

The sixth type of Germanic alliterative verse : the case of Old English Beowulf (Part I)

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The sixth type of Germanic alliterative verse: the case of Old English *Beowulf**

Part I

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Abstract

According to Sievers (1885, 1893), there are five metrical types of Germanic alliterative poetry based on two stressed positions or lifts (S) and two unstressed positions or drops (W), i.e. SWSW (Type A), WSWS (Type B), WSSW (Type C), SSWW (Type D), and SWWS (Type E), with the sixth possible combination WWSS lacking from the inventory. A close examination of Old English *Beowulf* reveals that this sixth type is in fact present. The two patterns of this type WWSS are verses with a disyllabic compound filling two lifts, as *Mē þone wælvæðs* '... me for the murderous on-slaughter' (2101a), and verses with a 'contracted' vowel (i.e. a vowel that has arisen from hiatus) as the second lift, as *Swā sceal mán dōn* 'as a man should do' (1534b). Previous analyses subsumed the above verses under the basic five by stipulation of metrical stress and by an interpretive device that 'decontracts' a monosyllabic word form into the stem syllable and the ending syllable, thus making a sequence of a lift and a drop, e.g. *dō-an* from *dōn* (cf. Sievers 1885, 1893, Bliss 1967, Fulk 1992, Hutcheson 1995, Suzuki 1996 among others). However, not only is metrical stress relative by nature, but also 'decontraction' as a metrical device presupposes Sievers's scansion and lacks independent motivation. Arranging stressed and unstressed positions in alliterative verse is not restricted in the way in which the WWSS pattern is prohibited.

Keywords: metrical types, Germanic alliterative verse, Old English, *Beowulf*, decontraction

1. Introduction

According to Sievers (1885, 1893), there are five metrical types of Germanic alliterative poetry based on two stressed positions and two unstressed positions. With S and W representing a strong position and a weak position, respectively, these five are SWSW (Type A), WSWS (Type

B), WSSW (Type C), SSWW (Type D), and SWWS (Type E). As Sievers himself claims (cf. Sievers 1893: 31), the sixth and the last possible pattern, i.e. WWSS, is absent from Sievers's scansion.

Based on the metrical analysis of Old English *Beowulf*, this paper shows that this sixth type is in fact present. The two patterns of this type WWSS are verses with a disyllabic compound, as *Mē þone wælræðs* '... me for the murderous onslaught', and verses with a 'contracted' vowel (i.e. a vowel that has arisen from hiatus) as the second lift, as *Swā sceal mán dōn* 'as a man should do'. Previous analyses in the line of Sievers such as Bliss (1967), Fulk (1992), Hutcheson (1995), and Suzuki (1996) have assumed that the first verse given above is a subtype of SWSW pattern with the first strong position suppressed. Further, the second verse has been analyzed as WSSW pattern whereby the last vowel is decontracted into the stem vowel and the ending vowel, e.g. *dō-an*, thus forming a sequence of a strong position and a weak position. However, this 'decontraction' in metrical analysis presupposes Sievers's scansion and lacks independent motivation.

Sections 2.1-2.4 below illustrate properties of early Germanic alliterative poetry and Sievers's metrical analysis: alliteration and freedom in the number of unstressed syllables (section 2.1), Sievers's five metrical types (section 2.2), nature of metrical stress (section 2.3), and variations in the number of metrical positions (section 2.4). It will be shown that Sievers's scansion follows from patterns of word- and phrase-level stress instead of being metrical conventions that frame the poetic language. Rather than being uniformly defined, Sieversian scansion allows a number of deviant patterns and leaves much room for multiple interpretations. In Part II, section 2.5 discusses two metrical devices, i.e. resolution and decontraction, and section 3.1 discusses the sixth-type verses with a disyllabic compound mentioned above. In Part III, the rest of section 3 discusses the second group of sixth-type verses, other possible sixth-type verses, and various problems associated with the proposed analysis.

2. Metrical interpretation of Germanic alliterative poetry

2.1. Alliteration and freedom in the number of unstressed syllables

Early Germanic poetry including Old English *Beowulf* is characterized by alliteration, which is associated with phrase-level accent (cf. Rieger 1876, Sievers 1885, 1893, Bliss 1962 among others). For example, in the following line from *Beowulf*, the alliterating consonant is marked with an underline.¹

- (1) wæs se grímma gæst Gréndel hāten 102
 was the grim spirit Grendel called 'the grim spirit was called Grendel'

The domain of alliteration as given in (1), i.e. a long line, consists of two metrical units, i.e. the first halfline or a-verse and the second halfline or b-verse. Henceforth the term 'verse' is used to refer to this basic metrical unit. According to the traditional scansion by Sievers (1885, 1893), each verse consists typically of two strong positions and two weak positions. A strong position or lift indicated with an acute accent in (1) is associated with a stressed syllable, while a weak position or drop is associated with one or more unstressed or weakly stressed syllables.

The first lift of each halfline normally alliterates (for variations in a-verses, see section 2.4.2.1 below). However, alliteration of the second lift is asymmetrical in a-verse and b-verse: the second lift may alliterate in a-verses but never alliterates in b-verses. Thus, in (1) above the a-verse shows double alliteration, while only the first lift in the b-verse alliterates. Another common possibility is single alliteration in both a-verse and b-verse, as given in (2).

- (2) siþðan ic hōnd ond rōnd hēbban mihte, 656
 since I hand and shield lift could 'since I could lift my hand and shield'

The third lift of a long line, i.e. the first lift of the b-verse, governs alliteration of the entire line and thus is considered metrically the strongest position. On the other hand, the fourth lift never alliterates and thus is the weakest.

A number of metrists equate metrical positions with natural stress, referring both by one and the same term i.e. 'stress' (e.g. Bliss 1962, 1967). However, I distinguish these two because, although metrical stress is derived from natural stress, it is relative depending on verses as will be shown below in section 2.3.

While alliterating lifts are directly visible, non-alliterating lifts are not marked in texts. However, in most cases it is not difficult to determine non-alliterating lifts. Since the first of the two lifts typically alliterates and since lifts are associated with phrase-level stress, the non-alliterating lift is the stressed syllable of the element that follows the element that alliterates. For example, in (1) above the non-alliterating lift is the first syllable of *hāten* in the b-verse. Similarly, in the b-verse in (2) the stressed syllable of *mihte* fills the fourth lift. In the a-verse in (2), of two words that follow the alliterating lift *hond*, *rōnd* is more likely to be stressed than *ond* and thus fills the second lift.

In regular verses, the number of alliterating words is either one or two in a-verses and always one in b-verses. Since grammatical words are either unstressed or weakly stressed, alliteration on grammatical words is considered non-intentional when there are one or more alliterating lexical words in the same verse. For example, in verse 319a in (3), of three words that begin with *w*, the two lexical words *wīrǣð* and *wérod* are more likely to be stressed than the preposition *wið*. Thus these two fill the two lifts, while the preposition fills a drop.

- (3) *wið* *wrǣð* *wérod* 319a
 against hostile horde 'against the hostile horde'
- ofer* *ýlða* *béarn* 605a²
 over of-men children 'over the children of men'

In verse 605a in (3), although the preposition *ofer* begins with a vowel, this alliteration is considered accidental because there is another word *bearn* following the alliterating lexical word *ýlða*, which is a better candidate for a lift.

In addition to alliteration, another prominent feature of early Germanic poetry is that, while a strong position is typically associated with one stressed syllable (for further qualifications, see section 2.5.1 in Part II), a weak position may contain more than one syllable (cf. Sievers 1885, 1893, Bliss 1962: 5, and Godden 1992 among others). As a result, the length of each verse in terms of the number of syllables may vary considerably. For example, in the b-verse of the line in (2) above each drop is filled by one unstressed syllable, i.e. (*heb*)*ban* (*mih*)*te*. However, in the a-verse of the same line the first drop is filled by three syllables, i.e. *siþðan ic*. Even a greater number of syllables may fill a drop. For example, the first drop of the verse given in (4) consists of as many as five syllables.

- (4) *ið* *ðæs þe* *hē on* *rǣste* *geséah* 1585b
 to that which he on resting-place saw 'so that he saw...in the resting place'

A polysyllabic drop is typically the first drop of a verse, as in a-verses in (1), (2), and the verse in (4). In contrast, verse-final drops normally accommodate only one syllable.

As has been shown thus far, the two prominent features of early Germanic poetry are alliteration associated with phrase-level stress and lack of strict syllable-counting. These two

characteristics are directly visible and are incorporated in any metrical analysis. Other features discussed so far and below in this section are susceptible to different interpretations although most metrical analyses follow Sievers (1885, 1893). Sievers's scansion has been supported by a number of metrists such as Bliss (1962, 1967), Cable (1974), Russom (1987), Fulk (1992), Kendall (1991), Hutcheson (1995), and Suzuki (1996) and by performance-oriented works by Heusler (1925) and Pope (1966) although some such as Hoover (1985), Obst (1987), and Getty (1998, 2002) propose an alternative. For example, in contrast to Sievers, the latter three authors assume that the number of strong positions is not restricted to two even in the case of normal verses. As will be shown below, Sieversian analysis has different strategies for verses with apparently more than two stressed syllables.

Metrical structure as realized in poetry has been claimed to reflect natural accent and other linguistic features. For example, lexical words normally fill strong metrical positions, while grammatical words mostly fill weak positions (cf. Rieger 1876, Russom 1987, Suzuki 1996 among others). Verse boundaries are determined by syntactic boundaries and boundaries of phonological phrases (cf. Hock 1985, Getty 1998, 2002, Pintzuk 1991, Taylor 2005).

2.2. Sievers's five metrical types

According to the most prevalent metrical analysis by Sievers (1885, 1893), there are five ways of arranging two strong positions and two weak positions in a verse: in the order of decreasing frequency, SWSW or Type A, WSWS or Type B, WSSW or Type C, SSWW or Type D, and SWWS or Type E. In (5) are given examples of these five verse types from *Beowulf* with double alliteration (examples from Cassidy and Ringler 1971: 287-288; cf. also Bliss 1962, Cable 1974: 84-85, Godden 1992: 492).

(5)	A	SWSW	gómban gýldan tribute pay	11a 'pay the tribute'
	B	WSWS	on gǫðne sæ on wide sea	507a 'on the broad sea'
	C	WSSW	of brýðbúre of marriage-chamber	921a 'of the marriage-chamber'

D	SSWW	<u>h</u> éard <u>h</u> ícgende hard-thinking	394a 'brave-minded'
E	SWWS	<u>f</u> lód <u>y</u> þum <u>f</u> éor sea-waves far	542a 'far over the sea-waves'

Since metrical patterns reflect natural stress, Type A is the most frequent because words generally have initial stress in Old English, which leads to trochee when the initial stress is followed by one or more unstressed syllables. Also, at the phrase-level it is assumed that trochee is the norm (cf. Rieger 1876).

Sievers explicitly denies the existence of the sixth and the last possible pattern WWSS (cf. Sievers 1893: 31).

Adding to these five basic types, there are several qualifications, interpretive devices such as anacrusis, resolution, and decontraction (cf. section 2.4.1 below and section 2.5 in Part II), and numerous subtypes that have been discussed by Sievers (1885, 1893) and other metrists including Bliss (1962) and Suzuki (1996). The assumption underlying the Sieversian metrical analysis seems to be that Anglo-Saxon poets tried to make their verse conform to the five types (cf. (5) above) and other details which will be discussed in the following sections. However, while alliteration and freedom in the length of verse are uncontroversial features of early Germanic verse, we are not certain if five metrical types were the norms of verse composition. Instead, the observed patterns follow from the stress patterns of words and phrases in each verse that are arranged by syntax rather than by rules of verse composition. The purpose of the following sections is two-fold: first, to show that Sievers's five metrical types require several interpretive devices and allow for various subtypes and deviations and, second, to show that these five types represent the common patterns of word- and phrase-level stress and that less frequent patterns, which are by no means metrically deviant, lead to proliferation of the metrical system. In what follows, i.e. sections 2.3-2.4 in Part I and section 2.5 in Part II, I discuss only those items that are relevant to the discussions on the possible sixth type in section 3 (cf. Parts II and III) and leave aside a number of other controversial issues such as foot, caesura, and parasitic vowels. Nor do I make decision on all the issues that will be discussed below; for example, I leave open the questions of whether the apparently unstressed medial syllable of non-compounds is metrically stressed (cf. section 2.3.1) or whether resolution and its suspension are valid as metrical devices (cf. section 2.5.1 in Part II).

2.3. Nature of metrical stress

2.3.1. Secondary lift and heavy drop

As shown above, there are three basic levels of metrical stress in Sievers's metrical analysis: in the order of decreasing stress levels, alliterating lifts, non-alliterating lifts, and drops. There is an additional level between the non-alliterating lift and the drop, i.e. secondary lift in verses of Types D and E and heavy drop in verses of Type A.

When there are two drops in succession, one of them is normally filled by a stressable element and is interpreted as stronger in stress than a regular drop. That is, in Type D (i.e. SSWW) and Type E (i.e. SWWS), one of the two drops in a sequence is filled by a syllable with secondary stress. For example, in the two verses given in (6) the second element of a compound fills the secondary lift marked with a grave accent: the verse-final syllable in verse 998a and the syllable directly following the first alliterating lift in verse 542a.

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| (6) | <u>é</u> al ínnewèard | 998a |
| | all inward | 'all...within' |
| | <u>fl</u> óðǫpum féor | 542a |
| | sea-waves far | 'far over the sea-waves' |

The secondary lift may be filled by the medial syllable of trisyllabic inflected forms with initial stress, as given in (7).

- | | | |
|-----|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| (7) | <u>h</u> éard <u>h</u> ícgènde | 394a |
| | brave-thinking | 'brave-minded' |
| | <u>w</u> él lícòdon | 639b |
| | well pleased | 'they pleased...well' |

The secondary lift marked in verses in (7) is required by the assumption that one of the two drops in a sequence must be raised to a secondary lift. Otherwise, there seems to be no evidence that the syllable filling the secondary lift in (7) bears certain amount of stress in actual utterance. Therefore, while the secondary lift filled by the second element of a compound as in verses in (6) seems reasonable, the secondary lift filled by the medial syllable of inflected forms

as in verses in (7) appears less convincing.

A secondary lift may be filled by an independent word in verses with three lexical words. For example, in (8), since the two alliterating words *swútol* and *sang* fill the two lifts, the non-alliterating *scôpes* must fill a secondary lift.

- (8) *swútol gáng scôpes* 90a³
 clear song poet ‘the clear song of the poet’

There are several verses of Type E in *Beowulf* where the secondary lift cannot be determined between two successive drops. In (9), the two drops are filled by an inflectional ending and a prefix, both of which are unstressed and thus are not qualified for a secondary lift.

- (9) *líssa gelóng* 2150a
 favour dependent-on ‘dependent on the favour’

Although verses of Types D and E mostly have a secondary lift, the verse in (9) shows that the two drops in succession may be equally unstressed. The absence of secondary lift in a sequence of two drops applies generally to verses of the sixth type that will be discussed in section 3 in Parts II and III.

On the other hand, when a stressable element fills a drop in verses of Types A, this drop is called a heavy drop. A heavy drop is typically filled by a second element of a compound. For example, the verse in (10) consists of two disyllabic compounds with the two lifts filled by the first alliterating element of a compound, i.e. *gūð-* and *gold-*, and the two drops filled by the second element of a compound, i.e. *-rinc* and *-wlanc*.

- (10) *gūðrinc góldwlanc* 1881a
 warrior proud-in-his-gold ‘the warrior proud in his gold’

While both of the drops are heavy in the verse in (10), there are also verses where only one of the two drops is filled by a stressable syllable and thus is a heavy drop. Type A verses with one or more heavy drops are called A2.

Dichotomy of metrical positions into strong and weak ones does not faithfully reflect natural stress, which is more than just strong or weak. Metrically ‘weak’ positions may be occupied

by elements with secondary stress. In order to accommodate multi-level of natural stress, stipulation on the intermediate stress-level becomes necessary in a metrical analysis.

2.3.2. Metrical status of secondary stress

A syllable with secondary stress may even occupy a lift if other elements in the same verse are less stressable than the element that contains this syllable. Thus, the second element of a compound not only occurs in metrically weak positions, as has been just shown in section 2.3.1, but also in metrically strong positions when the verse in which it occurs has no better candidate for a lift. For example, in verse 921a in (11) both the first and the second element of a compound fill the alliterating lifts.

- | | | |
|------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| (11) | of <u>brýðbúre</u> | 921a |
| | of marriage-chamber | ‘of the marriage-chamber’ |
| | æfter þām <u>wælræse</u> | 824a |
| | after the murderous-onslaught | ‘after the murderous onslaught’ |

Further, in verse 824a the second element of a compound fills the non-alliterating lift, while the first element fills the alliterating lift.

As has been shown, the second element of compounds bears secondary stress and thus may fill a lift, mostly non-alliterating as in 824a in (11) but sometimes also alliterating as in 394a in (7) and 921a in (11), a secondary lift as in 998a and 542a in (6), or a heavy drop as in 1881a in (10). Whether a non-alliterating stressable syllable fills a lift or a strengthened drop, i.e. secondary lift or a heavy drop, depends on whether it is followed by an unstressed ending syllable.

Less explicitly, when the primary stressed syllable is followed by two apparently unstressed syllables in the same word, the first of these two unstressed syllable is interpreted as filling a lift or a secondary lift. As given in (12), these non-compounds include an inflected infinitive as in 2445a and singular past as in 2619b as well as other inflected verb, adjective, and noun forms.

- | | | |
|------|---------------------|-------------|
| (12) | tō <u>geþídanne</u> | 2445a |
| | to endure | ‘to endure’ |

<u>a</u> brédwáde	2619b
killed	‘he killed’

As the secondary lift assigned to the medial syllable (cf. (7) above), assigning metrical stress to the medial syllable appears to follow from the one-syllable requirement on the verse-final drop and the two-lift requirement (cf. section 2.1 above) rather than from natural stress. The metrical stress assigned to the medial syllable varies depending on the analysis, i.e. non-alliterating lift according to Sievers (1885, 1893) and Suzuki (1996) as shown in (12) but secondary lift according to Bliss (1967). However, metrists agree in that there is a certain amount of metrical stress on the medial syllable although corresponding disyllabic forms (excluding prefixes) are consistently analyzed as a sequence of a lift and a drop, as *(ge)bīdan* in (13).

(13)	bōte	gebīdan	934a
	remedy	experience	‘experience remedy’

As the second element of a compound, the metrical status of an apparently unstressed syllable depends on whether or not it is followed by an unstressed ending syllable.

The same ambivalence applies to non-alliterating stressable words, which may lead to ambiguity in scansion. While verses with two lexical elements are unambiguously scanned, verses with three words or potential candidates for lift may allow two possible interpretations if there is only one alliterating lift. For example, in a verse with an alliterating word followed by two non-alliterating words such as in (14), either the first or the second non-alliterating word may fill the second lift. Thus the verse is ambiguous between Type D and Type E, as shown in (14) (cf. Sievers 1893: 35).

(14)	D	<u>s</u> écg éft	ongàn	871b
		man again	began	‘the man began again’
	E	<u>s</u> écg èft	ongán	

This example not only shows ambiguity in scansion but also ambivalence in metrical analysis (cf. Bliss 1962: 16). The ambiguity and ambivalence in metrical analysis as shown in this example result from discrepancy between metrical structure and natural stress. That is, there should be two metrical stresses in a verse, but in actual utterance the number of stressed syllables may

exceed two.

As has been shown, Sieversian scansion allows certain latitude of ambivalence and ambiguity instead of being uniformly defined. These facts show that, although metrical stress is based on natural stress, it is by no means a faithful reflection of natural stress and is to a large extent susceptible to varying interpretation. Metrical analyses are in part stipulative (cf. Bliss 1962) and varies depending on presuppositions.

2.4. Variations in the number of metrical positions

2.4.1. Extra weak positions

Extra weak positions are allowed in verse-initial position preceding the first lift in Types A, D, and E and between two lifts in Type D.

A verse-initial extra weak position or anacrusis occurs in the verse types that begin with a lift, i.e. Types A, D, and E. It consists typically of the negative particle *ne*, the prefix *ge-*, or verbal prefixes in *Beowulf*, as given in (15).

- (15) *ne geféah* *hē þære fæhðe* 109a
 not rejoiced-in he that feud ‘he did not rejoice in that feud’
- gesægd sōðlice* 141a
 said truly ‘said truly’

In Old English the negative particle *ne* consistently precedes the finite verb and thus is comparable to verbal prefixes in distribution. Therefore, anacrusis is typically filled by one or more extra unstressed syllables that precede the primary stressed syllable of the same word. Since the primary word stress is otherwise word-initial in Old English, the exceptional status of the negative particle and unstressed prefixes in terms of stress leads to the extrametrical status of anacrusis. However, in a number of other verses, anacrusis is filled by independent unstressed words such as prepositions, e.g. *in* in (16).

- (16) *in Caines cýnne* 107a
 in Cain’s progeny ‘in Cain’s progeny’

In addition, unstressed prefixes may also fill a regular weak position instead of anacrusis, as *ge-*

in the verse given in (17).

- (17) *góld gegángan* 2536a
 gold obtain ‘obtain the gold’

Therefore, while a ‘typical’ anacrusis is filled by one or more extra unstressed syllables at the beginning of the word (i.e. unstressed prefixes) or something comparable (i.e. the negative particle *ne*), there are variations both in the material that fills an anacrusis and in the metrical status of the word-initial unstressed syllables.

In contrast to anacrusis, an extra weak position between two lifts forms extended subtypes of the basic five types. For example, the verse given in (18) has three stressable elements, namely two alliterating ones, i.e. *rondas* and *regn-*, and one non-alliterating one, i.e. *-hearde*. The alliterating syllables must fill the two lifts, while the non-alliterating stressed syllable fills a secondary lift with the verse-final unstressed syllable filling a drop. Thus the verse is scanned as Type D, i.e. SSWW with the first drop raised to the secondary lift (cf. section 2.3.1 above).

- (18) *róndas* *régnhèarde* 326a
 shield-bosses wonderfully-hard ‘the shield-bosses wonderfully hard’

The extra unstressed syllable *-das* between two alliterating lifts thus must be allowed as an extra drop. This type of verse with a verse-medial extra drop is considered a subtype of the basic type with two lifts and two drops.

Verses with extra weak positions of either type are by no means rare. There are also verses with both an anacrusis and an extra medial drop. For example, in (19) the two alliterating syllables fill the two lifts, while the verse-final word fills a secondary lift.

- (19) *gehnægde hëlle gâst* 1274a
 laid-low hell spirit ‘...laid the hell-spirit low’

This verse then should make Type D verse with two initial successive lifts. Therefore, the verse-initial *ge-* and the unstressed syllable between two alliterating lifts *-de* must be both extra weak positions.

2.4.2. Variations in the number of strong positions

There are both verses with apparently only one strong position (cf. section 2.4.2.1) and verses with typically three strong positions (cf. section 2.4.2.2), both of which are acknowledged as productive patterns.

2.4.2.1. Verses with one lift

While the first of the two lifts normally alliterates, the clause-initial a-verse often has alliteration on the second lift, as in (20).

- (20) *þæt wē hine swā gōdne* 347a
 that we him so gracious ‘that we...him, such a gracious one’

Sievers (1885, 1893) allows for the iambic lifts where the first non-alliterating lift is weaker than the second alliterating lift. Syntactically, such verses are found typically in clause-initial position where there is a sequence of unstressed light elements. Metrically, they are restricted to a-verses because b-verses must have the first lift that governs alliteration of the entire long line (cf. section 2.1 above). Since there is usually a drop after the sole lift in verses as in (20), this type of verses is treated as a subtype of type A verse and is called A3 (cf. Sievers 1885, 1893, and others). Later metrists such as Bliss (1967), Fulk (1992), Hutcheson (1995), and Suzuki (1996) assume that these verses lack the first lift and thus have only one lift. Allowing one-lift verses is reasonable for two reasons. First, the choice of any of the weakly stressable elements as a lift is arbitrary. For example, in (20) choosing *þæt* or any other word preceding *gōdne* as the first lift lacks independent justification. The trochaic stress pattern of *gōdne* does suggest that the verse type is A and thus that the first word in the sequence of light elements must be the lift in order to form a trochee. However, metrical structure otherwise does not suggest this scansion nor do we know if *þæt* actually bears stronger stress than the three words that follow it.

As a further piece of evidence for one-lift verses, similar clause-initial sequences of grammatical words in b-verse consistently occur preceding the alliterating lift, as in (21).

- (21) *swā ic giō wið Gréndle dýde* 2521b
 as I formerly against Grendel did ‘as I formerly did against Grendel’

This fact suggests that none of the grammatical words in the clause-initial sequence bears

strong enough stress to form a lift and further that the sequence of light elements preceding the sole alliterating lift in the verse given in (20) forms a drop and does not contain a non-alliterating lift.

The question then arises if potentially stressable elements are metrically unstressed when they are followed by the alliterating lift in clause-initial a-verse, as the verb *gewāt* in (22).

- (22) *Gewāt him ðā se hēarda* 1963a
 went himself then the brave ‘The brave one then went’

Most metrists claim that the finite verb in clause-initial verses forms part of the verse-initial drop. The motivation is the generalization proposed by Kuhn (1933), i.e. the Law of sentence particles or Kuhn’s first law, which dictates that sentence particles (roughly equal to but more inclusive than unstressed grammatical words) must occur either in the first or the second drop of the clause. Finite verbs can be ‘sentence particles’ in Kuhn’s definition and thus must be metrically unstressed in clause-initial position. Since Kuhn’s generalization is observation of poetic language rather than a rule according to which verse was composed, this justification cannot be supported. However, since this is no place to discuss the interpretation and validity of Kuhn’s law, which requires extensive arguments, I only present an additional piece of evidence for metrical status of clause-initial/early finite verbs.

I argued above that a clause-initial sequence of grammatical words in the a-verse together forms one drop because similar sequences in the b-verse are followed by two lifts and thus are metrically unstressed. Similarly, clause-initial finite verbs, both auxiliaries and non-auxiliaries, precede the alliterating lift in b-verse, as shown in (23).

- (23) *scōp him Héort náman* 78b
 created it Hart name ‘he named it Hart’

According to Getty (2002), clause-initial non-alliterating finite verbs as *scōp* in (23) must be metrically stressed because a sequence of lifts and drops must be strictly trochaic. However, other than his trochee assumption, there seems to be no evidence such as alliteration that indicates that the finite verb preceding the alliterating word in b-verses is stressed. This fact suggests, as Sievers (1885, 1893) and other metrists assume, that even lexical verbs occur in a drop in clause-initial/early position and thus may actually be unstressed.

Bliss (1967: 12-13) maximally generalizes the metrical interpretation of clause-initial/-early finite verbs and, based on Kuhn's first law, claims that any clause-early finite verb, not only non-alliterating but also alliterating such as *gewāt* in (24), is metrically unstressed.

- (24) *Gewāt þā ofer wægholm* 217a
 went then over wavy-ocean 'Then...went over the wavy ocean'

Bliss considers such alliteration 'ornamental' because alliteration on clause-initial/-early finite verbs is more frequent than accidental. On the other hand, Suzuki (1996) claims that clause-early alliterating finite verbs as in (24) fill a lift. Since alliteration on the finite verb in verses as in (24) cannot be unintentional as Bliss points out and since application of Kuhn's law as a metrical convention cannot be justified in the way Bliss and his followers do, following Suzuki (1996), I assume that the alliterating stressed syllable of the finite verb fills a strong position.

In contrast to finite verbs that involve both grammatical and lexical elements, alliteration on a grammatical word, whether it is in a clause-initial sequence or later in the clause, is usually considered accidental if there is another alliterating element that is more stressable than that grammatical word. For example, the preposition *on* in verse given in (25) is usually considered filling a drop because there is one lift filled by the following alliterating noun.

- (25) *Ðā wæs on ūhtan* 126a
 then was on dawn 'Then at the dawn...was'
 NOT *Ðā wæs on ūhtan*

Lack of metrical stress on an alliterating preposition preceding the alliterating lift will be relevant in section 3.3.2 in Part III.

One-lift verses discussed above are restricted to a-verses for obviously two reasons. First, the trochee requirement of lifts is violable in a-verses, while it must be observed in b-verses. However, if trochee is the norm, a-verses such as that in (20) could have had an additional lift after the alliterating lift just like b-verses in (21) and (23). The factor that excludes this possibility is presumably length requirement. If the sequence of several grammatical words together form a drop and is followed by two lifts and one other drop, the verse can be excessively long in terms of the number of syllables. In order to restrict the verse to reasonable length, one possibility is to suppress the first lift. And this is possible only in a-verses where the two-lift requirement is

violable.

Whether the first lift is demoted to a drop or simply disappears in one-lift verses is not discussed in literature. If the suppressed lift is demoted to a drop, the stress pattern of A3 verses should be WWSW with two successive weak positions in verse-initial position. The assumption seems to be, however, that A3 verses have one weak position preceding the sole lift. The entire clause-initial sequence of unstressed grammatical words forms one drop, which is longer than verse-medial or verse-final drops. This seems to be characteristic of the clause-initial drop, which applies also to the sixth-type verses that will be discussed in section 3 (cf. Parts II and III).

2.4.2.2. Hypermetrical lines

Verses with more than two lifts, usually three, are called hypermetrical lines. For example, the verse in (26) has two alliterating lifts and one other noun *Scyldinga* that apparently forms an additional lift, thus making three lifts in a verse.

- (26) æt fōtum sæt fréan Scyldinga 1166a
 at feet sat lord Scyldings ‘he sat at the feet of the lord of the Scyldings’

In *Beowulf* hypermetrical lines occur in a group (cf. Sievers 1886, 1893, Bliss 1962, and others). The existence of verses with more than three strong positions again suggests that the two-lift requirement is violable.

2.4.3. Three-syllable verses

While Sievers’s analysis posits four metrical positions, thus requiring at least four syllables in each verse, several verses in *Beowulf* consist only of three syllables, as in (27).

- (27) hāt in gán 386b
 ordered in go ‘he ordered...to enter’
- sécg bétsta 947a, 1759a
 man of-best ‘best of men’

hórd wið rónð 2673a
shield up-to boss ‘the shield up to the boss’

The verse-final verb *gān* in 386b is usually decomposed into the stressed stem syllable and the unstressed ending syllable, thus forming a sequence of a lift and a drop, as will be shown in section 2.5.2 in Part II. Three-syllable verses such as 386b are therefore interpreted as having four metrical positions in accordance with Sieversian scansion. However, verses such as 947a and 2673a in (27) can only be analyzed as having three metrical positions, i.e. two lifts and only one drop. Such verses thus violate the four-syllable requirement and must be accepted as anomalous.

As a summary of section 2.4, while a verse normally consists of two lifts and two drops, the number of both lifts and drops may be one or three. The requirements of two lifts and two drops in a verse are violable.

Notes

- * I thank two anonymous reviewers for comments on an earlier version of this paper.
- 1 Examples from Old English *Beowulf* are taken from Klaeber's (1950) edition. The number refers to the line number and a and b after the line number represent the a-verse or the first halfline and the b-verse or the second halfline, respectively (cf. see this section below). Accent marks are supplied to show strong positions in verse. Punctuation marks are omitted.
- 2 A vowel alliterates with any other vowel.
- 3 The letters *sp*, *st*, and *sc* alliterate only with the same sequence of letters and not with *s* alone.

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