



# **GOMBE SAVANNAH**

**JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND  
COMMUNICATION STUDIES (GOSAJOLLCOS)**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
GOMBE STATE UNIVERSITY  
NIGERIA**

**Volume 3 No. 1**  
**October, 2022**

# LANGUAGE

# **The Application of the Stress Maxima Theory to Selected Poems from Nwoga's *WEST AFRICAN VERSE***

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## **Abstract**

*This paper analyses the metrical lines of three poems, namely: Nativity, Season and Abiku, selected from an anthology titled West African Verse. Simultaneously adopting the Stress Maxima (SM) theory of Halle and Keyser and Beaver's extension of it, the work reveals the poetic meter of the poems through scansions of the metrical feet contained in their lines. Using the SM theory, the scansions show that only a few lines have the regular iambic and trochaic feet while most of the lines have a mixture of both. Other combinations found are: spondaic and iambic, trochaic and iambic, spondaic, iambic and trochaic, anapestic, trochaic iambic and anapest. A few lines were rendered without SM because of the combinations of feet in them. Such combinations of feet imply that rhythm as a poetic feature is not achieved by the poets therefore; the poems would be read as mere tales, without poetic meters. This may be attributed to the fact that they are meant to inform and morally correct and not to appeal to readers' sense of pleasure. Not adhering to the rules of meter in their poems may render the poems as free verses. Also, the work identifies another way that grammar and phonology may complement one another in the working of a particular language as in this case, grammatical classification of words used as the basis for achieving rhythmic effects in poems.*

**Keywords:** Stress Maxima, Poems, Poetic Meters, Rhythm, African Verse

## **Introduction**

Understanding meter in poetry is simply applying abstract metric patterns to the sequences of words. These abstract patterns must in turn correspond to certain rules in the formation of rhythm in poetry and these rules also corresponds to the stress laws of the particular language the poem is written in. Like the works of Guéron (1974) which is a study of meter in Mother Goose nursery rhymes through the use of the theoretical framework of Halle and Keyser. The work suggests that a meter consists on the one hand an underlying abstract pattern; and on the other hand, of realization rules

specifying which sequences of the language count as realizations of the abstract pattern. Similarly, Topintzi and Versace (2015) sought to also understand the underlying structure of meter in several *dimotikatragoudia* (folk songs) by exploring the *dekapentasyllavo* (15 syllables) in the context of the folk songs; Like the work of Guéron (1974) above and the current paper Agirrezaba, Algeria and Hulden (2016) sets out to identify the rhythmic patterns in poetry written in English. However, it differs because the aim was to establish a baseline of automatic scansion of poetry using machine tools. Machine learning techniques were explored to automatically assign stress to written poetry against human- annotated gold standards. A bit different but related is the work of Erickson et al (2012) which examines the kinematic patterns of jaw dropping and associated F1 values of four American English speakers in productions of the sentence ‘I saw five bright heights in the sky’. The aim is to examine their articulation patterns in order to explore the hypothesis that: the jaw is the articulatory organizer of rhythm. In one way or the other, the above works were also concerned with the study of meter; this paper equally examines the lines of three poems selected from an anthology titled *West African Verse* to unveil their poetic meter and how rhythm can be achieved in poems in the English language especially by poets who are second language speakers of English, and whose themes of writing are different from the outside world but however, peculiar to Africans. The work does not however compare the authors or their works but simply to explicate how rhythm is achieved using the SM theory. The selected poems are: *Nativity* by Gladys Casely- Hayford, *Season* by Wole Soyinka, and *Abiku* by J.P Clark. With so many upcoming poets in Africa, it is only right to explicate poetic works of older poets such as these, to serve as guides. The paper simultaneously adopts the Halle and Keyser’s Stress Maxima (SM) rules and its extension by Beaver to analyse the lines of the selected written poems so as to reveal their rhythm. The paper does not however restrict itself to scansions of just pentameters like Halle and Keyser but, all the lines of the poems were critically examined.

The poems are labelled A, B, C respectively and presented in a tabular form. The analysis is descriptively done to show how SM is achieved and also the metrical patterns based on the different poetic feet found in them.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This section discusses the concept of metrical phonology first and then goes on to describe the theory of stress maxima and its application in the scansion of lines in poetry.

### **Metrical phonology**

Metrical phonology is a linguistic theory which concerns itself with stress in relation to the relative prominence of syllables. Hogg and McCully (1987) posit that stress assignment in metrical phonology is a matter of denoting the relative prominence of sister constituents. In other words, relationship of syllables is defined by being stronger than or weaker than. This relationship is explicated through a procedure called foot formation that is, stress is assigned to strings which have constituent structure consisting of two elements, and one is strong (dominant) and the other weak (subordinate) (Katamba 1989, Giegerich 1992, Hammond 1995). The strong and weak relationship is reflected in metrical trees as suggested by Liberman and Prince (1977). The metrical trees should be used so as to reflect the syntactic structure which reveals the relative strength of constituents. Each node should be labeled either S or W. The S and W pair is referred to as the foot or feet in a line of more than one pair and the structure of the metrical feet is what determines meter in poetry. For example, a right-headed foot that is, one that begins with an S is referred to as iambic meter Katamba (1989).

### **Stress Maxima Theory**

Stress Maxima Theory (henceforth SM) was propounded by Morris Halle and Samuel Jay Keyser to replace the English iambic pentameter which assigns all syllables in a line, stressed and unstressed, to abstract metrical patterns with all its deviations. The SM is meant to look at only fully stressed syllables in relation to its relative prominence with its neighbouring ones. It is defined by Halle and Keyser (1971) as fully stressed syllable which occurs between the unstressed syllables in the same syntactic constituent within a line of verse. In other words, a fully stressed syllable of a major category of word (noun, verb, adjective, adverb, exclamation) occurring between two unstressed syllables (Napoli 1975). The correspondence rules are given below.

- I. a position (S,W, or X) corresponds to a single syllable or to a sonorant sequence incorporating at most two vowels immediately adjoining or separated by a sonorant consonant. For example,
1. The cúrfew tólls the knéll of pártíng dáy

W   S   W   S   W   S   W   S   W   S

(Halle and Keyser 1971:170)

Where each of the syllables corresponds to W or S, and where S is stressed and W is unstressed, and

2. I sat in a tree and watched the dog go by

W   S   W   S   W   S   W   S   W   S

(Elgin 1973:90)

Where the vowels /i/ and /a/ are separated by a sonorant /n/.

- II. Fully stressed syllables occur in S positions only and in all S positions as in example 1 above where all the stressed syllables occur in the S positions and in all S positions for instance, in the foot *cúrfew*, the first syllable is stressed and by the correspondence pattern, S occurs there.
- III. Fully stressed syllables occur in S positions only but not in all S positions. For example,

3. Báttér my heárt, thrée-pérson'd Gód, for you

W   S   W   S   W   S   W   S   W   S

(Halle and Keyser:170)

Where the first foot *batter* has the first syllable as it's stressed one but S falls on the second syllable. The stressed syllable here occurs in an S position but falls in a W position.

- IV. Stress maxima occurs in S positions only but not in all S positions. According to Halle and Keyser (1971) this kind of lines are not frequent however, when SM occurs in a W position, the line is judged unmetrical. An example is:

4. Hów mány bárd's gild the lápsés of time.

W   S   W   S   W   S   W   S   W   S

(Halle and Keyser 1971:171)

In the above example, the fourth W is a full and stressed vowel but occurring in a W position. This violates the rule of fully stressed vowel

occurring in S position and in all S positions thereby rendering the line unmetrical.

The SM theory is therefore seen as one that allows for a great deal of freedom while at the same time providing sufficient constraints to make the art form an interesting one for the poet to work in and, moving out of the restrictions of the meter may be for a different aesthetic motivation or style (Halle and Keyser 1971).

In addition to Halle and Keyser's theory, this paper also adopts the Joseph Beaver's reproduction of the rules of meter given by Halle and Keyser. Beaver (1968) also defines a stress maximum as a syllable bearing linguistically determined stress that is greater than that of the two syllables adjacent to it. He further reproduces the rules of meter as:

- i. The iambic pentameter verse consists of ten positions which may be appended one or two extra-metrical syllables.
- ii. A position is normally occupied by a single syllable, but under certain conditions it may be occupied by more than one syllable, or by none. These conditions are;
  - a. Two vowels may constitute a single position provided that they adjoin, or are separated by a liquid or nasal or by a word boundary, and provided that one of them is a weakly stressed vowel.
  - b. An unstressed monosyllabic word may constitute a single metrical position with a preceding stressed or unstressed syllable.
  - c. A stress maximum may only occupy even positions within a verse, but not every position needs to be so occupied.
- iii. For a trochaic verse, stress maxima may occupy only odd positions, though not every odd position need to be occupied.

The rules here are similar to Halle and Keyser's but with a bit of expansions, for instance, condition a includes two vowels immediately adjoining each other to constitute a single position, in addition to two vowels separated by a sonorant constituting a single position in Halle and Keyser (1971). Condition b is another expansion which reduces the number of positions in a metrical line since it collapses an unstressed monosyllabic with a preceding syllable into one. Rule three here, takes care of SM that falls on odd numbers while Halle and Keyser refer to such as unmetrical as in example

4 above. Following Beaver (1968) who says that the English regular-metered verse is expanded to embrace the different kinds of meter, from pentameter, to tetrameter or a trimeter this paper also analyses the selected poems irrespective of the kind of lines.

### Data Presentation

The presentation is done according to their stanzas and with the number of SM contained in each metrical line and also the types of feet found in a particular line. Where there are same kinds of feet consecutively, only one is mentioned.

**Table 1: Nativity (Poem A)**

| S/N      | STANZA 1                                                              | SM  | Types of Meter                           |
|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|------------------------------------------|
| 1.       | Within a <b>native hut</b> , ere <b>stirred</b> the dawn              | 4   | Iambic                                   |
| 2.       | Unto the pure one was an <b>infant</b> born                           | 1   | Trochaic, Spondaic, Iambic               |
| 3.       | Wrapped in <b>blue lappah</b> , that His <b>mother</b> dyed,          | 3   | Trochaic, Iambic                         |
| 4.       | Laid on His <b>father's</b> home-tanned deer skin hide                | 1   | Trochaic, Iambic, spondaic, Spondaic     |
| 5.       | The babe still slept, by all things glorified                         | Nil | Iambic, Spondaic, Iambic, Dactylic       |
| 6.       | Spirits of black bards burst their <b>bonds</b> and sang              | 1   | Trochaic, Iambic, Spondaic, Iambic       |
| 7.       | Peace upon the earth until the <b>heavens</b> rang                    | 1   | Trochaic, Iambic, Trochaic, Iambic       |
| 8.       | All the black babies who from <b>earth</b> had fled                   | 1   | Pyrrhic, Spondaic, Pyrrhic, Iambic, Iamb |
| 9.       | Peeped through the <b>clouds</b> -then <b>gathered round</b> His head | 3   | Trochaic, Iambic                         |
| STANZA 2 |                                                                       |     |                                          |
| 10.      | Telling of <b>things</b> a <b>baby</b> <b>needs</b> to do             | 3   | Trochaic, Iambic                         |
| 11.      | When first he <b>opes</b> His <b>eyes</b> on <b>wonder</b> new        | 3   | Iambic                                   |
| 12.      | Telling Him that <b>sleep</b> was <b>sweetest</b> rest                | 2   | Trochaic, Iambic                         |

|     |                                                                           |     |                                             |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------------|
| 13. | All <b>comfort came</b> from His black mother's breast                    | 2   | Iambic, Pyrrhic, Spondaic, Iambic           |
| 14. | Their <b>gift</b> was love, caught from the <b>springing</b> sod          | 2   | Iambic, Trochaic, Iambic                    |
| 15. | Whilst tears and <b>laughter</b> were the <b>gifts</b> of God             | 2   | Iambic, Pyrrhic, Iambic                     |
| 16. | Then all the wise men of the past stood forth                             | Nil | Iambic, Trochaic, Iambic, Spondaic          |
| 17. | And <b>told</b> Him of the <b>joy</b> that <b>wisdom</b> brings           | 3   | Iambic, Pyrrhic, iambic                     |
| 18. | To <b>mortals</b> in their <b>earthly wanderings</b>                      | 3   | Iambic, Pyrrhic, Iambic,                    |
| 19. | The <b>children</b> of the past shook down each bough,                    | 1   | Iambic, Pyrrhic, Iambic, Spondaic           |
| 20. | Wreathed frangipani <b>blossoms</b> for His brow                          | 2   | Trochaic, Iambic, Pyrrhic, Iambic           |
|     | <b>STANZA 3</b>                                                           |     |                                             |
| 22. | They <b>put</b> pink lilies in His <b>mother's</b> hand,                  | 2   | Iambic, Spondaic, Pyrrhic, Iambic           |
| 23. | And <b>heaped</b> for both the first fruits of the land                   | 1   | Iambic, Trochaic, Iambic                    |
| 24. | His <b>father cut</b> some palm fronds, that the air                      | 2   | Iambic, Trochaic, Iambic                    |
| 25. | Be <b>coaxed</b> to zephyrs while He <b>rested</b> here                   | 3   | Iambic, pyrrhic, Iambic,                    |
| 26. | Birds trilled their hallelujah, all the dew                               | 1   | Spondaic, Iambic, Pyrrhic, Iambic           |
| 27. | Trembled with <b>laughter</b> , till the Babe laughed too                 | 1   | Trochaic, Iambic, Pyrrhic, Iambic, Trochaic |
| 28. | Black women <b>brought</b> their <b>love</b> so wise,                     | 2   | Spondaic, Iambic                            |
| 29. | And <b>kissed</b> their <b>mother</b> hood into His <b>mother's</b> eyes. | 3   | Iambic, Trochaic, Iambic                    |
| 30. |                                                                           |     |                                             |

**Table 2: Season (Poem B)**

| S/N | STANZA 1                                             | SM  |                                |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------|-----|--------------------------------|
| 1.  | Rust in <b>ripeness</b>                              | 1   | Trochaic                       |
| 2.  | And the <b>wilted</b> corn-plume                     | 1   | Pyrrhic, Trochaic,<br>Spondaic |
| 3.  | Pollen is <b>mating-time</b> when<br><b>swallows</b> | 3   | Trochaic, Iambic               |
| 4.  | Weave a dance                                        | Nil | Trochaic                       |
| 5.  | Of <b>feathered</b> arrows                           | 2   | Iambic                         |
| 6.  | Thread corn-stalks in winged                         | Nil | Spondaic, Trochaic             |
| 7.  | Streaks oflight. And we <b>loved</b> to<br>hear      | 1   | Trochaic, Anapest,<br>Iambic   |
| 8.  | Spliced phrases of the <b>wind</b> , to<br>hear      | 1   | Spondaic, Pyrrhic,<br>Iambic   |
| 9.  | Rasps in the <b>field</b> , where corn-<br>leaves    | 1   | Trochaic, Iambic               |
| 10  | Pierce like bamboo silvers                           | Nil | Spondaic, Iambic,<br>Trochaic  |
|     | <b>STANZA 2</b>                                      |     |                                |
| 11. | Now, <b>garneres</b> we,                             | 1   | Iambic                         |
| 12. | <b>Awaiting rust</b> on <b>tassels</b> , draw        | 3   | Iambic                         |
| 13. | Long shadows from the dusk,<br>wreathe               | Nil | Spondaic, Iambic               |
| 14. | The <b>thatch</b> in wood-smoke. Laden<br>stalks     | 1   | Iambic, Spondaic               |
| 15  | Ride the <b>germ's decay</b> - we await              | 2   | Trochaic, Iambic               |
| 16. | The <b>promise</b> of the rust                       | 1   | Iambic                         |

**Table 3: Abiku (Poem C)**

| S/N | STANZA                                                            | SM  |                                      |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|--------------------------------------|
| 1.  | Coming and <b>going</b> these <b>several</b> <b>seasons</b> ,     | 3   | Trochaic, Iambic                     |
| 2.  | Do <b>stay</b> out on the <b>baobab</b> tree,                     | 2   | Iambic                               |
| 3.  | Follow where you <b>please</b> your <b>kindred</b> <b>spirits</b> | 3   | Trochaic                             |
| 4.  | If <b>indoors</b> is not <b>enough</b> for you                    | 2   | Trochaic, Iambic                     |
| 5.  | True, it <b>leaks</b> through the thatch                          | 1   | Trochaic, Iambic                     |
| 6.  | When floods brim the banks                                        | Nil | Iambic, Trochaic                     |
| 7.  | And the <b>bats</b> and the owls                                  | 1   | Anapest                              |
| 8.  | Often <b>tear</b> in at <b>night</b> through the eaves,           | 2   | Trochaic, Iambic, Anapest            |
| 9.  | And at <b>harmattan</b> , the bamboo walls                        | 1   | Pyrrhic, Anapest,                    |
| 10  | Are <b>ready</b> <b>tinder</b> for the fire                       | 2   | Iambic                               |
| 11. | That <b>dries</b> the fresh fish up on the rack                   | 1   | Iambic, trochaic, Anapest            |
| 12. | Still, it's been the <b>healthy</b> stock                         | 1   | Trochaic                             |
| 13. | To <b>several</b> <b>fingers</b> , to <b>many</b> more will be    | 3   | Iambic,                              |
| 14. | Who <b>reach</b> to the sun                                       | 1   | Iambic, Anapest                      |
| 15. | No <b>longer</b> then <b>bestride</b> the <b>threshold</b>        | 3   | Iambic                               |
| 16. | But <b>step</b> in and stay                                       | 1   | Iambic                               |
| 17. | For <b>good</b> . We <b>know</b> the knife scars                  | 2   | Iambic                               |
| 18. | Serrating <b>down</b> your <b>back</b> and front                  | 3   | Iambic                               |
| 19. | Like <b>beak</b> of the sword-fish,                               | 1   | Iambic                               |
| 20. | And <b>both</b> your ears, notched                                | 1   | Iambic                               |
| 21. | As a <b>bondsman</b> to this house,                               | 1   | Trochaic, Anapest                    |
| 22. | Are all <b>relics</b> of your first coming.                       | 1   | Pyrrhic, Trochaic, Anapest, Trochaic |
| 23. | Then <b>step</b> in, <b>step</b> in and stay                      | 2   | Iambic                               |
| 24. | For her <b>body</b> is tired,                                     | 1   | Anapest                              |
| 25. | Tired, her milk going sour                                        | Nil | Trochaic, spondaic                   |
| 26. | Where <b>many</b> more mouths gladden the heart                   | 1   | Iambic, Spondaic, Iambic             |

## Discussion

The above tables reveal that the three poems are characterized by lines of different poetic meters. While others have single meters all through, as in iambic, trochaic and anapest, others are a combination of different meters. The lines are discussed based on the kinds of meter contained in them and as found in all the three tables. In the discussions below, all syllables which ought to be SMs are in bold but only SMs are underlined.

### Iambic Metrical Line

An iambic line is one whose feet consist of a light syllable (weak) followed by a heavy one (strong). SM in iambic lines are strong syllables which fall on even numbers. Examples of iambic lines are found in all three poems and examples from each are given below:

#### Poem A

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Line 1- Within a native hut ere stirred the dawn (Line 1)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Line 11- When first he opes his eyes on wonder new,

#### Poem B

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Line 12- Awaiting rust on tassels, draw

#### Poem C

1 2 3 4 5 6

Line 2- Do stay out on the baobab tree,

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Line 15- Serrating down your back and front

All the even numbered syllables in the above lines are filled with strong syllables and, going by the rules of SM, lines 1, 11, 12 and 15 have the WS iambic feet because of the number of SM they have. The underlined SM in the lines are either accented syllables of words or fully stressed monosyllabic words and, all are flanked by adjoining weak syllables. Line 2 realises its iambic meter through the insertion of two light syllables (pyrrhic) which collapses into one thereby realizing a single W position. The feet therefore exhibit a WS pattern. All the final syllables of the lines are not SM because they do not precede any syllable.

Ideally, such a pattern is meant to give a rhythmic effect and even though the pattern is achieved, it clearly reveals that going by the number; the

poets were not concerned about melody but merely a serendipitous occurrence. If melody was the concern, the poems would have been composed in similar pattern all through, also, even with the iambic pattern, the composition would have been made with more polysyllabic words than monosyllabic ones because with that, the low- high tone would have been more seamless, especially that the poems are written in Africa, with the possibility of a wider reading coverage by Africans whose languages, are not stressed-timed like the English language. The presence of a pyrrhic in line 2 above also signifies the poets' lack of concern for melody because collapsing a pyrrhic of three syllables may not give a desired rhythm.

### Trochaic Metrical Line

Unlike the iambic, a trochaic foot consists of one heavy syllable followed by a light one. SM in a trochaic line is realised by a strong syllable falling on odd numbered syllable. Instances of trochaic lines are found in poems Band C. Examples:

#### Poem B

1    2   3    4    5

Line1- **Rust** in ripeness, **rust**,

1    2    3   4    5    6    7    8

Lines 3- **Pollen** is mating-time when swallows

1    2    3       4   5    6   7

Line 15- **Ride** the germ's decay-we await

#### Poem C

1    2    3    4    5    6    7   8   9   10

Line 3- **Follow** where you please your kindred spirits

1    2    3   4   5   6   7

Line 12- **Still**, it's been the healthy **stock**

The feet in the above lines exhibit trochaic meter because the SM syllables falls on the odd numbers giving an SW pattern. Patterns for lines 3, and 15 in poem B are realized differently, syllable 2 in line 3 is merged because there is a sonorant between the vowels and syllables, 6 in line 15 are collapsed into a pyrrhic- the weak monosyllabic *and* is preceded by another weak one *we* in 7 so also *we* and *a* (the unaccented syllable of *await*) in 15. All the initial syllables even though stressed are not preceded by another syllable hence they cannot be SM. Like the iambic pattern above, the presence of trochaic lines in the poems does not suggest concern for melody but mere

occurrences and, this can also be attributed to the limited number of trochaic in the poems.

### Spondaic and Iambic Metrical Lines

There are instances of both kinds of feet coming together in a single metrical line. Examples are found in poems A and C below.

#### Poem A

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Line 25- **Birds** **trilled** their **hallelujah**, **all** the **dew**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Line 27- **Black** **women** **brought** their **love** so **wise**,

The first two feet in both lines 25 and 27 are spondees followed by a number iambic feet. This shows that in a combination such as this, SM cannot be found where there are spondee feet (because it does not give room for adjacent unstressed syllables), only where the iambic feet occurs. Though it is a combination, SM are still fully stressed syllables as in 6 in line 25, 4 and 6 in line 27. 4 and 8 in line 25 even though falls in S positions cannot be SM because 4 is not the stressed syllable of *hallelujah* and the monosyllabic in 8 *all* is not a fully stressed one. Syllable 8 and 10 are not adjoined by another syllable as such cannot be SM.

There are instances where the iambic feet come before the spondaic, as in:

#### Poem A

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Line 13- All **com**fort **came** from **His** **black**mother's **breast**.

#### Poem C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Line 17- For **good**. We **know** the **knife** scars

Both lines here, begins with iambic feet and somewhere in syllable 8 and 9 of line 13, there is a medial insertion of a trochee which realises a spondee in 7 and 8. Line 17 is similar too only that the spondee comes finally in the line. This clearly shows that in an iambic line, where there is an inversion to a trochee it results into a spondee which deprives the occurrence of a SM. The presence of spondees in all the lines scanned in this category reveal the absence of an intention for melody by the poets.

### Trochaic and Iambic Metrical Lines

Examples of this kind of combination are found in poems A and C as shown below.

#### Poem A

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
Line 9- Peeped through the clouds- then gathered round His head,  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
Line 10- Telling of things a baby needs to do,  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8  
Line 12- Telling Him that sleep was sweetest rest,  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
Line 26- Trembled with laughter, till the **Babe** laughed too.

#### Poem C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  
Line 1- Coming and going these several  
seasons

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  
Line 4- If indoors is not enough for you

The above lines all begin with an initial trochee foot and subsequently changes to iambic however all SM in the lines are fully stressed syllables and adjoined by weakly stressed syllables. All the lines with the exception of line 4 changes to iambic in the second foot but in line 4, the first two feet are trochees then followed by iambic in the third. This explains the reason for a SM in both even and odd position, that is, in a line with such combination, if there is more than foot of the same kind as in 4, both will have an SM according to the kind of feet within which it occurs.

There are instances of a medial insertion of a pyrrhic in between a trochaic and an iambic. An example from poem A is:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Line 20- **Wreathed** frangipani blossoms for His **brow** where the line has an initial trochee foot, medial iamb feet, two weakly stressed syllables merged into one in 7 and a final iamb foot. However, the combinations, SM were still realized in 4 and 6 but, the line does not have a poetic pattern. Sticking to just a combination of trochee and iamb would have given the lines the desired melody; however, the occurrence of pyrrhics in all lines is an indication of lack of intention for rhythm.

### Spondaic, Iambic and Trochaic Metrical Lines

This is a mixture of two and more different foot in a line. Examples from the data are found in:

#### Poem A

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Line 4 - **Laid** on His **father's** **home-tanned deer skin hide**

#### Poem B

1 2 3 4 5

Line 2- And the **wilted** **corn-plume**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Line 8- **Spliced phrases of the** **wind**, to **hear**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Line 14- The **thatch** in **wood-smoke laden stalks**

Line 4 begins with a trochaic, then an iambic in 3-6 and then followed by two spondaic feet. Only syllable 4 is a SM while 6 and 8 are not because of the spondee feet, Line 2 begins with an iambic feet in 1-4 but ends with a fully stressed monosyllabic in 5, which forms a spondee with 4 and prevents it from being an SM. Lines 8 begin with a spondaic foot while in 14 the spondee foot is inserted medially. This causes an adjoining stressed syllable to 2 in line 8; 4 and 6 in line 14 which renders them not a SM. However, syllables 6 and 2 are both SM because they have adjoining weak syllables. Patterns for both lines are: SSWSWSWS and WSWSSWSWS respectively. The consecutive SS in both patterns reveals a strong syllable without adjoining weak ones, these occurrences renders the lines without melody.

### Anapestic Metrical Lines

Anapestic meter consists of two light syllables followed by a heavy. From the data, only poem C exhibits this kind of meter.

1 2 3 4 5 6

Line 7- And the **bats** and the **owls**

1 2 3 4 5 6

Line 24 – For her **body** is **tired**

SM in both lines fall on syllable 3- one is a full-vowel monosyllabic word and the other an accented syllable. The examples also reveal that SM in such a line can fall on both even and odd numbers. However, if following Beaver (1968) which says that a weakly stressed monosyllabic preceded by a

stressed or unstressed syllable may constitute a single metrical position, one may collapse 1 and 2, 4 and 5 in both lines thereby realizing an iambic instead of an anapest. With this then, a WS pattern is realised in both lines, however, there are only two occurrences as such not enough give a desired rhythm even if it was intended.

### Trochaic, Iambic and Anapestic Metrical Lines

Examples of the above mixture of feet are found in poem C below.

#### Poem C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Line 8- Often tear in at night through the eaves

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Line 11- That dries the fresh fish up on the rack

Line 8 begins with an initial trochee foot which extends to syllable 6 because 4 is merged to a single metrical position (two vowels separated by a nasal) thereby manifesting a trochaic since SM are on the odd numbers. The line however ends with an anapest. In line 11, the first two feet are iambs then a medial trochee and a final anapest. SM naturally falls on 2 which is an even numbered position while, the medial trochee results in a medial spondee which stops 4 from being a SM. While line 8 can be considered an SW pattern, line 11 is not because of the medial spondee as a result of the back to back position between the stressed syllable of an iamb and a trochaic. Like other combinations with spondees above, line 11 is also not intended to have melody.

### Lines with zero SM

There are instances of lines without SM as in below.

#### Poem A

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Line 5- The **Babe still slept**, by all **things glorified**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Line 16- Then **all the wise men** of the **past stood forth**

These lines are without SM even though there are fully stressed syllables occupying S positions. Line 5 begins with an iambic foot which would have rendered 2 a SM but because the next foot that follows is a spondaic, 2 lacked an adjoining weak syllable to the right. In a similar way, 4

is not a SM because of the spondaic foot. Syllable 5 is collapsed into one because there are two vowels adjoining each other. 6 is a stressed syllable but not a SM because it is adjacent to the stressed syllable in the dactylic *glorified*. In line 16, syllables 2 and 6 are unstressed which makes them unfit for SM while, 4 and 8 which are fully stressed are not SM because of a medial trochee foot and a spondee foot adjoined to them respectively.

#### Poem B

1        2        3    4    5

Line 6- **Thread corn- stalks** in winged

1        2        3    4    5    6

Line 10- **Pierce like bamboo silvers**

The above lines lack SM because of the initial spondaic feet in both lines and a medial trochee in 10 as well as a medial iamb and a final trochee in 6. This combination gives an adjacent stressed syllable to an already stressed one in 2 of both lines and also 4 in line 10.

#### Poem C

1        2 3    4    5

Line 6- When **floods brim** the **banks**,

1        2        3        4        5

Line 25- **Tired**, her **milk going sour**

Line 6 begins with an iamb and then a trochee placing 2 which ought to be a SM in an adjacent position with another stressed syllable which renders it not a SM. Line 25 which has a trochee initially changes to a spondee which similarly deprives 3 from being a SM. Like all lines with spondees above, lines with zero SMs are no exceptions to the fact that their presence distorts the achievement of melody in such lines.

Poem A exhibits a good number of pentameters however, like poems B and C, it does not exhibit a single kind of feet respectively. Their similarity comes from the fact that the lines were mostly made up of different feet. From the analysis it can be observed that the poets did not pay attention to the traditional poetic English rhyme scheme. Such rhyme scheme is achieved through repetitions of a particular metrical foot but, the above poems do not exhibit such. Generally, the poems display a lot of inverted iambs which deprive the realization of SM, when such inversions occur; they tend to be adjoined to a stressed syllable from the preceding iambic foot. For example, line 14 in poem A below

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Their **gift** was **love**, caught **from** the **springing** sod

Where 1-4 are iambic feet and 5-6 is an inversion of iamb (trochee), this inversion renders 4- a fully stressed syllable not a SM because 5, the stressed syllable of the trochee foot is immediately adjoined to 4.

The use of spondaic feet which also prevents SM in the lines was also recurrent in all three poems. There is a recurrent occurrence of medial insertions of pyrrhic in poem A possibly in an attempt to define the poetic meter of the lines.

### Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, one may conclude that poems such as the ones in this study are different from nursery rhymes or poems with regular rhyme scheme, and the poets had no concern for melody hence their lack of rhythm and, this will not however pose difficulty to readers in trying to comprehend the messages. While Poem A is meant to inform by painting the nativity in an African way, B and C are poems that are meant to have an effect of thought and correction on the reader. The WS or SW patterns as in iambic and trochaic lines above, are what gives a poem its meter or melodious rhythm however, they are used only in few instances in all three poems. Conversely, so many spondees were used as well as different combinations of patterns within the lines which, is a clear indication that the poets were more concerned with conveying their messages rather than achieving rhythmic effects because the spondees used in the poems are mostly lexical monosyllabic words and such words tend to be strong syllables, and which, also guarantees them to as suitable contenders for SMs in the poems. This is another indication that rhythm is indeed the structural vehicle which enables meaning to come forth and happen and, meaning on the other hand provides the material to be rhythmically formed (Bittner 1977). This is also another prove that meter in poetry does not violate the stress rules of the language within which it is written. It is so because all lexical words in the lines scanned above are the ones considered as SM so long as they have neighbouring weaker ones and, function words from the lines are the ones considered weakly stressed when they appear. The poems are written in English and the language recognizes lexical words to bear stress and not function words. Violation of the poetic

meters by the poets can be said to be as a result of style or to give their work an aesthetic value.

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