's own work, the studies of Hoekstra (1965) and Hainsworth (1968) are especially useful for such purposes. In what follows I should like to offer some preliminary interpretations of their findings, which have suggested to me that a strictly grammatical characterization of the formula may be illuminating.

⁷I shall for present purposes assume that syntactico-semantic relations are all expressed in deep structure. Whether this is really so is a much discussed problem. It involves, for example, the analysis of relative constructions like *the headway which you made was terrific* (Vergnaud 1973, Fiengo 1974). The issue does not affect the point at stake.

Hainsworth shows that it is necessary to distinguish two classes of formulas: *fixed formulas*, which appear in a constant shape, and *flexible formulas*, which can be inflected, expanded, and split by other words. Of course, as our data comes from texts instead of a still living tradition of verse-making, the argument that a formula is fixed must be statistical and therefore fallible. However, if *θούριδος ἀλκῆς* 'impetuous strength' (gen.) occurs twenty-two times in that precise shape, and never in any other, though meter and sense would both permit it, there is little doubt that the expression was formulaic in only that shape (in other forms it was of course no doubt perfectly grammatical and usable, but had no formulaic status). But when an expression occurs only a few times, we obviously cannot decide for sure whether it is a fixed formula, or a flexible one that happens to be attested in just one form. The same limitations of evidence mean that not all forms of flexibility will generally be attested for any one formula.

Suppose, then, that we adopt an analysis of the Homeric formulas along the lines of bound phraseology in ordinary language. Flexible formulas would then correspond to co-occurrence restrictions (obligatory or variable) between lexical items. Fixed formulas would correspond to phrases like *foregone conclusion*, which the lexicon provides directly in their surface structure form. For example, the flexible formula *ὠκέες ἵπποι* 'swift horses,' which can be inflected (*ὠκέας ἵππους*), split (*ἵππων . . . ὠκειάων*) and modified (*ἐρυσάρματες ὠκέες ἵπποι*) corresponds, in the generative grammar of the Homeric *Kunstsprache*, to a (variable) co-occurrence restriction in the lexical entry of the noun stem *hippo-* which pairs it with the adjective *δoku-*. Fixed formulas are listed as ready-made phrases in their surface form, e.g.,



An immediate advantage of this definition is that it explicitly refers the formula to the abstract system of the poetic language, to which the epic text is related in somewhat the same way as any sample of speech (*parole*) is related to language (*langue*). All definitions of the formula that are based in one or another way on properties or regularities of texts run into some conceptual problems which the present proposal avoids. It is necessary to distinguish theoretically between the *conventional* kind of repetition that marks the formula, and other, irrelevant kinds: accidental repetition, semantically and pragmatically motivated repetition, and the myriad kinds of poetically motivated repetition (refrains, parallelism, allusion, and so on).⁸ In order to do this, Parry defined the formula as a group of words *regularly* employed under the same metrical conditions *to express a given essential idea*. Although Parry makes the intended coverage of the definition clear, it is doubtful whether his wording does the job. The problem with requiring that the employment of formulas be *regular* is that Ζεύς *τερπικέρανος* (used four times) cannot then be a formula for Zeus, for the regular formula is *νεφεληγερέτα Ζεύς* (used thirty times). And if the requirement of regular employment is weakened to simple repetition, then it is not clear how the notion of an "essential idea" is to make a precise separation between the different types of repetition in the intended way.

These quibbles are not the primary reasons, however, why I think that a grammatical characterization of the formula is worth working out. Its value should be to uncover relationships between facts that otherwise remain disconnected, and to contribute heuristically to further discoveries. In what follows I shall test some of the consequences of this view using the material and results of Hainsworth and others. Finally, a grammatical analysis of the formula provides, I think, the most useful dimensions for comparing the way different oral traditions handle their formulaic material. I shall make some use of this aspect in section 2 below.

Most of my remarks will be concerned with the flexible type of formula. Fixed formulas are treated as ready-made surface structures. As far as I can see, the prediction made by our proposed

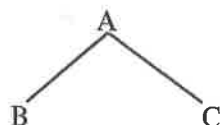
⁸Hainsworth (1968, 150) curiously proposes: "Repetition at a short interval is not easily classified, but I do not see why we should not look upon the stock of formulae as fluid enough to admit temporary members rather than devise rules for their exclusion."

treatment, that they must be constituents (with at most one variable Noun Phrase member), is borne out. We may note that formulas with unique lexical items are fixed, although I have not found any clearly idiomatic cases. It also seems that frequent metrical deviance is tolerated only in fixed formulas (*πότνια* "Ἥρη).

One consequence of our treatment of fixed formulas may be worth noting briefly. Like any surface structure, a fixed formula is of course subject to all the phonological processes, such as elision, corruption, and so forth. This well-known fact means that formulas do not (contrary to the letter, if not the spirit of Parry's definition) necessarily have a fixed metrical form. For example, *κῦμα μέγα* fills one and a half feet in μ 60 but just one foot in ϵ 416, where the next word begins with a vowel.

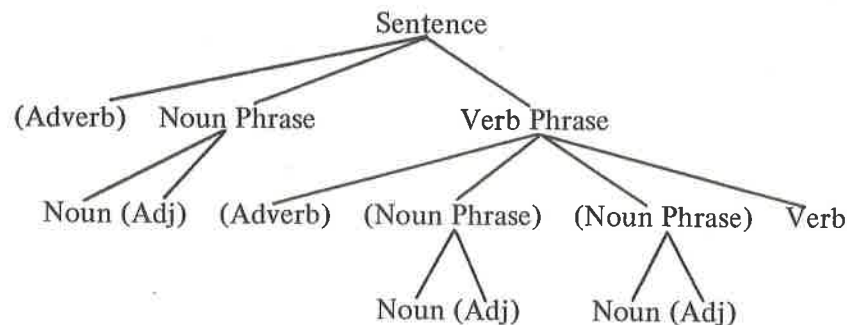
In regard to the flexible formula, the hypothesis which we are considering here leads to a number of interesting consequences.

(1) It entails that the members of a flexible formula should be grammatically related. This means that they must be sisters of a constituent, i.e., directly dominated by the same node, as B and C in the configuration



For example, the typical flexible formulas are of the form Adj-Noun (*ὠκέας ἵππους*) or Verb-Object (*πάθεν ἄλγεα*).

If we diagram some simple deep structure forms of sentences,



(where parenthesized constituents are not present in all sentences) we see that a great many imaginable "groups of words" are directly excluded as formulas. There could not be, for example, a formula of the form $\text{Noun}_i - \text{Noun}_j$, that is, a conventional pairing of Subject and Object, or Direct and Indirect Object, with a free choice of verb. There could be no formulas of the form Adjective - Verb, with the adjective modifying an arbitrary noun. There could be no formulas of the form Adverb - Noun. In a flexible formula of the pattern Verb - Adverb, the adverb must be a "verb phrase adverb" (such as *quickly*) and not a "sentence adverb" (such as *certainly*). In fact, no flexible formula should, if the treatment is right, contain sentence adverbs (including particles like *μέν* and *δέ*) as essential members. All this simply amounts to a precise statement of the requirement that a formula must "express a single idea." But there is more. The analysis also sets limits on the internal complexity of flexible formulas.

Formulas which are not made up of words directly dominated by a single constituent, such as *ἡμος δ' ἠριγένεια φάνη* *ροδοδάκτυλος Ἥως* must on this theory be fixed, as seems indeed to be the case. (Apparent exceptions are the complex formulas built from simple ones, as discussed below.)

(2) Our model allows for the inflection, separation, and modification of formulas without singling out one form as the prototype and postulating analogical processes to generate the others. This is of course in direct contradiction to all treatments of the formula, except that of Nagler (1967), if I understand it right. There is no question that many flexible formulas may have arisen from originally fixed formulas (Hoekstra 1965), though I do not doubt that the opposite development of "freezing" also occurs. (Hainsworth 1968, 113 speaks of the "ossification of more flexible systems at points of frequent use.") All that this means is that the flexibility of a formula may change in time. No doubt a singer might learn a formula in a single (perhaps very frequent) shape and proceed to treat it as flexible, or conversely limit a flexible formula into a fixed form. The question is whether the proper representation of the singer's internalized *Kunstsprache* requires the selection of one surface form as basic and the attendant treatment of the others as derived by "analogy." A perusal of the modifications of noun phrase formulas enumerated by Hainsworth (pp. 62-9) suggests that the choice would on the whole be arbitrary. Perhaps

the more frequent member of an inversion pair might be chosen as basic, but it will not necessarily be of a given metrical type or of a given word order. For example, ἄστυ μέγα is more frequent than μέγα ἄστυ, but μέγα κύμα is more frequent than κύμα μέγα. And what are we to say of cases where three or more shapes of a flexible formula are found? Who is to say that Homer considered as basic either πάθεν ἄλγεα, πάθ' ἄλγεα, ἄλγεα πάσχει, ἄλγεα πάσχων, or ἄλγε' ἔπασχον? What is essential on the present hypothesis is only the abstract bond between ἄλγος and παθ-. It is this bond which constitutes the formula. The "flexibility" of formulas is, then, the product of the transformational rules of the language itself, not of any special analogical machinery.

The issue is of course related to one which has dominated discussions of syntax in recent decades. The conclusion that proportional analogy, substitution-in-frames techniques, and similar devices are not adequate accounts of sentence formation or language acquisition has been reasonably well established in linguistics and psycholinguistics (McNeill 1970, Fedor, Bever, and Garrett 1974).

(3) We predict that the "expansion" of formulas treated at length by Hainsworth (Ch. 5) should be a normal occurrence. For the fact that there is binding between two words A and B does not mean that A or B cannot be further specified by C in any of the ways permitted by the syntax.

In the special case where a new element C joined to a formula AB is bound to either member A or B, the result is itself a (second-order) formula. Such nesting of formulas within formulas, which can be repeated to give large "formulaic complexes," also needs no special treatment in this approach. It is directly accounted for by the grammar itself. For example, if ἔλικας βοῦς 'cattle with curved horns' is a formula, and εἰλίποδας βοῦς 'lumbering cattle' is a formula, it follows that εἰλίποδας ἔλικας βοῦς is also a formula. If μένος καὶ θυμός and θυμός ἀγήνωρ are formulas, it follows that μένος καὶ θυμός ἀγήνωρ is also a formula. From the formulas λεύκ' ὀστέα (ὀστέα λευκά) 'white bones,' θυμός ἀγήνωρ 'valiant spirit,' and λίπε δ' ὀστέα θυμός 'the spirit left the bones,' we predict automatically the complex formula λίπε δ' ὀστέα θυμός ἀγήνωρ (μ 414), λίπη λεύκ' ὀστέα θυμός (λ 221).

(4) A most important property of this way of looking at the formula is that no metrical criteria are made part of its definition. This allows for phonologically induced metrical variation in fixed formulas and for both phonologically and syntactically induced metrical variation in flexible formulas.

A dramatic confirmation of this view is the existence of formulas split between two lines (Hainsworth, pp. 107-8). The formula τεύχεα καλά (19 x) 'fine armor' straddles the verse boundary in

τοῦ δὲ καὶ ἄλλο τόσον μὲν ἔχε χροῖα χάλκεα τεύχεα
καλά

(X 322-3)

In addition, the parts of the formula are often separated by other words:

τύνη δ' Ἡφαίστω παρὰ κλυτὰ τεύχεα δέξο
καλὰ μάλ'

(T 10-11)

In one case (Achilles speaking) the split formula extends over three lines:

τὸν ἀπώλεσα, τεύχεα δ' ἔκτωρ
δηώσας ἀπέδυσσε πελώρια, θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι,
καλὰ

(Σ 82-4)

The independence of formula from meter could hardly be better visualized than from these examples.

A more general corollary of our position is that formulas should occur equally in oral poetry that uses relatively free metrical schemata, and in oral prose. I think there is no question that all oral literatures, not just those with tight meter, tend to be formulaic to some degree. For example, to take an American form of oral poetry, the blues has a loose metrical (as opposed to musical) form, and yet blues verses (especially the totally oral "country" blues) are eminently formulaic. Folktales are the most obvious example of formulaic language in oral prose. An advantage of the grammar-based analysis proposed here is that the formula in

such forms of oral literature can be defined in exactly the same way as for Homer (which is impossible under Parry's definition) and studied in the same framework as these.

By this I do not mean to deny Parry's insight that the formula makes possible the improvisation of metrical verse. This is, however, a specialized utilization of formulaic language, not its cause. Parry was also clearly right in connecting the exigencies of strict meter with the completeness and economy of formulaic repertoire that he so strikingly demonstrated for Homer. Brecht once remarked of the hexameter that it "forces the German language into the most fruitful exertions" (*zwingt die deutsche Sprache zu den fruchtbarsten Anstrengungen*). His observation is even more true of the original Greek hexameter, for the "exertions" which the meter forced on that language brought a richer and more lasting harvest, not merely in a particular poem, but in a whole poetry.

One could say that the traditional and the individual esthetic set diametrically opposed requirements on meter. A traditional poetic language seems to rise to its greatest heights when a strict meter pushes it there; non-traditional poetry must constantly free itself from old constraints in order to break the new formal ground its esthetic requires. It has been said of English poetry that "all the rhymes have been found." For a traditional poetry it would mean that the *Kunstsprache*, which, in Meister's words "does the thinking for the poet," has been brought to perfection. In an individual poetry such as ours it merely means that rhyme as an obligatory formal constraint is played out. Therefore, since the Romantic movement (of which modernism is really a continuation) the search for individual expression has gone hand in hand with the development of increasingly free verse forms.

Up to this point, we have been able to maintain that formulas are from the grammatical point of view indistinguishable from the bound phrases of ordinary language. The language of oral literature does not differ qualitatively from ordinary language. It does differ quantitatively in the extent and frequency of its use of bound phraseology, especially, but not exclusively, when the meter is strict.

However, the above phrase patterns by no means cover everything that has been brought under the rubric of a "formula" in Homer. Russo (1966) has argued that the tendency for certain

syntactic patterns to be concentrated in fixed metrical positions in the line should be considered part of the formulaic technique of oral poetry. On this proposal, there are such formulas as

- $\overset{N}{\cup} \overset{V}{\cup} | - x \parallel$, which plainly can in no way be accommodated in the way the types I have treated so far can, since they are independent of any lexical items.

There is no question that such tendencies to localization are important features of Homer's verse. The question whether they are to be considered formulaic is in part a matter of terminology. The real question is whether they are phenomena of the same order as the bound phrases that constitute the original extension of that term, and whether they are indicators of oral style.

There are indications that the answer is no on both counts. Localization tendencies in fact appear in most kinds of metrical verse. In the Greek hexameter, where they have been exhaustively studied (O'Neill 1942), they could of course be said simply to continue the style established when the poetry was oral. But similar tendencies appear where this way out cannot be taken. In English iambic pentameter, there is a strong tendency to place noun phrases with adjacent stresses (the type *old man, red leaves*) in weak-strong (even-odd) positions in the line. Buss (1974) shows that this localization is mandatory in Milton. The same is true, with no exceptions, to my knowledge, for Pope. This localization cannot be accounted for by the ordinary metrical constraints, for compounds of the type *blackbird*, where the stress difference between the syllables is more marked than in the noun phrases, are freely permitted in both strong-weak and weak positions. It is interesting that not all English poetry is equally strict in the placement of noun phrases: Shakespeare has plenty of lines like

Better becomes the *grey cheeks* of the east (S. 132)

which would be impossible in Milton and Pope.

To be sure, this is small potatoes compared to the numerous and intricate localization patterns that have been discovered in Greek. We might say, then, while conceding that localization is a general tendency of metrical verse, that its exuberant development in the hexameter is a consequence of the greater schematization of oral poetry. That may well turn out to be true, but it would be a

premature conclusion now. We have to take into account as another possible factor the greater complexity of the hexameter form, which may well impose a stronger localization even in literary poetry (O'Neill's data would then no longer have to be explained as survivals from the distant past of oral composition). Secondly, the actual extent of localization in English verse has just begun to be studied. There is no telling how much localization will be found when English meter is examined with the same care that classicists are accustomed to devote to their material.

There is, however, still another type of recurrence, also first identified by Parry (p. 73, 328), which is very clearly a mark of oral style, and in no way fits into the types we have examined so far. It produces the patterns which might be termed *echoes*, involving purely phonological repetition, without any necessary lexical or syntactic relationship:

ἔξετ' ἔπειτ' ἀπάνευθε νεῶν, μετὰ δ' ὧν ἔηκε (A 48)

'then he sat down opposite the ships and
released an arrow'

ἔξετ' ἔπειτ' ἀπάνευθε κιῶν ἐπὶ θῶα θαλάσσης (§ 236)

'then, going to the seashore, he sat down by himself'
(example from Parry, p. 73)

where νεῶν and κιῶν come in the same place, with completely different syntax. In the following case this technique seems to be used for deliberate rhetorical effect. To Nestor's

οὐνεκα πολλῶν

λαῶν ἐσσι ἄναξ καί τοι Ζεὺς ἐγγυάλιξε (I 97-8)

'since you are lord over many men and Zeus has put
into your hand [. . . the scepter]'

Agamemnon replies:

ἀντί νυ πολλῶν

λαῶν ἐστὶν ἀνὴρ ὃν τε Ζεὺς κῆρι φιλήσῃ (I 116-7)

'worth many men is that man whom Zeus in his heart loves'

echoing Nestor's words, but with the constituent structure radically rearranged.

The sovereign disregard of syntactic and phonological categories which these patterns exhibit is, to my knowledge, nowhere paralleled in literary style. Certainly nothing like it has been discovered in English poetry. The "sound texture" discussed by Jakobson shows a far looser patterning, and, unlike Homeric echoing, is limited to "local" recurrence over relatively short stretches of verse. So far, we have found formulas crystallizing at two levels: deep structure and surface structure. To these a third must now be added, that of phonological representations. Some of the stereotyped patterns of oral poetry are apparently coded in the singer's memory simply in terms of phoneme sequences, which can be matched in composition with syntactically and lexically divergent sequences. Exactly what these phonological patterns look like formally, and what are the dimensions and limits of their variability, is hard to tell for now. A thorough study of such patterns in Homer and other oral poetry would be most useful.

The existence of three levels of formulaic patterning would agree well with the results of psychological experiments on the way sentences are remembered. Verbal memory has been the object of intensive experimental study, especially in recent years when the theory of transformational grammar has provided a strong stimulus to psychological research. In the most recent major study of the subject (Wanner 1974) the conclusion is reached that there are three kinds of verbal memory: (1) an "echoic" memory system, which stores an auditory trace; (2) "preliminary storage," which stores sentences in surface structure form; and (3) "long-term storage," which stores sentences in deep structure (or semantic) form. Ordinarily, "echoic" memory traces, the most concrete form of storage, are extremely short-lived, and the intermediate surface structure form, though more lasting, also decays rather quickly. For long-term recall, only the most abstract representation is stored. To put it simply, the sound of a sentence is ordinarily remembered for a very short time, the wording is remembered a bit longer, and the meaning longest of all. What is interesting is that all three levels of representation appear to be activated for *long-term* memory in oral composition. Presumably, this is in part because of meter, which has both a mechanically mnemonic function (cf. its use in slogans, advertising jingles, etc.)

and a central esthetic function (itself of mnemonic value) of foregrounding, bringing in phonological form and surface structure to the interpretation of verse. The most important factor surely is the repetition inherent in oral poetry, as in any performing art.

2. *Towards a Typology of Oral Composition*

No-one would maintain that all oral literatures are necessarily alike. As Lord has noted, "the degree of 'improvisation' varies from singer to singer and depends as well on the song itself" (1960, 71). It would be truly surprising, therefore, if in addition to this variation *within* a tradition there were not also overall differences *between* traditions. That this is the case is amply clear from such works as Finnegan (1970). What we lack so far is some organizing framework in which to talk about these differences. What is the meaning of "degree of improvisation"? What exactly does Kirk mean when he considers Homer "more organized" than Yugoslav oral poetry? When can two poems be said to be "the same"? And beyond these immediate questions of accurate factual description, there are such questions as: what, if anything, is common to all oral literature? Is there some set of formal properties that identifies a text as orally composed? What is the relationship between style, genre, and relative fluidity of a composition?

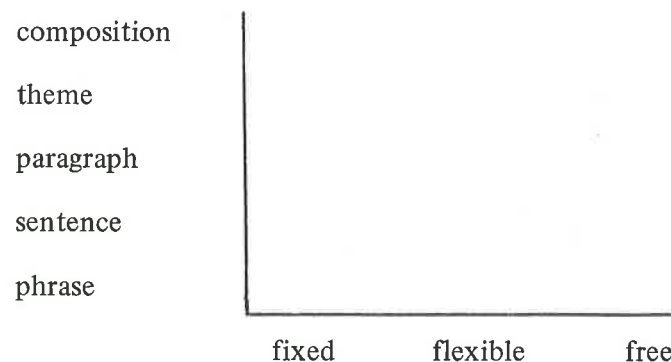
The answers to such questions would constitute a theory of oral literature. As a modest beginning towards such an eventual theory, we might try to find an appropriate way of classifying oral literatures into types. Such a typology would be semi-theoretical in that the choice of categories necessarily involves hypotheses about what the relevant dimensions of diversity are, but it would not commit us to any claims about how these dimensions are related. It is clear that in order to be able to talk about degrees of improvisation, we shall need to distinguish between different levels of composition (phrase, verse, theme, etc.) and to find a way of specifying the flexibility of each.

The linguistic approach to the formula I sketched out could provide part of what we need to construct our typology. We can represent a phrase as a point on a scale of flexibility. We shall need a scale of at least three points: fixed-flexible-free. Should further study of the formula prove the need for distinguishing intermediate

degrees of flexibility, these can be represented as additional points on the scale.

The same thing can be done for longer units of integration. I assume a hierarchy of the form: phrase / sentence / group of sentences / theme / composition. The precise nature of these units as well as the proper interpretation of flexibility for them would have to be given by a theory of discourse, which does not exist yet in any well-developed form. Of great interest in this connection is Propp's (1928a = 1968, 1928b) syntax of narrative discourse, especially as it was developed on the basis of oral literature (folktales).

A piece of verse can thus be placed on a two-dimensional diagram whose axes represent the size (in the above as yet ill-defined sense of units of discourse) and the relative freedom of a given expression.



For example, going up along the left side, we would first have, at the bottom, fixed formulas, then fixed floating verses, "repeated passages" of varying size, and finally, entire fixed compositions. If we then systematically chart a whole body of poetry, for example, a singer's repertoire, a genre, or even a whole oral tradition, we shall get a scatter of points which will be a kind of outline map of its degree of improvisation. The prototypical oral epic tradition, for example, would come out as a swath running from the bottom left to the top right hand corners, narrow at the base according to Parry's original position, expanding rightwards according to most later scholars.

From the viewpoint of a general typology, we can then ask whether some points on the map must always stay unpopulated. The two controversial points in this regard are the bottom right-hand corner and the top left-hand corner. The question whether they are filled in corresponds to the two hotly disputed issues: is oral literature completely formulaic? and are there fixed compositions in oral literature? According to Parry and Lord, the answer to both is no. Outside the diagonal swath, in other words, only written poetry can exist.

Parry's argument for the completely formulaic character of Homer (p. 313) involves claiming that apparent unique phrases are all really formulas which happen to have found no other use in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The only justification he gave for this view is that if more texts had survived, the proportion of formulas would be greater, because apparently unique expressions of the extant poetry would turn up again in them, just as the *Odyssey* proves to be formulaic many expressions that occur only once in the *Iliad*. But this argument seems to be fallacious. It is equally clear that any new texts would in turn contain their share of fresh expressions (in fact, of new words) not known to us from the texts we have, just as the *Odyssey* contains phrases and even words that do not appear in the *Iliad*. There is no reason to believe that new phrases would stop turning up in additional Homeric epics until we had enough of them to contain all the phrases of Greek itself. Thus this line of reasoning on the contrary tends to show, if anything, that *not* all of Homer is formulaic.

The claim could be given another interpretation by a looser definition of the formula. If we allow formulas to be abstract "phrase patterns" independent of particular words, then we could say that all of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* can be fitted into certain phrase patterns. But then we must say either that all phrase patterns of Greek grammar are formulas, which makes the formula a vacuous concept, or that not all phrase patterns of Greek grammar are allowed to occur in the epic, which is surely false.

There is a vast body of oral poetry which has never, to my knowledge, been exploited to test the Parry-Lord theory: the Finnish epic and lyric poems collected from singers for the most part in the nineteenth century, with some later gleanings, and printed in the thirty-two hefty volumes of *Suomen Kansan Vanhat Runot* (*Old Poems of the Finnish People*). The early collections,

most of them obtained by Lönnrot, were made by him the basis of his *Kalevala* and a volume of lyric poetry, the *Kanteletar*. Subsequently much additional poetry was gathered, making the completed collection a rich source also for the historical evolution of an oral literature during a period of nearly a hundred years.

In order to check to what extent the songs are products of composition-in-performance I compared repeated performances of a song by the same singer, and the versions of father and son wherever several generations in bardic families are on record. I did this for the epic songs of the White Sea district (Viena), which included some of the greatest singers, among them those who contributed the bulk of the *Kalevala*. The results were interesting. The repertoire of the Finnish singers, unlike those of Yugoslavia, must be regarded, at least for the epic poetry, as consisting of fairly stable compositions. Performances recorded even many decades apart are, as a rule, far more alike than the corresponding Yugoslav cases presented by Lord. Changes in the content and organization of the story are rare. Usually, differences within lines are a matter of small changes of wording, most of them changes of word order or substitutions of synonyms. Whole lines or small groups of lines are frequently inserted, omitted, or transposed. These are, of course, the typical kinds of differences between "variants" in oral literature. However, unlike what is apparently the case in Yugoslavia, there are few signs of "composition by theme" or "elaboration" of the story with traditional elements.

Interestingly enough, a son's version of a song frequently differs in more substantial ways from that of his father, who can be assumed to have taught it to him. This shows that the Finnish singers did not simply learn their songs by copying someone else's version verbatim. Another indication of this is that the songs which SKVR I, 2 banishes under the special heading *Learned from the Kalevala* do not by any means slavishly copy the printed text, but often rearrange and tighten the somewhat diffuse narration of the *Kalevala*. What all this suggests is that each individual singer works out his own arrangement of a song, which perhaps at first is relatively fluid, but then crystallizes into a stable form, which changes only gradually over the years as new elements are incorporated here and there and others are dropped.

The important point is that the singers dispose of very little floating thematic material which can be freely inserted at

appropriate points in the narration. There are no standard sequences describing fighting, forging of weapons, preparation for battle, etc. Each event is unique, and most epic verses are identified with a particular song. The changes that occur in a singer's version through successive performances, and the often more radical changes between generations, are omissions and additions (the latter in many cases demonstrably borrowings from other singers' versions, cf. Kuusi 1949 *passim*) largely of lines and passages that "belong" in that song. A long version of a song comes about much less through adding embellishments than by including all its verses, including parallel passages from different local traditions.

The following are some examples illustrating the above points.

One of the longest intervals is between the recorded performances of Gostja Ondreinen of Suurijärvi. He sang of the incest and revenge of Kalova's [sic] son (the Kullervo figure of the *Kalevala*) to Europaeus in 1845 (SKVR I, 2, No. 960). Genetz noted down his song again in 1872 (960a). There is no difference of substance between the two versions, the only changes being the usual minor variations in surface form (insertions, omissions, transposition). All the details of the story are retained without change. The version which his son Iivana Gostjanen sang to Genetz on the same day in 1872 (961) is radically condensed.

Several versions of the poems in the Sampo cycle were sung over the years by Miihkali Perttunen. The part of this cycle which tells the story of how Väinämöinen and the smith Ilmollinen (the Ilmarinen of the *Kalevala*) wooed Anni, and Ilmollinen on losing made himself a substitute girl out of gold, was recorded in 1872 by Berner (369 lines, SKVR I, 2, No. 473) in 1877 by Borenius (385 lines, No. 473a) and in 1886 by Varonen (361 lines, No. 473b). The differences between them are essentially matters of wording. But the version which Lönnrot obtained in 1834 from this singer's father Arhippa Perttunen, the greatest of the Finnish singers (No. 469) is in many respects more dramatic and elaborate (452 lines), although the story is hardly different. Kuusi (1949, 51-3) shows that the greater fullness of Arhippa's version is the result of combining verses from different local types of the song, and his detailed collation indicates (p. 53) that Miihkali's version often is closer to the tradition of his family.

The Malinens were another great bardic family. The versions of the Sampo cycle sung by Jyrki Malinen to Borenius in 1871, 1872, and 1877 (No. 84, 84a, 84b) are close to those of his father Ontrei Malinen as taken down by Sjögren in 1825 (No. 79) and again by Lönnrot in 1833 (No. 79a), about as close as the latter are to each other. In this case, then, there is not only a fixed composition, but it is transmitted substantially unchanged from one generation to the next. However, in the third generation, Jyrki Ontreinen's son Jeremei combines traditional elements into two new Sampo-cycles (92, 93), and Jeremei's brother Iivana performs two very strongly compressed renditions of his grandfather's version.

In general, in the occasional cases where radically different versions are recorded from one singer, this is apparently not to be interpreted as exemplifying the range of variation inherent in different performances of the same song, but rather cases of a singer knowing two distinct versions of it. The singer himself recognizes the two versions as different, and can produce both when asked to do so. There is, however, one contrary case of a singer whose every song has changed radically: Arhippa Perttunen's nephew Simana Miihkalinen. The songs he sang to Lönnrot in 1835 had changed beyond recognition when Borenius next took them down in 1872 (No. 1, 2; 514; 514a; 955, 956).

The fact that the traditional songs tended to have a fixed shape does not mean, however, that no new ones were composed. We know of many poems that were made on particular occasions. Martiska Karjalainen, one of Lönnrot's sources for the *Kalevala*, composed a poem about his imprisonment for a reindeer-raid (Haavio 1967, 122). A generation later, when Finnish folk poetry had become respectable, the great singer Miihkali Perttunen composed a poem on being awarded a stipend from the Finnish Literature Society (Virtaranta et al. 1968, 84).

There were also a few bards in the later days whose repertoire seems to have been entirely personal. Consigned by the stern editor (A. R. Niemi) to a separate category entitled "Confused Formations" (*Sekavia muodostuksia*) is a series of lays which Inha heard in 1894 from Sohvonja Simanainen. In them the old heroes Väinämöinen, Ilmarinen, and Lemminkäinen are put through some rollicking adventures. The plots are apparently in part untraditional and the meter is a bit ragged at times, but they are still fine stories. The singer Elessei Valjokainen gave the scholars similar trouble.

Niemi (VII, 1, 6) dismissed his songs as "mere inventions (*sepustuksia*) put together from the *Kalevala*, from folk tales, and from ideas that have just popped into his head." We shall never know how many such independent-minded bards went unrecorded because of the collectors' bias for the "old" songs.

An adherent of the theory of oral composition as usually formulated would probably consider this latter type of singer as more representative of "true" oral poetry. If composition-in-performance is made the criterion, then the Perttunens and Malinens must be counted as second-rate, degenerate singers. Finnish folklorists, on the contrary, valued these singers most highly as carriers of the most archaic tradition, and considered the handful of improvising singers degenerate, since they did not remember the old songs. Both views, I think, fail to take note of the fact that the value of fixed renditions depends on the function of the text.

It is evident that the differences in stability between the Finnish and Yugoslav oral epic poetry spring from their different roles in their respective cultures. Where the Yugoslav poetry functions largely as storytelling and entertainment, the Finnish poetry has strong elements of *myth* and ritual. The epic material is symbiotic with medical spells (e.g., for stopping the flow of blood), etiological verses ("origin-words"), and rituals for promoting the growth of crops. The Sampo-cycle contains a cosmogony, according to which the world originated from an egg laid by a goose on Väinämöinen's knee as he is lying helpless in the sea. Iivana Malinen told Krohn in 1881: "At the spring and fall sowing, first the sowing-words were sung, and then the song of the forging and taking of the Sampo, and of the chase given by the mistress of Pohjola" (SKVR I, 1, 158). It might be expected that changes in content are avoided in a poem which tells you how the world originated and which in addition makes the corn grow.

From the viewpoint of function (as opposed to form), narrative can be classified as follows:

	realis	irrealis
fact	history	myth
fiction	story	romance

The relevant distinction between fact and fiction here is roughly that between things which are primarily told as *knowledge* and things which are primarily told for *entertainment*. Whether they are actually true or false, and whether they are believed or not believed, are irrelevant and often unanswerable questions. The difference between the *realis* and *irrealis* mode of representation is whether the narration sticks to the familiar conditions of the real world or allows them to be suspended "with no questions asked." Putting the action in a distant time or place ("once upon a time") is a common, but by no means necessary device of *irrealis* narration (and it is, in any case, also compatible with the *realis* mode). Again, it is the mode of representation which is decisive.

It is important that the boundaries between the categories are sometimes ambiguous. Some types of narration systematically neutralize the fact/fiction distinction. On the *irrealis* side, the legend is a genre that straddles myth and romance; on the *realis* side, the anecdote similarly straddles history and story. In either case, it is almost a *faux pas* to ask: did it really happen?

Structurally defined genre categories, such as ballad and epic, cross-classify with these functional ones. In particular, epic poetry can serve all four functions. My conjecture is this: the dividing line between relatively fixed epic and relatively fluid epic will tend to coincide with the dividing line between factual and fictional narrative. Thus, myth and history (the latter including genealogy and possibly some types of panegyric) will be relatively stable, whereas stories and romances will be relatively fluid. The generally small role of improvisation in the Finnish epic poetry compared to the Yugoslav poetry could be explained in this way, as could the tendency of improvisation to appear as the significance of figures like Väinämöinen fades away.

There are also oral traditions in which poems are transmitted verbatim. The most famous example is, of course, the Vedic literature of India. It is remarkable in several respects: the extent of the compositions, the great length of time (well over two thousand years) during which it has been continuously transmitted in oral form, and the absolute fidelity with which the text has been preserved, down to the smallest phonetic details.

This astonishing feat was made possible by a hereditary priesthood which regarded the verbatim recitation and preservation

of the texts as its most important duty. In addition to memorization of the connected text, two other methods of fixing the text helped to secure its stability. The first was an elaborate system of analytic recitation, including the *padapāṭha*, a form of word-by-word recitation (showing the shape of each word *in pausa*) and a variety of permutations of the words (e.g., *krama*: AB, BA, BC, C, CB, etc., *ghana*: AB BA, ABC CBA ABC, BCCB, BCD DCB BCD, CDDC, etc.). Secondly, there were auxiliary treatises, themselves memorized, on phonetics and philology (*śikṣā*, cf. Varma 1961). They ranged from sophisticated investigations into the articulatory mechanisms of speech (far superior to the achievements of modern phonetics until the development of instrumental techniques) to more pedestrian aids to pronunciation, e.g., a list of all 641 words in the White Yajurveda containing the sound *b* (which was liable to be confused with *v* because of their phonetic merger in some of the vernaculars). There is evidence that the typical minor kinds of variation (e.g., in word order) have affected the text at a very early date, but over two thousand years ago standardized (oral) editions of the texts were prepared, which have come down in unchanged form to this day.

The importance of India for a theory of oral tradition is that it is a unique example of a rich and highly developed culture, embracing both literature and sciences, which is completely oral:

... In India, from the oldest times, up till the present day, the spoken word, and not writing, has been the basis of the whole of the literary and scientific activity. Even today, when the Indians have known the art of writing since centuries, when there are innumerable manuscripts, and when even a certain sanctity and reverence is accorded to these manuscripts, when the most important texts are accessible also in India in cheap printed editions, even today, the whole of the literary and scientific intercourse in India is based upon the spoken word. Not out of manuscripts or books does one learn the texts, but from the mouth of the teacher, today as thousands of years ago. The written text can at most be used as an aid to learning, as a support to the memory, but no authority is attributed to it. Authority is possessed, only by the spoken word of the teacher. If today all the manuscripts and prints were to be lost, that would by no means cause the disappearance of Indian literature from the face of the earth,

for a great portion of it could be recalled out of the memory of the scholars and reciters. The works of the poets, too, were in India never intended for readers, but always for hearers. Even modern poets do not desire to be read, but their wish is that their poetry may become "an adornment for the throats of the experts." (Winternitz 1927, 33-4)

This was so in spite of the fact that writing has clearly been known in India for over two thousand years. Its primary and original use, as is generally the case (cf. Mycenaean), was for accounting and administration. The secondary use of writing, that of recording literature, arose late and never assumed the importance in India that it got very early in Europe and the Far East. When a text survived "only in (written) books" (*granthamātre*) it was as good as dead. Among Vedic priests, writing was even regarded as an unclean activity which required subsequent ritual purification. In this culture, then, we have the exact opposite of the expected situation: oral tradition maintains a text in extremely fixed form, whereas a purely written text is evanescent, and if it survives at all, will be subject to thorough changes in form.

Once again, we see that contrary to Parry and Lord it is not the *technique* (writing versus speech) that determines the fixity of a text, but rather the *function* which that text has in the society. The Vedic texts, though oral, were maintained unchanged with a solicitude comparable only to that which was lavished on an object that played a somewhat corresponding role in our culture: the platinum-iridium bar resting at a constant temperature in its underground vault in Paris which used to define the standard length of one meter.

Lord (1960, p. 5, with fn. 9) excluded the Vedic literature from oral poetry by fiat, in reserving the term "oral poetry" for poetry composed during performance. This would make the most important thesis of Lord's book true by definition. It leaves us without a category for not only cases like the Vedic literature, but also such short compositions as ballads and lyric songs, where composition-in-performance is clearly not an important factor (cf. the exchange between J. H. Jones and A. B. Friedman in *Journal of American Folklore* 1961).

Consider the process by which large fixed oral poems such as Vedas come about. At the origin, we may be sure, lies a tradition

of oral composition of the classical type. That it must have been oral follows from the fact that their composition must be dated to before 500 B.C., long before writing in India was used for literary purposes at all, and from everything we know about the antipathy for writing characteristic of the Brahmin priests. In addition, its formulaic character is obvious: "Set phrases, groups of two or three words—what Bergaigne used to call formulas—are, as every Vedist knows, the commonplace of Vedic technique" (Bloomfield 1906, p. xiv). The evidence for bardic families is met at every step in the Vedic texts themselves.

This means that we have an example of a fluid oral tradition "freezing" into an absolutely rigid shape. How does this happen? We cannot suppose that a particular recitation happened to be memorized one day. This is excluded by the length of the text and by the internal evidence of multiple composition. We must rather picture a gradual jelling of an initially loosely connected body of poetry, which was gradually added to and reorganized, at first quite freely, and then with diminishing scope, the last stage in the Rig Veda being the largely phonetic normalizations introduced by Sākalya's edition, prepared sometime before 500 B.C.

The intermediate stage of development which we must assume to have existed, a collective hammering out of a definitive version of the text, has naturally been lost. But the text itself is not lacking in internal evidence for such a process. The Valākhilya hymns, products of the latest period of composition, include parallel versions (e.g., 49 and 50, 51 and 52) of which one looks like a modest reworking of the other.

It seems to me that an account of oral tradition which has something to say about fixed compositions and their formation is preferable to one which defines them out of its domain. If, as I have argued, the differences between oral and written tradition turn out not to be so fundamental as Parry thought, it is natural to look for corresponding phenomena in written literature. And here in fact a simple and illuminating parallel can be drawn. The distinction in oral literature between fixed compositions ("set pieces") and fluid compositions parallels the distinction in written literature between "classics" read by everyone and the more or less ephemeral works of "current" literature. The freezing and memorization of the Rig Veda is the oral counterpart of the editing and reprinting of classical works in written literature. The fixed

form of the Vedas is no more and no less a result of "degeneration" of oral tradition than the *Riverside Shakespeare* is of written tradition. As long as the Vedas are treasured in India they will continue to be memorized, and mutatis mutandis, the same is true for the reprinting of Shakespeare in our culture.

It is not the development of fixed oral texts or written classics which is a mark of decaying creativity, but the failure of new works to be produced. Of course, any healthy society continues to create the literature it needs. In particular, the subsequent oral tradition of India produced a flourishing epic literature, which itself crystallized into the *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata*, and this was in turn followed by a rich tradition of prose narrative. To view the fixation of the Vedic literature as a sign of declining creativity would be simply a prejudice.

Let me close by returning to Homer. I should like to propose that the collective elaboration of a fixed text out of a tradition of oral poetry deserves consideration as a way in which the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* might have been composed. On this account, the creative *aoidoi* were not in some mysterious way replaced by rhapsodes who recited a fixed text, but simply gradually turned into them as the text assumed its final shape over many generations. This gradual development would be consistent with the linguistic character of the text as well as with indications that a bardic guild of *Homeridae* who recited the epics existed in early times. More important, it would reconcile an apparent contradiction between the present version of the theory of oral composition and the actual character of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

"An oral poet spins out a tale" (Lord 1960, 148). He tells stories as they come to his mind, and there is no "preconceived idea of structural unity which the singer is self-consciously and laboriously working out" (*ibid.*). Beye (1966, 111-112) puts it even more sharply: "Perhaps, actually, various episodes in the *Iliad* are random happenings and do not depend upon each other, while the intellectual mind animated by an instinct for order, insisting upon cause and effect moves the critic to seek patterns and connections in even the smallest places." And it follows that "seeking significance . . . in a repeated line or two lines is futile" (*ibid.*, p. 98).

But then what are we to make of the intricate verbal correspondences which scholars like Reinhardt (1961) and Lohmann

(1970) have uncovered? Some of them are damaging to the standard theory of oral composition. Let us take a specific example. The *Iliad* begins and ends with an old man (Chryses, Priam) entering the enemy camp in order to ransom his child (Chryseis, Hektor) from the enemy leader. The ensuing scene in Book 1 touches off the conflict of the *Iliad*, and its counterpart in Book 24 forms the final resolution of that conflict. Now the theory of oral composition-in-performance can accommodate *short-range verbal* parallelism, and might, reasonably, by allowing the singer some time to plan the structure of the epic he will recite, also accommodate *long-range structural* parallelism. But *long-range verbal* parallelism would imply that the singer remembers his improvised wording over long stretches of the poem, which is surely impossible. But it is just such long-range verbal parallelism which Reinhardt (63-68) and Lohmann (169-173) have demonstrated in this passage, viz. "bearing countless gifts" (1.13, 24.502), "let me not . . . , old man" (1.26, 24.568), "so he spoke, and the old man was afraid and obeyed him" (1.33, 24.571). Unless these are accidental correspondences, which I cannot convince myself of in this and many of Reinhardt's and Lohmann's other examples, we shall have to assume a different manner of composition. One way (perhaps not the only way) of reconciling such facts, as well as others, such as the sheer length of the epics, with the overwhelming indications of oral composition would be to assume an organic working out and gradual fixation of the text of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in the course of several generations of continuous recitation by a family or guild of singers. Homer, then, would be the last of the singers to make a major contribution to the definitive form of the epics.

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Response

Calvert Watkins

Prof. Kiparsky has given us in fact two papers to discuss, each of which is characteristically thought-provoking and original. The first applies the technique of grammatical analysis to the verbal form of an oral literary text, while the second directs the technique of structural typology to the classification and definition of a set of literary genres within oral literature, and indeed perhaps beyond. Let me say at the outset that his work is a most eloquent reaffirmation of the validity and the productivity of the linguistic approach.

I begin with Kiparsky's second part. In the first place, for the detailed description and analysis of the nineteenth-century Finnish singers and their productions, I can only say that we are all in Kiparsky's debt; they provide a welcome control on the tendency to generalize the theory of universals based on inadequate or disproportionate sampling of data, which is something that also takes place in linguistics. Kiparsky's fundamental point is that relative fixity of composition depends on the function of the text, and that relatively high fixity as in Finnish can be correlated with the function of myth and ritual by opposition to the greater flexibility and associated creativity and improvisation found in story and epic. The great and immediate value of this hypothesis is that it permits the inclusion of Vedic literature in the class of oral poetry from which it had previously been excluded. The point is, of course, controversial. But the formulaic character of the composition of the Vedic hymns is apparent in virtually every *mantra*, and it's important to point out what Kiparsky presumably felt was perfectly obvious, that the function of the Vedic hymns, with their individual absolute fixity, is precisely in the domain of myth and ritual.

In this connection falls squarely the final speculation of Kiparsky's on the sociology, or social context, of the composition of oral poetry in India and Greece. There can be no doubt, as noted long ago by Vendryes, that the presence of a traditional priestly class is a decisive factor in the preservation of fixed compositions. In the Indo-European world, we find these in three traditions: Indic with the Brahmans, Italic with the Roman pontifical

college and the several brotherhoods of Rome and Umbria, and Celtic with the Druids. The class of poets themselves—the *kavis* of India, the *aoidoi* of Greece, the *filid* of Ireland—are not the same as the priestly class, but in each tradition they share comparable positions in the global structure of society. To use Dumézil's term, they belong to the "first function." It cannot be accidental that these three cultures with a priestly tradition share also the veneration and preservation by rote of fixed compositions, and, in the case of both Indic and Celtic, an antipathy to writing. One can go further. It is well known, perhaps not as well as it ought to be, that we can observe the common inheritance, from pre-literate Indo-European times, of verbal formulas in Indic, Iranian, Hittite, Greek, Italic, Germanic and Celtic. Any theory of oral literature may legitimately be required to give a principled account for this extraordinary fact of conservation. And for these reasons I welcome Kiparsky's principled inclusion of Vedic poetry within the universal discourse of this conference, and solicit further discussion.

Kiparsky's first section, to which I now pass, addresses the relation of oral poetry to ordinary language with a view toward an ultimate definition of the formula. His point of departure is the restrictiveness of formulas in oral poetry, with clear analogues to bound expressions in natural language, which he defined for us so clearly a few moments ago: the opposition between fixed phrases and flexible phrases. Some haziness necessarily does exist in this area, as he noted; for example 'bite the dust,' which he lists as an idiom, is clearly metaphoric by his criteria, since it is both borrowed, as in French, and independently created, as in both Hittite and Homeric Greek. Kiparsky suggests that formulas are special bound phrases, and follows Hainsworth in distinguishing fixed formulas and flexible formulas (the latter are those which can be inflected, separated, split, transposed, and so forth). His distinction of fixed and flexible formulas clearly mirrors that which he establishes for ordinary language, but to what degree it is valid for poetic language is still, in my mind, uncertain. Most of the so-called fixed formulas which he cites don't seem to me to share the properties that Kiparsky assigns to the fixed phrase, especially the idiom, in ordinary language. Fundamentally, they are not syntactically anomalous, and for the most part they do not show non-compositional semantics; they simply have arbitrarily limited distribution—a feature that they share with flexible formulas. Far

more comparable to the fixed phrase and idiom of ordinary language is the *kenning* of Germanic poetry with its analogues in Celtic and Vedic.

Kiparsky's definition, that formulas are like bound phraseology, explicitly refers the formula to the abstract system of the poetic language, to which epic is related like Saussurean *parole* to *langue*. This is a suggestion which has been made before, and one which still leaves unanswered the question of the specific character of the formula or of oral literature. Now, Kiparsky opposes his notion of a grammatical characterization of the formula to Parry's famous definition as 'a group of words regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea.' The important difference is that Kiparsky's proposal sharpens the first part of Parry's definition in a very productive way; it explicitly excludes the second, the metrical, part but it omits the third part entirely, which is the essential idea. This has to do with the notion of theme, and this would seem a fruitful point for discussion and one to which I will return. His grammatical categorization, in brief, is into an opposition of fixed formulas and flexible formulas. The fixed formulas are ready-made surface structures with no synchronic derivation, whereas his main concern, the flexible formulas, show four properties. Of these four properties, the first three belong together as grammatical/syntactic descriptions of derivation, as against the fourth, the metrical exclusion. The first of these properties, the single-node domination, seems to me a simple, elegant, and very efficient way of accounting, in the deep structure, for the constraints on what may go with what in a formula. His properties two and three, I would collapse into a single one. The third seems to me only a special case of the second dealing with particular transformations that can apply to the basic or deep structure formulas generated by the first.

The fourth negative property, the exclusion of metrical criteria, contradicts Parry directly. But it agrees with Professor Nagy's notion that formula creates meter and not vice-versa. And in principle I agree. But I would note that there will arise a connection between formula and meter after the fact, so to speak, which a theory of any given poetic language and its output must give account for. Kiparsky then passes to some non-grammatical properties of the formula, such as Professor Russo's example of the line-final adonic cadence consisting of a noun followed by a verb. The

particular example is surely related to sentence-final position of the verb in the deep structure of the particular language, and to the convention which Kiparsky doesn't mention, that sentence equals verse line, and this is something which deserves further exploration in light of a grammar of formulas. Location in reference to boundaries in and of the verse line is a totally separate question from location in reference to strong and weak position in metrical lines, on which Kiparsky has some interesting remarks. But the former seems clearly to me, as against Kiparsky, to be part of grammar.

Now, finally, Kiparsky raises the clearly important point of echoes—a phenomenon of the surface phonological level. To what extent this is a mark of or confined to the oral style might well be discussed; the phenomenon is at any rate extremely wide-spread, and perhaps more so than the system would allow. He concludes with some extremely interesting results from experimental psychology on verbal memory and rates of retention, where in ascending order of duration of memory we have first the echoic, second the surface structure, and third the deep structure, which may be equated respectively with sound, with wording, and with theme. This brings us to the notion I have alluded to before, the central notion of theme, of meaning, and of what Parry called the essential idea. If I understand Kiparsky correctly, he would have a corresponding three-poled hierarchy consisting of the echoic phrase, the fixed formula, and the flexible formula, where the fixed formula is a ready-made surface structure and the flexible formula is generated from the deep structure in the grammatical sense. But after all, both fixed and flexible formulas are manifested in the surface structure, in the wording, and, furthermore, diachronically, a ready-made surface structure must have been generated sometime. I would therefore propose that the formula itself, both fixed and flexible (if that is a significant distinction), be assigned to the second level of the model, and that the third level be regarded not as the deep structure or semantic form of the second level, but rather that the third level be the semantic form or deep structure of the theme itself. The formula then, I would suggest, is the verbal and grammatical device in oral literature for encoding and transmitting a given theme or interaction of theme, with the repetition or potential repetition assuring the long-term preservation of the surface structure, the wording. Meter itself may be assigned in large part to the echoic function, particularly in the Indo-European tradition

and perhaps the Finnic. It's significant that in oral traditions lacking fixed metrical form, the same echoic function is assured by institutionalized verbal responsions such as grammatical parallelism, as in Semitic or in Vogul and Ostyak.

Discussion

Cook:

Kiparsky's third level and Watkins' thematic level is precisely the area where one wants ultimate definitions—the relationships between linguistic forms beyond those of the ordinary language and social meanings. And without offering here my preliminary revision of the distinction between oral and written, I will simply say that we fall always into the trap, while providing insight, of anachronism, in the highly interesting two-fold scheme of *realis/irrealis*, *fact/fiction*. This is interestingly enough, however, only a version of the diagram. Indeed the terms are very comparable to the ones to be found in the *Poetics* of Julius Caesar Scaliger, in the sixteenth century. May I propose a case, for example. It is anachronistic because the *Iliad* cannot meaningfully be seen as either *realis* or *irrealis*, nor can it meaningfully be seen as history as opposed to storytelling. The use of the word *historia* in Greek is a kind of discovering of a particular attitude which I think enters the Greek language at precisely the point where Havelock would locate the beginnings of a transition from oral to written. Therefore, it wouldn't work either way. Obviously, in some sense, myth, as we would use the term, is functional inside the *Iliad* and, also, history is functional in our terms inside the *Iliad*. I'm not saying that this typology is not a useful one. I find it very helpful and obviously more modern than Scaliger, but it shares with him a kind of unanthropological anachronism. We are projecting our own culture backwards in a typology that I find less useful than, say, the typology of Jolles' *Einfache Formen*, where he

defines types not by opposing them to one another but precisely by thematic congeries. So that, for example, a myth is an answer to which we have no question and a riddle is a question to which we have no answer. He describes this at somewhat greater length, but it's a typology which, in being thematic and undoubtedly oversimplistic, is synchronic in the sense that it's independent of the anthropological phenomena which I would suggest your Renaissance and post-Renaissance categories really are not.

Kiparsky: I'm really very delighted with some of the observations by Professor Watkins on the parallel phenomena in Celtic and so on. As you have suggested, it is reasonable to assume there's an Indo-European tradition involved. You made some very telling criticisms. You're right in pointing out that idiomatic formulas and syntactically deviant formulas are rare. In fact, syntactically deviant ones I was unable to find, although I did find some idiomatic ones. Why that's so I don't know. I thought it might have something to do with the arguments I believe Hoekstra makes, that the formation of the *Kunstsprache*, the formation of the whole system of formulas, is in large part an ongoing process, and rather recent. Much of it post-dates the various late sound-changes that went on in Greek, such as the loss of the digamma. It may be that the appearance of archaism in many cases is deceptive, and that's why there has simply been no time for the formation of idiomatic meanings or the formation of deviant formulas, though they have been weeded out. I don't know exactly how to make that any more satisfactory. You also touched a sore spot. I don't know if I'm really convinced by your questioning the sharpness or even the necessity of the distinction between fixed and flexible formulas. I cannot prove that there are exactly two categories. It might be that there is a continuum, for example: fixed formulas, flexible formulas, and all kinds of gradations of flexibility in between. And I don't see any way of settling the matter. It's a statistical problem with a sort of scattered flexibility which we find in the data. It's the

kind of problem that would be expected on the assumption that there is a type of formula which is absolutely fixed and one that is flexible. Is the degree of flexibility randomly variable, or is it systematically variable? It is very hard for me to see how that could be decided even for a dead tradition such as Homer. That's why I want to second the many speakers who have already noted how important it is to look at live material to settle this question. I don't know that there have been any studies that have been done on this in Serbo-Croatian or anywhere else. It would be very nice to know whether these distinctions between fixed and flexible formulas, for example, turn up there in an absolute or in a sliding way. I just have to leave that question open.

Your point concerning the categories I have—I certainly don't want to claim to have invented them—especially the fact/fiction distinction; obviously no one has the patent on that one. And the *realis/irrealis* one, too, is pretty traditional. A fairly standard one in anthropology and folklore has three categories combining what I have suggested here—Romance, Folktale, Fairytale, and Story—into a single category. I think that distinction, however, is important to make, and it parallels a distinction between myth and chronicle in essential ways. I don't quite understand the inadequacy you referred to. I realize that it's hard to tell for the *Iliad*, for example, whether it was regarded as fact or as storytelling. It is hard to tell, nearly three thousand years after. There's no doubt that there are very many other relevant categories. I don't mean to say that these four are precisely the important ones for any particular purpose. I do want to say that they are fundamental in the sense that they are something that language has in common with forms of narrative, with any kind of *mimesis* in part, and they are the ones that lead in interesting directions from this point of view. The categories themselves, although shifting and so forth, are extremely fundamental ones.

Opland: As far as the propagation of the possible means of