

Ling 103: Language Structure and Verbal Art Formulaic Language in Homer and in Beowulf

What is meant by **formula**:

A phrase that recurs:

- (1) in the same meaning
- (2) in the same metrical position
- (3) contains 'empty' material -- material that is superfluous and could be omitted without sentences being ill-formed, for example

i. epithets

- stereotyped descriptions of a person or object: *rosy-fingered dawn*
- patronymics: *Achilles, son of Peleus*
- alternative names, 'cult titles' — *Phoebus Apollo, Pallas Athene*

ii. adverbial phrases that merely repeat or slightly modify the predicate

iii. conjunctions which might be omitted

'The most stable formulas will be those for the most common ideas of the poetry'

- (a) the names of actors
- (b) the main actions which take place
 - i. introducing a character into the scene
 - ii. departure of a character
 - iii. introducing a speech
 - iv. introducing a responseand many others
- (c) times
 - i. dawn, dusk
- (d) places

Homeric verse structure

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are composed in *dactylic hexameter*. Lines consist of *six* dactyls of the form

— ∪ ∪

where — is a *heavy* syllable and ∪ is a *light* syllable. A sequence of two light syllables ∪ ∪ can be freely replaced by a single long —. This replacement always occurs in the last foot of the line; moreover, a line-final light syllable can ‘count’ as heavy.

Thus a line will have a pattern

— ∪ ∪ / — ∪ ∪ / — ∪ ∪ / — ∪ ∪ / — ∪ ∪ / — ∪

Formulas in Homer

From a *functional perspective*, formulas for introducing a response need to include:

- a. the person doing the answering
- b. optionally: some additional information about the person doing the answering
- c. the verb *answered* or something similar
- d. optionally: a pronoun indicating who is being answered
- e. optionally: some connecting conjunction like *but, and*
- e. optionally: a time adverb such as *then, after*
- f. optionally: a manner adverb showing the state of mind of the speaker (*angry, happy, irritated*)

In Homer the line is frequently divided so that the second part has ‘room’ for the person doing the answering and, typically, some epithet for that person. The first half of the line is occupied by various predicates which express some combination of (c-f):

1. — — / — ∪ ∪ / — ∪
 tòn d'ēmeíbet' épeita
 tèn
him/her but answered then
2. — — / — ∪ ∪ / — ∪
 tòn d'aûte proséeipe
 tèn
him/her but again addressed
- ∪ / — ∪∪ / — ∪∪ / — ∪
- name of the person answering
 accompanied by an *epithet***

1: 8x

1: 7x, 2: 14x

1: 5x

1: 4x, 2: 19x

1: 4x

1: 3x, 2: 8x

1: 1x, 2: 7x

1: 3x, 2: 5x

Ge/rénios / hippóta / Néstōr
 Nestor, *horseman from Gerenia*

the/à Glau/kôpis A/thénē
grey-eyed goddess Athena

gé/rōn Pría/mos theo/eidés
god-like old-man Priam

pe/ríphrōn / Pēneló/peia
foresighted Penelope

bo/ôpis / pótnia Hérē
ox-eyed Lady Hera

po/lútlās / díos O/dusseús
long-suffering god-like Odysseus

phí/lē trophòs /Eurú/kleia
dear nurse Eurykleia

á/naks an/drōn Aga/mémnōn
lord of men Agamemnon

Predicate slot

Once the line is divided like this with appropriate epithets assigned to the characters so that the subject of the sentence will fit into the second half, the first half can then be varied according to the needs of the story: it can extend beyond mere answering:

tèn mèn idòn géthēse
her seeing was-glad

géthēsén t' ár' épeita
was-glad and then

hōs ho mèn éntha katheûde
thus he there slept

tois ára múthōn árkhe
to-them speech began

ê toi ho pîne kai êsthe
Indeed he drank and ate

autàr epeì tó g' ákouse
but when that heard

autàr ho déksato kherì
but he took in-his-hand

tòn d' hōs oûn enóēse
him but thus was-aware-of

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| <p>— tòn him — tèn her — toùs them</p> | <p>Ɀ / — Ɀ / — d'apameibómenos but answering</p> <p>Ɀ / — Ɀ / — d' epimeidésās but smiling at</p> <p>Ɀ / — Ɀ / — dè még' okhthésās but very annoyed at</p> <p>Ɀ / — Ɀ / — d' ár' hupódra idòn but looking at suspiciously</p> | <p>ⱿⱿ / — proséphē addressed</p> | <p>Ɀ / — Ɀ / — Ɀ name of person answering plus a shorter <i>epithet</i> or just the <i>epithet</i> alone</p> <p>nephe/légére/ta Zdeus <i>cloud-gatherer Zeus</i></p> <p>pódas / òkùs A/khilleús <i>swift-footed Achilles</i></p> <p>ksan/thòs Mené/lāos <i>blond Menelaus</i></p> <p>kreí/ōn Aga/memnon <i>mighty Agamemnon</i></p> <p>Pría/mos theo/eidés <i>god-like Priam</i></p> <p>kreí/ōn Eon/síkhthōn <i>mighty Earth-shaker</i></p> <p>klutòs /Ennosí/gaios <i>famous Earth-shaker</i></p> |
|---|---|---|---|

The andswarode-System

Creed, Robert. 1957. 'The *andswarode*-system in Old English poetry'

In addition to formulas for introducing speeches (the *maðelode*-system), Creed shows that there was an additional system for introducing replies to speeches: the *andswarode*-system ('answered'). Every known instance of *andswarode* in Old English poetry fits into this system in some way.

The basic system:

| | | |
|----------------------|---|----------------------|
| him/hire | X | á <u>nd</u> -swàrode |
| <i>to-him/to-her</i> | | <i>answered</i> |

X consists of the subject of 'answered', sometimes preceded by one or two adverbs.

Since *andswarode* is vowel-initial it functions as the alliterative 'key'. This means that the first stressed word in the subject of 'answered' has to also be vowel-initial.

| | | | |
|-------|--------------------------|----------------------|------|
| B 258 | him se <u>íeldèsta</u> | á <u>nd</u> -swàrode | C/D1 |
| | <i>to-him the eldest</i> | <i>answered</i> | |

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| wérodes wísa, | wórd-hòrd on-lèac: |
| <i>war-band's leader</i> | <i>word-hoard unlocked:</i> |

'The eldest one, the war-band's leader, answered him then, unlocked his word-hoard'

| | | |
|-------|--|----------------------|
| B 340 | him þā <u>éllen-rōf</u> | á <u>nd</u> -swàrode |
| | <i>to-him then renowned-for-strength</i> | <i>answered</i> |

| | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| wlānc Wédera lèod | wórd æfter spráec |
| <i>brave Weders' prince</i> | <i>word then spoke</i> |

héard under hélme:
bold under helmet:

'The one renowned for strength, the brave prince of the Weders, answered him then, spoke his word, bold under his helmet'

In both cases in *Bēowulf* the subject is introduced by a characteristic description or *kenning* rather than a proper

name. In the following line the speaker is further specified before the quotation actually begins.

There are only two instances of this formula in *Bēowulf* but Creed shows that the formula is also found in the Old English poetic renderings of the books of *Genesis*, *Daniel* and the poem *Andreas*.

| | | |
|---------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| Gen 827 | hire þā <u>Ǽ</u> dam | <u>á</u> nd-swàrode |
| | <i>to-her then Adam</i> | <i>answered</i> |
| Gen 872, 2187 | him þā <u>ǣ</u> dre Gód | <u>á</u> nd-swàrode |
| | <i>to-him then quickly God</i> | <i>answered</i> |
| Gen 882 | him þā <u>Ǽ</u> dam eft | <u>á</u> nd-swàrode |
| | <i>to-him then Adam back</i> | <i>answered</i> |
| Gen 1022 | him þā <u>ǣ</u> dre Cáin | <u>á</u> nd-swàrode |
| | <i>to-him then quickly Cain</i> | <i>answered</i> |
| Gen 2136 | him þā <u>Ǽ</u> braham | <u>á</u> nd-swàrode |
| | <i>to-him then Abraham</i> | <i>answered</i> |
| Gen 2280 | him þā se <u>é</u> ngel | <u>á</u> nd-swàrode |
| | <i>to-him then the agnel</i> | <i>answered</i> |
| Gen 2513 | him þā <u>ǣ</u> dre Lóth | <u>á</u> nd-swàrode |
| | <i>to-him then quickly Lot</i> | <i>answered</i> |
| Dan 741 | him <u>ǣ</u> -cræftig | <u>á</u> nd-swàrode |
| | <i>to-him ever-powerful</i> | <i>answered</i> |

The **second pattern** in the *andswarode*-system

Put *him þā ...* ‘to-him then’ or its variants in a line before *andswarode*.

| | | |
|--|---|--------------------|
| | | <i>him þā X</i> |
| | X | <i>and-swarode</i> |

| | | |
|-----------|---------------|--------------------|
| or | <i>him þā</i> | X |
| | X | <i>and-swarode</i> |

Examples:

| | | |
|---------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Gen 895 | | <i>him þā fríó-liću mǣġ</i> |
| | | <i>to-him then free-born maid</i> |

| | |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| <u>í</u> des æwisc-mōd | <u>á</u> nd-swàrode |
| <i>woman ashamed</i> | <i>answered</i> |

‘Then his lawful wife, a woman ashamed, answered him’

| | | |
|----------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
| Gen 1004 | <i>him þā se cýst-lēasa</i> | cwéalmes wýrhta |
| | <i>to-him then the fruit-less</i> | <i>death worker</i> |

| | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| <u>ǣ</u> dre æfter þòn | <u>á</u> nd-swàrode |
| <i>quickly back now</i> | <i>answered</i> |

‘Then quickly the reprobate worker of death now answered him back’

The **third pattern** in the *andswarode*-system

Leave out either

- (a) the indirect object *him/hire* ‘to-him, to-her’, or
- (b) a kenning or name for the subject, substituting an vowel-initial adverb:

| | | |
|----------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Gen 2173 | Ǽbrahàm þā | á <u>nd</u> -swàrode |
| & 2691 | <i>Abraham then</i> | <i>answered</i> |
| Gen 2265 | hire þā Ǽdre | á <u>nd</u> -swàrode |
| | <i>to-her then quickly</i> | <i>answered</i> |
| Gen 2273 | hīo him Ǽdre | á <u>nd</u> -swàrode |
| | <i>she to-him quickly</i> | <i>answered</i> |
| Dan 127 | þā him ún-blīðe | á <u>nd</u> -swàrode |
| | <i>then to-him sadly</i> | <i>(they) answered</i> |
| Dan 134 | þā him ún-blīðe | á <u>nd</u> -swàrode |
| | <i>then to-him sadly</i> | <i>answered</i> |