Lines in Nanti *karintaa* chants:
An areal poetic typological perspective

An essay in honor of Joel Sherzer

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Abstract

This paper argues for a significant typological distinction among lines in indigenous genres of verbal art of the Americas: those which are crucially defined by the size and number of prosodic elements constituting them, and those that are not subject to prosodic restrictions of this type, but are instead delimited by a variety of line edge-marking strategies. I refer to these broad classes of lines as *metrical lines* and *edge-marked lines*, respectively. Genres of verbal art studied within the ethnopoetics tradition have mainly focused on those with latter type of line, mirroring an apparent rarity of verbal art genres in the Americas with metrical lines. This paper describes *karintaa*, a genre of extemporaneous verbal art performed by an Amazonian indigenous group, the Arawakan Nantis of southeastern Peru, which exhibits lines with strict prosodic sizes, and examines the morphological and morpho-phonological strategies that performers employ to satisfy this size requirement. I conclude by observing that while metrical genres of verbal art may be less common in the Americas in comparison to edge-marking genres, such as the Kuna chant genres described by Sherzer, they are clearly to be found.

1 Introduction

This paper represents a line of research that owes a great debt to Joel Sherzer's scholarship, which has so illuminated our understanding of the artistry, structure, and significance of the verbal art forms of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, especially those of the lowland neo-tropics. Of course, his work extends far beyond this important area of research, both geographically and analytically. Over the course of his career, his geographic focus has stretched from North America (Sherzer 1972) to Mesoamerica (Lastra, Sherzer, and Sherzer 2009) and South America (Sherzer 1970), as well as to Asia (Sherzer 1993) and Europe (Sherzer and Sherzer 2003), and has spanned themes as diverse as the areal patterning of linguistic typological features (Sherzer 1976) and the poetic organization of discourse (Sherzer 1990). Bringing together these latter themes, and animated by the same interest in large-scale geographical patterns, this paper seeks to make a contribution to what we can call *areal poetic typology* (see Sherzer and Woodbury 1987b: 6) by examining the typological diversity of types of poetic lines found among genres of verbal art performed by the peoples of the Americas. Focusing on *karintaa* chants performed by speakers of Nanti, an Arawakan language of southeastern Peru, I argue that line-structured genres of indigenous verbal art in the Americas fall into two broad categories in terms of the types of poetic lines they exhibit: 1) *metrical lines*, which are crucially defined by the type and number of prosodic elements constituting them; and 2) *edge-marked* lines, that are not subject to prosodic restrictions of this type, but are instead delimited by a variety of line edge-marking strategies. I observe that the clear existence of genres of the former type undermines claims advanced by Dennis Tedlock and Munro Edmonson that metrical genres of indigenous verbal art are not found in the Americas – a special case of a more general claim they advance that metrical genres of verbal art arise from the influence of literacy.

2 Typology: Metrical vs. edge-marked lines

The ethnopoetics tradition is animated by the idea that genres of verbal art performed in indigenous societies around the world merit the same careful study in terms of their formal organization as has been lavished on the poetry and literature of global languages. One of the major contributions of the ethnopoetics tradition has been to elucidate how diverse genres of verbal art are organized in terms of lines, defined by the "pattern and recurrence" of a variety of features (Woodbury and Sherzer 1987), including the 'particle' placement, pause structure, phonological phrasing, and syntactic organization. These features may align (Bright 1979; McLendon 1982; Hymes 1987), or might interact in nontrivial ways (Hymes 1980, Woodbury 1987), but in any case are instrumental in marking the edges of poetic lines. Significantly, most scholars in the ethnopoetics tradition see edge-marking devices like those just mentioned as not merely *aligning* with the edges of pre-existing poetic constituents (i.e the line), but rather as themselves *constituting* the line edges, and thereby creating the line. This view is lucidly expressed in the following comments by Dell Hymes, which take Chinookan narrrative as their inspiration:

> The principal of organization [of Chinookan narrative] has to do with the intial elements of sentences... In this respect … Chinookan narratives possess formulaic elements of the sort so important in the work on epic by Milman Parry, Albert Lord, and others. There is a fundamental difference, however, between the two. The formulaic elements of Slavic, Greek, and other oral poetries occur within, manifest and adapt to, verse that is regulated by another principle. In Chinookan and, I suspect, in American Indian narrative generally, the recurrent intial elements represent the regulatory principle itself. They are aspects of the measuring which makes the material verse. (Hymes 1980[1977], p 318)

It is important to note that Hymes contrasts this line-creating behavior of particles with the "verse that is regulated by *another principle*" (my italics), where the content of the line *conforms* to additional requirements that can be conceived as external to that material, in contrast with Chinookan verse, in which the linguistic material itself creates the line. This other principle that Hymes refers to is, of course, the metrical restrictions of the poetic genres in question, effectively drawing a distinction between what I call 'edge-marking' and 'metrical' genres.

Turning to areal perspective on these two types of line, we see Hymes articulating a suspicion that what I call edge-marking genres are typical of "American Indian narrative generally," a position cast in a stronger form by Edmonson (1971), and echoed by Tedlock (1977, 1983, 1987) that metrical indigenous verbal art forms are not found in the Americas. Certainly, edge-marking genres of verbal art have proven common in the Americas in comparison to metrical genres, and Sherzer's (1982) careful work on the variety of intonational, morphologogical, syntactic, and lexical aspects of edge-marking in Kuna genres of verbal art shows how rich the edge-marking machinery can be. One of the goals of this paper is to show that while edge-marked lines are clearly common in the Americas, metrical lines are also to be found.

3 Performance of Nanti *karintaa* chants

During the time I studied Nanti *karintaa* chants (roughly 1999-2006), they were performed exclusively during roughly village-wide weekly manioc beer feasts in the Nanti community of Montetoni, where I carried out fieldwork. Virtually all adults participated in these feasts, as indeed did most adolescents and many children.

Feasts typically began around noon, with women of each household providing manioc beer (*oburoki*) in turn. The chanting was always begun several hours later by men, who formed a dance line by grasping their neighbors' hands. After roughly an hour, a parallel women's line formed, facing the men's line, and like the men's line, snaked in an undulating fashion over the packed ground of an area largely cleared for this purpose. Around dusk the lines typically broke apart into smaller, more mobile mixed circles of women

and men. Energetic chanting typically continued in these groups without interruption for 16-20 hours, until chanters succumbed to exhaustion and the supplies of *oburoki* were depleted.

    All adults can and did perform *karintaa* chants, there being no artistic specialists as such for this genre. *Karintaa* performance is not explicitly taught to anyone, but rather is acquired by children as part of their basic social and communicative competence. Moreover, *karintaa* chants permit a wide range of topics, and are remarkably dialogic in nature. Topics of *karintaa* verses included anything from matters of political import within the community, sharp criticism of others' behavior, wistful remembrances of absent relatives, outrageous sexual joking, to recounting interesting hunting trips or travels. As Beier (2001, 2003) notes, it may even be the case that socially sensitive topics, such as personal criticism, are more frequently expressed through *karintaa* chanting than through everyday conversation.

Karintaa chants were normally performed dialogically, either in pairs or in a larger group. The majority of *karintaa* verses were directed at a specific person (or a small group of people) who replied with *karintaa* verses of their own. It was a common occurrence during a feast for a pair of individuals to discuss or argue over some topic at length by means of alternating *karintaa* verses, with nearby individuals jumping in with commentary or rebuttals of their own, also in the form of *karintaa* verses. In these respects, *karintaa* chants strongly resemble everyday conversation, albeit in a highly poetically structured form.

4 Large-scale structure of Nanti *karintaa* chants

Karintaa chants are organized by a basic alternation between one of a number of fixed refrains and a variable number of extemporaneously-composed *karintaa* verses, as exemplified in (1).

| (1) | a. | *kaharoni kaharo* | | refrain |
| | | *kaimite kaniro* | | |

	b.	*irotari*	*teratyo*	extemporaneous verse
		iro-ta-ri	tera=tyo	
		3fsg.PRO-CNGT-CNTR	NEG.REAL=VCBL	

	c.	*nonehahempigatyo*		extemporaneous verse
		no-N-neh-ah-e=mpi=gatyo		
		1sg.NOM-IRR-see-REG-IRR.I=2sg=VCBL		

            'Consequently, I will not see you again.'

| | d. | *kaharoni kaharo* | | refrain |
| | | *kaimite kaniro* | | |

There at least 100 fixed refrains, some of which are exemplified in (2).

| (2) | a. | *kirahari kimaro eheheehe* | (*kirahari kimaro* = 'red macaw') |
| | | *ehehe ehehe eheheehe* | |

| | b. | *haararo kekeeke* | |
| | | *haararo kekee* | |

| | c. | *henenenkooni* | |
| | | *henenenkoo* | |

d.   *iinkiro iinki*   (*inkiro* = 'tree frog sp.')
       iinkiro bee

Some refrains contain Nanti words, with animal and plant names surfacing with some frequency (see, e.g., (2a&d), above), but most consist of strings of vocables (Hinton 1980; Hinton 1984; Hinton 1994). Even when refrains contain meaningful words, the topic of *karintaa* verses are not related in any systematic way to the refrains being chanted.

The extemporaneous *karintaa* verses are normally composed in couplets, in the sense that a single *karintaa* verse between repetitions of refrains is vanishingly rare, with a pair of verses being the minimum, as in (1), above, and when numerous *karintaa* verses are performed, the total number of verses being even.

There appear to be no restrictions in performance on the pattern of alternation between refrains and extemporaneous verses, apart from the preservation of the basic couplet structure. A chanter might repeat a refrain several hundred times without intercalating a single extemporaneous verse, or may perform dozens of extemporaneously composed verses without interruption.

5 Metrical lines in Nanti *karintaa*

Extemporaneous *karintaa* verses are subject to moraic quantity requirement, the precise requirement depending on the style of verse being composed. For reasons of space, in this article I will focus on the most common style, which requires that each line contain exactly seven moras.[1] For purposes of *karintaa* moraic quantity counts, long vowels and complex syllabic nuclei count as heavy, i.e. bimoraic, but closed syllables do not.

The seven mora requirement is obeyed by the extemporaneous verses in (1), as well as those in (3), where the moraic quantity of the line is schematized. Note that refrains are not subject to this moraic quantity requirement.

(3)   a.   μ   μ   μ   μ   μ   μ   μ   (7μ)
              ma   hi   ka   ri   no   kan   ti
              mahikari nokanti
              maika-ri   no-kant-ø-i
              now-CNTR   1sg.NOM-say-IMPF-REAL.I

       b.   μ   μ   μ   μ   μ   μ   μ   (7μ)
              no   kan   ta   kem   pi   ga   tyo
              nokantakempigatyo
              no-kant-ak-i=mpi=gatyo
              1sg.NOM-say-PFV-REAL.I=2sg=VCBL

              'Now I say, I say to you,'

The strongest evidence for the seven mora *karintaa* verse requirement comes from cases where the lexical content of lines does not satisfy this requirement. In such cases, Nantis employ a number of strategies to increase the quantity of the line to meet it. These include vowel lengthening, partial syllable reduplication, vocable insertion, and truncation. I discuss each of these now.

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[1] If one treats the pause between lines as an empty beat, then *karintaa* lines can be considered eight mora lines.

5.1 Vowel lengthening

Poetic vowel lengthening in *karintaa* verses only occurs when the lexical content of a line falls short of the seven mora line requirement, and serves to bring the line up to this quantity requirement. In (4a), for example, the lexical content of the line (*ikanti ige* "He said, "Brother...") is only five moras, and poetic lengthening is employed twice to bring the line up to seven moras. Such vowel lengthening starts at word edges, either left or right, as evident in (4a), and can only subsequently work towards the interior of the word, as in (4b), where the first and second vowels of the word *totatyo* "wait!" (an interjection that also bears a vocable clitic) have been poetically lengthened.

(4) a. *ikanti:*   *i:ge*
         i-kant-ø-i~:   ige~:
         3msg.NOM-say-IMPF-REAL.I~POET:LNG   brother.VOC~POET:LNG

     b. atsi   to:ta:tyo
         atsi   tota=tyo~:~:
         HORT   wait!=VCBL~POET:LNG~POET:LNG

         'He said, "Brother, wait a sec!"'

5.2 Partial syllable reduplication

Another poetic moraic augmentation strategy frequently used by *karintaa* performers is partial syllable reduplication, where a monomoraic nucleus of a syllable is copied, and an /h/ onset appended, and this partially-reduplicated syllable is inserted following the base syllable. Using this poetic strategy, an original monomoraic sequence (C)V becomes the bimoraic sequence (C)VhV. The sole word in (5b) exhibits two (underlined) instances of poetic partial syllable reduplication, producing the seven mora form *pahagahaherotyo* from the five mora form *pagaherotyo* (which also bears a vocable clitic).

(5) a. *mahikari*   *kameti*
         maika-ri   kameti
         now-CNTR   good

     b. *pahagahaherotyo*
         pi-N-ag-ah-e=ro=tyo~ha~ha
         2sg.NOM-IRR-take-REG=3fsg.ACC=VCBL~POET:REDUP~POET:REDUP

         'Now you may take her.'

We discuss below what factors guide the choice of vowel lengthening over partial syllable reduplication, which have very similar prosodic effects on *karintaa* verses.

5.3 Vocable insertion

In addition to the preceding prosodic augmentation strategies *karintaa* performers make use a set of vocable elements that serve to increase the moraic quantity of the line. These include 'simple' monomoraic vocable clitics, such as *=ga*, *=nka*, *=ra*, *=sa*, and the ubiquitous *=tyo* (see (4b) and (5b)), as well as seemingly concatenative bimoraic clitics *=gaka*, *=gasa*, *=gatyo*, and the trimoraic *=hityonka*, *=kagasa*, and *=ragasa*, exemplified in (6), among others.

(6)   a.   *irotari*   *pi:ne*
           iro=tari   pine~:
           3msg.PRO=REAS   you.see~POET:LNG

      b.   *inehiriragasa*
           i-neh-ø-i=ri=ragasa
           3msg.NOM-see-IMPF-REAL.I=3msg.ACC=VCBL

           'Consequently, you see, he saw him.'

Vocable clitics are usually applied to the rightmost words in lines, as in (6b), and if they are applied to words that are not rightmost, this normally transpires if the rightmost word also bears a vocable clitic, suggesting the right-to-left application of vocable clitics, as in (7).

(7)   a.   *na:ronka*   *haratyo*
           naro=nka~:   hara=tyo
           1sg.PRO=VCBL~POET:LNG   NEG.IRR=VCBL

      b.   *pineta*   *aityoka*
           pine=ta   aityo=ka
           you.see=CNGRNT   EXIST.INAN=INFR

           'I will not (do it), because there is (something), you see.'

In addition, performers make use of a single vocable word, *karinta*, exemplified in (8), which is of course very similar to the name of the genre itself.

(8)   a.   *ikantityo*   *karinta*
           i-kant-ø-i=tyo   karinta
           3msg.NOM-say-IMPF-REAL.I=VCBL VCBL

      b.   *ankante pa:he:*
           a-N-kant-e   p-ah-e
           1pl.incl.NOM-IRR-say-IRR   give-REG-IRR.I

           'He says "We will say, "Give (it) back.""'

5.4 Truncation

Perhaps the most striking evidence for the seven mora limit is found in cases of line truncation, exemplified in (9) and (10). In these cases, a grammatical word is simply truncated when the seven mora limit of the first line is reached, leaving the word incomplete. The word that undergoes truncation in the first line is then performed in its entirety from the beginning of the following line, repeating the portion that was performed in the preceding line.

(9)   a.   *ka:meti pogaha*]
           kameti~:   pi-og-aa]~ha
           good-POET:LNG   2sg.NOM-put-AM:REG~POET:REDUP

b. *pogahaatirisa*
pi-og-aa-t-i=ri=sa~ha
2sg.NOM-put-AM:REG-EPC-IRR=VCBL~POET:REDUP

'It is good that you took him back'

(10) a. hara hanta pi:ka]
hara   hanta   pi-ka]~:
NEG.IRR   there   2sg.NOM-say~POET:LNG

b. *pi:kamantahiri*
pi-kamant-ah-i=ri~:
2sg.NOM-tell-REG-REAL.I=3msg.ACC~POET:LNG

'You will not tell him again there'

6 Prosodic parallelism in *karintaa* verses

The principle form of parallelism exhibited by *karintaa* verses is the simple identity of the moraic quantity of each line. Skilled performers add to this another form of prosodic parallelism, namely, parallelism in the distribution of light (monomoraic) and heavy (bimoraic) syllables. It is precisely striving to achieve this form of parallelism that governs in part the choice between the two morphophonological moraic augmentation strategies, vowel lengthening and partial reduplication, since the former produces heavy syllables, and the latter, light ones. The efficacy of these two strategies can be appreciated by comparing the distribution of heavy ($\sigma_{\mu\mu}$) and light (σ_{μ}) syllables in (4) and (5), schematized in (11) and (12).

(11)   a. $\sigma_{\mu}\,\sigma_{\mu}\,\sigma_{\mu\mu}\,\sigma_{\mu\mu}\,\sigma_{\mu}$
           b. $\sigma_{\mu}\,\sigma_{\mu}\,\sigma_{\mu\mu}\,\sigma_{\mu\mu}\,\sigma_{\mu}$

(12)   a. $\sigma_{\mu}\,\sigma_{\mu}\,\sigma_{\mu}\,\sigma_{\mu}\,\sigma_{\mu}\,\sigma_{\mu}\,\sigma_{\mu}$
           b. $\sigma_{\mu}\,\sigma_{\mu}\,\sigma_{\mu}\,\sigma_{\mu}\,\sigma_{\mu}\,\sigma_{\mu}\,\sigma_{\mu}$

In the case of (4), it is judicious choice of vowel lengthening that produces the prosodic parallelism evident in (11), while in (5) it is the choice of partial syllable reduplication rather than vowel lengthening that results in the prosodic parallelism evident in (11). In either case, the adoption of the opposite strategy would result in a different patterning of heavy and light syllables, disrupting this additional level of prosodic parallelism between the lines.

     It is worth noting that (5) exhibits two other poetic processes that I cannot address in detail for reasons of space, namely: 1) the suppression of normal intervocalic /h/ deletion, which would give the poetically unaugmented form [pa.gae,ro] from the underlying /pagahero/ 'you will take her', resulting in an unwanted heavy syllable; and 2) and diphthong splitting, whereby a complex syllablic nucleus is converted to two light syllables via the insertion of /h/, as in the case of [ma.hi.ka] from the underlying /maika/ 'now'.

     It should be noted that the prosodic parallelisms of the type just mentioned are not conventionalized, in the sense that there is no norm regarding the distribution of heavy and light syllables in *karintaa* verses. Instead, they are nonce creations of the performer which may only hold over the lines of a single couplet, or over dozens of couplets.

7 Discussion and conclusion

The description above shows that extemporaneous *karintaa* verses consist of couplets of seven mora lines, making *karintaa* a non-rhythmic moraic meter. In this light , we can now evaluate the poetic areal typological claim initially due to Edmonson (1971:99), and later echoed by Tedlock (1977, 1983, 1987), that pervasively metrical indigenous verbal art forms are not found in the Americas, in the sense that of genres whose lines are subject to an 'external' requirement -- to use Hymes term -- that restrict the prosodic size of poetic lines. Indeed, as Rumsey (2001) observes, the claim is even stronger: echoing Edmonson (1971:114), Tedlock (1983: 250, n. 12) remarks, "...long runs of lines with equal numbers of syllables, moras, or feet does not occur in audible texts from cultures whose verbal arts are not under the direct influence of literary traditions."

Although the Edmonson-Tedlock hypothesis regarding the areal distribution of metrical verbal art forms was already cast in doubt by the structure of Havasupai songs (Hinton 1980; Hinton 1984), Nanti *karintaa* chants present particularly strong evidence of a metrical verbal art form, this time from the Amazon Basin, to add to these examples from North America. This complements recent work on Máíhɨ̃ki (Tukanoan, northern Peru) verbal art (Skilton 2017), which is argued to regulate the size of prosodic words and the position of tonal prominences within the line.

Although the Edmonson-Tedlock hypothesis does not appear viable in its original formulation, it is worth noting that none of the three metrical American verbal art genres mentioned above are *rhythmic* metrical genres, i.e. where the prosodic requirement specifies a particular prosodic foots structure that yield rhythmic stress or length requirements. A question for further research, then, is whether rhythmic metrical verbal genres are subject to the areal restriction proposed by Edmonson and Tedlock, or whether the current typological lacuna is merely a reflection of our ignorance regarding metrical verbal art in the Americas.

9 Glossing Conventions

Abbreviations used: ACC 'accusative', AM:REG 'regressive associated motion', CNGT 'congruent stance', CNTR 'contrastive', EPC 'epenthetic consonant', EXIST.INAN 'inanimate existential', HORT 'hortative', IMPF 'imperfective', INFR 'inferential', IRR `irrealis (prefix)', IRR.I `I-class irrealis', NEG.IRR 'irrealis negation', NEG.REAL 'realis negation', NOM 'nominative', PFV 'perfective', POET:LNG 'poetic vowel lengthening', POET:REDUP 'poetic reduplication', PRO 'pronoun', REAL.I 'I-class realis', REAS 'reason', REG 'regressive', VCBL 'vocable', VOC 'vocative'.

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