

Workshop

THE STRUCTURE OF VERSE

Formal, (psychological) / experimental and computational approaches

19 – 20 March 2015
University of Leiden

These are interesting times for the study of formal aspects of verse. On the one hand, many new techniques are being employed to uncover new kinds of data, for instance experimentally, or by use of large corpora. On the other hand, many different kinds of conceptual frameworks are brought in to apply on such data, ranging from cognitive psychology to literary analysis, and from linguistic theory to acoustics. Old debates revive and new questions arise. How can we study verse forms? How can we create a typology of forms across languages and cultures? What explains universals and variation within this typology? How can we make sure that our data can be exchanged most easily across researchers?

In this perspective, we are pleased to invite you to the Workshop *The structure of verse*, organized at the University of Leiden in the framework of the Horizon project *Knowledge and Culture*. The two-day workshop aims at bringing together scholars and graduate students interested in formal aspects of poetry, song, chant and related phenomena, including typological, experimental and computational approaches.

TOPICS & SESSIONS

The workshop will comprise two distinct albeit connected sessions.

First session (19 March):

‘Encoding and decoding verse: structure and perception of metered poetry’

Second session (20 March):

‘Encoding verse digitally: how to build, use and connect corpora’

Abstracts for a 20 minutes talk should be submitted in .pdf form (1 page A4, max. excluding references) before December 21st 2014. Notifications of acceptance will be sent to authors in early January 2015.

The organizing committee:

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Click [here](#) for the full version of the call for paper.

Call for paper

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TOPICS

SESSION 1: **Encoding and decoding verse: structure and perception of metered verse**

Since [Jakobson's *Closing statement*](#), much research in the field of metrics has followed the idea that what constitutes a (spoken) meter is the regular occurrence of similar items in a sequence. However, it has soon become clear that one should not dismiss the role played by the reader/listener in decoding and attributing structure to a metered text ([Attridge 1987](#)). As a matter of fact, the formal equivalence established among successive items in verse is only possible within the limits of the reader's (or listener's) perception ([Cornulier 1982](#)).

The influence of general perceptual and cognitive constraints on the perception and representation of metrical structure has thus become part of the debate about meter.

Evidence from experimental psychology provides support for this approach. In fact, independent work carried out with both simple and complex sound sequences ([Fraisse 1956](#), [Jones 1976](#)) has revealed that the perception and processing of sound(-like) events is restricted by quantity, temporal limits and internal organization.

Moreover, it has been argued that there exist cognitive limitations on the amount of information that we are able to receive, process, and remember. In particular, storage of information in immediate memory appears to be subject to the so-called Miller's Law, which limits the maximum number of items that we are able to memorize to seven, plus or minus two ([Miller 1992](#)). The role of combined constraints and formal organization in cueing recall and ensuring stable transmission of oral poetry has also been investigated ([Rubin 1995](#)).

Insights from metrical typology suggest that the proliferation of poetic forms observed across cultures and times corresponds in fact to a limited number of cognitive mechanisms that allow us to perceive and mentally represent the equivalences created by metrical repetitions ([Kiparsky/Youmans 1989](#), [Arleo/Aroui 2009](#)).

In this workshop, we invite papers focusing on the mechanisms of perception, mental representation and memorization involved in the creation, reception and transmission of metered texts. Proposals may address theoretical issues and/or present empirical analyses based on spoken and/or sung poetry. Typological approaches as well as comparative analyses conducted in the above spirit are also welcome.

SESSION 2: **Encoding verse digitally.**

Now that digital data is easily available, it becomes crucial to develop efficient ways of storing, sharing and exploiting it. Verse is still most often than not stored only in printed form, and easily automatisable analytical tasks are still performed by hand. Fortunately, more and more verse corpora are being built at different institutions (e.g. [Czech](#), [Estonian](#), [Dutch](#)). The main goal of this workshop is to bring together different initiatives and ideas so that encoding standards are developed in the benefit of the whole research community.

For encoding standards to be useful, several aspects can be considered. The system should be flexible, so that the typological diversity can be covered (spoken, chanted and sung verse, quantitative and stress systems, etc.). Flexibility can be ensured by a modular and extensible approach, where researchers develop sub-modules as required by the data. Formats should also be maximally compatible, easily convertible and platform-independent. This guarantees the circulation of corpora and the reproducibility of research. Encoding standards also give the chance to share and reuse scripts for recurrent analyses, such as the identification of stress mismatches or rhymes.

As a side topic, we are also interested in how to build **typological databases of metrical forms**. For both the main and the side topics, fruitful insights can be drawn from similar initiatives in two sister disciplines: musicology ([MEI](#), [MusicXML](#), [music21](#)), and linguistics ([Phoible](#), [Autotyp](#), [WALS](#)).

With this in mind, we invite contributions on the following and related topics.

- Which features of verse are to be encoded, and how? E.g. phonological layer: phonemes, syllables, intonational phrases, stress, quantity, etc; metrical layer: metrical positions, feet, lines, stanzas, etc; musical layer: metrical-grid prominence, durations, pitch-classes, motifs, etc.
- How to integrate the different layers of information? E.g. one metrical position may contain more than one syllable, or none; one syllable may be associated to different notes, each with a different metrical prominence, etc.
- Which are the optimal file formats in terms of flexibility, compatibility and extensibility?
- How to automatise the extraction of analytical features from plain text? E.g. automatic syllabification, scansion.
- How to automatise the analysis of encoded verse? E.g. rule violations, textsetting mismatches, pattern extraction, statistical tendencies.
- Typological databases of metrical forms. Which descriptive traits are required? How to encode non-discrete or variable features? Which are the optimal file formats?

References

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