The Persistence of the Germanic Foot in Middle High German

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Foot structure in modern German (NHG) remains controversial, complicated by the lack of isomorphism between segmental quantity and weight. This has obvious consequences for any analysis of the NHG foot, leading Wiese (1996) to deny quantity sensitivity altogether, suggesting a syllabic trochee. However, most other authors favour the moraic trochee. Giegerich (1985) and Yu (1992) suggest that both long vowels and closed syllables contribute to syllable weight, but most recent literature denies a transparent relationship, with Vennemann (1991;1995) and Hall (1992) (amongst others), arguing that vowel length, although phonemically distinctive, does not contribute weight and only closed syllables are heavy. This synchronic picture differs markedly from Old High German (OHG) which, although trochaic, maintained a quantity distinction in both vowels and consonants and is argued to have exploited the Germanic Foot. This was an uneven moraic trochee where the head must be minimally bimoraic, even if this involves two syllables, ideally forming a branching ([σ̄]σ̆) foot. Arguments in support of the importance of this structure for Germanic can be found in Dresher & Lahiri (1991) and Lahiri & Dresher (1999) (see also Jacobs 2000 for Latin).

Many of these changes to the modern system have their roots in the Middle High German (MHG) period. It is therefore surprising that the MHG foot has been so neglected in the literature. Drawing evidence from the prosodic accommodation of Romance loan words in the MHG system and the metre of Wolfram von Eschenbach's thirteenth-century work, *Parzival*, this paper argues that MHG maintained the Germanic Foot, preferring to place main stress on more complex, branching feet. The persistence of the uneven moraic trochee can most clearly be seen in its effect on stress assignment in Romance loan words. In contrast to some accounts, I argue that such words were integrated into the native system, as in Middle English (ME) (cf. Lahiri 2015). Initial stress remains the default in MHG, as words such as *Drî́.a.kel* and *Fế.nix* demonstrate. Right-edge stress results from the prosodic structure of loans, borrowed with word-final superheavy syllables (σ̄̄) which consistently attract stress, as in *sur.kốt*. In contrast to ME, long vowels in final closed syllables remained a feature of MHG, where they carried secondary stress and remained unreduced. In line with Fikkert's (2000) account of Middle Dutch (MNL), I argue that MHG continued to defoot final non-branching feet (cf. Dresher & Lahiri 1991), but that (σ̄̄)s were metrically equivalent to branching feet with the structure ([σ̄]σ̆). This explains the variation between (σ́)(σ̄) words with native initial stress and (σ̄)(σ̄́) words with final stress. Crucially, the latter pattern with (σ̄)([σ́]σ̆) words, stressed on the penult and ending with a branching foot. The consistency with which stress mirrors native patterns in σ̄-final words but is shifted to final branching feet provides clear evidence for the continued coherence of the Germanic Foot (e.g. *hár.nasc* and *Sma.ráid*). Native simplex words rarely comprised more than one foot, with σ̄̄s largely restricted to derivational affixes, so will have been unaffected by stress shift. If MHG did not continue to exploit the Germanic foot, both (σ̄̄) and (σ̄σ̆) feet would behave in exactly the same way as a monosyllabic ([σ̄]), with word-final heavy syllables defooted and unable to bear stress.

Resolution, whereby a sequence of ([σ̆σ]) is metrically equivalent to ([σ̄]), whether the second syllable is light or heavy, was a highly important feature of the metrical system of early Germanic languages, but was lost before the modern period. I argue that it was still possible in MHG, but that it was opaquer than in OHG, as feet of more than two syllables were no longer tolerated and resolved heads were restricted to word-initial position, meaning MHG feet could only be resolved if they were not branching. Unlike OHG, MHG appears to have constructed feet from right to left (likely triggered by Romance loan words, see Booth 2020), forming branching feet if possible and associating σ̆s to the left. σ̆s can thus only form a resolved head if they are word initial and the following syllable is not already the head of a branching foot. Evidence for this comes from both Romance loan words and the prosodic structure of rhyming words in *Parzival*. Branching feet blocked resolution, unlike in MNL (cf. Fikkert 2000), with variation in stress between (σ̆σ̄) on the one hand and (σ̆σ̄̄)/(σ̆σ̄σ̆) on the other suggesting the contrasting structures ([σ̆σ̄]) and σ̆([σ̄]σ̆). Additional evidence comes from *Parzival*, where Wolfram rhymes on the head of the final moraic trochee, but ([σ̆σ̄]) words never occur in line-final position. Whilst the first ([σ̄]) of a ([σ̄])([σ̄]) word can be defooted to achieve the weak strong alternation required for verse (as it forms a foot alone), this strategy is not possible for a ([σ̆σ̄]) foot, as both syllables form a single resolved head. As this σ̄ can be neither defooted nor extrametrical (being heavy), this structure is incompatible with the poem's metre. ([σ̆σ̄]) feet can therefore only occur line-internally, confirming their status as a single prosodic unit.

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