ON THE FUNCTION OF ALLITERATION*

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In this article we will examine theoretical problems involved in current metrical frameworks for Germanic poetry, and demonstrate that alliteration performs two significant functions of dividing a sequence of words into two verses or lines and forming a trochaic metrical pattern within these units. We will also claim that the half-line structure and the trochaic pattern common to Germanic poetry are precise reflections of a demarcational function of fixed stress and a predominant stress pattern of Germanic words.

1. INTRODUCTION. Old Germanic poetry is characterized by half-line structure and alliteration, as shown in 1. The largest metrical unit is a line; each line is divided into two verses (i.e. the smaller units ‘a-verse’ and ‘b-verse’), and a-verse includes one or two alliterating syllables, while b-verse regularly only one. Hereafter, alliterating sounds are indicated in italics. Citations in this paper are all taken firsthand from old Germanic poems listed in the references below.

(1) a. daz sagētun mīr șcōldante (OHG Hildebrandslied 42)
   ‘The seafarers said to me that’

   b. westar ubar wentilsēo, daz inan wēc furnam (Ibid. 43)
   ‘(going) westward over the ocean, that the fighting snatched him away’

Those common structures have made a metrical analysis of all Germanic poetry possible within a single framework such as Sievers 1893. As for language-specific characteristics, they usually do not affect the fundamental metrical structure of poetry. For example, verse form is

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stichic in West Germanic (i.e. Old English, Old Saxon, Old High German), but strophic in Old Norse (cf. Sievers 1893: II. §§4, 5; Lehmann 1956: 24). However, the difference in question is irrelevant to the metric construction of a verse or a line. Verses composed of four syllables are commonly observed in Old English and Old Norse, while much longer verses are predominant in Old High German and Old Saxon (cf. Schipper 1910: 15–6). But, such longer verses are not rare in Old English poetry also, where their metrical significance is equivalent to the usual quadrisyllabic verses, as demonstrated by Fujiwara 1986.

A common verse form developed in old Germanic poetry may possibly be a reflection of some linguistic properties common to all Germanic languages. However, theories are conflicting on how metrical structure corresponds with linguistic structure, especially on what function alliteration performs in poetry. Hence, we want to give an explicit account of function not only in earlier but also in later Germanic poetry, for the verse form was greatly affected by changes the Germanic languages had undergone in later periods.

2. Alliteration in Current Metrical Theories. The basic verse form of old Germanic poetry outlined in the preceding section is widely accepted as such by different metrical theories. However, identification of the metrical pattern of verses and the function of alliteration differs essentially in different theories. Hence, we will take up three contrasting approaches and examine their validity as a metrical framework in this section.

2.1. Alliteration in Traditional Metrics. Within the traditional metrical framework such as Sievers 1893, Schipper 1910, Bliss 1962, 1967, Cable 1974, verses of various length are subject to several metrical interpretations, and finally fall under the Five Basic Types as shown in 2. According to this metrical approach, each verse is composed of two feet, and each foot must include one arsis or a fully stressed long syllable. The distribution and number of thesis or a weakly stressed syllable differ in accordance with the type.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Type A:} & & \_ x \mid \_ x \\
\text{Type B:} & & x \_ \mid x \_ \\
\text{Type C:} & & x \_ \mid \_ x \\
\text{Type D:} & & \_ \_ \mid \_ \_ \_ x
\end{align*}
\]
When a given verse is longer than any of the basic types, metrical interpretations such as ANACRUSIS, RESOLUTION, STRESS SUBORDINATION are resorted to, and the verse in question is also ultimately incorporated into one of the five types. However, when a verse includes only three syllables or as many as three arses in contrast to the usual two, the verse is regarded merely as an exception, or some special metrical devices may be applied to it.

In this metrical framework, alliteration has no virtual effect on the rhythm of a verse, because the rhythmic pattern remains intact whether SINGLE ALLITERATION may be realized as in 3a and 3c or DOUBLE ALLITERATION may come out as in 3b and 3d.

(3) a. Kaldri roddo (ON Atlakviða 2/6) ‘with cold voice’ (_x | _x)
   b. Frágo froeðnan (Ibid. 20/1) ‘They asked the brave one’ (_x | _x)
   c. leod Scyldinga (OE Beowulf 1653a) ‘ruler of the Scyldings’
   d. eal innewead (Ibid. 998a) ‘all within’ (_x | _xx)

Thus, the function of alliteration must be sought elsewhere. The previous view, which is commonly held as unquestionable, is that alliteration binds the two verses together. Although scholars’ opinions may sometimes differ on the metrical interpretation of some controversial cases, the binding function of alliteration receives their unanimous consent (cf. Sievers 1893: 36, 48; Tolkien 1950: xxxvii; Gordon 1956: 315; Lehmann 1956: 3, 36).

However, objections may be raised against the traditional metrics, and some of them are crucial to the basic principles of the framework. First, the motivation for assuming the rhythmic patterns for verses like 2 is weak, for Germanic compound or complex words like OHG sunu-fatar ‘father and son’, ON sliðr-fengligr ‘fearful’, OS morgan-stunda ‘morning hour’, OE forð-snotter ‘very wise’, for example, which often construct a whole verse by themselves, always indicate an inherent trochaic stress pattern within a verse, and this pattern will never be changed into an even or iambic one by any linguistic motives. Thus, the traditional rhythmic pattern of verses deviates greatly from the linguistic rhythm for no convincing reason. Second, the binding function of alliteration is dubious, for if alliteration could really unite the separate verses, single alliteration would be enough, and double alliteration superfluous. Besides, the
function cannot explain the clear fact that double alliteration is solely
found in a-verse. Third, the traditional approach cannot give any answer
to the question as to why a line is divided into two halves.

2.2. Alliteration in Generative Metrics. The generative prosodic
model for Old English poetry proposed by Halle and Keyser 1971 differs
greatly from the previous metrical theory in two crucial points.
First, alliteration plays a decisive role in forming metrical patterns of
verses. To state more concretely, the two metrical entities $S(=\text{strong})$
and $W(=\text{weak})$ determine verse patterns. $S$ corresponds to the fully
stressed syllable with alliteration, while $W$ corresponds to the one with-
out alliteration. The two entities are generally restricted to the major
categories of words like nouns, verbs, adjectives, nonclitic adverbs, and to
the first element of compound words. Applying this principle to
Beowulf, we can identify seven metrical patterns (SS, S, SW, WS, SSW,
WSS, SWS) for a-verse, and 5 (SW, S, SWW, WSW, WS) for b-verse. A
combination of two adjacent verse patterns constructs a metrical type of
line. A prosodic analysis within the generative framework discloses
anew some interesting metrical characteristics of the poem: (i) the com-
bination SS/SW is most frequent, (ii) lines corresponding to the six types
(i.e. WSS/SWW, WSS/WSW, WSS/WS, SWS/SW, SWS/SWW, SWS/
WS) are somehow lacking, (iii) the combination SW/SW most often
corresponds to the syntactic boundary. The second innovation is that
the metrical devices indispensable for the traditional approach such as
anacrusis, resolution, stress subordination, restriction on the length of
verses, and constraint on the quantity of syllables in alliterative positions
can all be dispensed with in the generative framework.

However, the generative approach cannot evade serious objections.
First, S cannot be restricted to major classes of words, for alliteration may
fall on function words also, not exceptionally but often, especially in b-
verse, as in 4a and 4b. Indeed, on account of many occurrences of these
examples, words like him and hyne in 4c and 4d cannot be rejected as
candidates for alliteration simply because they are stressless pronouns.
In the face of such alliterating function words like 4a and 4b, identi-
fication of W becomes even more difficult, for W cannot be confined
only to the major lexical categories.

(4) a. mine hate (OE Beowulf 293b) 'bid my (thanes)'
b. Sæmod ærdæge (Ibid. 1311b) 'With daybreak'
c. ac him on hreþre (Ibid. 1878a) 'but in his heart'
paer hyne Hetware (Ibid. 2916a) ‘there the Hetware (vanquished) him’

The second problem lies in the metrical status of the verse patterns. The two metrical entities $S$ and $W$ correspond to the stressed syllables with and without alliteration, respectively, but it is not explicitly stated what corresponds to the verse patterns, i.e. combinations of these entities. Unless the relationship is captured, not only 9 verse patterns but also 29 contrasting metrical types of lines would be merely a fiction without any linguistic correlations. It would be far from reasonable to assume that the Beowulf poet discriminated these numerous types or patterns. As the third problem, we can suggest the fact that Halle and Keyser assign no function to alliteration other than deciding the metrical patterns of verses. Hence, it is uncertain what metrical relationship holds between the two adjacent verses. Besides, they do not touch on the questions of half-line structure and the peculiar distribution of double alliteration.

2.3. Alliteration in Russom 1987. Many of the traditional metrical interpretations and units are inherited in Russom 1987 without any radical modification, but at the same time, some entirely new devices are introduced. First, the correspondence between metrical units and their linguistic correlates is well taken into consideration. For example, nine types of foot (i.e. $x$, $xx$, $S$, $Sx$, $Sxx$, $Ss$, $Ssx$, $Sxs$, $Sxxs$) correspond to ‘a word pattern’, that is, a metrical version of a word stress pattern. $S$ represents a syllable with primary stress, $s$ with secondary, and $x$ with no stress. Thus, OE talu ‘tale’ whose stress pattern is $SW$ corresponds to the word pattern $S$, but not $Sx$, for the first stressed syllable is short and subject to resolution. On the other hand, Old English words like $ge-dôn$ ‘do’, $under-gân$ ‘undergo’, $for-wýrd$ ‘destruction’ are collapsed into two feet $x$ and $S$, $xx$ and $S$, $x$ and $S$, respectively, for the unstressed prefixes $ge$, $under$, and $for$ in these words are regarded as function words in his theory. As a natural consequence of these interpretations, all feet other than unstressed $x$ and $xx$ are characterized by a falling pattern, which may therefore contrast sharply with many types of feet in the traditional metrics. A verse, which is composed of two feet, includes one or two $S$’s. Hence, Russom 1987 and Bliss 1962, 1967 agree in admitting a verse with a single arsis, as opposed to the traditional view ‘one arsis for one foot, and two arses for one verse’. However, Russom differs strongly from any previous approach in capturing the relationship between the
two adjacent feet by means of a notion ‘METRICAL SUBORDINATION’, which is a parallel metrical correlation that can be observed between the two elements of a compound word. He further extends the SW relationship to a higher level ‘a line’, assuming that a trochaic pattern holds between the two verses comprising a line. Thus, a line composed of standard verse patterns Sx/Sx is represented by a metrical structure like 5.

Now, we will examine the validity of this new metrical theory. First, as alliteration is described only as occupying some specified metrical positions, and double alliteration is regarded as optional, the function of alliteration is virtually suppressed both within a line and a verse.

Next, there seems to be no strong motivation for setting up metrical subordination between the two verses. It is true that compound words always indicate a trochaic pattern and may come out across the two feet within a verse, but there will be no linguistic units whose constituents are in a subordinate relationship, indicate a trochaic pattern, and come out across the two adjacent verses within a line.

The third problem concerns the assumption of two feet for one verse. The two-foot theory necessarily requires two word patterns, which in turn demand at least two words for a verse, or one word with a separable prefix or one compound word composed of two separable independent elements. However, a separation of any established linguistic units into two constituents for the sake of setting up two feet within a verse will not be supported for several reasons. First, a compound word cannot be divided into two as a phrase can be. A compound and a phrase are strictly discriminated by Germanic poets in that alliterating sounds always fall on only the first element of a compound, but in many cases these sounds fall on both words of a phrase. Second, Russom claims that an unstressed prefix can be separated, for a diachronic reason, from the stem, and one can assign the prefix a metrical status of an independent foot. But his contention will not gain any strong support from synchronic evidence. Separation of a stressed prefix from words like 6a which constitute a whole verse will be even more untenable, for the linguistic unity of both elements is very close, both diachronically and synchronically. Third, proper nouns may sometimes constitute a whole verse, as shown in 6b,
but as they are inseparable monomorphemic nouns, we cannot make two word patterns, hence two feet, out of these words. Citations in 6 are all taken from Old English Elene.

(6)  a. un-wíslícę (293b) 'unwisely', èd-niowunga (300a) 'anew', förp-snottera (379b) 'very wise', in-gemynde (895a) 'well-remembered'

b. Constantínus (8a, 79a, 103a, 145a, 1007a) 'Constantinus', Essaias (350b) 'Isaiah', Caluarie (676a) 'Calvary', Eusebium (1050b) 'Eusebius', Cyriacus (1097a) 'Cyriacus'

Lastly, just as the other previous approaches to old Germanic poetry, Russom 1987 cannot explicate ultimate causes of peculiar metrical properties: half-line structure, alliteration instead of rhyme, or distribution of alliteration.

2.4. Summary. The previous metrical approaches attempt to establish a system of rules which classify verses with varying length into a smaller number of verse types. And, the typical properties of old Germanic poetry, alliteration and half-line structure, are regarded as nothing but established facts. Consequently, the correspondence between these metrical peculiarities and linguistic properties of the Germanic languages are not captured successfully.

3. Reconsideration of the Function of Alliteration. In order to work out a satisfactory solution for the problems raised in the last section, as first prerequisite we have to reexamine the relationship between the half-line structure and alliteration. Fortunately, the old Germanic languages have left us three substantial clues to our queries. First, as alliterative poems were widely composed in these languages, it is highly possible that some linguistic properties common to them all might have contributed to the formation of identical metrical structure and a common use of alliteration. Second, numerous instances of a single word composing a whole verse suggest that a close structural and metrical connection holds between a word and a verse. Third, alliteration, which is primarily employed to make a stressed syllable more prominent than others within a word or a verse, seems to have a direct effect upon the formation of the metrical pattern of a verse which must contain one or two alliterating syllables. Thus, these clues will be examined one by one in the following sections.
3.1. The Function of Stress in Old Germanic Languages. Among the characteristics of the Germanic languages, what draws our interest most is the system of fixed stress, that is, a strong tendency to fix the stress of a word on its root syllable or as near to its beginning as possible (cf. Meillet 1970: 37-42). Thus, primary stress is always assigned to the root-initial syllable, and it is never shifted by the addition of an inflectional or a derivational ending; inflectional endings are almost always stressless, while derivational suffixes may be assigned secondary or tertiary stress (cf. Campbell 1959: §§ 88-90; Bliss 1962: §§ 11). Hence, each word in 7 shows a simple trochaic stress pattern SW; S denotes primary stress, and W any degree of stress weaker than primary.


b. OE: wēter ‘water’ > wēter-es, wēter-e, wēter-a; sē ‘sea’ > sē-s, sē-we, sē-wum, sē-m; mān ‘evil deed’ > mān-lic ‘infamous’, mān-lice ‘wickedly’

c. OHG: hélid ‘warrior’ > hélid-os ‘warriors’; ságēn ‘say’ > ságē-tun ‘(they) said’; árg ‘timid’ > árg-ōsto ‘most timid’; ált ‘old’ > ált-er ‘older’

In contrast to suffixes, most prefixes give a direct effect upon the stress pattern of a word. In Old English, for example, all prefixes other than ge-, be- (or bi-), and for- receive primary stress when they are added to any class of words excepting a verb, and the root-initial syllable is assigned secondary stress, as shown in 8b. In verbal forms like 8c and words in 8a other than denominals like ánd-ättan ‘confess’, ánd-wyrdan ‘answer’, ónd-swārian ‘answer’, the prefix is stressless, and primary stress is placed on the root-initial syllable. Thus, the stress pattern of the words in 8 is represented by WS for 8a and 8c, and by SW for 8b.


On the other hand, we sometimes come across words with two prefixes, as exemplified in 9. One interesting characteristic of these prefixes is that the first position is always occupied by a stressable class of prefixes, and the second by unstressed ones (cf. Fujiwara 1977). Since the root-initial syllable of these words carries secondary stress, the stress pattern of the whole word is represented simply by SW just as in 7 and 8b.

(9) forō-ge-scéaft 'destiny', in-ge-mèn 'native warriors', mis-ge-dwield 'deceit', ún-bi-þyrfe 'useless', ún-for-cūð 'honourable'

Next, let us turn our eyes to the stress pattern of compound words. When a given compound word is composed of two elements like 10a and 10b, primary stress is always assigned to the first, and secondary stress to the second, irrespective of its internal construction of each element. Hence, the prosodic configuration of compound words of this type is represented simply by SW. On the other hand, when three words construct a compound like 10c, the constituents are usually not coordinated but one of them (in this case the last word) is subordinated to the others. Thus, the stress contour of these words is indicated numerically as 132, but it may also be represented relationally as SW. Compound words may also be subject to suffixation, but their stress pattern is never affected by suffixes.

(10) a. daeges-ðage 'day's eye, daisy', hilde-heàrd 'bold in battle', sæ-bàt 'ship', æl-mihtig 'almighty', ðæð-begeâte 'easy to get', hànd-gewriðen 'twisted by hand', mân-forðæðla 'wicked destroyer'

b. inwit-ðanc 'evil thought', gescéap-hwîl 'fated time', gerûm-liçer 'at a more distance', gewis-licost 'most certainly'

c. geo-scéaft-gast 'fated spirit', wulf-heafod-tréo 'gallows, cross'

As a result of the preceding investigation, it is evident that the stress pattern of old Germanic words of any type can be represented either by a predominant trochee SW or by a less common iambus WS. A more important fact is that since a word boundary always comes directly before S not only in the pattern SW but also in WS, S always signals the boundary, especially the beginning, of a word. Thus, in all old Germanic languages the fixed stress plays a dimarcational function (cf. Martinet 1964: 87). Besides, the presence of W before S is completely predictable since it is automatically determined by the class of prefixes or a lexical category of prefixed words. Compare the situation of Modern English,
for example, in which primary stress of a word does not always signal the word boundary: génesis, cinnamon, médical, but Américá, caprice, muséum (cf. Halle & Keyser 1971: 4).

3.2. CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN STRESS PATTERN AND METRICAL PATTERN. Our next task is an investigation of the function of alliteration and the correspondence between the stress pattern of a word and the metrical pattern of a verse. The best fitted cases for our present purpose seem to be the verse composed of a single word, for in such examples the metrical and structural relations between a word and a verse may be captured in a simple and explicit way. According to my investigation, such verses are commonly attested in Old English poetry, and sporadically in Old High German, Old Saxon, and Old Norse poetry also. Hence, examples are all taken from Old English Elene and Beowulf. In Elene, 124 instances out of the total 2635 verses are attested as conforming to our requirement, while in Beowulf, 296 out of 6364. In other words, in both poems, approximately 4.7% of verses fall under the case in point.

An overwhelming majority of verses like 11a (i.e. as many as 112 among 124 in Elene, and 294 among 296 in Beowulf) represents the SW pattern which parallels the stress pattern of the words comprising the verses in question. On the other hand, the number of verses like 11b which show an iambic pattern WS is very small (i.e. only 12 verses among 124 in Elene, and as small as 2 among 296 in Beowulf) and restricted to the words with one or two unstressed prefixes. It should not be overlooked here that alliteration does not change the trochaic or iambic pattern of the words but rather makes it more distinct within each verse, for alliteration always comes out in the syllable with primary stress.


The same thing holds good for more common verses composed of
a prepositional phrase like 12 in which the stress pattern of the phrase and the head word remains unchanged within the verses, for alliteration is regularly realized in most prominent part of the phrase.

(12) a. miti Déotricche (OHG Hildebrandslied 26b) 'with Theodric'
    b. obal middilgard (OS Genesis 336b) 'upon the earth'
    c. fyr qølingom (ON Atlakviða 41/8) 'before the nobles'
    d. mid ærdæge (OE Elene 105b) 'with the day-break'

As a natural consequence of these observations, we can deduce at least two assumptions. First, the metrical pattern of a verse closely coincides with the stress pattern of a word. Second, the fixed stress of a word fulfils its demarcational function in old Germanic poetry also. The second assumption amounts to a new proposal that alliteration does not combine the two separate verses into one, but divides a sequence of words into two verses. This hypothesis can be a decisive solution to the genetic question of the half-line structure common to old Germanic poetry.

3.3. THE FUNCTION OF SINGLE ALLITERATION. This section (and the following one also) is devoted to the verification of the two assumptions built up in the last section. First, we will examine the verses like 13 composed of two or more words and characterized by a single alliteration. In these examples, alliteration occurs in the left-most syllable and makes the syllable more prominent than the following non-alliterating syllables. Consequently, the verse represents a metrical pattern SW. This pattern corresponds closely with the predominant stress pattern SW of Germanic words.

(13) a. arbeo láosa (OHG Hildebrandslied 22a) 'deprived of possessions'
    b. Lifanda grám (ON Atlakviða 32/1) 'The living prince'
    c. lángo huíla (OS Genesis 30b) 'for a long time'
    d. géarwe stóðon (OE Elene 227b) 'stood ready'

However, verses like 14 need some comments. Non-alliterating words precede an alliterating word, contrary to verses in 13. Halle and Keyser would assign W to such words. But, in many respects, the verses in question are parallel with words in 8a and 8c, and the words preceding the alliterating word may be excluded from consideration as extrametrical elements for the reasons specified below. First, just as the candidate for alliteration is systematically selected from among several words con-
stituting a verse in accordance with the Principle of Alliterative Hierarchy, the preceding non-alliterating words under consideration can also be automatically identified by the principle (cf. Fujiwara 1987). Second, alliterative priority is always given to the following word, and the preceding words cannot take part in alliteration. Thus, all verses in 13 and 14 conform to the predominant metrical pattern SW, and alliteration contributes to the formation of a verse pattern and construction of the two metrical units, a-verse and b-verse, for each line.

(14) a. flōh her Ōtaches nid (OHG Hildebrandslied 18b) ‘he ran away from the enmity of Otacher’
    b. stōð uf hleðom (ON Hamðismál 22/2) ‘stood by the chamber door’
    c. Thō gengun sie ðuuelibi samad (OS Heliand 1272b) ‘Then they, the twelve (apostles) went together’
    d. Heht him þā gewyrcean (OE Beowulf 2337a) ‘Then (he) bade (his men) to accomplish for him’

3.4. The Function of Double Alliteration. Our last assignment is to make a consistent metrical interpretation of double alliteration. In verses like 15a-d, we cannot resort to such metrical subordination between alliterating and non-alliterating words as is always realized in verses with single alliteration, for both words constituting the verse take part in alliteration, and neither can be rendered more prominent than the other. However, there is one undeniable, well-known fact about the alliterative lines like 15e and 15f that in contrast to the two alliterating words in a-verse, the corresponding b-verse always includes only one alliterating word.

(15) a. rauba birahanen (OHG Hildebrandslied 57a) ‘carry off the booty’
    b. svinna systrungo (ON Atlamál in Grænlenzko 54/5) ‘my wise cousin’
    c. hard harmscare (OS Heliand 240a) ‘a severe punishment’
    d. wrōht webbedan (OE Elene 309a) ‘projected a crime’
    e. heuwun harmlicco huitte scilti (OHG Hildebrandslied 66) ‘cut grimly the gleaming shield’
    f. Fanka ek ī hug heilom hiōna vætr sīðan (ON Atlamál in Grænlenzko 94/9-10) ‘I never found good will in my household again’

Thus, we may assume that metrical subordination is realized between
the two adjacent verses, for the two alliterating words make a-verse more prominent than b-verse with only one alliterating word. Consequently, the whole line indicates the metrical pattern SW, which naturally qualifies the whole line as one metrical unit. Hence, we can claim that whenever double alliteration is realized, the dominant S signals the beginning of a line, but not a verse. Here, we need some comments on the difference of metrical significance that the two contrastive alliterative types give to a verse or a line. Two verses with a single alliteration indicate nothing but a sequence of two coordinate identical metrical patterns SW-SW, while a line with double alliteration represents a single trochaic pattern SW. Thus, double alliteration may be highly esteemed as an optimal means to precisely reflect the predominant stress pattern of a word upon the highest metrical unit, a line.

3.5. SUMMARY. The conclusion of the preceding sections is twofold. First, the metrical pattern SW of a verse or a line in old Germanic poetry is a strict reflection of a predominant stress pattern SW of Germanic words, and alliteration plays a crucial role in forming the metrical pattern. Second, just as primary stress of a word signals its beginning, the dominant S of a verse or a line indicates the boundary of these metrical units; the half-line structure common to all old Germanic poetry is a natural consequence of the demarcational function of alliteration.

4. THE FUNCTION OF ALLITERATION IN MIDDLE ENGLISH POETRY. Germanic verse form underwent a tremendous change in the centuries after A.D. 800, and the old form gradually became obsolete in all the Germanic languages. In England, for example, the alliterative form was in general use until the Norman Conquest, but when English poetry was resumed after interruption from the continent, the new form had replaced the old. However, curiously enough, the traditional alliterative form was revived in the 14th and 15th centuries in the north and west, continuing into the 16th century (cf. Lehmann 1956: 3, 23-4; Oakden 1968: Chapter 7, 8). Hence, our primary concern in the following sections is the function that alliteration performed in the poetry in the period of ALLITERATIVE REVIVAL.

4.1. METRICAL STRUCTURE OF Gawain. The structure of Middle English alliterative poetry may not be so homogeneous as that of Old
English poetry even in the period of the Revival. However, for the sake of our present purpose, we will take up only a single poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (hereafter shortened as *Gawain*) as a representative of poetry in this period. First, a brief description of the characteristic metrical structures of this poem will be necessary. The metrical unit is a single line, which has no formal link with the lines following or preceding it. Its structure depends upon the distribution of a *lift* and a *dip*. A single lift is composed of a single stressed syllable. There is no fixed limit to the number of unstressed syllables which may compose a dip. A line is divided into two verses by a natural pause or *caesura*, each of which usually includes two lifts. The principal rhythmic types are exemplified in 16 (cf. Tolkien 1967: 148).

(16)  

a. Type A (falling)  
(1) *Tirius to Túaskan* (11a) ‘Tirius (goes) to Tuscany’  
(2) *háf þe no wónder* (496b) ‘don’t be amazed’

b. Type B (rising)  
(1) Such gláum ande glé (46a) ‘Such a noise of merry-making and merriment’  
(2) of rúly and társ (858b) ‘(made) of rich red stuff and silk of Tharsia’

c. Type C (clashing)  
(1) *Pe most kýd knýȝtez* (51a) ‘The most famous knights’  
(2) *þat euer lif haden* (52b) ‘that ever lived’

d. Type BA (rising-faing)  
(1) Ande quen þis Brétyyn watz bigged (20a) ‘And when this Britain was founded’  
(2) and réchles mérþes (40b) ‘and joyous amusements’

Next, we will give a detailed account of the characteristics of verses and lines. Three lifts are often used in a-verse, and all of them may sometimes alliterate. These verses may be classified as in 17 in accordance with metrical patterning. In each type, verses with lifts all separated by dips can be discriminated from those with two lifts clashing.

(17)  
a. Type A (falling)  
(1) *Áy watz Árthur þe héndest* (26a) ‘Arthur was always the noblest’  
(2) *Smál séndal bisides* (76a) ‘Fine rich silk at the sides’

b. Type B (rising)  
(1) A *spétos spárþe* to expóun (209a) ‘A cruel battle-axe to describe (in words)’
(2) Þe bórʒ, brittene and brént (2a) ‘The city (was) destroyed and burnt’
c. Type BA (rising-falling)
(1) Were hárder hápped on þat hápel (655a) ‘firmly fastened upon that knight’
(2) Were bóun búsked on hor blónkkez (1693a) ‘(they) were ready arrayed on their horses’

A-verse may occasionally include only one alliterating sound as in 18, in which alliteration falls on either lift (cf. Tolkien 1967: 150).
(18) a. Þat quen he blúsched þértó (650a) ‘So that when he looked at it’
b. Thenne comáunded þe lórde in þat sále (1372a) ‘Then the lord in that hall bade’
c. Þif any were so vîlanous (1497a) ‘If any were so ill-bred’

Next, we will examine the metrical properties of b-verse. First, the verses of this type often have only a single dip, usually between two lifts, as shown in 19a and 19b, and the dip may sometimes precede two lifts, as in 19c.
(19) a. stóð vpton hýʒt (332b) ‘stood towering’
b. sésounde of þe þést (889b) ‘seasoned in the best manner’
c. let alle þis córt rých (360b) ‘let all these members of household (be) noble’

In b-verse, alliteration may sometimes fall on the second lift, as in 20, in contrast to the usual case on the first lift (cf. Tolkien 1967: 150).
(20) a. watz cléne vérdure (161b) ‘was bright green’
b. on þe béd-sýde (1193b) ‘on the bedside’
c. mony ápel sóngez (1654b) ‘many splendid songs’

Lastly, we have to make a brief outline of the metrical structure of the whole line. First, two adjacent verses are combined into a single line by means of alliteration, although they have no fixed rhythmical relations. Each verse must include at least one alliterating sound. Second, as exemplified in 21, the most common alliterative pattern is characterized by two alliterating sounds in a-verse and one in b-verse. In the latter, the first of the two lifts normally alliterates as in old Germanic poetry (cf. Tolkien 1967: 149).
(21) a. Þe tulk þat þe trammes of tresoun þer wroʒt (3) ‘The man who brought about cunning devices of treason there’
b. Þat a selly in siʒt summe men hit holden (28) ‘Which some men may consider a marvel to see’
c. *Pe most kyd knyȝtez vnder Krystes seluen* (51) ‘The most famous knights under heaven’

Every lift of a line may alliterate as in 22, but these examples, especially the b-verse with two alliterating sounds, are very rare and seem to be accidental (cf. Tolkien 1967: 150).

(22) a. *Wel gay watz pis gome gered in grene* (179) ‘This knight, clothed in green, was very fair’
b. *Keuer hem comfort and colen her carez* (1254) ‘Obtain comfort for them and relieve their sorrow’
c. *Pay boȝen bi bonkkez per boȝez ar bare* (2077) ‘They went on the slopes where boughs are bare’

Other significant metrical characteristics of *Gawain*, many of which can be observed in other Middle English alliterative poems and differ greatly from those of old Germanic poetry, are as follows: (i) as the rhythm of Middle English poetry is purely based upon stress accent, a lift is not restricted to stressed long syllables as in old Germanic poetry; (ii) stress is much less regularly associated with grammatical function; (iii) the verse types D and E in the traditional metrics, which depend on secondary stress, do not appear; (iv) verses composed of only four syllables, which are commonly attested in Old English poetry, are rare (cf. Tolkien 1967: 151–2).

### 4.2. The Function of Alliteration in *Gawain*

Our problem to be solved in this section is to give a clear explanation of the function that alliteration performs in the metrical structure of *Gawain*. The metrical properties of the poem discussed in the previous section will serve our purpose. The first outstanding characteristic of the poem, which sharply contrasts with that of *Beowulf* and many other old Germanic poems, is that double alliteration and triple alliteration command an absolute majority of a-verse, i.e. about 91% of the whole, and single alliteration is very rare. What does this fact reflect? As suggested in 3.4., double alliteration contributes to the formation of a trochaic metrical pattern SW and qualifies each line as a single metrical unit, for two alliterating words make a-verse greater in prominence than b-verse with only one alliterating word. When we apply the same interpretation to *Gawain*, a consistent and reasonable metrical explanation will be provided for the lines not only with double but also triple alliteration. The whole line will indicate a metrical pattern SW reflecting the difference of prominence between a-verse with three alliterating words and b-verse with only one or
two. It must not be forgotten here, as pointed out in the previous section, that an even metrical pattern of a line, i.e. S/S or SS/SS, formed by an equal number of alliterating word(s) in each verse, is extremely rare in *Gawain*. The trochaic pattern SW of a line will naturally lead us to an assumption that a line, but not a verse, is a metrical unit of the poem, which gives us an interesting suggestion of its structure. The previous prevalent theories are based upon the assumption, as described in 4.1., that the basic metrical unit of Middle English alliterative poetry is a verse just as in old Germanic poetry. However, this assumption is not motivated by any positive and substantial evidence. On the other hand, our new hypothesis is strongly supported by the manuscript, i.e. Cotton Nero A. x., in which each line starts with a capital letter, being written separately one by one and left with no overt trace or device for dividing a line into verses. These characteristics make a clear contrast to those of Old English manuscripts, for example, The Junius Manuscript in which a boundary between verses is indicated precisely and regularly throughout the manuscript by a punctuation mark. When the basic metrical unit of *Gawain* is confirmed to be a line, and not a verse, alliteration will surely cease to perform the traditional function of binding two adjacent verses. Instead, it will serve to construct a metrical pattern SW and indicate the unit, a line.

The second characteristic of *Gawain* is the fact that verses composed of four syllables are rare. This fact seems to be closely connected with the scarcity of single alliteration in the poem, because both quadrisyllabic verses and single alliteration are commonly attested in old Germanic poetry. In old Germanic languages, common simple words are bisyllabic, usually indicating the predominant stress pattern SW. When a verse of this type is composed of two words, single alliteration regularly falls on the left-most S of the sequence SW + SW. Consequently, the number of verses composed of four syllables becomes naturally larger than any other verses. Single alliteration comes out in more than 70% of the verses of *Beowulf*, while less than 10% in *Gawain*. This contrast may indicate that language structures are markedly different between Old English and Late Middle English so that when the alliterative poetry revived, the former metrical properties such as half-line structure, stress pattern or construction of a word could not be used as they were. Hence, our assumption must be supported primarily by linguistic properties of Late Middle English.
4.3. Stress Rules of Middle English Words. In Middle English, three types of stress (primary, secondary, and weak) are significant. Principles of accentuation in all words inherited from Old English and Scandinavian loanwords do not differ greatly from those of Old English. Primary stress of simple words falls on the root-initial syllable, and secondary stress falls on the following heavy syllable. However, the stress assignment rules of Romance loanwords in Middle English are quite different from those of Germanic words; for example, primary stress falls on the last syllable of a word. In the Middle English period, most intellectuals of England tried to imitate the stress rules of French words, while the vast majority of English people attempted to adjust them to the vernacular stress patterns. In consequence, Anglicized stress patterns were used side by side with the original stress patterns of French words throughout the Middle English period.

Hence, our next task is to examine the principles of stress assignment in inherited words and loanwords in the period of Alliterative Revival. The following descriptions are mostly based upon Mossé 1952, Berndt 1960, Jordan 1968.

First, we will take up stress rules of words of Germanic origin. In root words and derived words, primary stress usually falls on the initial syllable, and suffixes are stressless, as in cómen ‘come’, hápel ‘knight’, rýght-ful ‘rightful’. The only exceptional instance in Middle English, in which primary stress shifted to the second syllable, is elléven(e) ‘eleven’ (< OE ēndleofan). However, in poetry, the position of primary stress is often altered to the final heavy syllable for the sake of scansion; this is attested by hyvýnge ‘living’ and swojning ‘swooning’ rhyming with bryngé ‘bring’ and ping ‘thing’, respectively. In words with an unstressed prefix also, primary stress is placed on the root-initial syllable, as in a-rísen ‘arise’, bi-fören ‘before’, i-lēsten ‘last’, per-fōre ‘therefore’, un-bōkelen ‘unbuckle’. Primary stress, which originally fell on the prefix, may be shifted to the root syllable, as in al-mýzti ‘almighty’ (< OE ēl-mihtig). In compound words, the Old English principle of accentuation, where primary stress is placed on the first element and secondary stress on the second, is almost strictly maintained: só-bōt ‘seaboot’ < OE só-bāt, góld-smíp ‘goldsmith’ < OE góld-smiā, twí-light ‘twilight’ < OE twí-lēoht, but cháp-man ‘chapman’ < OE céap-mān. The secondary or tertiary stress which might have been placed on some derivational suffixes in Old English is weakened, as in frēnd-shipe ‘friendship’ (< OE frēond-scipe), sók-ness ‘sickness’ (< OE sóc-nèss), wís-dom ‘wisdom’ (< OE wīs-dōm).
Next, we proceed to examine the main types of accentuation in French loanwords, especially the way they were adapted to the native English stress patterns. First, bisyllabic words with primary stress on the initial syllable generally conformed to the native pattern xx: *able* ‘able’, *cage* ‘cage’, *table* ‘table’. Some trisyllabic words became bisyllabic when they were integrated into English, and the adaptation entailed no trouble, as in *stúdie*, *stúdy* ‘study, thought’ (<OF *estúdie*, *estúde*), *stâble* ‘stable, firm’ (<OF *estâble*).

In bisyllabic words with primary stress on the second syllable, the original French pattern xx split into two types xx and x̄x as a result of adaptation: *gentil* ‘gentle, noble’ (<OF *gentiil*), *hônour > hónur* ‘honour, praise’ (<OF *honour*), *sêsoun* ‘season’ (<OF *saisôn*). However, when initial syllables were regarded as prefixes, primary stress did not shift, and the original pattern xx was preserved: *acórd* ‘accord, agreement’ (<OF *acórd*), *decré ‘deecree’ (<OF *decrê*), *renóun* ‘renown’ (<OF *renón*). On the other hand, in some words, the position of primary stress was altered to the initial syllable, as in *expert ~ expért* ‘experienced in’ (<OF *expért*), *méschief ~ mischief* ‘ill-luck’ (<OF *meschief*).

In trisyllabic words with primary stress on the second syllable, primary stress first moved to the initial syllable. And at the same time, secondary stress was placed on the second syllable for a while, but it soon disappeared; then the dropping of a final unstressed vowel [ə] produced bisyllabic words: *bataill(le) ‘battle’ (<OF *batáille*), *chápel ‘chapel’ (<OF *chapéle*), *náture ~ nátiur > nátiir; náter ‘nature’ (<OF *náture*). But, when the first syllable was regarded as a prefix, primary stress did not shift as in *apóstle ‘apostle’ (<OF *apóstle*), *aréste(n) ‘arrest’ (<OF *aréster*), *devis(e)n ‘tell, devise’ (<OF *deviser*). Examples of stress shift and doublets are *cómáunde(n) ‘command’ (<OF *commander*), *cónnude(n) ~ cónnlude(n) ‘conclude’, *rélik(e)s ~ rélïks ‘relics, remainders’ (<OF *reliques*). On the other hand, in trisyllabic words with primary stress on the final syllable, the original pattern xxx first became x̄x by commutation of primary and secondary stress, and then completely Anglicized into x̄x by the loss of secondary stress: OF *bachelêr > ME *bâchelêr > bacheler ‘bachelor’, OF *cârpetiêr > ME *cârpetêr > carpenter ‘carpenter’. However, the words, which underwent either syncopation or the change [i] > [j] after the shifting of primary stress was completed, became bisyllabic, as in OF *gênerâl > ME *général > génral ‘general’, OF *glòriûs > ME *glòríûs > glòrious ‘glorious’.

In quadrisyllabic words with primary stress on the third syllable, the
stress pattern xxx finally became xxx as a result of the same adaptation process as xxx. Most words of this type first became trisyllabic by the loss of a final unstressed vowel [e], and then became bisyllabic either by syncopation or the change [i] > [j]: OF bénéfice > ME bénéfice > bénéfice ‘favour, benefice’, OF chêmenée > ME chimenée > chimne ‘chimney, furnace’, OF hónourable > ME hönourable > hónourable > hóno(u)rable ‘honourable’. In this type of words also, when the first syllable was considered as a prefix, primary stress did not shift to the initial syllable, but was often preserved on the second syllable: OF assemblée > ME assemblée ‘assembly’, OF avantáge > ME avántage ‘advantage’, OF philósophre > ME philósophre ‘philosopher’. On the other hand, in quadrisyllabic words with primary stress on the final syllable, a complete Anglicization of stress assignment did not take place. The first change is commutation of primary and secondary stress. Next, secondary stress was gradually weakened, and finally disappeared. In some words, a syllable dropped as a result of syncopation or the change [i] > [j]. Hence, the original pattern xxx first became xxx, and then x(x)x: OF adversité > ME advérsté > advérsté > adversté ‘adversity’, OF confessión > ME confessioun > confessio(u)n ‘confession’, OF obédiént > ME obédiént > obédient ‘obedient’.

Lastly, in words of five syllables, the original stress pattern xxxxx underwent the same change as the other polysyllabic ones. Many words of this type became trisyllabic by the loss of a final [e] and syncopation or the change [i] > [j]: OF astrónomy > ME astrónomie > astrónomie ‘astronomy’, OF philósophie > ME philósophie > philósophy ‘philosophy’, OF expérience > ME expérience > expérience ‘experience’. However, in words which underwent syncopation in an earlier period, primary stress fell on the initial syllable: OF chevalerie > ME chiválerie > chivalrye ‘chivalry’, OF hostéllerie > ME hostéllerie > hóstelrye ‘hostelry’.

4.4. SUMMARY. It is now apparent that at about the end of the Middle English period, in the dialect or idiolect where the adaptation to the Germanic stress pattern was favoured, most words, irrespective of their internal structure or difference of their origin, indicated the same trochaic stress pattern SW as old Germanic words. But, at the same time, there are many words which often indicate the contrasting stress pattern WS. It should be noticed here that a word boundary does not always intervene between W and S in words with the stress pattern WS, and hence S does not necessarily mark the beginning of a word, which con-
trasts sharply with the dominant S of Germanic words.

It will not be accidental that the predominant stress pattern SW of Late Middle English words precisely corresponds with the following three undeniable facts: (i) almost all lines of Middle English alliterative poetry indicate the metrical pattern SW, (ii) the basic metrical unit is a line instead of a verse, (iii) the lines do not have a half-line structure. Now, we can claim that the predominant stress pattern SW contributed to the formation of the rhythmic pattern SW for lines of Late Middle English alliterative poetry. Thus, alliteration is not merely an ornament but an indispensable means to construct the metrical pattern which never contradicts the prevalent stress pattern of Middle English words.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS. Not only in old Germanic poetry but also in alliterative poetry in later periods, alliteration plays a crucial role in forming the metrical pattern SW within verses or lines, and the pattern precisely corresponds with the dominant stress pattern SW of words in earlier or later Germanic languages.

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