



Jean-Louis Aroui & Andy Arleo (Eds.), *Towards a Typology of Poetics Forms.
From language to metrics and beyond*, Amsterdam 2009

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As the title suggests, this volume aims to lay the foundations for a typological classification of all poetic forms found across languages and times. To this end, the structural features and organizing principles observed in poetry are identified and treated in four separate sections. The central point of investigation is, of course, meter, which is understood as a system of iterative regularities that may surface at different hierarchical levels. The main part of the book is thus concerned with metrical typology, whereby such features as alliteration, caesura and bridge, are dealt with to the extent that they are relevant to the discussion of meter (see in particular M. Dominicy and M. Nasta's paper focused on the caesura in Greek dramatic poetry). The remaining part is devoted to the study of "para-metrical rules" (mainly syllabification constraints), and the hierarchical makeup of meters at the macro-structural level (stanzas, rhyme, fixed forms).

This strong concern with the metrical object is justified in consideration of the close link between the formal features of meters and the properties of language. As stated in the subtitle (*From language to metrics*), the starting point for a full understanding of metrical systems is language. In versification, each language selects a specific set of grammatical properties that regulate the distribution of linguistic units across metrical positions. It has been suggested, however, that the profusion of forms found across the world's metrical traditions correspond to a limited number of cognitive mechanisms that allow for the perception and representation of regularly iterating patterns. The ultimate goal of an investigation of metrical universals should therefore be to model the cognitive processes that shape this special kind of verbal behavior. This epistemological perspective is foreshadowed in the subtitle's closure *and beyond*.

A large palette of languages and metrical traditions are represented in the book, ranging from Romance languages to Arabic, from Russian to Hungarian to sign language. While accentual, syllabic and quantitative meters are object of in-depth studies, tonal languages and their metrical systems are underrepresented (they only figure in A. Arleo's corpus of children's counting-out rhymes); this should partly be ascribed to the inherent character of conference proceedings (the book resulted from a conference that took place in Paris in 2005). Particularly valuable is M. Blondel and Ch. Miller's paper, which presents an interesting account of rhythmical schemas in children's rhymes in five sign languages, and offers insights into how metrical typology may profit from the study of non-spoken systems.

Both the theoretical and the empirical aspects of research in metrics are covered in this book. The theoretical orientation is well represented by the paper by N. Fabb and M. Halle, who present their theory of meter based on the grouping of syllables into pairs or triplets, and by A. Arleo's work, which is part of an on-going project aiming to uncover the universals of children folklore. Diachronic metrics is represented by a few articles focusing, respectively, on Middle English alliteration (D. Minkova), on the 18th-20th century Sephardic song (J. Domínguez

Caparrós) and on the 16th-17th century Hungarian poetry (I. Horváth). However, reference to older metrical systems are consistently made by authors dealing with long-standing metrical traditions, such as the Italian *endecasillabo* and French *décasyllabe* (K. Hanson and C. Piera) and the European sonnet (J.-L. Aroui), or with meters that are understood as historical residues of older verse forms (P. Noel Aziz/R. Vetterle). Particularly interesting is B. Paoli's treatment of classical Arabic meter, which has the virtue of substantiating the empirical results with theoretical questioning.

Methodologically, the editors distinguish linguistically based metrical structures, i.e. prosodic meters, from metrical forms based on temporal equivalences, i.e. isochronous meters. The first part of the book is entirely concerned with issues related to musical (isochronous) meters, ranging from minimal chronometric forms (B. de Cornulier) to folk songs, to rap. The relation between prosody, rhythm and meter in musical systems is addressed from different standpoints: B. Hayes' optimality account of English text-setting constraints is followed by F. Dell and J. Halle's comparative approach to text-to-tune alignment in French and English; P. Noel Aziz and R. Vetterle's analysis of German rap and Bavarian *Zwiefache* is conducted in the framework of Vennemann's *Maxim of Natural Versification*.

Rather than conceiving a typology based on a categorical distinction between isochronous and prosodic meters, one may think of both metrical systems as two opposite poles of a continuum ranging from spoken to sung forms, in which the features of language and music may combine in several ways. Such a typology would include, for example, mixed structures based on a prosodic meter delivered in musical form (an example is provided by the use of the *endecasillabo* in the extemporary sung poetry of Tuscany and Sardinia).

The volume also covers more general issues related to versification and to the cultural aspects associated with metrical forms. O. Floquet's paper shows how apparent linguistic deviations in poetry may be explained in terms of a dialectics between graphic and spoken registers; N. Friedberg's essay on Brodsky's translation of a poem by Auden illustrates the close connection between the choice of a meter and the cultural and biographical motivation underlying this choice.

In conclusion, this book constitutes an important advance in shining a bright light on the achievements made possible in the field of metrical typology and on the obstacles that still stand in the way.