Metrical Consistency in Two Poetic Genres of Tohono O'odham

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Tohono O'odham

- Tohono O'odham (or Papago) is a Native American language from the Uto-Aztecan language family spoken in southern Arizona and Sonora, Mexico.
- The language has a significant oral tradition, much of which has been published in O'odham, as well as in English translations.

Oral Literature in Tohono O'odham

- O'odham oral literature includes:
  - Myths and Creation Stories (Saxton and Saxton 1973, Bahr 2001)
  - Ritual speeches (Bahr 1975, Bahr et. al 1974, Underhill et. al 1979)
  - Contemporary poetry (Zepeda 1995, 1997)

The Relevant Genres

- This paper compares the metrical consistency of two genres, traditional songs and modern poetry.
- The meter of traditional O'odham songs are strictly trochaic, although line length is unregulated (Fitzgerald 1998).
- More recently, contemporary poetry has been written by Ofelia Zepeda, a native speaker of O'odham who is also bilingual in English (Zepeda 1995, 1997).
- The comparison shows that while both genres are trochaic, traditional songs display more trochaic elements than contemporary poetry.
Differences in the Two Genres

- Contrast in genre type:
  - songs versus poems.
- Contrast temporally:
  - songs are traditional and the poetry is modern.
- Contrast in mode of delivery:
  - the songs represent oral literature, while contemporary poetry is written
- Contrast in the linguistic mode:
  - the songs are monolingual in O’odham and the poetry is bilingual O’odham and English.

Relevance for Diachronic Poetics

- The two genres vary in at least four different ways, so we cannot determine whether temporal change alone necessarily results in a weakening of rhythmic effects.
- The metrical differences, and the metrical consistency between these two literary forms suggests one trajectory of historical change for the verse systems of a particular language.
- Even with change, I will argue that these two different genres display an evident metrical consistency in their meters.

Verse Change without Linguistic Change

- For the Tohono O’odham language, traditional songs are more conventionalized than modern poetry; the meter of traditional songs is more rigid and more trochaic.
- The two verse forms in Tohono O’odham are relatively similar, although song language does have certain properties not found in normal speech.
- The songs are performed today; the language is similar in song and poetry. This is different from a comparison across different time spans in English (i.e., Beowulf, Shakespeare)

The Idea: Metrical Consistency

- Metrical consistency: the degree to which a meter or rhythm type is replicated across genres; the comparison can hold at a surface level, or at an underlying level of scansion
- Classical Greek: metrically inconsistent at a surface level (dactylic hexameter, iambic trimeter, etc.)
- Japanese: metrically consistent across poetic genres, as well as in the language’s non-poetic prosody; these forms all count moras, with lines of either 5 or 7 moras each (haiku, tanka, chooka, sedooka, katauta, bussokuseikika)
Metrical Consistency in O’odham

- The argument here:
  
  The two genres are metrically consistent, although the songs display a stronger trochaic rhythm than the poetry.
  
- A trochaic foot is maintained in both genres, but the distributional properties of the trochee differ in songs and poetry.

Rhythmic Patterns in Words

- Lexical rhythm manifests itself most strongly in terms of stressed and unstressed syllables
- Particularly salient is the main stressed syllable, which is the initial syllable of the prosodic word
- Tohono O’odham words are trochaic

- There is an extremely strong preference for a stressed syllable (strong) to be followed by an unstressed syllable (weak) (Fitzgerald 1997a,b, 2001a, 2002b)

Alternating Rhythm in Words

- paño
  - ‘duck’
- paphado
  - ‘ducks’ (reduplication - copied syllable - indicates plural)
- paphadoa
  - ‘owning ducks’
- pañoalamp
  - ‘one who owns ducks’

Trochaic Rhythm in the Lexicon

- Stressed syllables at the beginning of words
- Alternating strong-weak rhythm
- Unstressed syllables in second position (stressed syllables in second position typify an iambic rhythm)

- Strong-weak is the key organizing principle in Tohono O’odham (Fitzgerald 2002a, 2002b)
Trochaic Foot

- Trochee (trochaic foot):

  ![Trochaic Foot Diagram]

Traditional Songs

- Song forms are very different from forms that would appear in speech
- Native speakers may have difficulty identifying what speech forms correspond with song forms.

Features of Songs

- Repetition of lines and entire verses.
- Heavy nasalization
- Short verse length
- Instruments used
- Extra syllables and vowels compared to spoken language

First Celkona Song

- *hułu biomedical technology kaíhaínim*  
  At dusk, before the songs resounding

- *huçu biomedical technology kaíhaínim*  
  At dusk, before the songs resounding

- *kućiame wóli wa kame inacuña*  
  And I arrive there and watch

- *hułu i wiâuunhim am*  
  Dusk, being pulled along

- *ika si wa ham kaíhada.*  
  Inside, arriving there to be heard.

O’odham Song Meter

- Lines begin with only two types of sequences
  - Strong-weak or weak-weak
- Lines never begin with iambic sequences
- Two stressed syllables are never adjacent
- Everywhere in song lines, a strong is always followed by a weak, even if this means an extra syllable is added
- Morphology "fixes" bad feet by adding a syllable

Reduplication

- English morphology creates plurals by adding the -s suffix
- O’odham morphology creates plurals by copying the first consonant and vowel of the word
- Reduplication marks plural in O’odham
  - ñę́́ ‘dog’ versus ñę́́⁻ę́́ ‘dogs’
  - pą́́ ‘duck’ versus pą́́⁻pą́́ ‘ducks’
  - dą́́ ‘chair’ versus dą́́⁻dą́́ ‘chairs’

Reduplication in the Meter

- The morphology of the language ensures the rhythmic pattern is invariant (unlike English iambic pentameter)
- Speech forms (ordinary language) versus song forms (song language)
- Song: oi na ñęékù
- Speech: oi na ñèè kuul
- "soon perhaps the beginning, the end"

Making Perfect Feet

- Extra copied syllables appear wherever a strong syllable would NOT be followed by a weak syllable
  - Imperfect trochaic feet in speech lines
  - Perfect trochaic feet in song lines
- Reduplication in the morphology: the way that O’odham indicates plural
- Reduplication in song meter: the way that O’odham creates trochaic feet
- The morphology makes the trochaic effects stronger by allowing a weak to follow every strong
January 5, 2003  
SSILA 2003/LSA Annual Meeting  
January 5, 2003

Feet in Songs and Speech

Song:

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
S & W & S & W \\
\text{oi} & \text{na} & \text{só-so} & \text{kú-ku:-ne} \\
\end{array}
\]

Speech:

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
S & W & S & S & S \\
\text{oi} & \text{na} & \text{són} & \text{s} & \text{kú-g} \\
\end{array}
\]

soon perhaps beginning end
"Soon, perhaps, the beginning, the end."

Summary of Rhythmic Effects

• Evidence for trochaic rhythm  
  – Beginnings of lines: only 2 of the four possible patterns (no weak-strong or strong-strong)  
  – Within lines, reduplication creates a trochaic rhythm (no strong-strong line-externally)  
  – Lines never end with a stressed syllable  
• Lines allow weak-weak sequences freely, but restrict weak-strong and never allow strong-strong.  
• Reduplication can always provide a weak to follow a strong

Rhythm of Traditional Songs

• Strict trochaic meter  
• Strong trochaic effects are found in a variety of places (line-initially, line-externally, in the morphology using reduplication)  
• Complex, interesting meter (Fitzgerald 1998)  
• Strong-weak predominates in traditional songs

Contemporary Poetry

• Ofelia Zepeda, an O'odham poet who is also bilingual in English (Zepeda 1995, 1997)  
• An examination of 165 line-initial sequences in the poetic meter (Fitzgerald To appear, 2002b)  
• Lines vary in their length so that there does not seem to be a consistent length  
• The poetry exists written, although there are also recordings of some of the poetry
Features of Modern Poetry

- Zepeda varies the language of the poetry; poems are written in O’odham only, English only, or alternates different language by lines.
- The unit of line generally serves as a strong demarcation between the two languages.
- The language used in poetry basically the same language used in normal spoken contexts, although it is organized more rhythmically.

Rhythm in Modern Poetry

- There is a tendency towards trochaic rhythm, less so than in poetry.
- Line-initial patterns show trochaic tendencies (but less so than songs).
- Syntactic rules are used to reinforce the trochaic rhythm.
Distribution of Patterns

- Line-initially:
  - All four possible sequences can begin poetry lines
  - A strong avoidance of initial sequences of two stressed syllables (but can occur)
  - A high occurrence of non-final sequences of an iambic sequence, weak strong (but occurs often)
- Also see a strong tendency for lines to begin with a strong-weak sequence
- However:
  - Poetry can also end with a stressed syllable (never in songs) or allow line-internal adjacent stresses (never in songs)

Phonological classification of line-initial sequences in poetry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial phonological sequence</th>
<th># of lines</th>
<th>% of lines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>weak-weak</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>47.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strong-weak</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weak-strong</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strong-strong</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Syntactic Distribution

- Tohono O’odham also shows syntactic effects of rhythm, in and out of verse (Fitzgerald 1994, To appear)
- The g-determiner marks all otherwise unmarked nouns; it is an unstressed element that precedes the noun without contributing any syntactic or semantic notion of definiteness or specificity
- The g-determiner is never found utterance-initially (Zepeda 1985: 13)
- The behavior of the g-determiner demonstrates a dispreference to begin an utterance with an initial weak-strong sequence

No initial G-determiners

S W S W S W S W
bán dó huñümíí g cwiwí

Coyote 3aux chasing det jackrabbit
'The coyote is/was chasing the jackrabbit.'

- The initial noun, bán, is bare while the noninitial noun is preceded by the g determiner
- Compare when both nouns are noninitial:
S W S W S W S W
huñümíí dó g báníí cwiwí
Distribution of the Determiner

- S W W S W S W S W  
  bañ ganhu ge c&i>pia  
  "coyotes moving along over there"

- S W W S W S W S  
  c&i>pia  bañ ganhu ge  
  "I would sing for you rain songs"

- W S W W W S S W S  
  *g c&i>pia  bañ ganhu ge  
  (construct)

Rhythm and Syntax

- The equivalent meaning of the different word orders shows that the determiner contributes nothing semantically.
  - The unstressed determiner followed by a noun with initial stress constitutes an iambic sequence (disfavored by Trochee constraint).
- Phonologically, the distribution of the determiner is predictable: utterances are not allowed to begin with iambs where the semantics will not be affected.
- Rhythmic constraints rule out this type of configuration and serve to structure the syntax.

Syntax in Zepeda's Poetry

- Zepeda's poetry shows that there are no cases with initial g-determiners.
- Ba:ban ñanhu ñe c&i>pia  
  "coyotes moving along over there"
- Wa nt o m-nab ñi j&u>ki8  
  "I would sing for you rain songs"
- Syntactic effects help make the poetry more trochaic, although there are no other additional devices (like reduplication).

The Meter of Modern Poetry

- Twice as many lines begin with a trochaic sequence as with an iambic sequence.
- Tendency to begin with trochees:
  - Avoid iambs
  - Avoid adjacent stressed syllables
- Nearly half of these lines begin with a weak-weak sequence.
- Trochaic meter, but could be "more trochaic"
Constraints on the Rhythm

- No Clash
  - No adjacent strong beats on the grid.
  - (Avoid strong-strong)
- Trochee
  - Feet have initial prominence
  - (Prefer strong-weak groupings)
- No Lapse
  - No adjacent weak beats on the grid
  - (Avoid weak-weak)

Variable Constraint Ranking

- These constraints vary in terms of the strength they have in affecting rhythmic patterns;
  - All three are very strong in words;
  - The first two (*Clash, Trochee) are very strong in songs
    - Trochee is getting ready to retire
  - Same constraints in the meter, just applying at different priorities (strengths) according to different genres

Gradient Rhythmic Effects

- My research on rhythm in other domains in O’odham shows that all genres show at least some manifestation of trochaic rhythm
- A preference for stressed syllables as the first syllable in words, sentences, discourse units, and poetic lines.
- An avoidance of stressed syllables as the second syllable in words, sentences, discourse units and poetic lines.
- Different degrees of "trochaicity" across genres: songs are more trochaic than poetry, which is more trochaic than narratives

Metrical Consistency in O'odham

- This paper has argued that verse forms can be characterized in terms of metrical consistency
- I have shown that the trochaic foot characterizes two different rhythmic genres in Tohono O'odham: traditional songs and contemporary poetry
- Furthermore, traditional songs display a more rigid application of trochaic meter than contemporary poetry does.
- We can use ranked constraints to model this.
- Metrical consistency allows the reiteration of a rhythmic motif across the temporal plane.
January 5, 2003

SSILA 2003/LSA Annual Meeting

January 5, 2003


