Meter and Performance

Paul Kiparsky

LSA Metrics Symposium
Jan. 8, 2010
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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Generative metrics goes further

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Narrow metrics

Metrical patterns → Correspondence rules/constraints → Syllabification, stress, weight, phrasing...

Metrical analysis: scansions, complexity
Broad metrics

Metrical patterns

Correspondence rules/constraints

Syllabification, stress, weight, phrasing...

Metrical analysis: scansions, complexity

Performance conventions (recitation, textsetting)

Acceptable deliveries
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

\[
(1 \ 2) \quad (3 \ 4) \quad (5 \ 6) \quad (7 \ 8)
\]

\[
(\bar{\bar{\circ}} \ \_ ) \quad (\bar{\bar{\circ}} \ \_ ) \quad (\bar{\bar{\circ}} \ \_ ) \quad (\bar{\circ} \ \_ )
\]

Weight is neutralized in final and initial syllables:

- Final $C\bar{V}$ counts as heavy as required by the meter ($\bar{V} = \_ $).
- Initial $\bar{C}V$ counts as light when required by the meter ($\bar{C}\bar{V}C\bar{V} = \bar{\bar{\circ}}$).
Hausa meter (Schuh 1995)

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\((\ \ \ \ \ \) \(\ \ \ \ \ \) \(\ \ \ \ \ \) \(\ \ \ \ \ \))

Weight is neutralized in final and initial syllables:

- Final C\(\bar{V}\) counts as heavy as required by the meter (\(\bar{V} = _{-}\)).
- Initial C\(\bar{V}\) counts as light when required by the meter (C\(\bar{VC}\bar{V} = \_\bar{\_}\)).
Hausa meter (Schuh 1995)

Eight positions, grouped into four (W S) feet

(1 2) (3 4) (5 6) (7 8)
(˘ ) (˘ ) (˘ ) (˘ )

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- Final C˘V counts as heavy as required by the meter (˘ = _).
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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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*Hausa songs*
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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2. Hausa songs (Schuh 1995)
3. Shakespeare’s dramatic meter
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Shakespeare’s dramas have a highly complex meter, the meter of his lyrics is much simpler because stage and song require different styles of delivery. (Hanson 2006)
Meter serves performance norms

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Shakespeare’s dramas have a highly complex meter, the meter of his lyrics is much simpler because stage and song require different styles of delivery. (Hanson 2006)
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

5. 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 / YOU had / not some/time in / your life
Erred in / THIS point / which now / YOU censure HIM, (M for M)
In most European dramatic verse traditions, meter dictates performance and interpretation.

English blank verse presents more interpretive options.
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English blank verse presents more interpretive options.
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

- iambic, trochaic, dolnik, syllabic

- *Fern Hill, Poem in October, Over Sir John’s Hill* are both stress-counting and syllable-counting
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- *Fern Hill, Poem in October, Over Sir John’s Hill* are both stress-counting *and* syllable-counting
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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Poem in October

- 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.
  - The *graphically marked lineation* determines syllable count and rhyme.
  - The *recited lineation* determines stress count and alliteration.
- Conclusion: recitation cannot be eliminated from metrical theory.
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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