Beginning from the End: Strategies of Composition in Lyrical Improvisation with End Rhyme

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Having studied why rhyming couplets are such an effective vehicle of lyrical communication in contemporary Cretan tradition for over a decade, the first time I attended a freestyle rap battle in Helsinki the expression seemed profoundly familiar to me. At first sight differences between the two oral poetic cultures might seem striking: language, style, communicative contexts, and social implantation—in two socially and linguistically distinct corners of Europe. Nevertheless, the major argumentative images developed within the improvised flow of rapping tended to be verbalized in a couplet form very similar to that in Crete. In addition to the structural similarity of these core units, both traditions share the role of end rhyme as a primary parameter in composition, as well as the argumentative ambition. These qualifiers also characterize the rhetorical structure of several other traditional forms of contest poetry, which I have recently been able to verify in the performance of improvised *gloses* in Mallorca.

The target of this paper is to analyze the structural and rhetorical principles that seem to be emblematic of extempore composition in all three of these rhymed forms of oral poetry.[1] The analysis focuses on the methods that improvisers employ in the construction of end rhyme patterns and in structuring the semantic hierarchy of verse units in the spontaneous composition of verses in these traditions.

End rhyme is a poetic device that ties verses together with parallel sound patterns situated at the ends of the lines. Although Richard Bauman (1977:18-19) specifically states that "the structural principles underlying the parallel constructions may serve as mnemonic aids to the performer of a fixed traditional text, or enhance the fluency of the improvisational or

spontaneous performance," the role of rhyme is often acknowledged only as a mnemotechnic device that is utilized to help the memory in the performance of an existing, pre-composed text. In this paper, by contrast, I will speak of end rhyme's role as a creative and cognitive device in the improvised oral composition of verses. The methods of structuring the poetic discourse by situating sound patterns at the ends of the lines are the very heart of the cognitive practice, skill, and art of lyrical improvisation with end rhyme. These methods further relate to a model of semantic hierarchy, in which semantic weight, the argument, is also at the end of a structural unit of composition. The fact that the improviser has to command a technique of structuring the verses in a manner that is often the reverse to what the audience perceives is largely unknown outside the communities of improvisers. I also address a type of orally composed poetry, rhymed poetry with an argumentative core, which, in spite of the historical depth of its roots and nearly universal distribution, has so far received little attention in English language research.

In what follows I focus on the poetic traditions of the Cretan rhyming couplets called *mandinadhes*, Mallorcan *gloses*, and Finnish improvised rap, freestyle. These poetic idioms all have end rhyme but they differ in their culture-specific conventions of performance and also in how the utterance as a whole is structured and composed. *Mandinadhes* represent a short, compact couplet form that states a desired point within its two lines. Improvised *gloses* are one example of the contest poetry stanzas of approximately eight to ten lines with a fixed rhyme pattern typical of the Southern European and Ibero-American areas. In Finnish improvised rap the length of the strophe can be either free or regularized by a time limit, but utterances often contain 16-24 lines. In addition to the length of utterances, the speed of rapping is very rapid. Both of these factors contribute to a greater variety in structuring the utterance as a whole. Each section of this essay will introduce the basic characteristics of the poetic idioms addressed, give one or several textualized examples of utterances in the tradition, analyze the rhyming and placement of semantic weight in these utterances, and then look at how individual improvisers explain their method. Following this I draw some conclusions concerning the similarities and differences between these traditions.

The research presented here is based on the ethnographic cross-cultural study of these contemporary traditions. The technique of oral composition first started to intrigue me during my field study of the Cretan *mandinadhes* in 1997.[2] Working on the same tradition earlier on the island of Karpathos, Samuel Baud-Bovy (1936) had already studied in great detail the formulaic expressions, syntactic structures allowing formulaic substitutions, as well as the principles of balancing units with parallel structures. Beyond such structural approaches, the research literature was not of much help in understanding the actual cognitive action or the method of composition. Because automatization plays such a central role in skillful oral composition (see below), many oral composers in Crete also found it difficult to explain just how they create their lines.[3] Some interlocutors whom I came to know better, however, elaborated on their method with detailed examples (Sykäri 2011:168-71). Based on that knowledge, I have more recently discussed these processes with improvisers of freestyle rap in Finland. This research was complemented by a stay (January 2015) in Mallorca, where I was able to interview two young

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[2] See Sykäri (2011 and 2009).

[3] See also Liu et al. (2012).

improvisers, the *glosadors* Mateu Matas "Xurí" and Maribel Servera.[4] This opportunity allowed me to discuss the methods of improvised oral composition with professionals who are not only experienced performers, but also teachers and analytical developers of a method for learning improvisation.[5]

Lyrical improvisation has long remained out of the topics of mainstream research. In the 1980s and the 1990s, however, several oral traditions with lyrical improvisation in the Mediterranean area were rendered visible particularly in anthropological and musicological research.[6] In the 1990s the theme of improvisation surfaced in studies of music and performance arts.[7] In the new millennium it also has received broader interest in cultural studies,[8] and the practices of lyrical improvisation in the Mediterranean area, just as the Basque *bertsolaritza* tradition, has also now been documented in more detail in English.[9] This need to conceptualize and research improvisation has obviously resulted from the urge to tackle this neglected theme, but the interest also reflects what increasingly takes place in the field: in the arts and popular culture, improvised music and theater have gained ground, and in oral cultures, traditional forms of improvisation, just as the new lyrical idiom of freestyle rap, are intensively being embraced by younger generations.

On the other hand, improvised verbal cultures with their specific poetic idioms, performative registers and practices, and in-group related subject matter, represent local or subcultural capital, which does not easily translate. The identical forms and techniques and the very existence of similar traditions over regional and national borders were recognized even in Spanish language improvisation only at the beginning of the 1990s.[10] Much local knowledge and local research still remain behind linguistic barriers, and many of the contemporary traditions

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[4] My contact with the *gloses* tradition in Mallorca was initiated by an interview with Pedro Bisbal Mayol in Søller in September 2013. Pedro kindly advised me to speak with his teacher, Mateu Matas. I am greatly indebted to Jaume Guiscafrè Danús, lecturer at the department of Catalan philology, University of the Balearic Islands in Palma, for his devoted collegial help in organizing this visit, accompanying me to events, as well as translating during the interview between Catalan and English.

[5] These three traditions differ vastly in how they are learned and conceptualized by the practitioners: while improvisation in both the Cretan tradition and the Finnish rap culture is learned by individuals mainly alone and with little verbalized analysis of the method, contemporary Mallorcan improvisers, like their Basque peers, have dedicated courses and schools. For Basque verse schools, see, for example, Agirreazaldegi and Goikoetxea (2007).

[6] See, for example, Caraveli (1982 and 1985), Caton (1990), Herndon and McLeod (1980), Herzfeld (1981 and 1985), Kezich (1982), and *Arabic Oral Traditions* (1989).

[7] See, for example, Berliner (1994), Sawyer (1997), and Nettl and Russell (1998).

[8] See Hallam and Ingold (2007).

[9] For Palestine, see Yaqub (2007), and in Sardinia, Zedda (2009). For the Basque *bertsolaritza* tradition, see, for example, Garzia, Sarasua, et al. (2001), Armistead and Zulaika (2005), and *Basque Special Issue* (2007).

[10] Trapero (2008:8).

continue to be unknown outside of their linguistic and cultural areas.[11] This, in turn, emphasizes the significance of lyrical improvisation as an arena for creating local, in-group identities, defying the globalizing and hegemonic trajectories of culture even today.

Of the sources available on the method of improvised composition, Andoni Egaña's (2007) detailed analyses of the rhetorical elaboration and patterns of interaction in the improvised composition of *bertsolaritza* have provided a comparative source for understanding the actual process of composition.[12] The major Spanish language reference, Alexis Díaz-Pimienta's *Teoría de la Improvisación Poética* (2014), significantly widens this comparative scope on the method of lyrical improvisation.[13] In addition to an inclusive introduction to the forms and traditions of improvisation in the Ibero-American area, where improvisation is specifically prominent even today, Díaz-Pimienta's theory focuses comprehensively on the compositional and performative structures, methods, and ideals connected to the ten-line stanza form *décima*. Egaña's and Díaz-Pimienta's contributions are particularly noteworthy, as both are also forefront performers.[14]

In this paper I will relate to the discussion on lyrical improvisation by focusing on the technique and the method, and by introducing three less well-known contemporary European traditions. What is not elaborated here is the diversity in each tradition: examples are cited for the purpose of structural analysis and do not illustrate the large variety of styles, aesthetics, and forms of expression that these traditions exhibit.[15] A closer analysis of the unfolding of interaction and strategies through which it is structured, so emblematic of improvisation, remains outside the scope of this essay.

The Concept of Improvised Oral Poetry and Terminology Used

To begin with, I shortly note the kind of poetry to which this analysis is relevant. End rhyme has become a distinguished feature in most Western oral and written poetry and song

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[11] Much is written in the Romance languages about the Italian *ottava rima*, Sardinian traditions, Basque *bertsolaritza*, several local traditions in different parts of Spain and Portugal, and those of Latin America. For bibliography in languages other than English, consult, for example, Armistead and Zulaika (2005), Bravi (2010), Caocci and Macchiarella (2011), Díaz-Pimienta (2014), Trapero (2008), and Zedda (2009). The countries at the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean also host lively improvised oral traditions; see, for example, *Oral Tradition* (1989 vol. 4.1-2), and Yaqub (2007) (my concern is limited to areas discussed here, but improvised oral poetry has been and is practiced worldwide).

[12] See also Garzia, Sarasua, et al. (2001:81-133).

[13] My own command of Spanish is yet elementary, but Díaz-Pimienta's volume was specifically declared as an improviser's "bible" by the Mallorcan informants and researchers.

[14] See also Zedda (2009).

[15] I have elsewhere analyzed the Cretan tradition in more detail (Sykäri 2009 and 2011). See also Baud-Bovy (1936), Herzfeld (1981 and 1985), Caraveli (1982 and 1985), and Kavouras (1991). Manuscripts on the Finnish battle scene and on the performative strategies and registers of Finnish freestyle are being prepared in English. In Finnish, see Palonen (2008) and Sykäri (2014a and 2014b). For *gloses* in Catalan, see Serrà Campins (2012), Ginard (1960), Moll (1966), and Sbert i Garau (2008).

lyrics since early medieval times.[16] Throughout this period of time and many cultures, a variety of oral and literary techniques of composition has been employed, with a major division normally made between longer, narrative genres, and shorter, lyric poetry. In the rhymed poetry of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries' oral communities, with respect to the aesthetics and techniques of composition, the divide is also evident between the short, argumentative, dialogic poetic registers, on the one hand, and the longer, narrative historical and topical registers on the other. In Crete,[17] Mallorca (see below), and Finland, for example, the same metrical mold has been employed as an independent single-stanza unit (couplet/quatrain) for communicative contexts, and then as a stanza form for longer narrative compositions.[18] The internal, semantic structure of the stanza can nevertheless be quite different when the unit holds the position of a self-dependent, argumentative poetic utterance, and when it is used for advancing a story or creating context for a narrative, like in historical or ideological topical compositions, or tradition-oriented genres such as ballads. Both argumentative and narrative registers, as well as single-stanza forms and several-stanzas-long forms, normally co-exist in a speech community, but they are employed for very different purposes. In this essay, I only address the argumentative registers that consist of relatively short units of utterance, and that characteristically include situation-specific, personalized statements and comments.

Improvisation as a form of oral composition is another issue that needs specification. In the interview in Palma with Mateu Matas "Xurí" and Maribel Servera (Sykäri 2015b), we discussed the talent and skills needed for one to become an improvising poet. They framed the requirements in terms of the following three points: 1) learning the melodic phrases and how to insert the syllables of textual phrases into them (how to sing/perform), 2) automatization of rhyming and of the construction of sentences, and 3) the ability to find and create "principal ideas."

The first two points describe the technical basis on which all oral composition in performance leans. An oral poet practices and must master these first. Nevertheless, according to Mateu and Maribel, learning the technique of oral composition in performance does not yet make one an improviser, because the final target and talent lie in the capacity to create those "principal ideas," that is, situation-specific arguments that emerge from and reflect the on-going dialogue and the immanent performative context. Both improvisers underlined that this is the focal point of improvisation and similar perception of verbal improvisation is expressed in many other communities (Sykäri 2014c). This scope differs, for example, from tradition-oriented narrative oral composition, in which the performer must master the storyline, schemes, and acts of the

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[16] Gasparov, Smith, et al. (1996:96-102).

[17] Sykäri (2011:26-27, 132-37).

[18] Although this aspect has not been specifically researched, the metrical models in Finnish rhymed tradition are described and analyzed, for example, in Asplund (1994, 1997, and 2006), Asplund and Hako (1981), Laitinen (2003), and Laurila (1956).

narrative.[19] On the other hand, all oral composition relies on language, and just how formulaic the poetic language used is, or how spontaneous a certain individual's certain performance is, depends on the performer's competence, energy, and contextual preferences, as well as the conventions of the tradition and register.[20] In brief, what I refer to as improvised oral poetry or lyrical improvisation is a form of oral composition in which, in addition to being composed on the spot by employing a shared poetic idiom, the aesthetics of performance rely on context-sensitive referents and arguments invented extemporaneously by the performer.

To gloss the concepts and descriptions employed by different people in different traditions, it is important first of all to pay attention to the length of the verse line. As discussed in detail in the next section on *mandinadhes*, line lengths vary and have varied through history and across cultures. One of the major differences between the poetic idioms analyzed here is between the "long" line of fifteen syllables (exactly or approximately) and the "short" line of seven or eight syllables.[21] In this regard, a *couplet* of two long lines is semantically equivalent to a *quatrain* of four short lines (see also below).

Another important point to pay attention to is the length and organization of the utterance. To analyze the semantic and structural parts of an utterance, I use the following terms: "statement" or "principal idea" to refer to the main ideas or messages that the improviser introduces in his or her utterance, regardless of their length, in terms of the number of verse lines. An improvised utterance can thus be conceptualized as one statement (couplet or quatrain), or, following to the meta-discourse on *glosa* composition, the utterance can be conceptualized as ideally concluding in a major statement. Rather than focusing only on a final statement (but with the possibility of including one), an improvised utterance can also aim at delivering several punchlines that rhetorically develop the issue at hand or reason for the performative speech act (freestyle).

At the level of *compositional units* and verse lines within an utterance, the improviser creates verbal *images*, which often contain two parts: I refer to the first, introductory, or leading part of this image as "priming,"[22] and the second part that contains the explicit argument as the "argument." A couplet often has one priming line and one argument line and a quatrain may

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[19] For example, Albert Lord (1975, 1989, and 2001) and John Miles Foley (1995 and 2002) have discussed at length the epic singers' own inclination toward the tradition and singing the story "word by word." This is an aesthetic statement and does not mean that some or all of them would not be able to improvise. John Miles Foley (2002:213-14) cited an example of a situation where his informant improvised a rhyming quatrain in the local epic meter. Because I was used to exactly this type of commentary in the Cretan poetic tradition, Foley's remark of this epic singer doing something *rare* had astonished me. I had the opportunity to discuss this with Foley in October 2006. He verified that the people present had affirmed to him that the singer had never done so before.

[20] Experienced Finnish freestylists speak, for example, of switching on or off the method of anticipation described in this paper: in a battle, anticipation is essential for the creation of startling and funny retorts and punchlines, whereas in other contexts the freestylist can opt for extreme spontaneity and free flow of mind. The level of spontaneity in improvisation is also discussed in detail by Egaña (2007) and Díaz-Pimienta (2014).

[21] Another currently popular metrical form is that of eleven syllables. This meter of the Italian *ottava rima*, for example, positions itself between those examined here.

[22] The term "priming" is a translation of the Finnish word *pohjustus* that was used in this sense by MC Kajo in a detailed discussion of the theme (Sykäri 2013).

correspondingly have two priming lines and two argument lines.[23] Longer improvised utterances such as freestyle can be constructed of regular couplets of one priming line and one argument line, but a compositional unit of freestyle may also be larger, for example, four lines with three priming lines and one argument line. The identity of some lines or units of lines can be easily identifiable, but this is not a mechanical model explaining each and every verse line—the focus is on discerning the main principles of composing units of utterance.

Cretan *Mandinadhes*: Composition in Self-Dependent Couplets

The Cretan rhyming couplets represent a typical "priming + argument" couplet structure that has the above-mentioned two parts: 1) an introduction or leading part, and 2) a closing argument. In Greece the Medieval Greek decapentesyllable (a line of eight + seven syllables) with iambic rhythm remained as such up to the present day, whereas in Romantic and Slavonic languages, the Medieval Latin decapentesyllable with trochaic rhythm was split into two lines corresponding to its hemistichs, lines of eight or seven syllables.[24] In Cretan *mandinadhes* rhyme then occurs at the ends of these two long lines, and the two parts of the couplet are formed of one line each.

After the split of the long line, in several linguistic areas this same couplet structure became accommodated by a *quatrain*, where consequently the first part (priming) often includes the first two lines and the last part (argument) includes the last two lines. In these quatrains, rhyme may occur—following the decapentesyllabic line—on the second and the fourth lines only (abcb), or all four lines may carry a rhyme, often with the patterns abab or abba. Whether written in two long or four short lines, the semantic information that can be expressed is the same, and many Cretans conceptualize the *mandinadha* as having four parts (four hemistichs), and write it in four lines.[25]

As already noted, such self-dependent short stanzas with this structure are widespread and employed in several registers of oral communication, sung and spoken. These include dance and ritual songs, verbal duels, proverbial commentary, spoken insinuation (erotic, romantic, and so on), mocking songs, and humor, just to mention some modes and contexts of these poetic discourses.[26]   The compact size and form of expression makes the mold practical for personalized, situational utterances, which one can compose extempore or draw from a reserve of memorized units. The memorized poems also provide a plentitude of generative formulaic

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[23] Compare with the Persian quatrain rhymed aaba, where the first two lines give the priming, the third line introduces a contradiction, and the final line offers a resolution. This form can also be conceptualized as a couplet, reflecting an interpretation of the lines as hemistichs (Hämeen-Anttila 2008:185-209). The quatrain rhymed aaba is very common in wide areas of Turkey, the Near East, and Asia. See, for example, Laurila (1956:67-70) and Bartók (1976).

[24] Gasparov, Smith, et al. (1996:105-08).

[25] See also Herzfeld (1981).

[26] Sykäri (2011:26-34).

structures that can be easily modified. People who learn the technique of oral composition and practice the creation of ideas can easily start by using such formulaic substitution systems.

In contemporary Crete the island's emblematic oral culture of the *mandinadhes* has entered modern media through a 30 years' period of literarization, and written oral utterances in the form of a *mandinadha*, such as SMS messages, are very popular today. The oral composition and performance cultures are fertile as well, but surface only in more secluded contexts. Couplets can be memorized, composed orally or with pen and paper, or, in rare occasions, they can still be improvised on the spot, although this skill is not particularly cultivated anymore. Unlike in other Mediterranean islands such as Cyprus, Sardinia, Corsica, Balearic Islands, and Malta, the widely established practice of organized, public verbal duels has never occurred in Crete. The typical context for oral exchange as well as improvisation is the informal singing event with musical accompaniment. These events, where a group of friends or relatives gather to sing, used to be one of the main pastimes for male Cretans until the 1970s. Some singers and musicians continue this practice to the present day and also female performers sometimes now take part in the singing.

In a Cretan singing event, the major principle is that of thematic coherence between consecutive strings of utterances.[27] Rather than a dialogue between two singers (which can also emerge in the course of an event), the singing is primarily collective and proceeds as an interaction between singers taking their turns and a choir repeating the verses. A singer presents the first verse of a couplet and the others repeat it. Singing and repetitions can also proceed in hemistichs first and then in full lines. After the singer has sung the second full verse, however, there is never repetition, and the next performer immediately takes up his or her turn. This resonates with the improvisatory practices and the fact that the singer's statement is unfolded or wrapped up by the argument made in the second verse, and it is then time for the next performer to develop or challenge it. As the following examples show, couplets can also be improvised in spoken communication.

Cretan interlocutors agreed that in a rhyming couplet, the second verse should always be semantically stronger than the first.[28] The Rethymniot composer, tavern-owner, and local radio-program host Georgos Sifakis is one of the Cretan poets who analyzed with me his own experience in versification in different compositional contexts, including improvisation. He likened improvisation to making a satirical cartoon (Sykäri 2011:183): the creation of an image that is made by quick, sparse strokes and that by itself evokes the context; an image that is immediately intelligible to the viewer but that at the same time discloses a new, surprising viewpoint. Contrary to the visual image, in lyrical improvisation (just as when joking), the image is constructed in layers: the punchline arrives at the end.

The couplet structure and the semantic weight of the second verse become particularly pointed in the concretely argumentative utterances, such as the following two mocking poems,

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[27] For this principle in the singing event, see Sykäri (2011:104-15), and for an audio example, see Sykäri (2009).

[28] This holds for all kinds of self-dependent *mandinadhes* and all types of composition processes, although in the lyrical end of the continuum, just as in written contributions, the structure may lose its argumentative organization.

which were recited to me by Sifakis as an example of the outspoken style of eastern Crete, Sitia (Sykäri 2011:156-57):[29]

Ta portokália tou horioú / yemízoune vapóri
O,ti skatá' ne o próedros / íne ke i psifofóri

The oranges of the village / fill up a motor boat
The same shit as the president / are the ones who vote

Stin páno bánda tsi koprés / fitrónoun i domátes
O,ti skatá' ne o kafetzís / íne ke i pelátes

Up above the dung / sprout up the tomatoes
The same shit as the café owner / are also the customers

In the first couplet, the singer's statement is to claim that the voters are not better than the village president, who has been elected by the voters. To accommodate his claim, the singer employs a formulaic pattern in the argument line. The phrase about oranges used to prime his argument is semantically irrelevant. The second couplet uses the same formulaic pattern in the same metrical positions (*O,ti skatá' ne X / íne ke Y*), this time to mock the customers of a café-bar and the café owner as being at the same (low) level. In this case, the priming produces a loose metaphorical analogue to the second line, yet neither of these priming lines is semantically attached to the argument line. Instead, the major reason for the choice in using them is the construction of the rhyme pattern: the wish to end the second line with the word *psofofóri* ("voters") determines the ending of the first line, for which is chosen the word *vapóri* ("boat"); in the second couplet, the word *pelátes* ("customers") determines the preceding rhyme word *domátes* ("tomatoes"). The Greek decapentesyllable's line end and rhyme are always feminine, and because word stress in Greek is meaning-bearing, only words that have stress on the penultimate syllable can be placed in this position. These priming lines are examples of "nature images" that are commonly employed in the first part of the couplet structure. In situations where time is very limited and the urge for a comment is demanding, the choice of the specific verse or words may primarily be motivated by the creation of rhyme, which reflects the phonetic sounds of the rhyme word in the argument line.[30]

Although words carrying end-rhyme can affect or even determine the syntactic and semantic structure of the poem in the context of quick extemporized argumentation, experienced improvisers are not restricted to the use of formulaic expressions, structures, or lines. Their skill lies particularly in the syntactic creativity in the construction of logical phrases after they have

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[29] Crete is not culturally uniform. In addition to the poetic forms, dance forms, and the use or lack of musical instruments, the styles in public singing and self-expression can vary greatly between areas. Until the modernization in the 1970s and 1980s, Sitia was the center of violinists and had a very lively male singing culture with openly obscene, bawdy, and mocking tones that would not have been publicly performed in most other areas. I have discussed these examples and their formulaic patterns in more detail elsewhere (Sykäri 2011:156-57).

[30] See also Dundes, Leach, et. al (1970).

chosen—or when in the process of choosing—the rhyme words. In the next example, recited to me by Sifakis, he wanted to disperse the participants in a singing event taking place at his tavern, because it was already late, and thus, improvised in that situation (Sykäri 2011:115):

> *'Omorfi íne i vradiá / ma piós tha dayiandísi*
> *Ohtó i óra to proí / aúrio na ksipnísi*

> Beautiful is the night / but who's the one capable
> At eight o' clock the morning / tomorrow to wake up?

He realized the statement that it was time to leave by creating an image describing how things would be next morning. Here, the first and the second lines together create this image: the priming line begins with a short opening (beautiful is the night) and starts the sentence that is completed in the argument line. Most probably the second rhyme word, the verb form *ksipnisi* ("to wake up"), is the leading rhyme word that first emanated from the emerging statement. It was then rhymed with another suitable verb form, *dayiandisi* ("to grasp," here in the meaning of "being capable of"), which could be chosen from among a large group of verb forms conjugated in this verb category, and the lines were built to end with these words.

An example of a conversational exchange of improvised couplets illustrates how each participant continues the dialogue by framing a new optical angle with regard to the theme. This exchange took place in July 2004 at Sifakis' tavern, where Papanikolis and Papadoyannis, two priests working then in the church around the corner, had come for a coffee (Sykäri 2011:179):[31]

> Georgos Sifakis:
> *Se tsánta ítan to psomí / stin pórta kremasméni*
> *fénete mou to klépsane / pendéxi pinasméni*

> The bread was in a bag, hanging in the door
> It seems that it was stolen from me, by five-six hungry men

> Papadoyiannis:
> *Eklépsane sou to psomí / ma sí epíres állo*
> *prin na gení to próvlima / apó mikró meghálo*

> They stole your bread, but you provided other one
> Before the problem to become, from small to a big one

> Papanikolis:
> *Eklépsane sou to psomí / ma léo den pirázi*
> *áma the klépsoun to faï / tha íne to marázi*

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[31] The incident was related to me by Papanikolis [Nikolaos Nikiforos].

They stole your bread, but I say it does not matter
If they'll steal the food, that will be a disaster

Sifakis opens the dialogue with his statement, depicting the peculiar incident that had arrived to him earlier that day. The poem consists of a layout of the setting in the priming line, and the report of the event in the argument line. Papadoyiannis continues by shortly summarizing the event in his first half-line and by noting that Sifakis had replaced the stolen bread, and then by evaluating this act as a reasonable one in his argument line. Papanikolis repeats Papadoyiannis' summary and closes the line with his evaluation of the event, and then turns to a new viewpoint in his argument line. The specific ideas expressed in this playful poetic dialogue create an image that, after the quick discovery of what to point out, seem to have been formulated effortlessly by rhyming every day expressions and words. Greek is an inflected language, which allows variance in word order, as the examples make explicit.

Indeed, Sifakis, like many other Cretan composers, referred to the following process as being the most typical for improvising a couplet: a principal idea emerges and the poet picks up a pair of rhyme words; he or she then constitutes the verses so that they logically end with the rhyme words. In other words, a draft of the image by which the message is communicated is created more or less simultaneously with the choice of the rhyme words, and the realization of the clauses is more or less simultaneous with the performance.

Although the situation of having *both* rhyme words chosen before realizing the sentences in performance was asserted by improvising Cretan composers as the most common and effective solution in situational improvisation, in many cases of spontaneous composition, composers also reported that ready-made lines, normally the second (the argument line), appear in their mind, and they then compose the other line to fit with it. Yet another possibility was cited especially for those communicative cases in which one has to react very quickly: starting with only the first line's rhyme word in mind. Here, the improviser would quickly figure out the second line's rhyme while already performing the first verse. This leads to the extraction of the image in even less time from the associations brought by the choice of the second rhyme word. This image may contain an argument of which the improviser was not aware when beginning the couplet; the phonetic patterning, the creation of the rhyme, then becomes the generator of the final statement.

The formation of improvised couplets as compact, dialogic utterances takes place in a wide range of communicative contexts. Correspondingly, the rationale for the poetic act varies from passing an intentional message to a spontaneous comment, from acting within the frames of a playful communicative event to a concentrated, ritual singing event. In addition to the significance of the ritual extents of the tradition,[32] many casual improvised couplets disclose the inherent value of the practice of exposing verbal skill in structuring statements by using the shared poetic idiom and in the ability of making references to in-group knowledge.

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[32] See Caraveli (1985) and Kavouras (1991).

Mallorcan Improvised *Glosat*: Contest Poetry with a Fixed Rhyme Pattern

The Mallorcan *glosat* tradition is an example of the contest poetry traditions typical of the southern European and Ibero-American areas. Whereas the dialogic, compact couplet and quatrain traditions are often multifunctional in the communities (also in Mallorca), these contest poetry traditions, in which the utterance is normally of eight to ten lines, are specifically used for improvised poetic confrontations in front of an audience.[33] With this example, I discuss the construction and order of composition of such stanzas that have, in addition to one major statement, the "principal idea," an opening and elaboration within the communicative unit of utterance. All these stanzas also have a fixed rhyme pattern. For a novice, the practice therefore starts from learning to think in "families" of word endings, that is, the groups of words that can be rhymed together.[34]

A Mallorcan *combat* or *combat de picat* ("a battle") is a cooperative event in which normally two poets called *glosadors* confront each other in front of an audience.[35] The confrontation is structured by each *glosador* composing and singing their utterances in turns. Verses are performed with a melodic formula consisting of one ascending and one descending melodic phrase, each phrase corresponding to one metrical line. This is done without musical accompaniment. Although performers tease each other and take opposing roles during their interchange, performances do not contain direct insults, nor are they competitive by arrangement: there is no jury or other kind of official assessment of relative skill. The purpose of the event is to offer entertainment to the audience, in the form of a clever, humorous poetic exchange of utterances that may also extend to highly critical and political tones.

The traditional form of the Mallorcan *glosa* is a quatrain containing four heptasyllabic lines, and thus equivalent to the Cretan *mandinadha* in length. Rhyme can be masculine or feminine and the rhyme pattern may be either abab or abba. This basic quatrain can be extended to up to five or six lines. In improvised verbal dueling, the stanza is lengthened so that an utterance is normally double in length, traditionally eight, and today from eight to about twelve lines. A few decades ago, the improvised *glosat* tradition was still a live oral tradition, but it was practiced mainly by elderly women and men who mastered the oral improvisation of this poetry, which is still today associated with singing at bonfires during the feast of Sant Antoni (January 16th). In the 1990s some local people started working to revitalize the oral improvisation tradition. Among them were the teacher and researcher Felip Munar i Munar and the young performer Mateu Matas "Xurí."[36] As explained to me by Mateu, he and some other local performers cooperated with Basque *bertsolaritza* performers and with the Cuban improviser Alexis Díaz-Pimienta in this process. They were influenced by the Basque stanzas that vary

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[33] For a definition of poetic contest, see Miner (1993), Pagliai (2009), and Sykäri (2014b).

[34] A more detailed discussion is available in Garzia, Sarasua, et al. (2001) and also Munar i Munar (2008).

[35] A *glosador* is technically anyone composing *gloses*, although in the performance contexts discussed here, the composers of *gloses* are improvisers. *Glosat* is the word that refers to the exchange of *gloses*, and a *glosada* is the event of exchange of *gloses*. The word *glosada* can also refer to any long and usually narrative oral poem constituted by heptasyllabic (sometimes pentasyllabic) lines. See further Ginard (1960) and Serrà Campins (2012).

[36] See, for example, Munar i Munar (2008).

between eight and ten lines and by the pan-Hispanic ten-line stanza form known as the *décima* (*décima espineliana* or *espinela*; rhymed abba ac cddc). This regulated the role of stanzas with a free number of verses in Mallorca. The variability of the lines in the stanza reflects the liberty to use two rhymes (a, b) in a number of ways in the rhyming patterns, and the augmentation of lines takes place *inside* the stanza, forming further elaboration between the opening and the statement.

The following example is from an event in which three *glosadors*, Mateu "Xurí," Maribel Servera, and Blai Salom performed in Mallorca, January 23, 2015.[37] The following exchange took place between Mateu "Xurí" and Blai Salom in a late portion of the event, when certain themes had already been introduced and addressed among the participants. One central theme was opened by Mateu, who addressed the fact that Blai Salom was performing with his hat and coat on. Mateu had earlier proposed that his opponent was wearing these in order that he could leave quickly (due to the shame of not performing well). Another theme was developed around the idea of pregnancy, reflecting that Blai was a new father. References to these themes and other ideas verbalized earlier are plenty, and the images rely heavily on poetic language, metaphors, and the double meanings of words. Here, three consecutive turns from the middle of this dialogue are taken to explicate the main structural organization of these utterances (Sykäri 2015a):

Fig. 1. The *glosadors* Mateu Matas "Xurí," Maribel Servera, and Blai Salom performing at a *glosada*-event in Mallorca, January 23, 2015.

A.Mateu:

1. *Thas d'aixecar, alca**vot**,* (x2[38])

2. *si vols fer aquei[x] glo**sat**.*

3. *Ja ho he dit i ho he expli**cat**:*

4. *l'he de fer partir an es **trot**.*

5. *Es capell no l'hi he lle**vat**,*

6. *perquè és un poquet bu**rot**.*

7. *Però ara m'he dema**nat**,*

8. *ell que està embaras**sat**:*

9. *si quan comanares s'al·**lot**,*

10. *duies es capell po**sat**?*

B. Blai:

1. *Resposta te vull do**nar*** (x2)

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[37] Transcription from audio recording and initial translation into English was made by Joan Mut; the translation was then finalized in collaboration with the present author and reviewed by Jaume Guiscafrè Danús.

[38] The first line is conventionally sung twice.

2. *i ho faré just un o**cell**,*

3. *resposta la tendrà **ell**,*

4. *i ben clar la vull dei**xar**.*

5. *Es... Me vaig llevar es ca**pell***

6. *i així bé ja va pas**sar**.*

7. *El me vaig llevar de s'o**cell***

8. *per poder-la embaras**sar**.*

C.Mateu:

1. *Ja sentiu es bergan**tell*** (x2)

2. *no va a jornal, va a esca**rada**,*

3. *es puta fa una fei**nada**,*

4. *o l'hi fa fer a s'o**cell**.*

5. *Només dic lo que diu **ell**,*

6. *avui a dins sa glo**sada**:*

7. *només va penjar es ca**pell***

8. *i va quedar embaras**sada**.*

A. Mateu:

1. You must stand up, dude,

2. if you want to make this *glosat*.

3. I've already said it, and explained it:

4. I have to make him leave rushing off.

5. I haven't taken his hat off,

6. because he's a bit madcap.

7. But now I've wondered,

8. about him, who is pregnant:[39]

9. if when you conceived the child,

10. you were wearing the hat?

B. Blai:

1. Answer to you I want to give (x2)

2. and I'll make it like a bird,

3. an answer will he [Mateu] get,

4. and I want it to be very clear.

5. The . . . I took the "hat" off,

6. and it went in well that way.

7. I took it off from the "bird"

8. to be able to make her pregnant.

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[39] *Embarassat* ("pregnant") can also refer to somebody who has difficulty moving or acting normally, and Mateu may be playing with this double meaning to refer to Blai's hesitation and slowness to start improvising.

C. Mateu:

1. You heard the dude (x2)

2. he doesn't work on time wage, but on piecework rate,[40]

3. the guy makes a lot of work,

4. or makes the "bird" to do it.

5. I only say what he says,

6. today, in the *glosada*:

7. he barely hanged the hat

8. and she became pregnant.

In the two opening lines of his first *glosa* (A) Mateu answers to a comment by Blai at the end of his previous turn. He then completes his opening quatrain by referring to an idea he has presented earlier (lines 3-4). After this Mateu wraps up another idea from earlier in the dialogue (5-6), appearing as a bridge leading towards his final quatrain. In the first two lines of this final quatrain (7-8), he introduces a new subject that culminates in a question on lines 9-10. The rhyme pattern is abba babbab. In the second *glosa* (B) Blai starts his turn somewhat more formulaically by introducing his desire to give an answer in the first two lines. He further elaborates on this theme on the next two lines (3-4) before proceeding to answer Mateu's question. His answer first contains priming verses (lines 5-6), anticipating the statement that he makes on lines 7-8. The rhyme pattern is abba baba. In his next turn (C) Mateu presents an interpretation of Blai's preceding verses: he turns to mock Blai for being very quick in his marital responsibilities. The first two verses introduce this theme with an image presenting a metaphor related to work, and the next two lines elaborate this idea further. He presents his comment more directly in the last four lines (5-8), first by priming his argument as something uttered by his opponent himself (5-6), and then ending with the argument, which concludes his final statement, in the last two lines. The rhyme pattern is abba abab.

Returning to the earlier discussion on verse length, it is also visible here that although each verse line is grammatically a clause and ends with a rhyme word, the two short lines of seven syllables together make a semantic entity, and often a sentence. In these three turns the argumentation proceeds mainly in units of four lines (in quatrains). In the middle of his first utterance (A), Mateu also presents a unit of two lines, which here structurally and semantically corresponds to the "bridge" found in the *dècima*.[41] At the beginning of the utterances the semantic hierarchy of the units of four lines is less evident, or slightly toward the last lines. At the end of each utterance, this moves exclusively towards highlighting the last two lines (the statement). Blai composed in regular eight line stanzas throughout the entire performance, while there was a great deal of variety in the length and organization of stanzas by Mateu (and by Maribel). The melody line used by Blai was also different. According to the researcher Miquel

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[40] *Anar a jornal* means to work based on an amount of time, while *anar a escarada* means not only to work based on the amount of work or reaching certain objectives, but also to proceed without distractions, and in a relatively quick manner.

[41] The Spanish accentuation of the word is *décima*, but the Catalan accentuation is *dècima*. A *dècima/décima* is comprised of two quatrains having different rhymes (abba and cddc), which are bridged by two lines rhyming ac (all together forming the final pattern abba ac cddc).

Sbert i Garau (Sykäri 2015c), this corresponds to different "schools," to the difference in how these performers have learned the tradition. Blai has learned the art from certain older local masters, whereas, as noted above, Mateu, who has improvised from his early childhood, has also experimented with the form in collaboration with poets from other contest poetry traditions.

As explained by Mateu and Maribel, their method of improvised composition and performance is in its basic form the following: a performer listens attentively to his or her partner, and when the partner arrives at his or her closing lines, the performer quickly creates, or, if thought up already while the other performs, finalizes the principal idea that will conclude his or her own utterance.[42] This idea is allocated to the two last lines of the utterance-to-be, and at this moment appears in the improviser's mind in an approximate linguistic form, but already decided to the extent that the rhyme words a and b are fixed. If we conceive that the composer's final two lines end with the two rhymes ab, he or she can start composing in either ab or ba order. The improviser sings the first, opening line twice to an ascending melody, and the second line once to a descending melody.[43] He or she then proceeds with a rhetorical elaboration on the theme, holding to the melodic couplet of ascending and descending lines and the alternation of the two rhymes in the forms abab, or abba. If willing to insert an unpaired number of lines, he or she may sing a verse line to the ascending melody twice or several times and then complete the elaboration with the descending melody line. The two final lines, disclosing the premeditated principal idea in a finalized form, consist again of one ascending and one descending melodic line. The performer advances from an opening of two lines to the elaboration of the idea(s) in a fixed or free number of verses, leading to the final disclosure of his or her principal idea in the final two-line statement. The audience, which has listened attentively, bursts into laughter and applause at the end.

The improviser composes first a draft of the last two lines, and he or she keeps this draft containing his or her argument in mind during the performance. Sometimes the performer forgets this principal idea in the moment, being forced to create a new one during the course of the performance. Other times he or she discards the initial principle idea in favor of a better one, to which the associations have led him or her during the rhetorical elaboration. As a very experienced performer, Mateu approximated that he would forget his drafted principal idea lines perhaps once in every 30 utterances, but that he would also discard them for better ones more often during the performance process.

Both performers said that they prefer either abba or abab as the main form of rhyming, although they said that after composing the principal idea, they do not take much notice of how and in which order the rest of the rhymes are formed. The transcription of these three utterances, however, points to the fact that the argumentation and composition can advance quite regularly in units of four, with the possibility to add units of other length, here of two lines. The semantic hierarchy of the utterance is very clear: as stated by the improvisers, the last two lines always receive the primary semantic stress. Although the patterning of rhymes is characteristically

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[42] See also Egaña (2007); compare with Díaz-Pimienta (2014:508-09, 516-17).

[43] One can become familiar with the singing style, as exemplified in the following YouTube video, where Mateu and Maribel perform (Matas and Servera 2012): Combat de glosadors entre Mateu Matas "Xurí" i Maribel Servera al V Curs de Cultura Popular (1/2) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zYJ1YkUxEo.

carried on at the level of the short lines, a comparison of the semantic contents equates the units of four short lines with the Cretan couplets of two long lines. A typical improvised *glosa* of eight short lines would thus be equivalent to two Cretan *mandinadhes*, but as the stanza as a whole is longer, additional pairs of lines are possible in the middle.

Improvised Rap in Finland

Whereas the two traditions discussed so far have been practiced in the given communities from medieval times, improvised rap in the Finnish language is a new, developing poetic idiom. Nonetheless, the metrical roots of American English rap lyrics stem from the same medieval models that have also reigned in Anglo-Saxon popular verse and oral poetry since at least the thirteenth century. According to Adam Bradley (2009:18-22), the early American rappers employed the English ballad meter (or common measure), the accentual rhyming quatrain with four-line stanzas of alternating four- and three-stress lines and rhyming abcb (or abab), a style of rapping that is today referred to as "old school." Rappers have later developed more personal and complicated rhythm, stress, and rhyme patterns in their written lyrics,[44] but metrically the accentual four-stress meter, the dominant form of English oral and popular poetry, still characterizes rap.[45] In Finnish rap the distinction between improvised and written rap lyrics is very clear. While the social contexts of freestyle rap in the United States have been researched to a degree, the history, composition, and strategies of improvisation have so far received little attention.[46]

Today in Finland freestyle is performed among several performative frames. This tradition has emerged under direct influences from the United States and there are no living, local cultural models for the improvised oral production of lyrics. Young boys influenced by rap music and lyrics and the underground hip-hop culture started composing freestyle rap in Finnish in the 1990s, with an accelerating momentum toward the end of the decade. This was already some years before the final breakthrough of the Finnish language into the local rap scene, which took place at the turn of the century. Freestyle rap battle events were introduced in Finland in

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[44] See, for example, Alim (2006), Bradley (2009), and Krims (2000).

[45] Bradley (2009:24-26).

[46] Erik Pihel's (1966) contribution finely exemplifies several facets of freestyle's aesthetics, but unfortunately the author lacks knowledge about rhymed oral poetry and is not able to fully appreciate the information on strategies of composition given by MC Supernatural. Supernatural clearly states that he thinks "about the next three lines before the first is even finished" (Destiny 1994:55, quoted in Pihel 1996:262), but Pihel, when discussing the role of rhyme, says that freestylists "know they must rhyme with a word they have already said" (255, n. 11).

Marcyliena Morgan (2009) provides a detailed sociocultural analysis of the Project Blowed (and its predecessor Good Life) open mic, battle, and cypher scene in 1990s Los Angeles. Jooyoung Lee (2009a, 2009b, 2009c, and 2016) further elaborates on the values, practices, and lives of the protagonists of this scene. Several sociolinguistic contributions address the linguistic strategies related to creating racial and topical identities in verbal duels. See Alim, Lee, et al. (2010 and 2011), Cutler (2007 and 2009), and regarding South Africa, see Williams and Stroud (2010 and 2014). A recent article by Flynn and Mitchell (2014) analyzes Older Scots flyting with reference to freestyle battle aesthetics.

2000 in the form of the Finnish Rap Championships. This brought about a venue for a fast-growing contest poetry activity that today consists of the annual Championships as well as other less formal annual and occasional battle events organized by the practitioners.[47] A number of experienced, long-term freestylists have recently also brought rap improvisation into the frame of interactive entertainment in different venues, including clubs and radio programs. At these events MCs improvise about themes suggested by the audience or about items given to them, and they create sketches in the style of improvised theater with a cast proposed by the audience.

Finnish freestyle follows the general conventions of American rap in delivery, poetics, and versification. Major differences are in the adaptations of these practices to the particularities of the Finnish language, language-related poetics, and culturally relevant thematic contents. Significantly, the Finnish language has much longer words than English, and the main stress is always on the first syllable of the word. In words longer than three syllables, a secondary stress appears on the third syllable (or sometimes on the fourth in still longer words), and the first syllable of each word in compound words receives a stress as well. Although Finnish authors of written rap lyrics often play with breaking these linguistic stress patterns, freestyle almost invariably holds to the natural word stresses, which facilitates immediate intelligibility. Finnish is also a heavily inflected language, which allows a great freedom in word order.

In addition to the language-specific stressing, and perhaps to balance the length of the rhyme section, Finnish freestyle is characterized by systematic *vowel rhyme*—in the phonetic section constituting the rhyme, all vowels are of the same quality and appear in the same order, but consonants can vary (for example, *suo-raan–vuok-raan*; *kiin-nos-taa–hiil-los-taa*; *läp-pä-ni–äs-säm-mis–bäk-kä-ril*).[48] Multi-rhymes, which in Finnish means rhymes longer than four syllables (for example, *jät-kä vie-lä–bät-läät siel-lä*; *ti-pu-tus-ta–vi-tut sus-ta–ki-du-tus-ta*), are considered a technical mastery. Vowel rhyme of this type is also common in the pre-Modern Finnish quatrain tradition, *rekilaulu*.[49] Most freestylists are, however, not even aware of the existence of this rhymed tradition, which was popular in the oral culture of the nineteenth century.[50]

Finnish freestyle customarily proceeds in regular pairs of verse lines with end rhyme (aabbcc . . .). Rhymes within a line and rhyme clusters of three or four verses are also common.

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[47] The local battle rap scene continues to be dominated by improvised freestyle battles. In 2012 two long-term improvisers, MC Kajo and MC S-Molli, founded in Finland the written battle league *Skriivaa ku Riivaa*, a format that now dominates the organized battle performances in the United States (The Ultimate Rap League or URL), Canada (King of the Dot), and Great Britain (Don't Flop battles), where performers know their rival about a month before the battle and prepare their lyrics in advance.

[48] Vowel rhyme is in this case a more accurate term than assonance, which can mean different things in different poetic cultures, but normally that the verse's last stressed vocal is the same, but other phonemes, also vowels, appearing after that can vary (see Vilén 1997:38-42). Assonance, which Adam Bradley (2009:66) describes as "the replication of unaccented vowel sounds," is very common in American rap, just as other types of partial rhymes (see also Edwards 2009:81-91). Vowel length bears meaning in Finnish, but vowel rhyme allows substitutions between single and double vowels. A diphthong can also be split into two syllables.

[49] See especially Asplund (1997).

[50] Lack of awareness of *rekilaulu* in contrast to *runo* song (or "kalevala-meter") poetry can be largely attributed to the fact that *rekilaulu* never received equal academic attention to epic and incantations, and, therefore, it was never valorized and mediated into the modern milieu as tradition.

When rapping "on the beat" (with instrumental music), the textual line mainly coincides with the four-beat musical bar, but minor bar-crossings as well as beginning on the up-beat are within normal variance. The number of syllables per line varies according to the personal or situational style, but an average is between 12 and 16 syllables. The number of lines in an utterance is not fixed, but tends to conform to the four and eight bar division of the musical structure. In battle performances the number of lines is regulated by a time limit. This is normally from 40 seconds to one minute and equates to about 16 to 24 lines on an average beat. In other performances, the MCs are either free to perform as long as they wish or collaborate on agreed terms of shorter stanzas, for example, of four or eight bars.

The following example illustrates the composition of freestyle in a Finnish organized verbal duel, a battle. The example is from the final battle of the 2015 Finnish Rap Championship, won by MC Kajo. This excerpt is Kajo's first utterance, in which he answers to MC Rivo's opening challenge. Kajo has won the competition earlier in 2009 and 2011, and returned this year to show that he is not afraid to lose, a blame commonly charged upon the long-timers who have won and do not participate thereafter. Turns in the final battle are longer than usual, one minute and 30 seconds. This is to test the finalists' stamina that is part of the performative prowess, which together with the verbal skills create the grounds for assessment of relative skill. MC Rivo opens this final battle with the claim that with regard to the audience response (which he accuses has been paid for by Kajo), it's not hard to guess who is the frontrunner. Among his other specific claims, he states that Kajo just came to puff his own battle league (Kajo wears the *Skriivaa ku Riivaa* league's shirt; see Note 46); that he's so poor that he doesn't have money to pay his rent; and, reflecting claims presented earlier by Kajo about arrangements made in the back stage, that Kajo had himself asked in the back stage for a "bank note" from the 1000 euros award (anticipating that Rivo will win it) for his rent.

With this rather long utterance, I want to illustrate how both principles discussed so far, the composition in couplets and the placement of major statements that are invented and pre-formulated during the rival's performance, can occur within a longer, continuous utterance. In the example, the rhyme sections in the original Finnish text are bolded. As the words are so long, syllables in the rhyme sections are also separated with hyphens. I have used capital letters at the beginning of a new semantic entity (Sykäri 2016):[51]

1. *Sanotaan tää **suo-raan***
2. *todellaki ne mun massit tulee menemään **vuok-raan***
3. *mut se et sä sanot sillee se ei tarkota et sä oot **näp-pä-rä***
4. *sehä meinaa vaa et mä oon ainut joka elättää oikeest ittes **räp-pää-mäl***
5. *Jos näit jäbii täällä **tsii-gaa***
6. *ja Rivo tulee **dissaa** myöski tätä Skriivaa ku Riivaa **lii-gaa***
7. *nii mitä ny **jät-kä vie-lä***
8. *hyvä dissaa ku ens tapahtumassa säki **räp-päät siel-lä***
9. *No onkse ihme et sä haluut siellä **bät-lä-tä***

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[51] This is a transcription of MC Kajo's first turn in the Finnish Rap Championship 2015 (2.07-3.37) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-0gxPMWtcA. The English translation below was realized with end rhymes by the bilingual Finnish Spoken Word artist Kasper Salonen.

10. *no kai ny vittu ku näis ässämmis sä et pysty **pär-jä-tä***

11. *tän homman MC Kajo **hoi-ti to***

12. *ku kuulin et Rivo o vastas nii kelasin et jes, mä **voi-tin jo***

13. *Siis heitän tässä **läp-pä-ni***

14. *räpin **äs-säm-mis**, kysy vaik räppäreilt **bäk-kä-ril***

15. *ni MC Kajo tekee sen **huo-lel-la***

16. *koska noi yleisö ja myös bäkkäriräppärit on mun **puo-lel-la***

17. *Ja ihan vitu varma nakki*

18. *mut seuraavaki homma on iha varma nakki*

19. *Mä voin kertoa sulle yhen tarinan jos sua **kiin-nos-taa***

20. *koska sä kävit mun kaverin kaa juttelee bäkkäril*

21. *ja aloit sitä **hiillostaa**, sanoit sillee*

22. *et mä en sais varmaa kertoa sulle tällasii tari**noi-ta***

23. *koska mä osallistun tähä ite*

24. *mut sanotaan silti suoraan et mustaki tuntuu et tänään Kajo **voit-taa***

25. *Se oli iha vitu true **story***

26. *ja äläkä väitä että se on **boring***

27. *Jee, eli tää on MC Kajon **kos-to***

28. *sä näytät silt et haluut hirttää ittes toho mikki**joh-toon***

29. *Jee, sä tiedät **it-se-ki** sulle tulee **mig-ree-ni***

30. *et voita Kajoo vaikka äsken sä voitit **Kris-te-rin***

31. *Jee eli sä et voi Kajoo **tääl es-tää***

32. *ku sä räppäsit mä mietin vaa kui kauan **tää kes-tää***

33. *MC Kajo sua naamaa vaik **pol-vel tint-taa***

34. *mä vedän näit rundei vaik se kestäis **kol-me min-saa***

35. *ja se on silkkaa suoraa vitu **ti-pu-tus-ta***

36. *mut **vi-tut sus-ta**, sun verse oli yhtä **ki-du-tus-ta***

1. I'll say this to you straight so you don't get it bent

2. you're damn right my money's gonna be spent on rent

3. you can say it but it doesn't make you witty

4. it just means that I'm the only one making a living by spitting

5. Check out these rappers, they're hard to miss

6. and it's weird that it's the Skriivaa league that Rivo was tryin' to diss

7. so just so you're aware

8. it's weird for you to diss it 'cause you're gonna be rapping there

9. It's no wonder you wanna battle on that ship

10. 'cause there's no fucking way you're winning this championship

11. MC Kajo's got this victory locked down, son

12. when I heard I'm against Rivo I was like "I've already won!"

13. So I'll lay down my bars

14. at this national seminar, just ask the backstage all-stars

15. they'll tell you MC Kajo brings the thunder with pride

16. 'cause the whole audience and the backstagers are on my side

17. And it's a piece of cake, dude

18. but this next bit of business is a piece of cake, too

19. I can tell you a little story here while I'm killin'

20. 'cause you went backstage to talk to a friend of mine

21. and you started to grill him, you were like

22. I probably shouldn't tell you this tale

23. because I'm a participant

24. but I can tell you straight I think Kajo will prevail

25. And that's a true fuckin' story

26. so don't try to tell me it's untrue or boring

27. Yeah, this is the vengeance of MC Kajo the lord

28. and you look like you wanna hang yourself on that mic cord

29. Yeah, you know it mister you're gonna get a migraine

30. you may've won against Krister but you'll never beat me at my game

31. If you think you can win me you've made a mistake

32. while you were rappin' I was thinking how long can this shit take

33. My words'll make you blind so you'll be dreamin' in sounds

34. I'll dominate you easy even in three-minute rounds

35. my rhymes are so dope they're endangered

36. but fuck you stranger, hearing you rap is like being stuck in a torture chamber

Within the first four lines Kajo answers to his opponent's claim regarding his rent with the implied argument that he will win the award, and by "flipping the script" (Lee 2016:110, 113-15) or turning the point to his favor, he infers that paying his rent with his awards means that he is a professional. In the next four lines he takes up the claim about presenting his own battle league by turning the point to the fact that his rival will in fact also participate in the near future. This in turn gives him the reason to continue in the next four lines with the accusation of the rival only being able to battle with written lines. The next four lines answer to the lines about him being a frontrunner, confirming that this is indeed so, and with reason. The associations that reflect the mentioned back stage arrangements further establish that in fact the rival has himself agreed with Kajo's superiority. In his first 24 lines Kajo takes up his rival's claims one by one and turns the edge of these claims back toward the rival. In the final 12 lines, he elaborates and closes his turn with thematically typical yet contextually shaped charges, belittling the opponent's skill and endurance and praising his own.

Kajo's freestyle proceeds here mainly in regular rhyming couplets of one priming line and one argument line. Rhymes within line occur at lines 6, 14, 29, and 36, creating a common pattern of three rhymes, of which two are final and one internal. The first unpaired priming lines are normally much shorter than the argument lines. There is not always such a difference in length between the priming and argument lines, but as stated by Kajo, his conscious style is also to leave a short pause after the argument so that the audience has time to react to it. In terms of meaning, many priming lines are straightforwardly more general (especially lines 5, 7, 11, 13, 15, 31, and 35) when compared with the second paired argument lines. Lines 17-26 are an

exception to the rigorous model of one priming line and one argument line. In these lines, he changes the style, and after framing the change in two lines (17 and 18) resorts to a narrative in a more conversational flow. The rhymes of this section of six lines (19-24) are timed to occur only at the ends of every second line, and once (21) the rhyme falls in the middle of the line (ends of lines 21 and 23 also rhyme, but this is most probably not deliberate). This scheme brings variation to the long utterance, and shows the flexibility of freestyle in the hands of a very experienced improviser.

MC Kajo has been practicing freestyle since 1999 at the age of ten. In my interviews with him in 2013, he made explicit that he had developed his method of composition to the point that he nowadays only pays attention to the argument lines, while the rhymes and the priming lines are created in performance without conscious mental effort. Thus, while performing an argument-line, he invents his next argument. He then primes that argument by creating a line that rhymes with it at the time of performance. Although his basic model of versification contains one priming line and one argument line, the process is not fixed. As explained by Kajo, it often happens that one adds argument-lines to a rhyme unit on the go. As to the major statements, he later also confirmed that it is relatively easy to shape several retorts during the contestant's performance, organize and keep these in mind, and then prime the statements in performance by larger semantic units. In addition to the tight thematic units of four lines (1-4, 5-8, and 13-16), this seems to have been structurally the case in lines 19-24. Long, semantically coherent compositional units thus emerge particularly in the opening and middle sections of the utterance, and in lines where the performer directs his repartee to cap his opponent's arguments.

In addition to the method of pre-formulating the second or concluding line of a series in advance, two other basic strategies have been indicated in my interviews with the Finnish freestylists. Some performers express their own perception that they start the composition of a couplet by having the first line's rhyme in mind. He or she then invents the second rhyme while creating and performing the first line. Another possibility expressed is that the improviser acknowledges in advance two or several rhymes that he or she then uses for composing that compositional unit. During a lengthy performance, it is most likely that all of these possibilities are employed even by experienced improvisers due to quick associations, a drop of energy levels, and the need to proceed without "freezing" (without remaining out of words and rhymes).

These strategies of composing a unit of two long lines that rhyme are equivalent to those expressed above for the composition of the *mandinadhes*. A difference in how often individuals perceive the process of composition in a certain way may be evident because, with *mandinadhes*, a composer composes only one couplet at the time, but in freestyle a long series of consecutive couplets is composed and performed with much higher speed.

The delivery of long utterances in rapping style is indeed quick (about twice the speed of the melodic singing of *gloses* or *bertsos*). It is also not broken by instrumental interludes or by the repetition of lines by the singer or a chorus. Consecutively, the composition of improvised text relies on very quick and spontaneous associations, which leaves less time to structure the overall utterance. Nonetheless, a skillful freestylist can repeatedly employ in his performance semantic units of four (or more) lines with a pre-formulated final line. This is closely equivalent to a *glosa* of eight seven-syllable lines, altogether 56 syllables. In the example, Kajo's first two thematic units of four lines contain 62 (lines 1-4) and 53 (5-8) syllables and the unit of six lines

(19-24) contains 95 syllables. Long, semantically coherent units are commonly situated at the beginning of the utterance, which seems to reflect a natural presumption that the cognitive capacity is highest at the beginning of the turn. Freestylists also try to end their utterances with a weighty statement. Performers have not, however, reported that they would seek to determine a final statement before beginning one's turn. The greater number of verses in an utterance together with the rate of articulation may present difficulties for this. Overall, in contrast to *gloses* and *mandinadhes*, long freestyle utterances such as those in a battle do not focus on delivering one clearly structured statement. Answering the rival's claims is crucial, but utterances are more inclined toward accumulating several arguments reflecting the subject at hand, and there is also an underlined stress on the ideal of being able to keep the performative flow of discourse. This does not diminish the fact that in interactive, competitive contexts, just as when *gloses* and other forms of contest poetry are performed, the final lines are decisive for the jury's and the audience's evaluation of the utterance.

Beginning from the End

This discussion of three different oral cultures has had the aim of examining the basic principles of constructing improvised verses with end rhyme. In all these cultures the patterning of end rhymes is the chief determinant in relation to which method of composition is developed. This remains true even if the conventional length of utterances in each tradition varies, and the contexts and conventions of performance place different constraints on the rate of utterances and how rapidly they follow on one another. The determinant of end rhymes can be described as producing a "reversed" method with regard to the experience of the audience. End rhyme occurs at the end of the line, but it is not arrived at in a linear progression of composition: the improviser has to figure out the end rhyme before creating the phrase preceding it. Improvisers of rhymed poetry thus begin each verse from the end, with the rhyme word.

The main issue of the present study has been to examine the organization of the utterance and its compositional units with regard to the semantic hierarchy of rhymed verses. It explored how poets of different poetic idioms structure improvised verses that end in rhyme. It was shown that the unit of two lines is a common compositional unit even outside of traditions where the primary unit of utterance is the couplet itself. Textual analysis corroborates what informants say in interviews: when the poet conceptualizes a couplet (of two long lines) as a compositional unit, whether that is a standalone couplet (the *mandinadha*) or one in a chain of couplets (freestyle), the second verse will be semantically stronger than the first. Similarly, within a longer stanza of regular length and rhyme pattern (*glosa*), the semantic weight is on the last two (short) lines, which constitute the main statement of that unit of utterance. The improviser therefore puts more impetus on creating the last line(s), and it was stated explicitly in interviews that the argument line(s) was/were composed before the priming line(s) or the opening of the utterance.

The possibilities cited for improvised composition of a couplet were introduced above as follows:

a. The performer formulates the second line in advance and adds the first line while performing.

b. The performer selects two (or several) rhyme words and formulates the clauses (or a series of clauses) that end with those words.

c. The performer selects the first rhyme word, starts creating a clause ending with that word, and when performing the verse line, he or she determines the second rhyme and then creates the second line.

In all cases the selection of rhyme words occurs in relation to an emerging idea, whether that is a statement that organizes the whole utterance or only the idea for a single statement or argument within the context of a larger utterance. Of course this process becomes automatized as a function of developing fluency in the poetic idiom. As a consequence, it becomes impossible to acquire results that would verify each detail in the subjective processes of composition. Nonetheless, improvisers' accounts together with patterns observed in the data are quite consistent. A competent improviser predominantly first selects the rhyme word for the last, semantically more important line of a couplet (a) or has chosen both rhyme words of a pair of lines before composing the clauses (b). This principle of "end first" is made particularly evident with the improvisation of longer, rhetorically constructed stanzas illustrated through the *glosa* tradition, where the improviser's aim is to disclose the main point of the utterance at the end: the improviser will, whenever possible, pre-formulate the last two lines before starting his utterance.

In the equally common case that the performer starts his or her compositional unit only with the first rhyme (c), the aim of placing the semantic weight on the last line or lines of this unit requires constructing the argument in a very short time. The performer may thus not have an idea for an argument when he or she begins the unit, but has to invent such at the same time he or she chooses the second end rhyme. This extreme rapidity may fail to conclude in a coherent image, but often enough it brings along unconscious messages very creatively.

The primacy of metrically or formally required rhyme words in composition is an outcome of the primacy of parallel phonic patterns at the ends of the lines for identifying the poetic text as well-formed. For the improviser, this primacy also stands for the basic level of practice: he or she has to be able to create verses that end with the rhyme words. The creation of verbal images that can poetically communicate a message occurs in parallel with rhyme word selection. The mind of competent improvisers becomes masterful at the art of finding new images to deploy in the rapid course of performance, and the poetry's constraints on lexical selection are in an ongoing dialogue with the images communicated. In the traditions reviewed here, rhyme patterns finalize an intended message, but they also, through their active role in this verbal play, suggest and create new messages.

As suggested in the beginning of this essay, end rhyme is a significant device for keying the poetic word by parallel phonic structures. In the traditions examined here, the reversed method of versification—beginning from the end—coincides with a model of semantic hierarchy, in which semantic weight is also at the end of a unit of composition as or within an utterance. End rhyme, when conceptualized as a poetic device, therefore also structures an utterance in a way that is opposed to semantic parallelism, another significant poetic device that characterizes many unrhymed traditions, for example, the Finnish *runo* song tradition (Saarinen

2014), Karelian laments (Stepanova 2014), or the Rotenese ritual discourse (Fox 2014).[52] In these traditions semantic weight is often on the first line, or it is distributed among the members of a parallel group, but it never falls on the final member of a parallel group. In the traditions of improvised oral poetry with end rhyme examined here, on the contrary, strong arguments are always situated at the end of the poetic units. The argument-lines are, consequently, preceded by one or several more general priming lines. The main statement can be preceded by a number of verses that lead to the final closure. The priming line may be wholly formal in function and semantically light or even void relative to the argument. In this type of argumentative, improvised rhymed oral poetry, the relationship between the order of lines and the semantic distribution of elements is the reverse of the tendency in semantic parallelism.

It is important to see that end rhyme as a poetic device is not only a stylistic or metrical feature in a poetic idiom, but also a constitutive functional determinant on the organization of discourse. In oral composition, these poetic devices are profoundly connected to methods of composition: the methods of composition emerge in dialectic with the formal requirements of versification. We have to focus on the process of composition in order to understand how poetic languages work.[53] Here, I wish to extend this discussion to include a perspective on improvisation and on rhymed poetic idioms. Neither of these has so far received much academic attention, although both present cognitive challenges and idiosyncratic processes of production that also certainly deserve recognition outside of the communities practicing these forms of verbal arts. Understanding these technical, cognitive constraints and challenges solely does not, of course, yet enlighten the social and cultural significance of improvised, rhymed argumentation, but it lays better ground for understanding its aesthetics, goals, and intrinsic value, as well as systems of assessment of skill.

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                                   Chinese MCs' and 'Good-Hair-Havin Uncle Tom Niggas': Performing Race and

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[52] By coincidence, in the original workshop leading to this article, Jonathan Roper also took up this idea based on the recent remark made by the Estonian paremiologist Arvo Krikmann that "alliteration is the friend, and rhyme the enemy, of parallelism" (Roper 2014:180).

[53] See Foley (1996) and Frog (2014).

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