Metrical Types of *Bylinas* (Russian Epic Folk Songs) in the Collection of the Institute of Linguistics, Literature and History at the Karelian Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences

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Abstract

The problem of analyzing folklore verse is among the most important
problems in metrical studies today. There have been some developments
in this area (works by A. Vostokov, F. Korsh, V. Zhirmunsky, M. Shtokmar,
M. Gasparov, J. Bailey, etc.); however, folk verse has not been fully exam-
ined. There are two reasons for this: 1) until recently, audio recordings of
folklore texts were not available to researchers; 2) metrical studies lacked
a developed method for the analysis of folk verse. At its present stage of
development, metrical studies have been equipped to analyze folklore
verse with precise methods. Also, the digitization of audio recordings of
folk songs provides the possibility of using audio files that display the
accentuation of folklore texts, their syllabic composition, etc.

This paper deals with the problem of the typology of epic verse in the
material stored in the Audio Archive of the Institute of Linguistics,
Literature and History at the Karelian Research Center of the Russian
Academy of Sciences (Petrozavodsk). The paper demonstrates the poten-
tial of the M.L. Gasparov–T.V. Skulacheva method for analyzing folklore
texts. A total of 25 texts (and fragments) with classic Russian epic stories
(about Duke Stepanovich, Ilya of Murom, Dobrynya, Vol'ga, etc.) collected
from the Russian traditional singer Fyodor Andreyevich Konashkov
(1860–1941) have been analyzed.

1   Introduction

The history of the study of *bylina* verse goes back more than 200 years, but there is as yet no satisfactory scientific description of it.

Why? In my opinion, the study of folk verse is complicated by the fact that it is almost always, with some exceptions, sung; it exists in unity with the melody and versification occurs in conjunction with the melody. The existence of folk verse through musical expression has two main consequences:

1. The process of singing can increase the number of syllables in a line, or, in some cases, an entire musical phrase can be performed on a single syllable.

2. The usual linguistic norms of accentuation can be changed, transferring the stress in a word from one syllable to another, which is often attributable to a difference in local dialect but may also be owing to the influence of melody and musical rhythm.

Folk verse has been studied in the framework of the three main theories: the *"foot"* theory (V. Trediakovsky, A. Hilferding, P. Golokhvastov and others), *accentual* theory (A. Vostokov and others) and *musical* theory (F. Korsh and others) (Gasparov 1978: 8–9). However, none of these theories can be considered satisfactory for its description.

The *"foot"* theory was developed at a time when non-classical metrical types of Russian verse (*dol'nik, taktovik, accentual verse*) had not yet been identified.

The *accentual* theory does not stand up to testing against empirical data: the rule of the accentual equality of the lines is always broken. This theory was proposed at a time when researchers were not able to use authentic audio recordings of folklore and studied epic verse through published texts in which the norms of folk song accentuation were not represented.

The *musical* theory brings to the fore the musical rhythm of a folklore work and does not take into account the linguistic basis of the verse. However, as M.P. Shtokmar indicates, the source of the folk verse system is not the music, but the language itself (Shtokmar 1952: 227). The inseparability of the text from the melody was convincingly refuted by M.P. Shtokmar when he showed examples of texts and melodies "migrating" (a single text being performed with different melodies; the same melody being used for different texts) (Shtokmar 1952: 155–176). To identify the exact linguistic, structural parameters of a folk verse, it is necessary to separate the text from the melody (Shtokmar 1952: 214). The mechanism for separating the text (textual analogue) from the melody was demonstrated in a work by J. Bailey (Bailey 2001: 30–36). This is a difficult task, which apparently does not have a universal solution: different approaches are needed for lyrical and epic genres. Concrete work with each text is required, and a high-quality audio recording of the epic song being performed becomes essential.

Today, we have certain advantages compared to earlier researchers. Firstly, we have the opportunity to listen to authentic audio recordings of folklore texts stored in scientific archives. This allows us to judge the norms of folk song accentuation more adequately. Secondly, the scientific method of studying verse has made advances.

2   Method of study

For this study I have used materials stored in the Audio Archive of the Institute of Linguistics, Literature and History at the Karelian Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Recordings of many genres are housed here, including those of *bylina*-epics made during the first half of the 20th century in the territory of the Russian North. In order to demonstrate my method of studying folklore verse I use the recordings collected in 1938 and 1940 by A.D. Soymonov from the well-known North-Russian singer and storyteller Fyodor Andreyevich Konashkov (1860–1941). Konashkov was known as an excellent performer: folklore works of many genres were recorded from him, such as *fairy tales*, *epics*, *spiritual verses*, etc. The epic songs used for this research work include: "Duke Stepanovich", "Volkh Vseslavyevich and the Indian kingdom", "Ilya of Murom and Tsar Kalin", "Dobrynya and Marinka", "Sukhman Rekhmantyevich" and many others.

A.D. Soymonov did not make audio recordings of complete epics, only short samples, owing to the technical limitations of that time. Usually he recorded the start (the first 1–2 minutes at the beginning of an epic). Transcribing these recordings is difficult because of the poor sound quality: they contain a lot of noise, hissing, etc. This is due to both the old age of the recording and the features of recording technologies in the 1930s–40s. In addition, the singing of F.A. Konashkov contains features of the North Russian dialect (of the Pudozhsky district of Karelia), and some features of his phonetics, vocabulary and grammar are not necessarily familiar to native speakers of the modern Russian literary language. In the event that the transcription of a line was not possible, I have indicated this by marking it "illegible".

The study of texts is carried out according to the method of M.L. Gasparov–T.V. Skulacheva (Skulacheva 2012, 2014). I use the following *five* parameters for analyzing epic verse (epic line):

1)   metrical structure

2)   anacrusis

3)   ending

4)   number of stresses

5)   number of syllables

First, I repeatedly listened to the audio recording of the text. This is necessary to identify the exact sound image of all word forms (place of stress in each word, the presence of vocables, syncope or apocope, etc.). I did not use special computer programs for phonetic analysis. Next, I made a transcription of the audio text. The transcription was made in the form of a table in accordance with the M.L. Gasparov–T.V. Skulacheva method. Next, the text was marked up: stresses were indicated; the place of the caesura was shown (if present); the schemes of the intervals were given; metrical types of the lines, anacruses and endings were identified and calculated; syllabic and accentual tendency was tested. To identify the unifying meter of the whole text, a numeric parameter of 75% was used (Skulacheva 2012).

The table with the markup of the text is as follows (TAB. 1, stressed syllables in italics):

Text		Interval Scheme	Coincidence with the meters	Number of Syllables	Number of Stresses
1	Как по *ма*тушки да по *Во*лге ре*ки*	2.42.0	Acc	11	3
	А *е*дет *три*дцать *три* корабля да роскра*шё*ныи,	1.1123.2	Tk	15	5
	А как о*дин* ко*ра*блик и*дет* да *ё*н по*лу*чше вс*ех*,	3.12111.0	Dk	15	6
	А *ё*н по*лу*чше вс*ех* и да по*ба*сче вс*их*,	1.1131.0	I6	12	5
5	А по *но*су ко*раб* как *лю*ты звер*и*,	3.121.0	Dk	11	4
	А по кор*мы* ко*раб* то да *чи*сты зме*и*,	3.131.0	I6	12	4
	А на ко*ра*блике *ма*чты золо*чё*ныи,	3.23.2	Tk	13	3
	А ка*на*тики вс*е* шел*ко*выи,	2.21.2	Dk	10	3
	А па*ру*са все *ши*ты-*бра*ныи да по*ло*тняныи,	3.115.2	I7	16	4
10	А на *бо*ку-то на ко*ра*блики да *на*писано,	3.34.2	Acc	15	3
	А ведь т*ак* си*дят*-то да *до*бры *мо*лодцы,	2.121.2	Dk	12	4
	А на дру*гом* бок*у* нари*со*вано,	3.12.2	Dk	11	3
	А си*дят*-то ведь да *кра*сныи *де*вушки,	2.32.2	Tk	12	3
	А ко*ра*блик-то ведь на в*о*душки да ко*лы*блетсе,	2.44.2	Acc	15	3
15	А *мо*лодцы вс*е* с *де*вицами об*о*ймутсе да поце*лу*ютсе	1.2135.2	Acc	19	5

TAB. 1: Markup of the text

Lines in total: 15 (=100%)

Trochee (T) = 0 (0%)
Iamb (I) = 3 (20%)
Dactyl (D) = 0 (0%)
Amphibrach (Amph) = 0 (0%)
Anapaest (An) = 0 (0%)
Dol'nik (Dk) = 5 (33.3%)
Taktovik (Tk) = 3 (20%)
Accentual verse (Acc) = 4 (26.7%)
1-word lines (1-w) = 0 (0%)

The threshold of 75% is exceeded by accentual verse: 100% = Accentual verse. Consequently, the meter of the presented text is *accentual verse.*

In TAB. 1, line No. 8 is a type often designated by researchers of folklore verse as *5+5*: "А ка*на*тики || вс*е* шел*ко*выи" (Bailey 2010: 219). Following M.L. Gasparov, I define the metrical scheme of this line as *dol'nik* (Gasparov 1984: 127–129). At this stage of my work, I adhere to the terminology of M.L. Gasparov for two reasons: 1) the *5+5* meter is found in epics in isolated cases and does not affect the calculations, 2) using terminology from other methods will lead to methodological eclecticism, which is unacceptable at any stage of research.

Note that there are some difficulties here: F.A. Konashkov does not pronounce this line very clearly: it is either "А канатики все шелковыи" (2.21.2) or "А канатики ведь шелковыи" (2.4.2). In the second case, there would be an *accentual verse* scheme (the particle *ведь* is always unstressed). In this instance, it is necessary to accept some uncertainty concerning the verse structure.

The *syllabic composition* of the text is given in TAB. 2:

Number of Syllables	Number of Lines
10	1 (6.7%)
11	3 (20%)
12	4 (26.6%)
13	1 (6.7%)
15	4 (26.6%)
16	1 (6.7%)
19	1 (6.7%)

TAB. 2: Syllabic Composition

Data on the *accentual structure* of the verse is given in TAB 3:

Number of Stresses	Number of Lines
3	7 (46.7%)
4	4 (26.7%)
5	3 (20%)
6	1 (6.7%)

TAB. 3: Accentual Structure

Typology of anacruses is presented in TAB. 4:

	Number	Percentage
Monosyllabic anacrusis	3	20%
Disyllabic anacrusis	5	33.3%
Trisyllabic anacrusis	7	46.7%
Total	**15**	**100%**

TAB. 4: Anacrusis

Typology of the endings is given in TAB. 5:

	Number	Percentage
Dactylic ending	10	66.7%
Masculine rhyme	5	33.3%
Total	**15**	**100%**

TAB. 5: Ending

At the beginning of the 19th century, it was discovered that a distinctive attribute of the *bylina*-epic is a dactylic ending. However, audio recordings of sung texts provide a new perspective on this claim. In the epic I analyze, there are such phrases as: *no*

Волге-реки, получше всех, побасче всих, люты звери, чисты змеи. Traditionally, these are considered as enclitic phrases with a primary stress on the first word: *по Волге-реке, получше всех, побасче всих, люты звери, чисты змеи.* Scanning the line in this way, the so-called "dactylic ending" appears. These folklore combinations drew the special attention of M.P. Shtokmar, who illustrated his observations with a multitude of examples from epic texts: *за родна сына, дорога госьтя, кованы замки,* etc. (Shtokmar 1952: 242). Judging by the audio recordings of epics collected from F.A. Konashkov, there is no empirical basis to interpret the second word as unstressed. The narrator clearly sings the line with a strong emphasis on each word, including the words *реки, всех, звери, змеи,* etc. The presence of two stresses in these and some other formulas is also recorded in published collections of folk songs, as indicated by J. Bailey (Bailey 2001: 391). Even the last syllable of the hyper-dactylic ending gets an additional stress: *понукиваёт, споскрипываёт, спочиркивают* (Bailey 2012: 15). It is obvious that the interpretation of phrases exhibiting this pattern as enclitic phrases does not quite correlate with their true nature, and, at a minimum, requires special commentary and good audio recordings. Let me clarify that I am talking about phrases that consist of *two* words: *люты звери,* etc. In the event that only *one* word is placed at the end of a line (*роскрашёныи, золочёныи,* etc.), the "dactylic ending" rule has no exceptions. Apparently, the last syllable in such a word may acquire some additional emphasis due to the influence of the musical rhythm. However, this emphasis cannot be called *stress* in the linguistic sense of the term.

The rest of the corpus of texts is analyzed in the same way. Currently, 25 texts, with a total of 441 lines, have been analyzed. This data is not sufficient for reliable statistical calculations, but it is quite enough to test and demonstrate the method of analysis. Since it is customary in metrical studies to work with large arrays of texts, my first priority is to enlarge the database. Currently, I have recordings of 100 epics (texts or fragments) that require making transcriptions and doing the markup. I also intend to include in the database texts of spiritual verses, historical songs, laments and other genres of verse folklore. The Audio Archive of the Institute of Linguistics, Literature and History at the Karelian Research Center has a sufficient number of such recordings, including, among other things, recordings of so-called *fakelore*—late imitations in the epic style, telling about Soviet political figures.

3   Conclusion

The main results obtained from these materials are as follows.

1. The repertoire of the epic singer F.A. Konashkov includes texts of different metrical types, such as *dol'nik, taktovik, accentual verse,* and *disyllabic meters with alternating anacrusis.* There is a tendency for *taktovik* to prevail. Some quantitative data is presented in TAB. 6:

	Number	Percentage
Disyllabic meter with alternating anacrusis	5	20%
Dol'nik	7	28%
Taktovik	10	40%
Accentual verse	3	12%
Total	**25**	**100%**

TAB. 6: Metrical types of *bylinas* by F.A. Konashkov

2. *Syllabic composition* of the texts is given in TAB. 7:

	Number	Percentage
9-syllable line	8	1.8%
10-syllable line	24	5.4%
11-syllable line	68	15.4%
12-syllable line	112	25.4%
13-syllable line	74	16.8%
14-syllable line	77	17.5%
15-syllable line	43	9.7%
16-syllable line	17	3.8%
17-syllable line	10	2.3%
18-syllable line	2	0.5%
19-syllable line	3	0.7%
20-syllable line	2	0.5%
21-syllable line	0	0%
22-syllable line	1	0.2%
Total	**441**	**100%**

TAB. 7: Syllabic composition

3. Data on the *accentual structure* of the texts are given in TAB. 8:

	Number	Percentage
2 stresses per line	47	10.7%
3 stresses per line	154	34.9%
4 stresses per line	164	37.2%
5 stresses per line	64	14.5%
6 stresses per line	9	2%
7 stresses per line	2	0.5%
8 stresses per line	1	0.2%
Total	**441**	**100%**

TAB. 8: Accentual structure

4. The *typology of anacruses* is presented in TAB. 9:

	Number	Percentage
No syllables in anacrusis	7	1.6%
Monosyllabic anacrusis	96	21.8%
Disyllabic anacrusis	183	41.5%
Trisyllabic anacrusis	141	31.9%
Quadrisyllabic anacrusis	14	3.2%
Total	**441**	**100%**

TAB. 9: Typology of anacruses

5. The *typology of the endings* is given in TAB. 10:

	Number	Percentage
Dactylic ending	334	75.7%
Masculine rhyme	98	22.2%
Hyper-dactylic ending	9	2.1%
Total	**441**	**100%**

TAB. 10: Endings of the lines

6. As can be seen from the above tables, F.A. Konashkov's manner of singing is strictly in line with the classical view of epic metrics. The narrator uses a variety of meters, but gives preference to the *taktovik* (this statement requires additional statistical verification). Despite the fact that Russian epic verse is not syllabic, it seems that the narrator tries not to go far beyond the range of 11–14 syllables in a verse, with a preference for 12-syllables lines. The widespread notion of three stresses in the *taktovik* lines of *bylina* verse requires some modification. As follows from my calculations based on audio recordings, lines with four stresses are slightly predominant in epic verse, although statistically the difference between the number of lines with three or four stresses is minimal. In general, epic verse is created with 3 or 4 stresses in each line (sometimes accentual models based on two or five stresses in the line are used). A striking typological feature of epic verse is the dactylic ending—the texts collected from F.A. Konashkov confirm this propensity (75.7%). The dactylic ending disappears when a *two-word* formula is placed at the end of a line: *люты звери*, *получше всех*. Audio recordings refute the widespread view that the second component in this type of phrase is unstressed.

7. The method I use for analyzing epic verse is based on three principles: 1) the obligatory use of an audio recording of the folklore text, 2) separation of the text from the music, 3) tabulation in accordance with the algorithm proposed by M.L. Gasparov and T.V. Skulacheva for the analysis of non-classical verse (involving five features: metrical structure, anacrusis, endings, number of stresses, and number of syllables). As I have tried to show in the paper, this approach takes into account many structural features of folklore verse and allows us to describe it with precise definitions.

This research needs to be extended to a wider range of material.

Acknowledgements

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