Integrating quantitative meter in non-quantitative metrical systems: the rise and fall of the German hexameter[1]

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Abstract

The default of metrical organisation is that it is based on the prosodic organisation of a language. If a language has vowel quantity, the quantity contrast is very likely to be found in its metrical patterns. If a language does not show this contrast, a quantity-based metrical system is unlikely. Unlike Classical Latin and Old Greek, New High German neither distinguishes between long and short syllables nor between long and short vowels. The relationship between prosody and metrics left German poets with the question of how to incorporate foreign meters which contradict the native prosodic system. This paper is about the quest for a solution which took centuries: the integration of the hexameter into German.

I. Speech rhythm and metrical systems

Meters are long-term perception and production experiments on rhythmic well-formedness. They provide an excellent means of studying what generations of native speakers have considered to be ideal patterns in terms of sentence rhythm. This is possible because, as a default, meters are the outcome of natural versification (cf. Miller 1902 or Allen 1973, Vennemann 1995), i.e. they evolve in unison with the native prosodic system. However, when a prosodic system changes, poets will not immediately change their ancestors' techniques of versification. On the contrary, they might never completely abandon the old style, although its prosodic foundation is no longer understood. After all, poetry is cultural heritage. The results are highly complex metrical patterns. A related scenario is the integration of metrical patterns which, being built on typologically different languages, contradict the native prosodic system.

Speech rhythm works automatically. Native speakers do not have to think consciously about which syllables to stress in a sentence or how to build well-formed feet. In contrast, the modelling of speech rhythm is a complex task. Although the Standard German vowel system and stress system have been analysed for decades, there is no general agreement (cf. for different approaches Eisenberg 1991, Vennemann 1991, Wiese 1996, Féry 1998). Metricists who wanted to integrate foreign meters faced the same problem. They had several hypotheses on how prosodic systems work and applied them. Successful attempts at integration have prevailed, while unsuccessful ones have failed in the long run. It is both the successful and the unsuccessful rhythmic experiments which help us to understand the prosodic system of a language. The integration of the Classical hexameter with its long and short syllables into German is the not just the history of a metrical genre, but also an investigation into the nature of the German prosodic system, i.e. in the existence or non-existence of a quantity contrast.

II. Latin, Middle High German, and Early New High German hexameters

The Classical hexameter has a long tradition of accentual imitations and adaptations of quantity in and outside Europe. The prospects of incorporation processes are language-specific. This section deals with the translation process into two prosodical systems, i.e. Middle High German with its accent-based quantity system and quantity-insensitive (Early) New High German. The applicability of the meter by the poets and its reception by the audience serve as evaluation criteria.

1. Classical Latin

Figure 1 shows the Classical Latin hexameter pattern with its six feet. Feet one to four consist either of dactyls (one long syllable and two short ones) or spondees (two long syllables). Thus each metron has two bi-moraic units. The last two feet form an adonic, which consists of a dactyl and a combination of a long syllable and an anceps syllable (which may be either short or long). Figure 2 shows a well-known example from Catull:
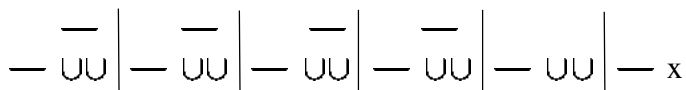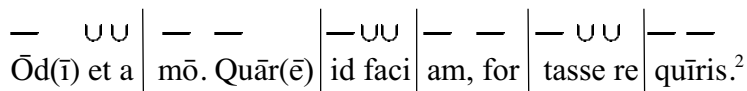

Figure 1. The Latin Hexameter pattern

[I hate and I love. You might ask why I do this.]

Figure 2. Catull, carmen 85

2. Middle High German

Middle High German (about 1050–1350) was an accent-based quantity language. It had long and short vowels like Classical Latin, but unlike Latin, vowel quantity was only distinctive in stressed syllables.[3] The hexameter in Figure 3 shows the first known German hexameter (Wackernagel 1831: 6), which is a translation from a Middle Latin proverb.

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[2]   Elisions in brackets.

[3]   Definition of syllable weight for accent-based quantitative languages (Vennemann 1995: 187–188): A syllable is short if it is open and contains a short nuclear vowel, otherwise it is long. A syllable is light if it is short or not relevant to syllable weight, otherwise it is heavy. The contrast between long and short syllables is only relevant if they are accentuated. Both in everyday language and in poetic language, Old and Middle High German differentiated between long and short syllables (for Germanic prosody cf. Dresher and Lahiri 1991).
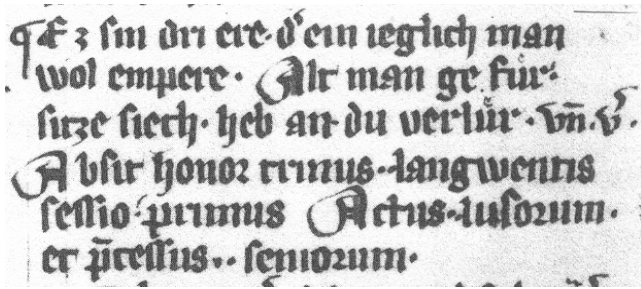
Figure 3. The first German hexameter with the Middle Latin original (Würzburg, around 1340; 2° Cod. Ms. 731)

Transcription[4]:

Line 1: hexameter	$F_{min}F_{min}$|F_{min} F_{ext} |$F_{min}F_{min}$|$F_{min}F_{min}$| $F_{min}F_{ext}$ | F_{min}
Ez sîn | drî êre, | der ein | ieglich | man wol em|pere:	'— '— |'— '—x |'— '— |'— '— |'— '—x |'∪ x
Line 2: pentameter[5]	$F_{min}F_{min}$|$F_{min}F_{min}$| F_{ext} ||$F_{min}F_{min}$| $F_{min}F_{ext}$ |F_{min}
Alt[6] man | gê für; | sitze || siech; heb | an, du ver|lür.	'— '— |'— '— |'— x||'— '— |'— '—x |'—

The German translation of the proverb does not make much sense. Still, the poem is a conscious attempt at integrating a foreign meter[7]. Interestingly, the well-formedness criteria for Middle High German feet are met.

- A Middle High German minimal foot consists of:
  - a long stressed syllable ('—, e.g. '*sîn*) or
  - a short stressed syllable plus another unstressed syllable (resolution) ('∪ x, e.g. [*em*]'*pĕ.re*)

- A Middle High German extended foot consists of:
  - a long stressed syllable plus a second unstressed syllable ('— x, e.g. '*ê.re*) or
  - a resolved foot plus an unstressed syllable ('∪ x x, e.g. '*mă.nĭge*)

The last foot in the first line, '*pĕ.re* in *empere* ('to miss'), serves as an example for illustration. While lines were unmetrical in Classical hexameters if there was a short syllable preceding the anceps syllable, this is not the case in Middle High German. To a medieval German poet it makes no difference whether the first stressed syllable is long or short, if the adjoining syllable is unstressed. The result is either a resolved foot or an extended foot. As a consequence, the last foot in the German hexameter version is well-formed.

The versification principles which the German poet employed are by no means coincidental. He transferred the number of metra in a line from the Latin hexameter. He also seems to have adopted the total number of syllables[8] and the number of syllables in a metron never exceeds three. In addition, the poet based metrical feet on isolated words rather than on sen-

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[4] Transcription of the Middle Latin proverb:

Absit honor trinus: languentis sessio primus
Actus! Lusor(um), et precessus seniorum

[5] There is disagreement as to whether the Middle Latin second line is a hexameter or a pentameter. The same is true for the Middle High German translation.

[6] Wackernagel corrects *alter*.

[7] Of course, the loss of quantity in the Latin language in favour of stress accent had occurred long before.

[8] This is only correct under the condition that the *u* in *languentis* was interpreted as a glide and that *um* in *lusorum* was elided.

tence rhythm; therefore the function word *ein* 'a' is stressed and counts as a bimoraic foot instead of a monomoraic foot extension. More strikingly, he reinterpreted the Classical metron according to his own prosodic system. While the Classical hexameter metron consists of two bimoraic units, i.e. either a long syllable or two short ones, the Middle High German poet understood this as a rule for placing two well-formed prosodic feet in each metron. Thus *drî êre* 'three honours' has five morae instead of four. It is evident that the translator used his native prosodic system – the first German hexameter is an example of natural versification.

3. Early New High German

In Early New High German (about 1350–1650), quantity had disappeared from the phonological system (Paul/Wiehl/Grosse 1989: §45). Open syllable lengthening resulted in a reinterpretation of stressed syllables ending in short vowels, i.e. a positional neutralization of the contrast between short and long vowels. Middle High German *să.gen* 'say' with a stressed open syllable ending in short *a* became New High German *sa.gen* with "long" or, more precisely, smoothly cut[9] *a*.

As a consequence of the loss of quantity, the principles on which medieval poetry was built, had become obscure. The feet of (Early) New High German are quantity-insensitive trochees and dactyls. A trochee consists of a stressed and an unstressed syllable (x́x) and a dactyl consists of a stressed syllable and two unstressed syllables (x́xx).

Many Early New High German poets strove for a metrical system equal to the prestigious Classical patterns. Their hexameters are experiments on how to model quantity with a quantity-insensitive prosodic system as a background. Konrad Geßner, for example, tried to integrate the concept of 'long by position', which resulted in systematic stress violations:

(1) Ó vat │ tér un │ sér, der │dú dyn │ éewige │ wónung

               (cf. *Metzler Literatur Lexikon* 1990: 200)

German *Vatér* 'father' instead of *Váter* is a violation of the primary stress pattern. Primary stress is not only lexicalised in German, but also never occurs on reduced syllables[10]. Evidently, Geßner did not intend to stylise German speech rhythm, but followed the aesthetic aim of creating a pattern which modelled length instead of accent.[11]

In the long run, his experiment was not successful, just like the experiments of other poets who formed hexameters based on quantity substitutes, like Johann Fischart, Johannes Brandmüller und Adam Bythner. Each of them proposed his own system. Adam Bythner, for instance, suggested basing long and short vowels on etymological criteria. The *a* in *Vater* is short because of Latin *pater*, the *u* in *Schule* ('school') is short because of Greek σχολή. Again, there are stress violations.

(2) ách selig │ únd see │ líg, wel │ chér wie │ Lázarus │ éntschläft.[12]

                  (Heusler 1929: 108)

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9 Cf. Sievers (1901), Vennemann 1991, Becker 1998, Murray 2000 and Restle 2003 for syllable cut theory.

10 Historically, the reduced syllables of German evolved since they did not bear primary accent.

11 Since five day-old infants can distinguish their native speech rhythm from typologically different rhythms (Nazzi/Bertoncini/Mehler 1998), the choice for meter which the Early New High German poets took was certainly not as naïve as has frequently been assumed.

12 *Seelíg* instead of *séelig*, *welchér* instead of *wélcher*, *éntschläft* instead of *entschláft*.

While Early New High German folk verse is frequently in unison with the native prosodic system, this is clearly not the case for integrated hexameters. The dichotomy between the stylisation of everyday speech and sophisticated 'classicist' poetry was to prevail for centuries. The counter-movement was initiated by Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock in the 18th century.

III. The quest for prosodic and/or aesthetic well-formedness: 18th century controversies in German hexameter translation and their prosodic evaluation

Since the Classical ideal was central in 18th century German literature, there was a general interest in the translation of Greek and Latin verse. The integration of quantitative meters was a challenge; just as in Early New High German, the nature of the problem was the lack of a phonological contrast between long and short syllables. The feature [±long] was not interpreted as a distinctive feature of the Standard German vowel system[13]. All meters reflect this fact, which for centuries has been part of the linguistic knowledge of the language community. Standard German metrical patterns are built on stress positions and syllable number, but do not refer to syllable or vowel length.

Just like the Early New High German poets, 18th century hexametrists were not ignorant about differences between the Classical Latin and the Standard German prosodic system. The mapping of the German and Classical hexameter was an issue of debate, because its integration meant that poets were in need of a feature which had the function of syllable length. In other words: What kind of German syllable is considered equal to a Latin long syllable? There were mainly two solutions to the prosodic problem, with Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock and Johann Heinrich Voß as two prominent representatives of the controversy.

1. Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock

The first 18th century solution to the problem was natural versification, i.e. a solution which is built on the Standard German prosodic system. Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock chose the hexameter for his religious epos *Der Messias* [The Messiah] (published in 1748). His early hexameters have six bars which are simply filled with the German version of dactyls and with trochees instead of spondees. Klopstock did not aim at an imitation of Classical quantity, but formed his hexameters "nach der Prosodie unsrer Sprache"[14] (1755 [1962: 1042]) [according to the prosody of our language].

(3) Sing, unsterbliche Seele, der sündigen Menschen Erlösung,   x́x|x́xx|x́xx|x́xx|x́xx|x́x
Die der Messias auf Erden in seiner Menschheit vollendet   x́xx|x́xx|x́x|x́xx|x́xx|x́x
Und durch die er Adams Geschlechte die Liebe der Gottheit   x́x|x́x|x́xx|x́xx|x́xx|x́x
Mit dem Blute des heiligen Bundes von neuem geschenkt hat.   x́x|x́xx|x́xx|x́xx|x́xx|x́x
...

(Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, from: *Der Messias*. First canto)

[Sing, immortal soul, salvation of sinners, which the Messiah has crowned on earth by his human existence and by which he has given God's love anew to Adam's house with the blood of the holy bond.]

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[13] Cf. for phonetic analyses of the Standard German vowel system Hoole/Mooshammer (2002), Dioubina/Noel Aziz Hanna/Lindner (forthc.).
[14] Cf. Restle (2003) for Klopstock's syllable cut concept (Klopstock 1779).

The natural versification hexameter meant a thorough restructuring of the quantitative Classical meter:

1) Just like in the Middle High German hexameter translation, Klopstock reinterprets the Classical metron. His metra neither consist of two bimoraic units (Classical version) nor of two prosodic feet (Middle High German version), but of only one well-formed foot.

2) While Classical hexameters are binary meters with four morae in each metron, German hexameters are ternary meters in their maximum extent, since German dactyls are ternary feet.

3) The German dactyl is a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed ones, the long Latin or Greek syllable being replaced by a stressed one.

4) Without a syllable length contrast it is difficult to form the analogue of a Classical spondee. The German version of a spondee consists of two clashing syllables (x́x́)[15], which is problematic from a prosodic perspective. Since monosyllabic feet are not well-formed in New High German, stress clash is a violation of rhythmic well-formedness. In German, the well-formed prosodic foot consisting of two syllables is the trochee (x́x), and it was both frequently employed by Klopstock and frequently criticized[16].

Klopstock's hexameter suits German speech rhythm and can only be distinguished from the rhythm of everyday speech by the adonic clausula. From a prosodic point of view, Klopstock's hexameter is an ideal solution. It provided both an easy way of versification for poets and an easy processing for the audience.

The reactions to Klopstock's metrical integration were emotional. Many poets were enthusiastic about the meter which read like prose, while others were irritated (Heusler 1929: 248–249). The reason for their disapproval was probably grounded in 18th century education, when pupils wrote poems in Latin at school with Vergil as a model (Albertsen 1964: 363). The translator and poet Johann Heinrich Voß was the most prominent critic. He complained: "So glaubte nun jeder, der sechs zählen konnte, auch einen Hexameter abfingern zu können." [So everybody who could count to six now considered himself capable of creating a hexameter by counting with their fingers.] (Voß 1789: XVIII).

The meter which could be used by everyone was not considered skilful. Therefore, the most suitable solution in terms of speech rhythm was not necessarily judged the best solution in terms of aesthetics. The sophisticated solution to the hexameter integration was put forward by Johann Heinrich Voß.

2. Johann Heinrich Voß

With his book *Zeitmessung* [The measuring of time] (1802), Voß introduced a list of criteria which aimed at enabling poets to distinguish between long, short, and middle-timed syl-

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[15] Still, it was common practice, but has often been criticised (cf. Heusler 1917). Though stress-clash means a violation of rhythmic well-formedness, it can be used to emphasise e.g. the morphological composition of a compound word.

[16] "Unsre deutschen trochäischen Hexameter sind im Grunde nichts, als sechsfüßige mit Daktylen untermischte Trochäen, die an sich eine recht gute Versart sein mögen; aber Hexameter sind sie nicht." [Our German trochaic hexameters are really nothing but hexametric trochees mixed with dactyls, which may by itself be a good meter; however, they are not hexameters.] (Karl Philipp Moritz 1786 [1981: 557]).

lables.[17] For instance, monosyllabic content words like *Baum* 'tree' and exclamations (*ach*) are considered long. Suffixal endings like *-heit*, *-thum*, *-bar*, *-sam* which can be traced back to former content words are middle-timed. Stressed syllables of foreign words are long (*Bálsam*), as are verbal particles like *ab, an, wider* and emphatically uttered syllables. The consonant *n* is longer than *t* (Voß 1802: 10, 15, 16, 17, 32, 33, 37). Voß' celebrated translation of the *Odyssey* (1781) was published before the *Zeitmessung*.

(4) Sage mir, Muse, die Taten des vielgewanderten Mannes,	x́xx|x́xx|x́xx|x́x|x́xx|x́x
Welcher so weit geirrt, nach der heiligen Troja Zerstörung,	x́xx|x́x|x́xx|x́xx|x́xx|x́x
Vieler Menschen Städte gesehn, und Sitte gelernt hat,	x́x|x́x|x́xx|x́x|x́xx|x́x
Und auf dem Meere so viel' unnennbare Leiden erduldet,	x́xx|x́xx|x́x|x́xx|x́xx|x́x
Seine Seele zu retten, und seiner Freunde Zurückkunft.	x́x|x́xx|x́x|x́xx|x́xx|x́x
...	

(Johann Heinrich Voß, from: *Odyssee* 1781. First canto)

[Tell me, Muse, about the deeds of a man who travelled far, who roamed so far after the destruction of holy Troy; who has seen the towns of many people and has learned their customs; who has endured unmentionable sufferings at sea, in order to save his soul and to enable his friends' return.]

His principles of versification are already applied here, however not as rigorously as in his later works. Inflectional *ge-*, which he later categorised as short, functions twice as a long syllable and twice as a short one in (4). His translation of Hesiod' s *Theogony* (1806) is more strict.

(5) Helikonischen Musen geweiht, heb' unser Gesang an,	x́x|x́xx|x́xx|x́x|x́xx|x́x
Die auf dem Helikonberge, dem großen und heiligen, walten:	x́xx|x́xx|x́xx|x́xx|x́xx|x́x
Wo sie den dunkelen Quell mit geschmeidigen Füßen im Reihntanz	x́xx|x́xx|x́xx|x́xx|x́xx|x́x
Und den Altar umschweben des allmachtfrohen Kronion.	x́xx|x́x|x́xx|x́x|x́xx|x́x
...	

(Johann Heinrich Voß, from: *Theogonie*. First canto)

[Consecrated to the Heliconian Muses, who rule on the great and holy mount of Helicon, where they glide around the dark well and the altar of almighty, cheerful Kronion, dancing with their supple feet, our song shall begin.]

From a linguistic point of view, Voß' system is too complicated. It involves semantic, pragmatic, phonetic, etymological, historical, syntactic and morphological criteria. In contrast to the Early New High German hexameter experiments, Voß' hexameters are well-formed in terms of the stress system, but the evaluation of versification principles always has two aspects. One aspect is the audience, the other one is the poet. The audience does not mind complicated patterns as long as verses sound fine. However, the poet has to cope with a problem when the application of the criteria is almost impossible. Wilhelm von Humboldt, who translated Aischylos' *Agamemnon*, did not feel comfortable with the quality of the meter until he got Voß' *Zeitmessung* in order to check it (Geiger 1909: 195). Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who was also influenced by Voß, changed the first four cantos of his epic *Reineke Fuchs* (1794) according to Voß' rules, but finally decided against publishing the revised ver-

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17 "Mittelzeitig, das heißt zwischen der zweizeitigen Länge und der einzeitigen Kürze ungefähr in der Mitte (von 1 1/4 bis 1 3/4 Zeit) schwebend" (Voß 1802: 49). [Middle-timed means floating approximately in the middle between double-timed length and single-timed shortness (from 1 1/4 to 1 3/4).]

sion.[18] Later he pointed out: "Es ist auffallend, daß wir in unserer Sprache nur wenige Silben finden, die entschieden kurz und lang sind. Mit den anderen verfährt man nach Geschmack oder Willkür" [It is striking that we find in our language only few syllables which are clearly short or long. All others are employed to one's own taste or arbitrarily.] (*Italienische Reise* 1816/17). Voß' criteria are not entirely in line with natural versification – it is an extra effort to place "long" syllables in weak positions when "short" ones sound just the same.

3. Thomas Mann

The German hexameter was established with coexisting traditions, the classicist type and the natural versification type. When Thomas Mann published his *Gesang vom Kindchen* [Song of the small child] in 1921, the conflicting positions were debated again. Passages which do not fit the classicist criteria for long or short syllables are marked in bold print.

(6) Mich aber nimmt **der** Tag der Erwachsenen hin, es wechseln x́xx|x́x̲|x́xx|x́xx|x́x|x́x
Die geordneten Stunden, und jede bringet das ihre. x́x̲|x́xx|x́xx|x́x|x́xx|x́x
Ernst des Alleinseins, leichterer Austausch und einige Ruhe, x́xx|x́x|x́xx|x́xx|x́xx|x́x
Diese wechseln. Und nur von weitem noch blicke ich meistens x́x|x́xx|x́x|x́xx|x́xx|x́x
Auf dein gesondertes Dasein, dies vorläufige Leben, - x́xx|x́xx|x́x|x́x|x́xx|x́x
Dämmernd streicht es dahin **dir** hinter dem Gittergeländer x́x|x́xx|x́x̲|x́xx|x́xx|x́x
Deines tiefen Bettchens, darin du beinahe verschwindest, x́x|x́x|x́xx|x́xx|x́xx|x́x
Da es doch selbst nur so klein: rings um dich her ist die Leere, x́xx|x́x|x́x|x́xx|x́xx|x́x
Oben und unten und beider**seits**, - winzig liegst **du** in der Mitte. x́xx|x́xx|x́x̲x̲|x́xx|x́x̲xx|x́x
...

(Thomas Mann, from: *Gesang vom Kindchen*. "Das Mal")

[The adult's day occupies me; hours go by regularly and every hour brings something about. The earnestness of being by oneself changes with a little talking and a bit of rest. Normally, I look only from a distance at your isolated existence, this preliminary life. It goes by dawning behind the grating of your low crib in which you almost vanish although it is itself so small. There is blankness around you, above and below you, and to the left and right. You are so small, lying in the middle of it all.]

The critics pointed out that the epic sounded clumsy. Thomas Mann, however, insisted that his epic was well-formed, stressing that it had to be read as prose:[19]

Die in Kritiken viel erwähnte Holprigkeit der Verse ist meinem besseren Wissen zufolge nur scheinbar. Liest man die Rhythmen nicht als Hexameter, sondern frei, so lesen sie sich gut, wie sprachlich feinfühlige Leute mir bestätigt haben. Sonst aber denke ich in diesem Zusammenhange gern daran, wie Goethe, der den alten Voß gebeten hatte, ihm die schlechten Hexameter in *Hermann und Dorothea* anzustreichen, von diesem zur Antwort erhielt, es tue ihm leid, aber er müsse sie alle anstreichen. (Mann 1921 [1974: 588])

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18   The first line in *Reineke Fuchs*:

1) revised version (Hötzer 1996: 86):
Pfingsten kam, das liebliche Fest; schon grünten und blühten

2) final version:
Pfingsten, das liebliche Fest, war gekommen; es grünten und blühten

19   A recent critique from Chisholm (1995: 529): "In contrast to other German poets, Mann does not appear to have successfully internalized the hexameter line or to have developed his own "hexameter style"".

[The frequent criticism that the lines are clumsy is to my better knowledge only seemingly true. If one reads the verses not like hexameters but like unbounded speech, they read well, as people with a feel for language have confirmed. Apart from that, I like to remember in this respect how Goethe, who had asked old Voß to correct false hexameters in his *Hermann und Dorothea* got as an answer that he was sorry, but he had to correct them all.]

The fact that Thomas Mann, one of the greatest German narrators, chose the hexameter for his idyll again points at the fact that the natural versification type hexameter is very close to spoken language. Despite of this, the hexameter has become a rare meter.

IV. Rise and fall of the hexameter: Semiosis of metrical patterns

The rise of the German hexameter was followed by its fall. Its decline is independent of the debate about the most suitable modelling of Classical prosody. The reason why it is almost never used in today's poetry is not a prosodic, but a semiotic one.

Rhythm is automatically and unconsciously assigned to sentences. Metrics is a stylisation of this unconscious segmentation of speech. It is prosody made conscious; thus both poets and the audience unintentionally make sense of it (semiosis). The meaning of the hexameter pattern is, of course, the meter of epic heroes and the meter of bucolic poetry.

When Goethe wrote his Bürgerliche Idylle *Hermann und Dorothea* it was well received by its audience. With only a little irony, it pictured the bourgeois who came close to a Homerian hero (Žmegač/Škreb/Sekulić 1993: 122).

(7) Aber es lächelte drauf der treffliche Hauswirt und sagte:	x́xx|x́xx|x́x|x́xx|x́xx|x́x
Ungern vermiss' ich ihn doch, den alten kattunenen Schlafrock,	x́xx|x́xx|x́x|x́xx|x́xx|x́x
Echt ostindischen Stoffs; so etwas kriegt man nicht wieder.	x́x|x́xx|x́x|x́x|x́xx|x́x
Wohl! ich trug ihn nicht mehr. Man will jetzt freilich, der Mann soll	x́x|x́xx|x́x|x́x|x́xx|x́x
Immer gehn im Sürtout und in der Peschke sich zeigen,	x́x|x́xx|x́x|x́x|x́xx|x́x
Immer gestiefelt sein; verbannt ist Pantoffel und Mütze.	x́xx|x́x|x́x|x́xx|x́xx|x́x
...	

(Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, from: *Hermann und Dorothea*. First canto)

[But in return the good landlord smiled and said: I am reluctant to miss the old cotton dressing gown. Real East Indian cloth cannot be bought any more. Well, I did not wear it any more. Of course, one wants a man to go about in his surtout coat, to appear in a jacket, and to always wear boots; slippers and night-caps are banished.]

However, 18th century idyllic poetry did not fit the *zeitgeist* of the 20th century. Thomas Mann's idyll failed because of its, as he put it, "Hang zum Parodischen", the tendency towards parody (Mann 1974: 588–589).[20]

Although it suits German speech rhythm, the hexameter has become an uncommon meter. It is occasionally employed in translations of Classic epics. A recent conscious choice for the hexameter is Durs Grünbein's *Erklärte Nacht*.

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[20] E.g. by using words like *Wasserstoffsuperoxyd* ('hydrogen peroxide').

(8)   Oder Dichtung, was war das noch? Entführung in alte Gefühle …   x́x|x́x|x́x|x́x|x́xx|x́xx|x́x

        Stimmenfang, Silbenzauber, *ars magna* im elaboriertesten Stil.   x́xx|x́x|x́xx|x́xx|x́xx|x́xx|x́

        Die Kälte der Selbstbegegnung, ein Tanz zwischen sämtlichen Stühlen.   x|x́xx|x́x|x́xx|x́xx|x́xx|x́x

        Nicht Halbes, nichts Ganzes also, doch das gewisse Etwas zuviel.   x|x́xx|x́x|x́x|x́xx|x́x|x́xx|x́

        …

                                    (Durs Grünbein 2002, from: *Erklärte Nacht*. *Gedichte*. "Erklärte Nacht")

[Or poetry, what was that again? Ravishment to old feelings, capture of voices, charm of syllables, *ars magna* in sophisticated style. The frost of self-encounter is a dance between two stools. Neither fish nor fowl, but still too much of 'je ne sais quoi'.]

It is the Klopstock type hexameter; *Fang* in *Stimmenfang* and *ars* would be long in Voß' system. The hexameter pattern is radically changed: anacrusis is allowed, there are rhymes, there are more than six metra, and the number of syllables in the clausula varies. To my knowledge Grünbein's choice for natural versification was not criticized; natural versification finally proved resilient. However, some critics found fault with the choice of meter, because it was not clear why Grünbein used it.[21] The hexameter is still interpreted as a sign within this genre, but the meaning of the sign has become obscure.

    Independent of the hexameter tradition, however, lines with six feet and an adonic clausula are also made use of. The pattern is occasionally employed in the most recent genre of language-based music: rap[22].

(9)   Denn ich bin kein Einzelfall, sondern einer von vielen[23]   x́x|x́x|x́xx|x́x|x́xx|x́x

        (Advanced Chemistry, *Fremd im eigenen Land*)

        denn wir sparn nie, wir klotzen, ihr kleckert wie Füller von Lamy   x́x|x́xx|x́xx|x́xx|x́xx|x́x

        (Lyroholika, *Rapstar*)

        Richtig arbeiten will ich eh nicht. Wir leben gefährlich   x́x|x́xx|x́x|x́xx|x́xx|x́x

        (Massive Töne, *Nichtsnutz*)

The hexameter in rap is a reinvention within the musical conventions of rap, i.e. the default of a 4/4 musical meter. Its semiotic status is very different from its traditional status; it is interchangeable. The hexameter has lost its meaning for most rappers and also for most of the audience, which is one of the reasons why it occurs.

    Again, neither vowel length nor syllable length have an influence on its structure. Since the lyrics are built according to the maxim of natural versification, metrical feet in German rap songs are quantity-insensitive. In rap, the hexameter pattern is used as one of many equivalent realizations of German speech rhythm.

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21 "Sie [die Form] ruft die deutsche Klassik und mit ihr die antike Tradition auf den Plan – zu welchem Zweck?" [It [the metrical pattern] evokes the German Classical period with its ancient tradition – for what reason?] (Hans-Herbert Räkel, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 10.06.2002)

22 I owe the information about "hexameters" in raps to Guido Naschert (University of Munich).

23 Lyrics from: Buhmann/Haeseler (2003).

V. Summary

The integration of the quantitative hexameter into German had several stages with characteristic ways of adaptation. The efforts concentrated on either establishing a quantity contrast by introducing new features representing length or on replacing metrical feet based on quantity with German quantity-insensitive ones. All experiments which aimed at translating syllable and vowel length by introducing features from systems other than the native prosodic system failed. The version which proved successful in the sense that it was used productively by generations of poets replaces Classical feet with their quantity-insensitive binary and ternary German versions. The evolution of the German hexameter thus proves the still disputed lack of quantity in the Standard German vowel system. Hexameter experiments demonstrate that the language community has not categorised vowel length as a distinctive feature since Early New High German times.

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