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A COMPARISON OF VUK'S DESETERAC WITH LÖNNROT'S KALEVALA
VERSE

This paper is part of an ongoing research project dealing with the rhythmic structure of poetry as compared of the rhythm of spoken language in general. A basic assumption in this project is the notion that the suprasegmental system of language is crystallized in the metric structure of its traditional poetry. Rhythm is part of the suprasegmental structure. To understand better the rhythm of spoken language, I believe that one should look at the rhythmic structure of poetry developed in that language over the years; patterns that may be imperfectly realized in prose may be manifested in a more regular fashion in poetry. The rhythmic structure of poetry may just represent what for the realization of segmental sound has sometimes been called „maximally differentiated style”.

Rhythm is one of several possible organizing principles for linguistic units such as sentences – or as poetic lines. In many languages, a poetic line is structured in terms of, for example, number and type of syllables. An example might be the ten-syllable line of the epic folksongs of Serbia, the so-called *deseterac*. In other languages, rhythm may be based on regular succession of stressed syllables; Germanic languages developed a metric structure of that kind, first manifested in the so-called Germanic long line. Modern Germanic languages still manifest similar patterns – when the poets are not imitating classical metres introduced at a considerably later date. In stress-timed poetry in contemporary English, metric feet consist of a stressed syllable and a flexible number of unstressed syllables, whose duration is subordinated to the requirement that within a poetic line, all metric feet have approximately the same duration.

One aspect of the problems I am currently exploring is the difference between poetry and prose on the one hand, and poetry composed in free verse vs. poetry composed in one of the classical metres (e.g. trochaic) on the other hand. Comparison of the realization of similar metres in different languages

is another aspect of the project. Toward the end of the current paper, I will attempt a comparison of Lönnrot's Kalevala verse with Vuk's deseterac. I have carried out preliminary, primarily descriptive studies in English, Estonian, Finnish, and Serbocroatian, and I have collaborated in a study of Latvian. Several of these papers are already published; three have yet to appear, and one is in progress. My research methodology involves acoustic analysis of materials recorded by native speakers who are intimately acquainted with, and part of, the poetic tradition. I am particularly interested in comparing metric structures in typologically different, unrelated languages, such as Finnish and Serbocroatian.

I have been able to analyze several kinds of orally produced poetry in Finnish, and at least one set of materials comes close to the kind of productions that I would like to analyze in each one of the mentioned languages. I received from the Finnist Literature Society a cassette with field recordings of orally produced poetry in the classical Kalevala metre. I have published a paper based on one of these recordings, entitled „The Metric Structure of a Recited Finnish Spell” (Lehiste 1984). The spell was recited by Pekka Tuovinen, born in 1891 in Nurmes; the recording was made in 1953. One of the scholars who made to recording provided the following description of Pekka Tuovinen's production of the incantation (in my translation):

„In the midst of quiet conversation, Pekka suddenly got carried away, forgot his surroundings and began to cast his spells. And at that moment the interviewers found themselves confronting the last genuine descendant of the old soothsayers. This was not a traditional recitation of spells by someone who does not believe in them himself any more. The arousal seemed to come from the mysterious *primaeva* depths of humanity. It made Pekka's eyes roll like bloodshot balls. It brought foam to his mouth, so that his saliva splattered around. It shook his clenched fists and made the man's strong body shiver like in a high fever. The words dropped out like sledgehammers, stabbed sharply like daggers, burst out in a bellowing roar as if a strong tempest had been blowing. The interviewer, whose hair almost standing on end in spite of all reassurances, became convinced that in this way a patient would be healed from sheer shock. The process of healing thus seems to be based on powerful suggestion”.

The incantation reproduced on the cassette concerns snakebite. It begins with the summoning of the snake. For this purpose, the origin of the snake is recalled. Pekka Tuovinen is reported to have pulled a live adder from his

pocket at this point, shown in to the interviewers, put it back in his pocket and continued the incantation.

The spell represents a genuine example of the Kalevala metre. Let us recall here what the Kalevala metre may be expected to look like. The name commonly applied to the metre is trochaic tetrameter: the line consists of four trochaic metric feet, for a total of eight syllables. There is a strictly regulated relationship between syllable quantity and its position within a word and within the poetic line, which can be expressed as two distribution rules: a long first syllable of a word must occur in ictus position, and a short first syllable of a word must occur in ictus position, and a short first syllable of a word must be excluded from ictus position. Using the terms „fall” and „rise”, we can state the rule as follows: a long first syllable may not occur on a fall, and a short first syllable may not occur on a rise. Since words are stressed on the first syllable in Finnish, this leads to a conflict between words stress and verse ictus in the case of words beginning with a short syllable. It must be added that there are no restrictions for unstressed syllables; an unstressed short syllable may occur on a rise, but a stressed short syllable may not.

To return to the recited Finnish spell, it consists of 41 lines. The speaker stressed the first syllables of words regardless of their syllabic length and their position within a metric foot. Only 19 of the 41 lines consisted of eight syllables; 15 lines contained seven syllables, and there were two lines with five syllables, one with six syllables, two with nine syllables, and one each with ten and twelve syllables. The average durations of the lines show a gradual increase in duration with increasing numbers of syllables, but the average duration of the syllables decreases as their number in the line increases, so that there appears to be a tendency for the speaker to equalize the duration of the lines. The average duration of a syllable was 181.5 msec in lines of five syllables, and 132.0 msec in lines of ten syllables. The duration of disyllabic metric feet ranged from an average of 226.1 msec for metric feet consisting of two short syllables to 372.6 msec for metric feet consisting of two long syllables. The most frequently occurring foot type was the genuine trochaic foot: there were 45 such long-short metric feet, with an average duration of 301.4 msec.

There were five lines (out of 41) that did indeed conform to the expected pattern of the Kalevala metre. I calculated the onsets of the metric feet in these lines as a percentage of the duration of the line. This procedure makes it possible to compare the temporal structure of lines of unequal duration.

In an idealized case, each metric foot should occupy 25% of the duration of a four-foot line, and the onsets should occur at 25%, 50% and 75% of the duration of the line. The onsets were really quite regular, occurring at 23.6%, 47.9%, and 78.6% of the duration of the line.

Since the speaker stressed the first syllable of every word, and there were trisyllabic words, the reading also provided a number of trisyllabic metric feet – 35 of them. I did a similar analysis of lines containing trisyllabic feet and got similar results: the onsets of metric feet in lines containing three metric feet (of which two were trisyllabic) were just as regular, the speaker had only divided the eight-syllable line into three units rather than into four units. The deviations from expected regularity were no greater than the deviations that occurred in the production of lines with four trochaic feet.

This investigation of orally Finnish Kalevala-type verse yielded several results that suggest that further study might be worth while. The metric foot did not emerge as a very powerful organizing element in the time domain: the duration of a metric foot depended on the number of syllables in the foot and on the types of syllables comprising the foot. The overall duration of the line, too, depended to a certain extent on the number of syllables. However, the average duration of a syllable decreased as their number in the line increased, which suggests an interaction between the durations of the syllable and the line. Furthermore, there appears a tendency for the lines to approximate an average duration: when a syllable is added, the increase in the duration of the line is in each case less than the average duration of a syllable. It appears then that the units with reference to which the metrical structure is realized in time are the syllable and the line.

I followed this up in a study in which I compared the production of poetry composed in the same metre – four-foot trochaic lines – in Finnish and English. The materials consisted of the same spell against snakebite that I had analysed previously, and Runo 111 from *Kanteletar* („Jo on mennyt mennyt vuosi”) for the Finnish part, and 57 lines of Longfellow’s poem „Hiawatha” for the English part. (Let us recall that Longfellow consciously imitated the Kalevala metre in composing „Hiawatha”). Two speakers produced the materials in both languages: a native speaker of English, who has acquired a good command of Finnish, and a native speaker of Finnish with a good command of English. Both speakers still possess a certain degree of foreign accent in speaking their second language. In that study I was interested in finding out whether there are any differences in the production of the trochaic lines by the two speakers that could be associated with their language background. I presented that paper at the VI International Conference of Nordic and General Linguistics, Aug. 18–22, 1986, in Helsinki; the detailed results will appear in the Proceedings of the conference. Here are only a few general observations.

Again, the poetic line emerged as the unit of temporal programming. If the line is the unit over which temporal organization takes place, one can

expect a certain amount of temporal compensation between the durations of the metric feet constituting the line; such compensation was indeed present. If the speaker is planning for lines of approximately equal duration, the speaker has greater freedom in the production of the first metric foot, and that freedom is considerably reduced by the time he reaches the last foot. Both speakers showed the same pattern: the variability of the duration of the first foot was considerably greater than the variability of the duration of the last foot of the line. The difference between the linguistic backgrounds of the speakers showed up in the degree of variability. The native speaker of Finnish produced the Finnish materials with great regularity, as evidenced by the small variability of the durations of the various metric feet averaged over the lines. The native speaker of English appears to have produced the Finnish materials with the same degree of variability that he employed in his productions of the English materials. In the production of the English materials, both speakers appear to have employed the same degree of regularity, since their average relative variances were of the same order of magnitude. In other words, the speaker of English seems to have carried over his English patterns into his Finnish productions, while the speaker of Finnish employed two different patterns.

The materials that I have been able to analyze for Serbocroatian are somewhat different from the Finnish ones. I am not aware of the possible existence of field recordings of recitations of epic poetry comparable to the Finnish *spell against snakebite*. A few years ago I published a study of the production of a 93-line Serbian epic poem by six speakers (Lehiste 1984/85). The individual lines consist of ten syllables; the metric structure called *deseterac* has sometimes been described as a trochaic pentameter.

I started with the simplifying assumption, which seems to be generally accepted, that the individual line consists of one four-syllable hemistich and one six-syllable hemistich, and that a caesura appears between the two. I measured the duration of the first hemistich, the duration of the pause marking the caesura (if indeed a pause was present), and the duration of the second hemistich. (The caesura was sometimes manifested as preboundary lengthening rather than as an actual pause.) Again, I found that there was temporal compensation between the two parts of the line into which the line is traditionally segmented. The sum of the relative variances of the first and second hemistichs in lines without a pause was 46.52, while the relative variance of whole lines without a pause was 20.75, which is less than half of the sum of the variances of the two subunits constituting the line. I interpret this difference as a strong indication of temporal compensation between the parts of the line. Temporal compensation between parts of the line suggests the presence of an overall temporal program for the line; the results of that study make it possible

to conclude that the ten-syllable line of the deseterac does indeed constitute a unit of temporal programming.

This finding constitutes an important similarity between the metric structures being compared – the Kalevala verse and the deseterac. In both metres, the line is the unit of temporal programming. However, the internal structure of the line appears to show important differences. The metric foot does not appear to be a very strong unit in terms of phonetic realization in Finnish: in the oral production of poetry in the Kalevala metre, the speakers produced words with word-level stress on the first syllable, regardless of whether that first syllable occurred in first or second position within the metric foot. In other words, word stress overrides metric stress. However, ictus still plays a role with regard to the two exclusion rules; and the word must constitute a concept for the speakers of the language, since the exclusion rules are defined with reference to the first syllable of a word. It is the short first syllable of a word that is excluded from ictus, not just any short syllable. The metric structure of the Kalevala verse thus involves an intricate relationship between syllables, words, and positions within the line.

The deseterac shows important similarities and important differences. Again, the line is the unit of temporal programming. There appeared to be no indication that metric feet play a part in this programming, but there is strong evidence that the ten-syllable line is in fact divided into two hemistichs, with a boundary between the fourth and fifth syllables of the line. As words in Serbocroatian are not necessarily stressed on the first syllable, word-level stress does not play as important a part in the metre as it does in the Kalevala verse. Still, word boundaries are involved in the phonetic manifestation of the caesura, which in turn interacts with the position of word-level stress within the hemistich.

There are at least two directions in which I would like to continue this research. One of them involves the relationship between word accents and their position within the line. Does the position of a word within the line depend on whether it carries falling or rising accent? In Finnish, with its fixed word stress on the first syllable, the structure of the line specifies the relationship between word boundaries and the position of the syllable within the line. Serbocroatian accents may or may not play a comparable role: but that role has to be determined by further experimental research.

The second direction involves a comparison of the phonetic realization of the kind of epic poetry transmitted to us through the work of Vuk Karadžić with the phonetic realization of poetry composed in contemporary metres, both syllable-counting and stress-timed. I hope to continue both lines of research, and I will appreciate any comments and suggestions.

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