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Towards a linguistic interpretation of Kuhn's Laws: With special reference to Old English *Beowulf*

Part III

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Abstract

This paper critically evaluates Kuhn's two Laws from a linguistic rather than metrical perspective based on examination of Old English *Beowulf*. The Laws reflect the earlier word order preserved in Geramnic alliterative verse whereby unstressed light elements called by Kuhn 'satzparkeln', such as pronouns, short adverbs, and light finite verbs tend to cluster in clause-initial position.

Part I (Volume 95) discussed cliticization phenomena in early Germanic as background, examined Kuhn's definition of satzpartikel, and contained part of the discussions on Kuhn's First Law. Part II (Volume 96) began with the rest of the discussions on the First Law, examined the Second Law, and ended with part of the discussions on the distinction between clause and phrase particles. It argued that Kuhn's Laws are not to be treated as metrical conventions as are usually done, that the Second Law reflects archaism in an indirect way, and that there are ambivalence and ambiguity surrounding the distinction between two kinds of Kuhn's particles due to freedom in word order. Part III (this volume) continues with the rest of Section 6 on this distinction and also contains Section 7 on metrical analyses of clause-initial verses that may either be one-lift or two-lift verses. It will be shown that, while both of these two issues affect application of the Laws, their use as a device to reduce Kuhn's Law violations is questionable. Part III ends with Conclusions in Section 8 and a list of references.

Keywords: Kuhn's Laws, clitics, Germanic alliterative verse, Old English, *Beowulf*

6. Distinction of clause particles and phrase particles (continued)

While clause-late prepositional phrases with a pronoun are typically stressed, there are some unstressed examples given in (42) presumably because there are more stressable words in the same verse (Kuhn 1933: 13; Momma 1997: 66–67).

(42) Ārā́s þā se rī́ca, *ymb hine* rínc mánig,
rose then the mighty around him warrior many
þrýðlīc þégna hēap; 399–400a
strong of-thanes company
'Then the mighty one rose, many a warrior about him, a company of strong thanes.'

Nū is se rǽd geláng
now is the advice dependent-on
éft *æt þē* ā́num. 1376b–1377a
again at you alone
'Now once again is the cure in you alone.'

þæt ðū ne ālǽte *be ðē* lífigéndum 2665
that you not would-let during you living
'that you would not let…while you lived'

In parallel with clause-late stressed prepositional phrases as in (39), one would expect stress on the prepositional phrases in (42). The unstressed pronouns in 1377a and 2665b in (42) are followed by a stressed appositive adjective, in which case the prepositional phrase as a whole is stressed, as noted by Kuhn (1933: 13). The contrast between unstressed in clause-early position and stressed in clause-late position applies to the prepositional phrase together with the appositive adjective as a whole. However, clause-late unstressed grammatical elements as in 399b are uncommon. As a possible interpretation, the pronoun in the unstressed prepositional phrase in 399b refers to the preceding subject and thus cannot occur earlier than it does. This example is comparable with the First Law violation of the object pronoun in (13) above.

Lastly, like prepositional phrases with a pronominal object, idioms that consist of short adverbs such as *ful oft* 'very often', *þā gēn* 'further, still', and *þā gȳt* 'further, besides' show the same pattern of stress: unstressed in clause-initial position as in (43a), but stressed in non-initial position as in (43b).

(43) a. *Ful oft* gebēotédon bēore drúncne 480
full often vowed beer having-drunk
'Full often those made bold with beer have vowed'

Đā gȳt æghwýlcum éorla dríhten
then yet each of-men lord
… …
on þære médubénce mā́þðum geséalde, 1050, 1052
on the mead-bench treasures gave
'Then further the lord gave treasure to each of the men on the mead-bench'

Þā gēn sýlf cýning
then still self king
gewéold his gewítte, 2702b–2703a
controlled his senses
'The king himself then still controlled his senses,'

b. ne wæs hit lénge *þā gḗn* 83b
not was it longer then yet
'the time was not yet at hand'

– wǽron bḗgen *þā gī́t*
were both then yet
on geógoðféore – 536b–537a
in youth
'we were both in our first youth'

swā him *ful óft* gelámp 1252b
as them full often happened
'just as had often befallen them'

Short adverbs that form idioms are bound to the idiom phrases and thus are phrase particles by definition (Kuhn 1933: 12–13). The clause-initial drops in (43a) thus consist only of phrase

particles in violation of the Second Law. Again these violations are excluded by Kuhn (1933: 43) as phrase particles that belong to clause particles. On the other hand, unstressed adverbs in the second or later drop of the clause in 83b and 536b do not incur violation of the First Law because they are phrase particles, which are exempted from the First Law. However, in parallel with prepositional phrases with a pronoun, idioms consisting of short adverbs are comparable to clause particles in function/meaning and phrasal stress.

As a summary of this section, the stress and distribution of phrases that consist of grammatical words are: unstressed if clause-initial, but stressed if not initial in parallel with clause particles. It appears immaterial whether the two words in succession form a constituent or not, whether the words are clause or phrase particles, or whether the stress and order as is given violate either of the Laws.

7. Stress on clause-initial alliterating verbs and the analysis of A3 verses

As has been shown, Kuhn's Laws presuppose Sieversian scansion. However, since metrical stress is not marked in the texts and must be interpreted based on alliteration, different metrical analyses may increase or decrease the number of violations.

Most problematical in relation to Kuhn's Laws is the stress on clause-initial or, less often, clause-early verbs that might incur Kuhn's Law violation. I begin with the interpretation of clause-initial verses that end with an alliterating word and, contrary to the otherwise productive pattern of alliteration, apparently lack an alliterating first lift. Such A3 verses are typically clause-initial and apparently reflect clause-initial sentence prosody. In the earlier analyses such as Sievers (1885, 1893), which Kuhn (1933: 11–12) follows (also Pope 1966; Cable 1970, 1974), these verses have two lifts with a non-alliterating lift and an alliterating lift in this order as indicated in (44).

(44) Þā gȳt *hīe him* āsétton 47a
then yet they him set
'Then also they set for him'

Ful óft *ic* for lǽssan lḗan téohhode, 951
full often I for less reward assigned
'Full often I have made reward for less,'

Gesā́won *ðā* æfter wǽtere wýrmcynnes féla, 1425
saw then on water of-race-of-serpents many
'then they saw on the water many a snake-shape'

Gewā́t *him* *ðā* se héarda mid his hóndscóle 1963
go himself then the fierce with his troop
'Then the fierce one went with his troop'

In the given metrical analysis, the a-verse incurs violation of both Laws because only the second drop but not the first has one or more clause particles indicated in italics. Note here that, as discussed in section 6, *þā gȳt* in 47a and *ful oft* in 951a are idioms and thus phrase particles.

More recently, however, A3 verses are analyzed as one-lift verses with the first lift suppressed as shown in (44') (Bliss 1967; Hoover 1985; Stanley 1992: 265; S. Suzuki 1996).

(44') Þā gȳt hīe him āsétton 47a
Ful oft ic for lǽssan lḗan téohhode, 951
Gesāwon ðā æfter wǽtere wýrmcynnes féla, 1425
Gewāt him ðā se héarda mid his hóndscóle 1963

Under the one-lift analysis, the given verses do not involve violation of either Law. The Laws thus have been used to argue for the one-lift analysis.

However, this reasoning involves circularity as has been criticized (Mitchell 1985; Hutcheson 1992: 132; Stockwell and Minkova 1997: 248, 249). Since Kuhn's Laws presuppose Sieversian scansion, using the Laws or whatever derives from the Laws as evidence for a particular metrical analysis is comparable to using the conclusion to prove the premise. Circularity, however, arises in the use of the Laws as metrical conventions and not in the Laws themselves. As argued especially in section 4, the assumption that Kuhn's Laws governed verse composition is highly questionable although they have often been treated as metrical conventions (e.g. Bliss 1967; Fulk et al. 2008). In relation to the metrical analysis of (44/44'), the First Law does not imply that clause-initial or -early finite verbs and grammatical words must be unstressed.

While Kuhn's Laws are not appropriate as evidence in support of the one-lift analysis,

there is independent evidence for the one-lift analysis (Hoover 1985). First, conjunctions, pronouns, and short adverbs that precede the alliterating word are all unlikely to receive strong enough stress to fill the first lift and choosing any one of them as the first lift is an arbitrary decision (Bliss 1967: § 68). In fact, sequences of light elements as well as clause-initial finite verbs fill the verse-initial drop in two-lift verses as given in (45).

(45) *Ful oft* gebéotédeon béore drúncne 480 (also in (43a))

geseah stéapne hrőf 926b
saw high roof
'he looked at the high roof'

Đā gȳt ǽghwýlcum éorla dríhten
… …
on þære médubénce mā́þðum geséalde, 1050, 1052 (also in (43a))

þā gȳt wæs hiera síb ætgædere,
then still was their friendship together
ǽghwylc óðrum trȳwe. 1164b–1165a
each others true
'their friendship was then still unbroken, each true to the other'

gewāt him hā́m þónon 1601b
went him home from-there
'he went back to his home from there'

Although the interpretation as given in (44') instead of (44) does not satisfy the two-lift requirement, it is supported by the metrical behavior of the words involved. It also does not contradict with the fact that the clause-initial position accommodates several light elements that are apparently unstressed.

In addition to the verses that incur Kuhn's Law violations, the one-lift analysis applies to a number of a-verses as in (46) that would not violate Kuhn's Laws even if they were analyzed as regular two-lift verses.

(46) *oð þæt him* ǽghwylc þāra ýmbsíttendra 9
until that him every-one of-those of-those-living-about
'until every one of those who lived about him [had to obey] him'

Đā wæs on búrgum Bḗow Scýldinga, 53 (also in (4))

ac hīe hæfdon gefrúnen 694a
but they had learned
'but they had learned'

Hēt đā gebḗodan býre Wíhstānes, 3110
ordered then announce son Wihstan's
'Then the son of Wihstan ordered to announce,'

Again similar sequences of words occur in the verse-initial drop of two-lift verses as given in (47). Compare sequences of words in italics that form the verse-initial drop in (46) and (47).

(47) *oþ þæt him* éft onwṓc 56b
until that him afterwards was-born
'until later he was born to him'

þā wæs súnd líden, 223b
then was sea traversed
'then was the sea crossed'

Đā wæs hā́ten hréþe 991a
then was ordered quickly
'Then was it ordered quickly'

hēt hine wḗl brū́can. 1045
ordered him well use
'he bade him use them well'

þæt hē hæfde mőd mícel, 1167a
that he had courage much
'that he had much courage'

A one-lift analysis is justified when verses apparently lack the first lift as shown so far, but is also extended by Bliss (1967) to clause-initial verses with two alliterating words, the first of which is the finite verb. Thus, the first lift filled by the alliterating verb as given in (48) is part of the verse-initial drop in Bliss's analysis, according to which alliteration on the verb is 'ornamental', i.e. non-functional (Bliss 1967: 16; see also sections 4 and 5).

(48) a. Hē *gefĕ́ng* þā fételhilt, 1563a (also in (23a))
'Hū *lómp* ēow on lā́de, 1987a (also in (23b))

b. *ne gefĕ́ah* hē þære fǽhðe, 109a (also in (26))
Gewā́t þā ofer wǽgholm 217a (also in (5))
ne gewĕ́ox hē him tō wíllan 1711a (also in (26))

Justification of the given analysis is again Kuhn's Laws. The verses in (48a) have one clause particle in the second drop in violation of the First Law: those in (48b) violate the First Law if clause particles in the second unstressed position incur violations. In addition, verses in (48b) do not have any clause particles in the clause-initial unstressed position and thus violate Kuhn's Second Law. If, however, the alliterating finite verb does not fill a lift, all the clause particles would precede the first lift of the clause in conformity with the Laws. Again, this one-lift analysis is further extended by Bliss (1967) to those a-verses that do not violate Kuhn's Laws where the clause-initial alliterating verbs lack verbal prefixes as in (49) (Bliss 1967: 17).

(49) *búgon* þā to bénce. 327a
sat-down then to bench
'then they sat down on the bench'

Héht þā se héarda Hrúnting béran 1807
ordered then the fierce Hrunting bear
'Then the hardy one bade that Hrunting be brought'

For more discussions on other verses with clause-early alliterating verbs, see Bliss (1967: 16–17).

While a one-lift analysis is reasonable with those verses without an alliterating verb as in (44/44') and (46), Bliss's extension of the one-lift analysis to those verses with an alliterating finite verb as in (48) and (49) cannot be supported (Hoover 1985; S. Suzuki 1996; Suzuki 2008, 2008–9). First, as has been argued, in lack of evidence that they are metrical conventions, Kuhn's Laws cannot be used to justify a particular metrical analysis. Even if they were metrical conventions, lexical verbs such as *gefēng* in 1563a in (48) or *bugon* in 327a in (49) are not particles in the usual sense of the term and it does not follow from either Law that clause-early finite verbs must be unstressed. Further, there are problems with treating an alliterating content word as not filling a lift (Suzuki 2008). Bliss's (1967: 12) notion of 'ornamental', i.e. intentional but not functional, alliteration is intended to solve this apparent contradiction and Kendall (1991) has a similar notion of 'extrametrical' alliteration. It is only clause-initial or sometimes second position finite verbs that show 'ornamental' alliteration and not verbs in other positions or other word classes. These issues are not discussed and the use of 'ornamental' alliteration appears arbitrary. Therefore, the simplest solution to the contradiction is to analyze clause-initial/-early alliterating verbs as metrically stressed.

In sum, one-lift verses are those where the verse-final alliterating word is preceded by a sequence of grammatical words, i.e. (44') and (46), which are typical of clause-initial position. Verses with clause-initial and -early alliterating verbs as in (48) and (49) must be regular two-lift verses. Kuhn's Laws should not be used as evidence for or against a one-lift analysis.

8. Conclusions

I agree with Schwetman (1993: 47) in that Kuhn's Laws are 'not adequate to describe metrical stress in the poetry' and with Stockwell and Minkova (1997: 253) in that the Laws are 'of no value at all…with respect to evaluating competing theories of the metrical system.' I have shown that Kuhn's Laws follow from linguistic properties and are highly unlikely to have been metrical conventions, which I define as properties that are peculiar to verse and that do not follow directly from language structure. The Laws are not intended as exceptionless generalizations. Nor are attempts to reduce Kuhn's Law violation justified without independent evidence. Kuhn's Laws follow from metrical analysis and simply state observational facts. They are not the device to predict or determine metrical stress or word

order in poetry. While the Kuhn's Law phenomenon typically marks clause-initial position, caution must be taken in using the Laws as criteria for emendation, repunctuation, for identifying scribal insertion and errors, or for determining whether a certain text is verse or prose.

I also agree with Stockwell and Minkova (1997: 253) in that the Laws are 'of some value to students of historical syntax.' They are valid generalizations on linguistic archaism when irrelevant violations are excluded, but they are not specific enough to be able to distinguish between different categories of clause particles and to predict verb-second. Given that language shows variations, removing apparent irregularities by forceful regularization is not a virtue. While the Laws are commonly used for metrical analysis and text criticism, the Laws would most fruitfully be used for dating purposes, which, to my knowledge, has not hitherto been done, however.

The value of Kuhn's Laws is not in its literal interpretation, mechanical application, or statistical validity. Rather, it is in Kuhn's insight into the processes whereby verb-second order arose originally as part of clause-initial clustering of light elements—the Kuhn's Law phenomenon—, and whereby this new order for clitic verbs was generalized subsequently.

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