

Ling 103 Language Structure and Verbal Art

Generative metrics (Halle & Keyser 1972 et seq.)

Defines meter as an *abstract rule system* which the poet unconsciously follows in constructing verse. The rule system explicitly defines whether a line is **metrical** or **non-metrical** in a given meter.

'We scan particular lines by establishing a *correspondence* between the *syllables* of the line and the *abstract entities in the abstract pattern* ... Lines are judged metrical if such a correspondence can be established without violating the applicable correspondence rule.'

Traditional model:

Lines are composed of *feet*, defined as groups of syllables which have a specific sequence of stressed or unstressed syllables.

iamb	(∨ /)	∨ = unstressed
trochee	(/ ∨)	/ = stressed
dactyl	(/ ∨ ∨)	
anapest	(∨ ∨ /)	
pyrrhic	(∨ ∨)	
spondee	(/ /)	

'Perfect' iambic pentameter would have five iambs:

The li/on dy/ing thrus/teth forth / his paw [Shak. R2]

Shortcoming:

Not all iambic lines are 'perfect'. All important English poets vary the feet contained in the lines. Traditional model does not say *how much* or *what kind of variation* may occur.

O Wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being
Thou from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing

[Shelley]

Ode to / the West / Wind by / Percy / B. Shel/ley
Is a / foolish / poem / which kids / all hate,
Espec/ially / after / reading / Camus

[pseudo-Shelley]

Earliest generative model (Halle & Keyser 1972):

Principal idea: the phonetics (pronunciation) of the line is separated from the abstract pattern of the meter. A line is metrical provided that the stresses in the line can be associated with positions in a metrical *pattern* or *template* in a way that obeys a *correspondence rule*. The positions in the template are chosen from:

S = Strong Position

W = Weak Position

x = extrametrical position (occurs optionally at line end)

IAMBIC PATTERN

(W) S W S W S W S W S (x)

(z) means 'z is optional'

Every syllable of the line (but see *complications*, below) must be associated with a position in the template.

Abstract properties of the iambic line

One might ask why meter should be composed of sequences of these three types (S, W, x).

A simpler approach uses the **grid representation** for the metrical template.

A **grid** is simply an array of **marks** — we can use **x** as a simple mark.

The grid has lines, beginning from the bottom, which are numbered line 0, line 1, line 2 etc.

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line 1      x      x      x      x      x
line 0      x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x
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On line 0 there is one mark for every 'position' required by the meter.

Certain marks on line 0 have a mark above them on line 1.
These line 0 marks are said to **'project'** a mark on line 1.

Marks which project to line 1 are **more prominent** than ('stronger') than marks which do not.

S = a projecting line 0 mark; W = non-projecting line 0 mark

CORRESPONDENCE RULES

These vary from poet to poet. This is the principal source of variation in metrical 'style'. Moreover the precise correspondence rule for any given poet is not always clear. Two correspondence rules of interest are given below.

Both correspondence rules depend on the idea that syllables with certain special properties need to be matched with certain positions in the template. These special syllables are called *stress maxima*.

Correspondence Rule 1 (CR 1):

- a. Define a *stress maximum* as a stressed syllable between stressless syllables, provided that they are in the same *phrase*.
- b. Syllables which are stress maxima occur only in S position.

thou breath of
of autumn's
like ghosts from
enchanter

For convenience we can underline the syllables that qualify as stress maxima.

CR1 was proposed for Chaucer's verse by Halle & Keyser.

Problem with CR 1.

CR 1 works most of the time, and has the advantage of being conceptually elegant. However, it fails on certain (rare) lines in Shakespeare such as:

(there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio)

W S W S W S W S W S
than are dreamt of in your philosophy. (Hamlet)

Here *dreamt* is clearly a stress maximum, and it is in a weak position.

We can retreat from this problem by restricting stress maxima to certain *polysyllabic* words (words containing more than one syllable). These words have a much more constrained distribution than do *monosyllabic* words.

b. Optional extra syllable at phrase boundary.

An extra syllable — ‘extrametrical’, i.e. one which does not have to be matched to the template — may occur adjacent to a phrase-boundary. This means at the end of a phrase or the beginning of a phrase in the middle of a line there may be an extra syllable:

W S W S W S W S W W
That is the madman. | The lover, all as frantic
[Othello]

My ill suspicion. | This is your son-in-law
[Winter’s Tale]

4. Content words (‘lexical words’) vs. **Function words**

Content or lexical words include all words which are not ‘function’ words.

Content words usually include all *nouns, adjectives, adverbs* and *verbs* (except, auxiliary verbs such as *have, be (is, are, was, etc.), will, may, shall, could, can, would, might, should*).

Most poets treat *prepositions, articles, conjunctions* and other ‘little structural words’ as function words. This means that on CR 2 they cannot — even when polysyllabic — contain a stress maximum.

Examples:

befóre, áfter, amóng, betwéen

W S W S W S W S W S
For mány lives stand betwéen me and home
[HenVIp. 3]

