

Ling 103

Dating Beowulf: Metrical and Syntactic Criteria

A. Formulas that stop fitting

Stage I: formula in use, formula scans properly in meter

Stage II: a sound change occurs that alters the metrics of the formula, so that it no longer scans properly

Stage III: Tradition validates use of formula EVEN though it does not scan properly. Apprentices continue to learn it by rote and use it their spontaneously produced verse

Stage IV: Apprentices abandon non-scanning formulas, or adjust them to suit contemporary pronunciation, but do so ONE-BY-ONE in a haphazard manner

Result: At any given time, text will show

- a. some 'old' non-scanning formulas that haven't yet been adjusted
- b. some 'adjusted' formulas, which do scan
- c. perhaps a mixture of adjusted and non-adjusted instances of the same formula.

'Carbon-dating' by the number of 'old' formulas still in use -- older texts or portions of texts should, on average, have more instances of 'old' (non-scanning) formulas

Beowulf:

Preservation of formulae rendered unmetrical by sound change.

1. ‘Anaptyctic’ vowel inserted $\bar{\sigma}$ C __ R #
(R = sonorant, # = end of word)

ātr > ātor	‘poison’	
cumbl > cumbol	‘banner’	
ealdr > ealdor	‘age, life’	
hleahtr > hleahtor , hlēoðor	‘hearing, sound’	
hlūtr > hlūtor	‘clear’	
hrōðr > hrōðor	‘joy’	
morðr > morðor	‘murder’	
sundr > sundor	‘apart’	
tācn > tācen	‘sign’	
tungl > tungol	‘star’	
wāpn > wāpen	‘weapon’	Old Norse <i>vápn</i>
wintr > winter	‘winter’	Old Norse <i>vintr</i>
wuldr > wuldor	‘glory’	
wundr > wundor	‘marvel’	

2. Loss of *h between vowels, contraction of the newly adjacent vowels into a single syllable. Oldest OE glossaries of 7th and 8th cent. still have *h written in some forms. Contraction must not have begun to take place before early 7th cent.

flēon ‘to flee’	< *fleuhan
fōn ‘to seize, to take’	< *fōhan
hēan (inflected form of hēah ‘high’)	< *hæuhan
nēan (inflected form of nēah ‘near’)	< *næhan
of-tēon ‘to withdraw, take away’	< *af-teuhan
sēon ‘to see’	< *sehan
slēan ‘to slay’	< *slēhan
þion ‘to thrive’	< *þīhan

Example half-lines that show anaptyxis or contraction

mán ġeþéon < mán ġeþíhan read as *before contraction*
 P x P x [A]

ġeþéon sceolde < ġeþíhan sceolde read as *after contraction*
 x P P x 'should thrive' [C] 910 b

nēan bīdan < nēahan bīdan read as *before contraction*
 'remain near' P x P x [A]

ðær wæs háleða hléahtor read *before anaptyxis*
 x x p-x x P (x) [B] 611 b
 'there was there the laughter of warriors'

wúndor-siona féla read *before anaptyxis*
 P (x) S x p-x [E] 995b
 'very wonderful scenes'

wīg ofer wāpen read *after anaptyxis*
 P x x P x [A] 685a
 'fight over weapons'

3. a. pre-anaptyctic lines b post-anaptyctic lines
 c. pre-contraction lines d. post-contraction lines

	a	b	c	d
Beowulf	22	5	15	9
Genesis A	11	9	27	4
Daniel	3	3	6	2
Andreas	4	22	2	9
Exodus	2	2	1	7
Cynewulf poems, 750-900	1	27	3	11
Alfred corpus, c. 900.	0	16	1	6

Summary so far of traditional and metrical considerations

Christianity: 675 +

Spelling: < 800-850

Meter: < 850

2. Syntax

1. OE **se** ‘the, that’.
 - Originally ‘that’ and *mostly used as such* in *Beowulf*.
 - Bare nouns (no article) often appear where later OE would have the article **se**, including cases where the adjective shows that the noun is definite.
2. Pronoun subject can be omitted (‘pro-drop’) in **Beowulf**.
 - This is not normal in later OE.
3. Verb-final word order unusually common.

Germanic syntax

In English sentences the normal word order is:

SUBJECT INFL (NEG) VERB-PHRASE

INFL = Inflection (the tense and subject agreement information)

NEG = Negation ‘not’

1. Mary *does* not [actually play the trumpet for Nicholas]
 - * Mary not actually plays the trumpet for Nicholas.
2. Mary *will* not [actually play the trumpet for Nicholas]
3. Mary *is* [actually playing the trumpet Nicholas]
 - The position of INFL is occupied by an auxiliary verb *do, will, is, are, may, might, can, should* etc. except in non-negative sentences with no modal verb:
4. Mary actually *played* [the trumpet for Nicholas]
 - * Mary *played* actually [the trumpet for Nicholas]
 - † Mary actually *plays* not [the trumpet for Nicholas]
 - Mary actually *plays* [the trumpet for Nicholas]
- Here it appears that INFL has moved rightward (across *actually*) to the main verb *play*. Whenever there is an auxiliary verb it moves to INFL and the main verb stays in place (*in situ*).

- The Modern English word order developed over time from Old English, which had two options: **INFL-medial** or **INFL-final** order.

INFL-medial: (conjunctions) PHRASE (pronouns) INFL VERB-PHRASE

INFL-final: (conjunctions) PHRASE (pronouns) VERB-PHRASE INFL

- In the INFL-final order INFL appeared *to the right of the verb-phrase*, as it still does in subordinate clauses in modern German and Dutch.

5. (Klaus glaubt dass) Maria eine Trompete *tragt*
Klaus thinks that Maria a trumpet *carries*

‘Klaus thinks that Maria *is* carrying a trumpet’

6. (Klaus glaubt dass) Maria eine Trompete getragen *hat*.
Klaus thinks that Maria a trumpet carried *has*

‘Klaus thinks that Maria *has* carried a trumpet.’

- In OE, the INFL-final ordering was always more common in subordinate clauses than in main clauses, but both orders were possible.

- In the *Laws of Ethelbert of Kent* (d. 616), almost all sentences are INFL-final.

7. INFL-Final (old ordering)

- a. swā þæt se scīnenda līg his locc *ūp-ātēah*
so that the shining flame his locks *up-drew*

- b. him þær se ġionga cyning þæs oferfæreldes forwiernan *mehte*
him there the young king the crossing prevent *could*

8. INFL-Medial (new ordering)

- a. swā þæt hȳ *āsettan* him ūpp on ænne sīþ
so that they *transported* them inland on one journey

- b. hī *tōflōwað* swīðe hræðe ūt
they *flow* very soon out

- By the time of mid-9th century entries in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the proportion of INFL-Medial sentences was much higher

9. Old INFL-Final orders

- a. ond hīe þēah micle fierd *ġegadoron*
and they even-so great army *gathered* (867)

‘And even so, they gathered a great army’

- b. ond hīe him friþ wiþ *nāmon* (866)
and they them peace with *made*

‘And they (the East Anglians) made peace with them’

10. New INFL-Medial orders

- a. ond [winter-setl] *nāmon* on Ēast-englum
and winter-quarters *they made* in East Anglia (866)

‘And they made winter quarters in East Anglia’

- b. ond [þȳ ilca ġēare] *cuōm* micel here on Angel-cynnes lond.
and the same year *came* large army into Englishmen land.

‘And in the same year a great army came to the land of the English people’ (866)

- c. [Hēr] *fōr* se here of Ēast-englum
Here *proceeded* the army from East Anglia

ofer Humber-mūðan tō Eoforwīc-ċeaster on Norþ-hymbre.
over Humber-mouth to York-town in North-humbria

‘In this year, the army proceeded from East Anglia over the mouth of the Humber to York in Northumbria.’ (867)