

Types of Interaction between Meter and Language in Relation to the Spread of the Syllabo-tonic in European Verse from the End of the 16th Century to the Mid 18th Century¹

Evgeny V. Kazartsev

Abstract. *This article studies the problem of the interaction between meter and language in the development of syllabo-tonicism in English, Dutch, German and Russian verse at the expense of re-stress: the shift in location of the main word stress from the strong to the weak position of the metrical scheme. The article draws attention to the question of metric "purity". It puts forward the hypothesis that the spread of the syllabo-tonic versification from one literary tradition to another had a purifying effect on the realisation of iambic metric schemes.*

Syllabo-tonic versification increased in English, Dutch and German poetry at the end of the 16th century and the first decades of the 17th century. The main characteristic of syllabo-tonic versification is the regular alternation of strong and weak positions (S- and W-positions) within a line of verse (as, for example, in iambic or trochaic verse). This versification replaced the earlier syllabic or the purely tonic verse systems. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the iambic pentameter was increasingly used in English verse, while the iambic hexameter began to surface in Dutch verse. In turn Dutch versification influenced the spread of syllabo-tonics into German poetry. Later, in the 18th century, under the influence of German iambic poetry, syllabo-tonic versification spread to Slavic verse.

The interaction between meter and language was an important problem that poets had to solve in order to master this new, more regular, system of versification. This endeavour was meant to overcome metric monotony and preserve the natural language accent. The search for the optimal type of interaction between meter and language to suit the different languages resulted in a variety of forms of metrical disruption.

It is generally accepted that in English verse there was an established tradition that allowed meter disruption at the expense of re-stress or re-stressing. These terms refer to a shift in location of the main word stress from the S- to the W-position. As a result, the S-position became unstressed. There are various examples of this infringement. We will consider as re-stress those instances in which the main accent of the polysyllabic phonetic word² receives a W-position.³ In iambic or trochaic verse

¹ This article was written during a fellowship at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS) of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. The author thanks NIAS for supporting this research and also expresses gratitude to A. Behrmann, M. Krasnoperova and Ch. Küper for their helpful comments.

² We name a phonetic word a group of the syllables incorporated by one main word accent: "the structure", "to shów", "my face", etc.

³ As R. Tsur testifies, many scientists (among them W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, M. Halle and S. J. Keyser,) recognize the given phenomenon of re-stress in an English verse as a metrical, but

it is possible to distinguish two basic types of this re-stress: the first type adopts the use of a strong accent in a W-position after the unaccented S-position, the second type the use of a strong accent in a W-position before the unaccented S-position. In terms of "foot theory", it is possible to say that in iambic verse, for example, the first type discussed above leads, as a rule, to the formation of spondee after the pyrrhic and the second leads to re-stress within the verse foot replacing the iamb with a trochee. However, in this and in other such examples, a deliberate friction arises in the interplay between metre and rhythm that, for want of a better term, may be called 'anaclastic' or 'counter-metrical' accentuation. Let us look at an example of the first type of 'anaclastic' accentuation. In the lines below, the accent of the phonetic word "but as Gláze" is realized in the W-position in the verse line but the preceding S-position is unstressed and the next one has the less strong stress on "which":

1. I had no suit there, nor new suit to show,
 Yet went to Court; but **as Gláze** which did go⁴
 W S W S W S W S W S

This type of re-stressing is occasionally seen in English poetry. Let us consider the second type of counter-metrical accentuation in the English iambic mentioned above:

2. **Stránger** that seven antiquaries' studies,
 Than Afric's monsters Guiana's rarities,
 Stránger than strangers; one, who for a Dane,
 In the Danes' Massacre had sure been slain...
3. From Heidelberg, thou longed'st to see; and thou
 This book, **gréater** than all, producest now.⁵

In example 2), the stress of the word "stránger" takes a W-position in iamb and the unstressed syllable of this word an S-position: a so-called trochee-iamb is formed. In number 3), we see the same phenomenon, but in the middle of the verse line in the word "gréater".

It is worth noticing that the so-called trochee-iamb is also possible in both German and Dutch iambic verse of the 17th century, but it occurred seldom and only at the start of the verse line. In English, this "foot" type was fairly typical and was, as we have seen, acceptable in the middle of the verse line as well.

some experts (for example P. Kiparsky, K. Magnusson and F. G. Ryder) consider this phenomenon as unmetrical. See R. Tsur. *Poetic rhythm: structure and performance: an empirical study in cognitive poetics*. Bern: Peter Lang, 1998. Pp. 144-145.

⁴ This example is from John Donne's "Satire 4". In: John Donne. *The Complete English Poems*. Edited by A.J. Smith, Great Britain 1971, P. 164.

⁵ The examples 2) and 3) are also from John Donne's Satires (see previous note). The first example is from "Satire 4", P. 164, and the second from Satire "Upon Mr Thomas Coryat's Crudities" P. 173.

In English versification, the practice of counter-metrical accentuation was widely accepted as an option for rhythmic nuances in meter. This principle can be regarded as one of the basic principles of interaction of meter and language within English versification.

In Dutch verse from the late 16th century, one sees anaclastic accentuation similar to that found in English verse (second type). Here is an example from J. van der Noot, one of the early poets of the Dutch baroque:

4. Geluckigh, want uit u ghesproten sijn, med vreuchdt,
 So veel **menschen**, begaeft med gracien en deught...
 W S W S WS W SWS W S

The example 4) is taken from "Himne oft Lof-Sangh van Brabant", one of the most important poems by Van der Noot.⁶ In this example, we can see a re-stress in an iambic foot (a 'trochee-iamb') in the middle of an iambic context: the word "m^en^schen" has its stressed syllable "men" in the W-position and its unstressed syllable "schen" in the S-position.

However, during the process of establishing the classic forms of syllabo-tonics in verse, the Dutch iamb was "purified" and by the early 17th century, this type had disappeared completely. It was replaced by a new, "lighter" type of counter-metrical accentuation, which is based on the idea that the W-position of the verse may take on a stronger stress than is seen on the neighbouring S-position. As a result, a particular kind of spondee arises in which the first stress is more pronounced than the second one. This effect is similar to the first type of "English" anaclastic accentuation described above, but here only in words that contain two or more stresses: composite words and verbs with separable prefixes. Let us look at the three following examples of such over stressing:

5. Arnolf de derde had twee Keyseren te gader
 Tot eenen Swager d'een, den andren tot **Schóónvader**
 W S W S W S W S W S W S W
6. Die (segge ick) heeft geproeft wat nut in zyne tochten
 En Krygen, iaerlijcx dees Provincen hem **aénbróchten**
 W S W S W S W S W S W S W
7. Uit laegh versopen Land, uit Poelen, en Morassen,
 ,t **Schatgeldrijck** Amsteldam, Rotterdam 't beroemt...⁷
 W S W S W S W S W S

⁶ The metrical structure of this poem illustrates the conformity of verse rhythm to iambic hexameter, see Jan van der Noot. "Lofsang van Brabant, Hymne de Brabant." *Facsimile-uitgave met inleiding en aantekeningen van Dr. C.A. Zaalberg*. Zwolle, 1958. P.4 (A2).

⁷ All three examples are from one of the earliest poems, "Lof-gesangh over... scheeps-vaert der Vereenighde Nederlanden", by the most famous Dutch poet of the 17th century J. van den Vondel. In: *De werken van Vondel. Volledige en geillustreerde tekstuutgave in tien deelen. Deel 1. Amsterdam, 1927. P. 431, P. 432, P. 430.*

In these lines, one can see that the main accent of the word falls on the W-position and the auxiliary accent occupies the S-position. In example 5), this occurs in the composite word, "Schóónvader", in the example 6) – in a verb form with the separable prefix "aénbròchten". The example shown in 7) is especially interesting because over-stressing is emphasized by means of relative accentuation. In the word, "t Schatgèldrijck" the syllable "geld" has the weakest accent but is in the S-position, whereas the preceding syllable "schat" has the strong accent and occupies the front W-position. The re-stress in this case is accentuated by the fact that the last part of the word "Schatgèldrijck", "rijck", has a weaker accent than the first part, "schat", but is stronger than the central syllable, "geld", which is assigned a back W-position. Thus, the weakest accent of this word is metrically heavy, and surrounding stronger accents of the same word are assigned neighbour W-positions.

In German, syllabo-tonicism developed in large measure under the influence of the mature versification found in Dutch but was from the beginning more "pure". The German author M. Opitz, influenced by his experience of Dutch, revived the theory of syllabo-tonic versification. His work shows an understanding of the discreet employment of pure iambic or trochaic verses.⁸ The German iamb, from the very beginning, avoided metrical obstructive means, excluded the anaclastic accentuation seen in English and Dutch verse and limited the use of metrically neutral feet, such as the spondee or pyrrhic. However, in certain early verses by M. Opitz it is possible to find rare instances of re-stress:

8. Das **der Gótt** Israel der stifter aller sachen /
Ihm selbst solt' ein gesetz' umb unsern willen machen...

9. Lass finden was du sagst **ánhèben** von der wiege /
Auffwàchsen gleich mit dir: biss unser hertze fliege⁹

The example 8) shows a line with an "English" type of counter-metrical accentuation, which is extremely rare in German verse: the main accent of the phonetic word "der Gótt" is used in a W-position but its unstressed part – the article "der" – is in an S-position. Example 9) shows two instances of the "Dutch" 'light' type of anaclastic accentuation: with secondary accents in the verbs "ánhèben" and "auffwàchsen" in S-positions and preceding main accents in W-positions. In Opitz's early verse, there are relatively few such examples of this light type of re-stress and it is not possible to conclude that they were incorporated into the German verse system. The largest number of 'light' re-stressing (only 10 instances in a text of 804 verses) were discovered in a translation into German of a famous work by the Dutch poet D. Heinsius, "Lofsanck van Jesus Christus". The counter-metrical accentuation was only fragmentary in character and probably reflected the influence of the original

⁸ M. Opitz. *Buch von der deutschen Poeterey*. Breslau, 1624. Pp. 37–38.

⁹ Both examples are from M. Opitz's translation of D. Heinsius, "Lobgesang Jesu Christi des ewigen und ewigen Sohnes Gottes" // *Martin Opitz Gesammelte Ausgabe. Band II, 1 Teil. Editor G. Schulz-Behrend*, Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1979. P. 292, P. 313.

Dutch verse. One should note that light re-stressing is seen more frequently in translations from the Dutch than in original German texts. For example, in one of the earliest Opitz's translations from Dutch to German (1619), we find two different metric uses of the same composite word "Jungfraw" in iambic tetrameter:

10. Ihr **Jú**ngfraw/ liegest in der Rhu/
Und habet ewer änglein zu/

11. **Jú**ngfraw ich geh/ und lass allhier
Die heissen Threnen vor der Thür...¹⁰

In example 10), the main accent of the composite word, "Jungfraw" is put on the S-position and the secondary accent on the W-position. This method of verse line organization, which can be characterized as metrically affirmative¹¹, is typical of German versification. In example 11), we observe a type of anaclastic accentuation in which the main stress in the word "Jungfraw" is on a W-position and the secondary stress is on a S-position. This type of re-stress was possible in the Dutch verse system, but it was seldom seen in German versification in the 17th and the first half of the 18th century, and almost never in the middle of the verse line. In Opitz's late iambs, as in later German verse, anaclastic accentuation had completely disappeared. Later, words of a similar class (with two accents – one main and one secondary) did appear in German verse only in the first, affirmative, type of verse line organization (see example number 10).¹² The German iamb of the baroque, on the whole, does not allow any form of counter-metrical accentuation. Its rhythm is constructed by means of metrically neutral resources: firstly by using pyrrhics – absence of accent in the verse foot – and, secondly, by varying the strength of the stressed syllables that are used in the S-position – the so-called relative accentuation of stressed syllables:

12. Das ander' in den kopff/ fiel todt hin in den wasen .
Der **Ó**bergótt war fro/ befahl nun **á**bzublásen/¹³
W S W S W S W S W S W S W

In the first verse line of example 12), the central S-positions in both half-verses are not realized because they are taken up by an unaccented preposition (the word:

¹⁰ These examples are from „Nachtklag“ (1619) by M. Opitz . In: *Martini Opicii Teutsche Pöemata und Aristarchus. Wieder die verachtung Teutscher Sprache, Item Verteutschung Danielies Heinsij Lobgesang Jesu Christi und Hymni in Bachum...* Strasburg, 1624. Pp. H2b-H3b. It is interesting that when Opitz later revised this poem in 1625, he changed the last stanza of this text (example number 11)) so that the reverse accentuation disappeared (see „Nachtklage“ (1625). In: *Martini Opitii Acht bücher Deutscher Poemata durch ihn selben herausgegeben...* Breslau, 1625. P. 158).

¹¹ The concept of metrically affirmative or obstructive use of the word stress was developed by Christoph Küper, see Küper, Ch. *Sprache und Metrum... Semiotik und Linguistik des Verses*. Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1988. P. 181.

¹² More about rhythmic structure of German and English words and their realization in verse (independent of the period) see in Küper, Ch. *Sprache und Metrum...* P. 196–203.

¹³ M. Opitz. Lob des Krieges Gottes. In: *Gesammelte Werke, Band IV, Teil 1*. Stuttgart, 1989. P. 149.

'in'), which results in a pyrrhic in the first half-verse. In the second verse line, metrical variation is realized by means of a relatively weaker accent on the second and last S-positions, which are placed on the secondary accents of the words "Öbergott" and "abzubläsen".

The Russian iamb, influenced by theories and practices of the German poets, seems to aspire to an even greater "purity" than that found in German verse. The principle of metric "purity" was introduced by one of originators of the Russian syllabo-tonic, M. Lomonosov.¹⁴ This principle not only made the aforementioned types of counter-metrical accentuation impossible but also, at the beginning, excluded, not just limited, the use of pyrrhics. Because of this, Lomonosov strove to realize the meter in his early iambs most completely. However, during his artistic development he strayed further and further away from his "purity" principle. Russian classical verse soon became more flexible, allowing a more extensive use of pyrrhics, which became the main tool of interaction between meter and language. However, re-accentuation continued to be prohibited. Nevertheless, in Lomonosov's late iambs one can find occasional instances of the non-standard use of stress in verse:

- | | |
|--|--|
| | <i>Transliteration</i> |
| 13. Так север, укротясь, впоследствии восстал. | <i>Tak sever, ukrotjas', vposledni vosstenal</i> |
| По усталым валам понт пену растстилал; | <i>Po ustälým valam pont penu rassttilal;</i> |
| W S W S W S W S W S W S | W S W S W S W S W S W S |
| 14. К лицу Святителя для вредного раздора, | <i>K licu Svjatitelja dlja vrednago razdora</i> |
| Скрывая к рамолу под именем собора. ¹⁵ | <i>Skryvaja kramolu pod imenem sobora</i> |
| W SW S W S W S W S W S W | W SW S W S W S W S W S W |

These two fragments could be characterized as examples of re-stress: in example number 13, instead of the standard accent on a second syllable, in the word "усталый" (*ustälýj*), metric constraints require a shift of the accent to the first unstressed syllable "u". In example number 14, a shift of accent occurs in the word "к^рамолу" (*kramólu*). However, such instances are very rare. Generally, Russian classical poetry avoided re-stress.¹⁶

¹⁴ Lomonosov M. V. Pismo o pravilakh rossijskogo stikhotvorstva. In: M.V. Lomonosov. *Polnoje sobranije sočinenij. Tom 7: Trudy po filologii.* Moskva-Leningrad: Izdatelstvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1952. P. 15.

¹⁵ These two examples are from Lomonosov's poem „Petr Velikij“. In: M.V. Lomonosov. *Polnoje sobranije sočinenij. Tom 8: Poэзия, ораторская проза, надписи.* Moskva-Leningrad: Izdatelstvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1959. Pp. 702, 716.

¹⁶ The law of inadmissibility of re-stress in Russian verse was formulated by R.O. Jakobson (Jakobson, R. Brjusovskaja stikhologija i nauka o stikhe. In: *Naučnyje izvestija Akademičeskogo centra Narkomprosa №2.* Moskva, 1922. Pp. 222–240; Jakobson, R. Ob odnosložnykh slovakh v russkom stikhe. In: *Slavic Poetics. Essays in honor of Kiril Taranovskij.* Hague-Paris, 1973. Pp. 239–252). R. Jakobson tries to explain the impossibility of the use of stresses of polysyllables on W-positions of a verse and the admissibility of an analogous phenomenon for monosyllables by the fact that the latter have no phonological stress. In the article "The theory of inadmissibility of re-stressing and monosyllabic words in Russian verse" M. A. Krasnoperova polemicalizes with R.

To conclude, with the spread of syllabo-tonic versification in Europe during the period from the end of the 16th century to the mid 18th century, writers from different language backgrounds had to deal with limitations on rhythmic freedom in verse. There seemed to be a tendency to avoid metrically obstructive methods. Counter-metrical accentuation was an important means of rhythmic expression in English verse, but later in Dutch iamb, we find only the lighter version of this. This type of anaclastic accentuation is practically absent from the verse that subsequently developed in Germany. Other metrical means of rhythmic expression such as relative accentuation and pyrrhics were typical in Germanic verse.¹⁷ Both Dutch and German poets frequently used these methods. However, it seems likely that the use of relative accentuation is more characteristic of German verse in the 17th century whereas pyrrhics were more common in Dutch verse.¹⁸

Finally, the anaclastic accentuation used to create prominence in the verse systems of some Germanic languages, was not adopted in early Russian syllabo-tonicism. From the mid 18th century onwards, Russian poets used pyrrhics and this became the main means, to variegate meter in Russian classical verse.¹⁹ On the whole, re-stress was rejected during the development of the Russian syllabo-tonic.

The conclusions drawn above can lead to the hypothesis that the spread of the syllabo-tonic from one literary tradition to another, during the period from the end of the 16th century to the mid 18th century, had a purifying effect on the realisation of iambic metric schemes.

Jakobson and gives a cognitive explanation of this phenomenon on the basis of her model of generation and reception of verse rhythmical structure (Krasnoperova, M.A. *Teorija nedopustivosti pereakcentuacii i odnosložnyje slova v russkom stikhe*. In: *Slavjanskij stikh: lingvističeskaja i prikladnaja poetika*. Moskva, 2001. Pp. 50–62).

¹⁷ Various studies (e.g. K. Ph. Moritz, 1786) have been written on the role of relative accentuation in interaction of meter and language on Germanic language material. See for example Kiparsky, P. *Über den deutschen Akzent*. In: *Untersuchungen über Akzent und Intonation im Deutschen*. Berlin, 1971. P. 69-98; Kiparsky, P. *Stress, Syntax and Meter*. In: *Language* 51, 1975. P. 576-616.

¹⁸ In the 17th century, fully accented iambs (without pyrrhics) were used more in German verse than in Dutch verse. For example, on our data, 70% of German baroque iambic tetrameter is made up of fully accented iambs whereas in Dutch iambic tetrameter this is only 55-53%.

¹⁹ In Russian verse, five to six years after the emergence of syllabo-tonic, the proportion of fully accented iambs has already fallen to 32,7% (on the data of K. Taranovskij, See Тарановски, К. *Руски дводелни ритмови*. Београд, 1953. P. 72.