

KANSAI GAIDAI UNIVERSITY

The alliterating verb in Beowulf 2717b seah on enta geweorc (Part 2)

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The alliterating verb in *Beowulf* 2717b *seah on enta geweorc*

Part II

Yasuko Suzuki

Abstract

This paper argues that the unique alliterative pattern of *Beowulf* 2717b *seah on enta geweorc* follows from several factors associated with phrasal prosody, i.e. the tendency for lexical verbs to receive stronger stress than auxiliaries, the tendency for clause-initial verbs to receive stronger stress than verbs elsewhere in the clause, and the stressability of verbs relative to that of other elements in the same prosodic phrase or verse. Part I has shown, first, that verbs tend to be weaker in stress than nouns in Present-day English: Sievers's Rule of Precedence thus most likely follows from natural prosody of Old English. On the other hand, the alliterative patterns of finite lexical verbs in *Beowulf* indicate that verbs receive certain amount of stress. In Part II, section 5 discusses verses in *Beowulf* where weakly stressable words such as pronouns and demonstratives take precedence over nominals in alliteration, which implies that verbs should have chance to alliterate in violation of Sievers's Rule of Precedence. Section 6 argues that alliteration on *enta geweorc* as a formulaic expression is not necessary although the context in which 2717b occurs does not unequivocally show strong stress on the verb. It also shows that the rare alliterative pattern and other problems associated with verse 2717b are not solved by Donoghue's (1987) emendation. Finally, section 7 gives conclusions and the Appendix gives a list of verses in *Beowulf* that violate Sievers's Rule of Precedence.

Keywords: finite verb stress, Sievers's Rule of Precedence, Germanic alliterative verse, Old English, *Beowulf*

5. Alliteration of grammatical words in precedence to nominals

Because finite verbs are between content words and grammatical words in stress level, it follows that grammatical words including auxiliaries have less chance to alliterate in precedence over nouns than do finite lexical verbs. However, there are examples in *Beowulf* where pronouns, possessive adjectives, and demonstratives take precedence over nouns in alliteration (Cosmos 1976: 320–321).

According to Andrew (1969: 123), the exceptional alliteration of grammatical words is

deliberately used in formulaic expressions. For example, in both verses in 197 in (21), the demonstrative alliterates but the following noun does not (Kuhn 1933: 73; Andrew 1969: 123; Kendall 1991: 11). Since phrases similar to 197a occur in 1395a and 1797b given below that are also accompanied with an uncommon alliterative pattern, this might be a conventional alliterative device for this expression. In 837b a possessive adjective alliterates but not the following noun.

- (21) on **þ**ǣm dæge **þ**ysses lifes, 197
 in the time of-this of-life
 ‘in the time of this life’
 Also 790 and 806

Ðā wæs on morgen **m**īne gefræge 837
 then was in morning my information
 ‘Then in the morning, as I have heard’
 Also 776, 1955, 2685, 2837

Ðys dōgor **þ**ū geþyld hafa 1395
 this day you patience have
 ‘this day have patience’

þegnes þearfe, swylce **þ**ū dōgor 1797
 thane’s need such-as that day
 ‘the thane’s need, such as in that day’

In 1395a both the demonstrative and the pronoun alliterate while the noun does not (Kuhn 1933: 73; Andrew 1969; Minkova 2006). The verse involves a rare example of an alliterating nominative pronoun. Other than this verse, *þū* occurs in a non-alliterating lift once i.e. 457a and fills a drop 61 times (Bessinger and Smith 1969: 249). Thus, the pronoun *þū* is distinctly less stressable than finite lexical verbs. Yet the fact that there is at least one verse where *þū* alliterates in precedence to a noun implies that a verb could alliterate in place of more stressable words.

There are phrases where an alliterating word is apparently determined by the necessity

Mæg þæs þonne ofþyncan	ðēoden Heaðo-Beardna	
may that then displeas	lord of-Heatho-Bards	
ond þegna gehwām	þāra lēoda	2032–2033
and of-thanes each	of-those of-people	
'It may displease the lord of the Heatho-Bards and each thane of that people'		

Verse 345b occurs in Beowulf's speech and 353b in Wulfgar's response to him when Beowulf arrived in Hrothgar's court and announced the purpose of his visit. In 1840b the alliterating *him* refers to Beowulf. The alliterating *þāra* in 2033b refers to *Heaðo-Beardna* in the previous line. While the possessive adjectives in 345b and 353b are parallel in the alliterative pattern, emphasis on the alliterating grammatical words in the following two examples is not self-evident.

Moreover, alliteration on grammatical words conforms to sentence prosody whereby weakly stressable words are consistently unstressed clause-initially, tend to be unstressed in clause-early position, but typically stressed in clause-late position although not necessarily in an alliterating lift (Kuhn 1933; Pintzuk 1999; Suzuki 2008–9: II 10). For example, the alliterating pronoun in *him on andsware* 1840b in (23) is in the second verse of the clause in which it occurs. In contrast, in (24) with the same a-verse, the b-verse forms an independent clause and thus the unstressed pronoun *hē* is clause-initial where weakly stressable elements are typically unstressed.

- (24) *Hrōðgār* mæþelode, – **hē** tō *healle* gēong, 925
Hrothgar spoke he to hall went
'Hrothgar spoke – he had gone to the hall'

While the pronoun taking precedence in alliteration to a noun is rare, it is in clause-late position and thus is more stressable than in clause-initial position. Other examples of alliterating grammatical words in precedence to nouns are restricted to clause-non-initial position.

This section has given verses where a grammatical word takes precedence over a nominal in alliteration. These deviations show a specific distributional pattern in that the alliterating grammatical words are in clause-late position, which is likely to reflect sentence prosody. In addition, in some examples, the alliterating word, whether it is a grammatical

word or a content word, is apparently determined by the alliterating sound of the line. The deviations appear to be common with formulas or fixed expressions although whether an unusual alliterative pattern was a device to mark formulaic expressions is not obvious. The factors just discussed are shared by alliterating finite verbs that violate Sievers's Rule of Precedence. While the verses discussed in this section involve an alliterating grammatical word and one non-alliterating nominal, they are a more serious violation of the stressability hierarchy than verses with an alliterating finite verb and one or more non-alliterating nominals. In other words, finite lexical verbs are apparently more stressable than the grammatical words discussed in this section and thus must have a better chance to take precedence over nominals in alliteration.

6. Stressability of the collocation *enta geweorc*, context, and metrical analysis

The expression *enta geweorc* is a formula and is typically used for vowel alliteration in Old English poetry in the verses listed under *enta* in Bessinger and Smith (1978: 273–274). It symbolizes relics of the past prosperity and specifically refers to stone monuments or treasures. In *Beowulf* there are three occurrences of this expression including 2717b (Bessinger and Smith 1969: 48).

In the first occurrence, *enta ærgeweorc* in 1679a refers to *gylden hilt* in 1677a and, with a vowel-initial adjective, shows double alliteration as given in (25).

- | | | | |
|------|--|---|------------------------------|
| (25) | Ðā wæs gylden hilt
then was golden hilt
h̄ārum hildfruman
hoary war-chief
enta ærgeweorc ;
of-giants ancient-work | gamelum rince,
old man
on h̄and gyfen,
in hand given
hit on æht gehwearf
it in possession went | 1677

1678

1679 |
|------|--|---|------------------------------|
- ‘Then the golden hilt was given into the hand of the old man, the hoary war-chief – the ancient work of giants. There came into the possession...’

Next, in (26) *eald enta geweorc* in 2774a anticipates *bunan ond discas* in 2775b or, according to Fulk et al. (2008: 256), refers to the stone chamber.

(26)	Ðā ic on hlǣwe gefrægn	hord rēafian,	2773
	then I in mound heard	hoard plunder	
	eald enta geweorc	āne mannan,	2774
	old of-giants work	one man	
	him on bearm hladon	bunan ond discas	2775
	him in breast load	cups and plates	
	sylfes dōme;		2776
	self discretion		
	‘Then I have heard that one man in the mound pillaged the hoard, the old work of giants, loaded in his bosom cups and plates at his own desire.’		

Both in (25) and (26), the collocation occurs with a vowel-initial adjective and occupies an entire verse, showing double alliteration.

On the other hand, *enta geweorc* in 2717b refers to what directly follows, i.e. dragon’s abode, stone arches, and pillars, or possibly treasure therein, as is given in (27) (Fulk et al. 2008: 255).

(27)		Ðā se æðeling giong,	2715
		then the prince went	
	þæt hē bī wealle	wishycgende	2716
	that he by wall	wise-in-thought	
	geṣæt on ṣesse;	seah on enta geweorc ,	2717
	sat-down on seat	saw on of-giants work	
	hū ðā stānbogan	stapulum fæste	2718
	how the stone-arches	pillars fast	
	ēce eorðreced	innan healde.	2719
	eternal earth-house	within would-hold	
	‘Then the prince, wise of thought, went to where he might sit on a seat near the wall. He looked on the work of giants, how the timeless earth-hall held within it stone-arches fast on pillars.’		

As briefly mentioned in section 2, Cosmos (1976: 314–315) argues that the metrical stress

on the verbs in the passage given in (27) reflects ‘communicative dynamism’. That is, in the passage given in (27), verbs, i.e. *gīong* in 2715b, *gesæt* in 2717a, and *seah* in 2717b, together with the one in the compound *wīshycgende* in 2716b, are ‘the vehicle of transition’. Among these verbs, *seah* has two different types of objects, namely one for ‘action’, which directly follows the verb, and the other for ‘experience’, which is expressed by the subordinate clause (Cosmos 1976: 315–316). In contrast, the unstressed occurrences of the verb have low dynamism e.g. in *geseah stēapne hrōf* 926b and *ne seah ic wīdan feorh* 2014b in (5a), in the latter of which, for example, there is more emphasis on what follows the verb rather than the verb itself (Cosmos 1976: 315, 316–317). The association of metrical stress with emphasis, however, does not appear to be compelling because, for example, one might argue instead that in (27) the fact that the object of the verb is rephrased suggests that the object rather than the verb is important and, therefore, contrary to the given alliterative pattern, that the object must be under emphasis.

In relation to the alliterative pattern, it has been pointed out that the metrical type of 2717b as is given is unique (Stanley 1975: 311–312; Russom 1987: 91; Fulk et al. 2008: 255). For example, according to Bliss (1967: 78), the verse cannot be classified because it is neither type D*4, which is restricted to a-verses and has a caesura after the verse-initial trochee, nor E, which requires unparalleled resolution across caesura of *seah on*, nor D*1, which requires double alliteration. Also, according to Hutcheson (1995: 48 fn. 37, 166–167), the sequence /x/xx/ is ‘perhaps unmetrical’ in b-verses. With Donoghue’s emendation, i.e. *sēon* instead of *seah on*, the verse is Bliss’s type 3E* (Donoghue 1987: 39). The anomaly attributed to the verse thus consists of non-existence of the same arrangements of stressed and unstressed syllables.

There are apparently restrictions on the length of verses in terms of the number of stressed and unstressed syllables. That is, while polysyllabic drops are generally restricted to verses with two lifts or less, unstressed syllables in verses with three lifts rarely exceed two. The combination of three stressed syllables and three unstressed syllables as in 2717b is uncommon in normal verses and there are fewer attested possibilities for the arrangement of those six syllables. However, as is the case with Kuhn’s Laws and Sievers’s Rule of Precedence discussed in section 4, we do not know if the productive patterns represent rules in verse composition or, even if they do, whether the rules are observed categorically. Nor do we know if rare patterns are an anomaly to be excluded. While these assumptions are generally presupposed, rejecting these assumptions would deprive of the motivation for the proposed emendation.

A further issue that has been raised in relation with 2717b and that has motivated Donoghue's emendation is the present subjunctive of the verb *healde* in 2719b where past indicative is expected (Stanley 1975: 313–315; Donoghue 1987: 39). In Donoghue's interpretation, the infinitive *sēon* expresses purpose and is dependent on *gīong* in 2715b rather than *gesæt* in 2717a (Donoghue 1987: 39–40); see (27) above. However, the proposed emendation yields convoluted syntax in that *gīong* takes both a tensed clause and an infinitival phrase for purpose, which is in turn accompanied by a prepositional phrase and a tensed clause. Also, the infinitive does not belong to the closer verb. Moreover, the problems of *healde* are not solved by the given emendation. With Donoghue's emendation *sēon... healde*, the tense of *healdan* in 2719b is determined by *gīong* in the main clause because an infinitive lacks its inherent tense, in which case the past tense is expected any way. The solution thus must be sought elsewhere. As one possibility, the present tense of *healde* may be attributed to the eternity of the stone chamber as represented by *ēce* in 2719a or more generally what Traugott (1992: 182) calls 'timeless present'. At any rate, the sequence of tenses is often forsaken in Old English (Mitchell 1985: §§859–864). Similarly, while subjunctive typically indicates uncertainty of the proposition, the distinction between subjunctive and indicative is not strictly observed (Mitchell 1985: §877; Traugott 1992: 184, 251). There is a reference to *stānbogan* 'stone arches' earlier in 2545a and the stone chamber described in (27) is likely to exist in reality, in which case indicative is expected irrespective of the finiteness of the verb 'to see'. The rule is the same in Present-day English except that it is less strictly observed in Old English as just stated. Donoghue (1987: 40) himself uses the past indicative in his translation of the passage: '...to see the work of giants, how the stone arches secured with posts *supported* from within the eternal earth-cave.' The subjunctive mood might be attributed to the situation whereby the subordinate clause beginning with *hū* represents the illusionary vision of Beowulf, mortally wounded, which he thought there should have been. Or perhaps it was not certain if stone arches and pillars were what he actually saw or his illusion. This, however, remains a possibility and *healde* may simply be an example of atypical use of subjunctive.

As has been shown, the expression *enta geweorc* is used for an appositive of what precedes or follows. It is a decorative expression but not highly informative in meaning. Given that stress depends on semantic weight, what is expected does not have to bear strong stress. Therefore, while the expression alliterates more often than not, lack of alliteration on the expression is by no means unreasonable. Also, Donoghue's emendation is not well

motivated in terms of word form with problematical chronology of *h*-deletion and subsequent contraction (section 2), alliteration (section 4), syntax, and the tense/mood of the subordinate clause verb (section 6). As for the metrical pattern, the motivation for emendation unwarrantedly presupposes that an unparalleled pattern is an anomaly that must be removed by all means.

7. Conclusions

I have shown above that both Sievers's Rule of Precedence and the unique alliterative pattern of verse 2717b follow from the ordinary principles of phrasal stress. While finite verbs in general are less stressable than nominals as the Rule states, the alliterative patterns of finite lexical verbs with respect to nominals show that verbs receive certain amount of stress. Moreover, alliteration is determined by where the verb occurs in the clause, the semantic weight of the verb relative to the nominals in the same verse, and sometimes by which sound must be involved in alliteration. The unique alliterative pattern is by no means an anomaly nor does it justify emendation.

Appendix

The following is a list of twenty-four verses with an alliterating verb and one or two non-alliterating nominals. As defined, 'nominals' include nouns, adjectives, deadjectival adverbs, and non-finite verbs. See also Rieger (1986: 24–25), Stanley (1975: 308), Orton (1985), and Fulk et al. (2008: 334–335).

<u>w</u> eardode hwile	'he guarded for a while'	105b
ond on <u>s</u> æ̅l meoto	'and unbind your thoughts'	489b
<u>s</u> lāt unwearnum	'he tore (at him) ravenously'	741b
G <u>e</u> munde þā se gōda	'Then the good man thought...'	758a (= (11))
<u>H</u> ēold hine fæste	'he held him fast'	788b
<u>w</u> iste þē geornor	'he knew the more surely'	821b
<u>w</u> unode mid Finne	'he stayed on with Finn'	1128b
<u>F</u> undode wrecca	'the exile was eager to go'	1137b
Mē man <u>s</u> ægde	'They have told me'	1175a (= (10a))

bonne <u>h</u> niton fēþan	‘when troops clashed’	1327b, 2544b
<u>G</u> yrede hine Bēowulf	‘Beowulf dressed himself’	1441b (= (13))
Gefēng þā be eaxle	‘then he seized by the shoulder’	1537a (= (11))
þæt ge <u>b</u> earh fēore	‘that protected his life’	1548b
læteð hworfan	‘he lets...turn’	1728b (= (4b), (17c))
<u>h</u> ruron him tēaras	‘tears fell from him’	1872b
<u>w</u> isse hē gearwe	‘he knew most certainly’	2339b, 2725b (= (2b))
<u>h</u> ēolde lange	‘he had long held...’	2344b
<u>b</u> āt unswiðor	‘he cut less strongly’	2578b (= (3b))
Ic <u>w</u> āt geara	‘I know well’	2656b
<u>s</u> eah on enta geweorc	‘he looked on the work of giants’	2717b (= (1), (27))
<u>s</u> eah on unlēofe	‘he looked on the unloved ones’	2863b (= (5b))
ðā ge <u>b</u> ēah cyning	‘then the king bowed’	2980b

Verses with an alliterating finite verb and a less stressable word in the fourth lift are excluded from the list such as 748b with *hræpe* and 1699b with an indefinite adjective *ealle* as given below. Also excluded is verse 3152b that involves emendation indicated by parentheses in Fulk et al. (2008).

hē on <u>f</u> ēng hræpe	‘he seized...at once’	748b
<u>s</u> wiġedon ealle	‘all were silent’	1699b
<u>f</u> ēhð oþer tō	‘another takes to himself’	1755b
<u>s</u> æ(<i>id</i> e) (ge)neah(<i>he</i>)	‘...said again and again’	3152b

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(すずき・やすこ 外国語学部准教授)