

Glossary and Definitions of General Terms

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The terminology used in this project has been used elsewhere in a variety of ways. Definitions of general terms are offered first. A glossary of more technical terms follows.

Poetry is a genre of verbal art in which highly patterned and highly figured language predominates. The patterns which qualify as “poetic” in a given language and time are established by convention. As far as ancient Hebrew poetry is concerned, the dominant patterns consist of co-occurring structures of parallelisms woven into the fabric of the text at the phonological, morphological, syntactic, prosodic, and semantic levels.

A **poem** is a sustained example of verbal art of the genre defined above.

“**Verse** is language in lines,” as Charles Hartman famously stated.¹ More precisely, as Albert Willem de Groot put it, “Continuous correspondence of successive segments, called ‘lines,’ is the only constant feature which distinguishes verse from prose.”² As far as verse in ancient Hebrew is concerned, the units of measurement which most clearly correspond to each other on a continuous basis are the stress unit, the verset, the line, and the strophe. These terms are defined in relationship to one another in the general rule.

Prose may be defined as a genre of verbal art in which the patterned and figured language conventional in poetry does *not* predominate.

Prose, nevertheless, may instantiate verse as defined above. Examples from world literature are well-known. Clausular periodic structures characterize a part of the classical and medieval rhetorical prose tradition in Latin. The most common meter in Sanskrit, the *śloka* (“praise”), is the verse

¹ Charles O. Hartman, *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980) 11; cited by Walter T. W. Cloete, *Versification and Syntax in Jeremiah 2-25: Syntactical Constraints in Hebrew Colometry* (SBLDS 117; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989) 5.

² Albert Willem de Groot, “The Description of a Poem,” in *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Linguists, Cambridge, Mass., August 27-31, 1962* (ed. Horace G. Lunt; The Hague: Mouton, 1964) 294-300; 299; cited by W. T. W. Cloete, *Versification*, 5

mode of choice for a diverse range of literary genres, including grammar and astronomy.³

As far as ancient Hebrew prose genres are concerned, legal, rhetorical, and even narrative prose often possesses a cadence that approximates the division of ancient Hebrew poetry into clusters of two or three stress units. But consistency in this respect is hard to find. Clusters of four stress units 1+3, 3+1, and 1+2+1 in configuration occur with some frequency. Syntactic parallelisms of verset length units across line length units, and of line length units across strophe length units, are not the norm as they are in poetry.

Enjambment across clusters of two, three, or four stress units is more common in prose than in poetry. The high density of semantic, syntactic, morphological, and phonological parallelisms across units of verset, line, and strophe length characteristic of ancient Hebrew poetry is only fitfully attested in ancient Hebrew prose. In prose narrative, *waw*-introduced structures, consecutive and otherwise, parallel each other with great regularity, but said structures vary widely in length. A frequent use of syndetic coordination and hypotaxis and a sparing use of apposition are typical of prose. The opposite is the case in poetry. The subject deserves further study.

The terms *meter* and *rhythm* are often conflated. An excellent definition of meter was given by John Lotz: “the numerical regulation of certain properties of the linguistic form.”⁴

The problem is that language in general possesses meter in this sense. At the highest level of abstraction, all one can say is that verse generally adheres to a more strictly defined set of regularities than do other forms of speech and literature in a given language. As a practical matter, however, the problem rarely obtains. Verse is characterized by specific and describable stylizations of the more general metrical properties observable in speech and literature within a given language and time frame. The stylizations which qualify as “verse” are established by convention. We normally reserve the term “meter” for the metrical properties of verse.

³ For details, see the articles entitled “Prose Rhythm” and “Indian Prosody” in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (gen. ed. Alex Preminger, Terry V. F. Brogan; Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993) 979-81 and 600-603, respectively.

⁴ John Lotz, “Elements of Versification,” in *Versification: Major Language Types* (ed. William K. Wimsatt; New York: Modern Language Association / New York Univ. Press, 1972) 1-21; 2; cited by M. O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1980) 67; and Cloete, *Versification*, 11.

If it is true that ancient Hebrew poetry instantiates a kind of accentual or tonic verse, then the comments and distinctions of Viktor Zhirmunsky are worth keeping in mind:

Pure tonic verse is based on a count of the stressed syllables; the number of unstressed syllables is a variable quantity . . . When attention is focused on the stressed syllables, groups of unstressed syllables – even though they contain varying numbers of syllables – may be perceived as equivalent to each other.

Of course, the number of unstressed syllables between stresses is of essential importance in shaping the rhythm of individual lines or of the poem as a whole: since, however, such syllables form no part of the compositional structure, they belong to the area of rhythm, not meter.⁵

Put another way, feet in the sense of classical prosody exist in ancient Hebrew poetry but are not metrical.⁶ The patterns or lack of them in which they co-occur belong to the dimension of rhythm.

Another key term is *prosody*. As I use the term, all language is subject to prosodic constraints at various levels. Syllables, feet, words, phrases, and utterances in a given language come in certain shapes and sizes, phonologically speaking, and not others. In poetry, language-specific constraints are stylized according to convention.

An explanation of important terms used in this research project is provided below. Abstracts from other sources are indicated by the following abbreviations:

G & H Carlos Gussenhoven and Haike Jacobs, *Understanding Phonology* (2d ed.; Understanding Language Series; London: Hodder Arnold, 2005).

H & M Bruce Hayes and John J. McCarthy, “Metrical Phonology,” in *The Oxford International Encyclopedia of Linguistics* (2d ed.; ed. William Frawley and William Bright. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 3:54-57.

L Ilse Lehiste, “Syllables and Stress in Phonetics,” in *The Oxford International Encyclopedia of Linguistics* (2d ed.; ed. William Frawley and William Bright. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 4:189.

⁵ Viktor Maksimovich Zhirmunsky, *Introduction to Metrics: The Theory of Verse* (tr. and ed. C.E. Brown; introd. Edward Stankiewicz and Walter N. Vickery; The Hague: Mouton, 1966) 171; cited by Cloete, *Versification*, 9.

⁶ For a discussion, see my “Regularities in Ancient Hebrew Verse: An Overview,” online at www.ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com.

Glossary

- Acrostichon.** An acrostichon is a unit in an acrostic poem.
- Acrostic poem.** An acrostic poem contains units of text each of which begins with a letter of the alphabet according to a conventional order.
- Apposition.** Apposition is the occurrence in series of syntactic units of the same rank without a conjunction, simple or subordinating, between the items in series. The units, called appositives, must normally be identical in reference. For the purposes of the “*hypotaxis*” index, enjambed structures in which syntactic units of the same rank but of dissimilar reference (like subject and predicate, or preposed subject followed by an interrogative clause) are appositionally distributed across contiguous versets score zero, as do appositives in the strict sense. Apposition, *syndetic coordination*, and *hypotaxis* lie on a syntactic continuum.
- Chiasm.** An *ab:ba* structure with items in parallelism in reverse order. An *abc:cab* structure exhibits partial chiasm.
- Ellipsis.** Ellipsis involves the omission of a word or phrase that is easily understood, and often supplied, in context. Ellipsis is not especially common in ancient Hebrew verse.
- Enallage.** Enallage takes place when, after the use of a particular grammatical person, gender, or number, or a particular verbal conjugation, one passes immediately to another which ordinarily would be unfitting. Enallage in ancient Hebrew literature often involves the abrupt movement from 2nd person address to 3rd person description and vice-versa. Examples abound in Song of Songs and the Psalms.
- Enjambment.** Enjambment, in which a syntactic whole is distributed across two or more prosodic wholes, is common in ancient Hebrew verse, particularly at the *line* level.
- Extrametricality.** At the periphery of a word – that is, at its right or left edge – a phonological constituent (syllable, consonant, vowel, mora, etc.) may be extrametrical, that is, irrelevant from the point of view of foot formation and/or prosodic structure more generally. (G & H).
- Foot.** In metrical phonology, the sequence of syllables that make up a word are parsed into groupings called feet. Each foot has a single *strong* or prominent syllable. A strong syllable is stressed to a greater degree than other syllables (if any) in the foot. See *stress*. Feet so understood tend to consist of two syllables. (H & M). Cross-linguistically, languages tend to

have one of two kinds of alternating rhythm, *trochaic rhythm* (even duration, initial prominence) or *iambic rhythm* (uneven duration, final prominence). (G & H). Long before the advent of metrical phonology, biblical Hebrew was described as possessing an iambic-anapestic rhythm. This still seems right, with allowance made for the *extrametricality* of post-tonic syllables and the not infrequent occurrence of monosyllabic feet. But perhaps post-tonic syllables, which always have a C_v(C) shape, are better analyzed as the coda component of the syllable that carries the strongest stress within a prosodic word.

General Rule. A prosodic hierarchy of “twos and threes” structures a poem. Two to three *stress units* form a *verset*, two to three versets a *line*, two to three lines a *strophe*, two to three strophes a *stanza*, and two to three stanzas a poem or *section* thereof.

Hypotaxis. Hypotaxis is the occurrence in series of syntactic units of the same rank with an intervening subordinating conjunction between the items in series. In the case of three or more items in series, one subordinate syntactic unit is usually superordinate relative to another. A short list of clause-level subordinating conjunctions in ancient Hebrew would include כִּי; פֶּן; וְ; אֲשֶׁר; וְ, זֶ, אֲשֶׁר; לְמַעַן, וְעַן; לֹא, אִם, פֶּן; בְּעֵבוּר, לְמַעַן, וְעַן; אֲשֶׁר; וְ, זֶ, אֲשֶׁר. For the purposes of the “hypotaxis” index, enjambed structures in which syntactic units of different types (like subject and predicate) are appositionally distributed across contiguous versets are scored zero, as are appositives in the strict sense. *Syndetic coordination* scores 0.5; hypotaxis 1. *Apposition*, syndetic coordination, and hypotaxis lie on a syntactic continuum.

Intonational Phrase. An intonational phrase in prosodic structure theory is marked off from its environment by intonational boundary tones, pauses, and final lengthening. In the context of ancient Hebrew verse, it tends to correspond to two syntactic structures of equal rank in parallelism; more generally, to a complex syntactic unit subdivisible into two or three components. Cross-linguistically, an intonational phrase consists of one or more phonological phrases; under the general rule, of two to three phonological phrases, referred to as a *line*.

Inversion. A departure from expected word order.

Length rule. A poem, if it contains more than 10 lines, typically consists of 12, 18, 22, 28, or 36 *lines*, or combinations thereof. Among the Psalms, 14 lines is also a common length.

Line. See under *intonational phrase* and *general rule*.

Meter. See “Definitions of General Terms” above.

Minimal phonological phrase. A *phonological phrase* or *verset* in ancient Hebrew verse is universally subdivisible into exactly two minimal phonological phrases each of which consists of one or two *prosodic words*. See under *phonological phrase*.

Mora. Many languages have more than one kind of syllable based on the number of segments in the rhyme (peak + coda; see *syllable*). Vowels are always moraic; coda segments may or may not be. Languages with vowel-length distinctions have both monomoraic and bimoraic syllables. Ancient Hebrew is a case in point, insofar as reduced and full vowels are reconstructible for it. It is not uncommon for languages to allow the last syllable of the word to have three morae. (G & H). Ancient Hebrew, in which word final CvC_(v)C and Cv(C)C_v are frequent, falls into this category.

Neumes. In the masoretic text, neumes are signs each of which corresponds to one or more musical notes sung to the syllable receiving primary stress in the *prosodic word* over which the sign is affixed.

Parallelism. Two or more items that correspond to one another on one or more linguistic levels are said to parallel each other. Poetry and non-poetry in ancient Hebrew is shot through with parallelisms, but the respective typologies differ in multiple ways. Poetry is characterized by obligatory prosodic parallelisms and a high density of concomitant semantic, syntactic, morphological, and phonological parallelisms.

Phonological phrase. A phonological phrase as understood in prosodic structure theory is marked off from its context by pitch accents, focus tones, phonological caesurae, and other closure phenomena. A phonological phrase is a prosodic, not a syntactic unit. Phonological and syntactic phrases do not necessarily align. In varieties of verse which make use of strong enjambment, this of course is beyond dispute. Cross-linguistically, a phonological phrase consists of one or more prosodic words. As far as ancient Hebrew verse is concerned, two minimal phonological phrases (ϕ_m), each consisting of one or two prosodic words, comprise a phonological phrase (ϕ). Under the general rule, a ϕ consists of two to three prosodic words, referred to as a *verset*.

Poem. See “Definitions of General Terms” above.

Poetry. See “Definitions of General Terms” above.

Prose. See “Definitions of General Terms” above.

Prosodic word. A prosodic word is the domain of word stress. In many languages, an orthographic word may be composed of a lexical word preceded or followed by a short function word the whole of which is dominated by a single main stress. An orthographically distinct function word and a lexical word to which it is attached may also constitute a prosodic word. Words without word stress are known as pro- and enclitics. A prosodic word consists of *feet* each of which has a single strong or prominent syllable. Another term used for a prosodic word is *stress unit*.

Prosody. See “Definitions of General Terms” above.

Rhythm. See “Definitions of General Terms” above.

Right-headed iambic rhythm. In metrical phonology, two fundamental laws of alternating rhythm are recognized at the *foot* level: trochaic rhythm (even duration, initial prominence) and iambic rhythm (uneven duration, final prominence). *Right-headed* iambic rhythm means that iambs are formed beginning word’s end moving backwards.

Section. See under *general rule*.

Stress. In metrical phonology, stress is an abstract property that is instantiated physically by a variety of mechanisms such as length and pitch that differ across languages. Stress is a property of *feet, prosodic words*, and *phonological phrases*. It is usually *culminative*: each word or phrase has a single strongest syllable. It is *rhythmically distributed*: syllables bearing equal levels of stress tend to occur at roughly equal intervals. It is *hierarchical*: it usually occurs in a number of degrees – primary, secondary, tertiary, etc. The existence of multiple levels reflects the hierarchical nature of rhythmic structure. (H & M).

Stress Unit. See under *prosodic word*.

Strict Layer Hypothesis. An analysis of language in terms of prosodic constituents organized within a strictly layered hierarchical structure first developed by Elisabeth Selkirk. The levels of the prosodic hierarchy include, in ascending order, the *syllable* (σ), the *foot* (f), the *prosodic word* (ω), the *phonological phrase* (φ), the *intonational phrase* (I), and the *utterance* (U). The levels are strictly layered in the sense that a single constituent of one level is fully parsed into one or more constituents of the next level down, and no constituent is dominated by another constituent of the same rank.

Stanza. See under *general rule*.

Strophe. See under *utterance and general rule*.

Sub-stanza. A sub-stanza consists of the first two or the last two strophes in a three strophe unit. The strophes of the sub-stanza cohere to a greater degree over against the third or the first strophe. For *strophe* and *stanza*, see under *general rule*.

Suprasegmentals. Phonological phenomena such as *stress*, rhythm, and intonation.

Syllables. A syllable is a sequence of *segments* grouped around an obligatory *nucleus*, ordinarily a vowel (though in many languages, liquids and nasals may also constitute syllable nuclei; syllable fricatives are also attested). An initial margin, if any, is referred to as the *onset*; the remainder of the syllable, as the *rhyme*, composed of the nucleus or *peak* and optionally, a final margin, known as the *coda*. Margins are usually but not always consonants. A segment is a vowel or a consonant. (L).

In many languages, a syllable is categorizable in terms of weight elements such that it may be either light (monomoraic), heavy (bimoraic), or superheavy (trimoraic). See *mora*. The concept of a syllable is not self-evident as many assume. The native grammatical traditions of the Arabic and Hebrew languages engaged in prosodic analysis without recourse to the concept of a syllable.

Syndetic coordination. Series of syntactic units of the same rank with a coordinating (as opposed to subordinating) conjunction between the items in series are said to be syndetically coordinated. The units must normally be identical in reference. A short list of clause-level coordinating conjunctions in ancient Hebrew would include וְ; גַם, כִּי, גַם, אֶף; אֲבָל (late); after a negative clause: כִּי, אֶם, כִּי-אֶם; כִּן...כִּי-אֶשֶׁר. For the purposes of the “*hypotaxis*” index, *apposition* scores 0, syndetic coordination 0.5; hypotaxis 1. Apposition, syndetic coordination, and hypotaxis lie on a syntactic continuum.

Utterance. In prosodic structure theory, Utterances are closed by “full stops” or similar. Cross-linguistically, an utterance consists of one or more intonational phrases; under the general rule, of two to three intonational phrases, referred to as a *strophe*.

Verse. See “Definitions of General Terms” above.

Verset. See under *phonological phrase* and *general rule*.