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A contribution to the typology of accentual-syllabic versifications

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A CONTRIBUTION TO THE TYPOLOGY OF ACCENTUAL-SYLLABIC VERSIFICATIONS

The general term of accentual-syllabic rhythm is applied to the poetry written in a group of languages, the word-stress of which is widely different in semantic function and in phonetic relevance [cp. 48, p. 135 ff.; 3, p. 69 ff.]: a) word-stress has a distinctive value in Russian (zámok-zamók), a limited distinctive value in English (desért-désert) and in German (umgéhen-úmgehen), and no distinctive value at all in Czech; b) in English, both the quality and quantity of a syllable are dependent — with a few exceptions — on whether it is stressed or unstressed (full vowels — reduced vowels), in Russian and German, this dependence is limited, in Czech, not relevant at all; c) the presence or absence of stress in an English syllable is determined, as a rule, by its grammatical category (noun, verb, etc.; conjunction, etc.), semantic value (it is-it is) and morphematic position (root syllable — suffix); in Czech, the 1st syllables of polysyllabic words are stressed and the 2nd syllables unstressed, while all the remaining ones are ambivalent and their stress is dependent on the rhythmical context; Russian and German are complex intermediary cases. — Though the distinctive value, function in the phonological development, phonetic prominence, and stability of stress are by no means parallel, English and Czech are, by most criteria, the opposite extremes of the scale of languages in consideration. For that reason, a comparison of the two versifications might be illustrative of the ways in which the versification of a nation is dependent on its language.

I

Of basic importance for a comparative analysis of the different systems of accentual-syllabic versification is the distinction between stress-timed rhythm and syllable-timed rhythm made by K. L. Pike [42, p. 35]. There are two slightly different descriptions of the stress-timed rhythm of English prose:

a) Intervals between stressed syllables are isochronous according to D. Jones (and K. L. Pike): "There is a strong tendency in connected speech to make stressed syllables follow each other as nearly as possible at equal distances" [27, p. 237].

b) Rhythmical units (i.e. groups of syllables dominated by one word-stress and delimited by an actual or potential pause) are isochronous

according to W. Jassem: "Utterances normally consist of sound sequences which tend to be of equal length and contain syllables whose length tends to be inversely proportionate to their number; one such sound sequence is the normal rhythmical unit" [25, p. 39].

The principle of isochrony, characteristic of stress-timed rhythm, is generally accepted to underly the rhythm of English *verse*, and the two different linguistic interpretations of this tendency have their correlatives in two different prosodic theories:

a) The isochronous interval theory shared by R. M. Alden, T. S. Omond, Egerton Smith, M. A. Bayfield and others.

b) The isochronous foot theory, to which only a few prosodists adhere, e.g. M. Kaluza and G. Saintsbury, who, however, does not make any clear-cut distinction between foot and interval [44, III, p. 440].

Only by phonetic measurements could be established, which of the two conceptions is more correct from the acoustic point of view, and only a thorough linguistic analysis could justify any of them from the linguistic point of view. In poetry, moreover, further agents enter into the play: the influence of the metrical scheme and the analogy with music can be quoted in favour of the isochronous foot theory, while the rhythmical value of word-limits and of limits between rhythmical units may operate against it. It is not impossible that a subtle interplay of, and tension between, the two different modes of the tendency towards isochrony is one of the means of rhythmical variation in English *verse* [cp. 34, p. 55–80].

A strong bent to stress-timed rhythm and the ensuing tendency to isochrony is shared by most types of Russian and German *verse*, though it is far from becoming a law common to both prose and *verse*. In German *versification*, the best-known champion of this tendency is A. Heusler [17, p. 17 ff.], followed by J. Minor [36, p. 60] and others; some of the German prosodists entertain doubts as to the degree to which objective isochrony is preserved.¹ Russian prosodists have been much less interested in this phenomenon, so that probably the first to take notice of it was S. Bobrov [quoted in 52, p. 191] in 1915. Though stress-timed rhythm prevails in most types of *verse* in these languages, it may more easily be counteracted by other rhythmical agents, by the exigencies of contents, or an individual way of reading.

A normal Czech utterance is governed by the syllable-timed rhythm characterized by K. L. Pike: "Many non-English languages (Spanish, for instance) tend to use rhythm which is more closely related to the syllable than the regular stress-timed type of English; in this case, it is the syllables, instead of the stresses, which tend to come at more-or-less evenly recurrent intervals – so that, as a result, phrases with extra syllables take proportionately more time, and syllables or vowels are less likely to be shortened and modified" [42, p. 35]. Even in *verse*, this rhythmical pattern cannot be changed into a stress-timed one for obvious reasons:

a) Czech stress – unless artificially reinforced, e.g. by music of forceful

¹ Cp. [46, p. 265–66]; in recent literature cp. objections of W. Stüben [47, p. 129] to W. Kayser [29, p. 9].

scansion — is too feeble to exert any marked influence on the duration of the intervening syllables.

b) In Czech, unstressed syllables are irreducible, because of the full vowels and of the long vowels (long vowels are even more frequent in unstressed syllables than in the stressed ones [cp. 39, p. 90—107]).

The poetry of any nation includes a wide variety of rhythmical forms. Some of them, however, are primary, while the remaining ones are used only as a reaction against the “normal”, “neutral” rhythmical background and must often be reinforced by extralinguistic agents (semantic stress, scansion etc.) to avoid anarchy. In comparing the rhythmical “norm” of the two versifications, the neutral, primary type of rhythm will serve as our starting-point, though the exceptional forms, too, will be taken into account.

The r h y t h m i c a l norm of English verse is stress-timed, the rhythmical norm of Czech verse is syllable-timed. In other words: The law of English verse is the equivalence of rhythmical units (“bars”), the law of Czech verse is the equivalence of syllables; the constant of English verse is the number of beats, the constant of Czech verse is the number of syllables. This a graphic expression of the two rhythmical patterns:

English verse: 

Czech verse: 

The following consequences ensue from this basic difference:

1. Since intervals between stressed syllables are constant (subjectively at least), extra syllables in the rhythmical segments of English verse cause an acceleration, and therefore dactylic or anapaestic verse gives the impression of greater speed than iamb or trochee. In Czech verse, on the contrary, an increase in the number of unstressed syllables extends the intervals between the beats and may be the cause of a slowing down of the (objective or subjective) speed of the line.

2. Since intervals between stressed syllables in English verse remain constant regardless of the number of intervening unstressed syllables, changes in the number of unstressed syllables in the thesis exert practically no influence on the system of beats and occasion no disappointment of the rhythmical expectation. — In Czech poetry, on the contrary, every extra syllable, and every deficiency in the number of syllables, brings about a change in the length of rhythmical intervals and violates the rhythm.

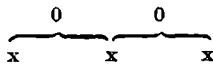
Ad. 1. Whenever an English prosodist tries to characterize the acoustic character and the resulting semantic possibilities of English anapaestic and dactylic verse, he speaks of a galloping and sprightly measure [cp. 11, p. 162; 28, p. 324; 6, p. 51; 1; 7, p. 227]; the only significant exception is the French prosodist P. Verrier, who, educated on his native syllable-timed rhythm, reads English dactylic verse at a slow speed [51, I, p. 163]. The generalizations of the English prosodists are largely justified by the fact that anapaest or dactyl are the favourite measures of dynamic and martial, or light and ironic verse. Whenever a serious mood was aimed at by a poet who used dactyls or anapaests, a patent discrepancy between the serious

“contents” and the sprightly form was noticed by the critics; cp. *The Day of Doom* by M. Wigglesworth or *The Bridge of Sighs* by Th. Hood [cp. 35, p. 31; 45, p. 746].

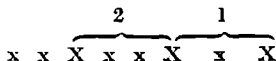
Pronouncements on the rhythmical character of Czech dactylic verse are contradictory: the poet P. Bezruč refers to the “wailing” of dactylic verse, J. Mukařovský, O. Zich, and J. Bečka are of a contrary opinion [52, p. 105; 37, I, p. 84; 4, p. 200; *Jedna melodie* 5]. The reason for these differences of opinion is the richness of Czech poetry in widely different types of dactylic verse, ranging from the sprightly folk ballads and song-like poetry (e.g. by J. Vrchlický or V. Dyk), up to the tragic oxymorons in Mácha’s *Máj*, the mournful poems in *Zpěvy páteční* by J. Neruda, and the meditative and weary *fin de siècle* poetry by O. Březina or A. Sova. The absence of the urge towards isochrony makes possible a free interplay of the secondary rhythmical tendencies and the formation of numerous types of dactylic rhythm, with the slower ones predominating.

Ad 2. Even in “traditional” English verse, the number of unstressed syllables within the rhythmical intervals may vary:

Bréak, bréak, bréak



At the foot of thy crágs, O Séa!



(A. Tennyson, *Break, break, break*)

Though the syllabic extent of the theses varies from 0 to 2 syllables, the principle of the isochrony of intervals is not violated. This type of verse is freely used in British and American poetry of the past centuries. Of course, its frequency varies in accordance with the prosodic conventions of the epoch; it is used most frequently by the Romantic and so-called Neo-Romantic poets. — The Czech reader is not sensitive to the recurring pattern of a fixed number of beats, and, for his ear, a form based on this principle is necessarily not “regular” verse, but free verse. In traditional poetry, this form is almost non-existent.

The rhythmical differences mentioned under 1 and 2 are of importance in translating verse. English translators have difficulties in creating rhythmical equivalents of the majestic dactylic measures of Antiquity: “To the Greeks and Romans dactylic was a weighty, sonorous, regular measure, used for heroic themes; iambic a light, pliant, colloquial type of verse, admitting greater variety. With us, though the names be identical, the characters are reversed” [40, p. 52]. Dactylic hexameter and pentameter, which gave a “galloping” and “cantering” impression to W. S. Landor [32], are not always congenial to the Greek or Latin models.

The Czech translator is confronted with a different type of difficulty; the composite measures of Latin and especially of Greek poetry are too irregular for a Czech ear to produce the impression of regular verse:

Spí vrcholky hor i propastí,
úbočí a úžlabiny,
lezoucí tvorstvo, kolik ho živí černá zem,
šelmy horské a včelí rod

i obludy v hlubinách třpytného moře;
spí i kmeny ptáků
roztahujících perutě.

(Alcman – transl. by F. Stiebitz)

A Czech reader who is not informed of the rhythm of the original will easily mistake this passage for free verse — a case which becomes more and more frequent, as the knowledge of classical metrics among the younger readers falls into oblivion [cp. 20, ed. 1956, p. 113]. The composite, and from the Czech point of view irregular, measure of the original is not self-evident and the metrical pattern needs a reinforcement.

As a result of the fact that the tendency to isochronous intervals is common to both English prose and verse, the opposition of verse and prose is less expressive in English than in Czech. Irregular blank verse is indistinguishable from prose, as is well known e.g. to students of late Elizabethan and of Jacobean drama [cp. 1, p. 224, 226]. As was demonstrated by C. Jacob, an English reader is generally unable to tell where are the limits of the single lines, if they are presented to him written *in continuo* [cp. 21]. Segments in irregular blank verse pass unnoticed in a passage of prose and therefore nothing is opposed to their use in any type of prose (cp. e.g. the beginning of *A Tale of Two Cities* by Ch. Dickens). In Czech, a segment written in the regular alternating rhythm produces a sharp contrast with the irregular rhythmical background of Czech prose, and therefore is apt to acquire parodistic effects, as was demonstrated by O. Fischer: “I nám je velmi pohodlné psát v té uspávané próze jambické, při které skoro myslit netřeba a jež se line z cituplných per... (věta právě napsaná budiž odstrašující ukázkou)” [13, p. 300]. The often discussed question of the relation between prose and verse offers different aspects in different languages.

II

In the historical development of a national versification, the primary rhythmical principle acts as a constant (compulsory principle) and the secondary one as a variant (optional principle): both the constant and the variant are part of the rhythmical pattern and therefore compulsory in the strictly “regular” type of verse. Which are the constants of the two versifications could be demonstrated, if space would allow us to confront the development of English and of Czech poetry. A summary notice of the three most conspicuous cases of “irregular” rhythm may be sufficient to indicate the different lines of development: a) accentual Old English verse v. syllabic Old Czech verse; b) accentual verse of English folk ballads v. syllabic verse of Czech folk ballads; c) accentual verse of some of the English Romantic poets (Coleridge, etc.) v. syllabic verse of some of the Czech Romantic poets (Erben, etc.).

Further particulars of the two rhythmical patterns will be best accessible to observation, if passages written on analogous principles in the two languages are confronted: A. “strict” accentual-syllabic verse (based on a regular succession of accentual and unaccentual syllables); B. syllabic verse (only a fixed number of syllables is compulsory); C. accentual verse (only a fixed number of beats is compulsory).

A. ACCENTUAL-SYLLABIC VERSE

The poets who are most frequently quoted in textbooks as model examples of "regular" rhythm are Pope in English and J. Vrchlický in Czech:

First in these fields I try the sylvan strains,
Nor blush to sport on Windsor's blissful plains.
Fair Thames, flow gently from thy sacred spring,
While on thy banks Sicilian Muses sing;

X X X X X X X X X X
x X x X x X x X x X
X X X X x X X X x X
X x X X x X X X x X

(A. Pope, *Pastorals*)

Měl hrabě paní, v kráse dennici,
ve lásce ženu, v ctnostech svěťici.
Jak vidět ji a vášní nezaplát?
Vždyť král sám chtěl se jejím sluhou zvat!

x X x X x X x X x X
X x x X x X x X x X
x X x X x X x X x X
x X x X x X x X x X

(J. Vrchlický, *Lvi fantom*)

The tension between the metrical pattern and the series of word-stresses within the line takes on different aspects in English and in Czech verse:

1. In English, where the rhythmical value of every syllable is unambiguous, and determined by its position within the word and the semantic and grammatical value of the word, every syllable either supports the metrical pattern, or is opposed to it. — In Czech verse, only the initial syllables of polysyllabic words are stressed and count in the formation of the metrical impulse; the majority of syllables are ambivalent and yield easily to the pattern, with the result that the tension in Czech verse is slighter.

2. In English verse, there are 3 types of syllables with secondary stress: a) secondary stresses of polysyllabic words, b) unstressed syllables with metrical accent, c) stressed syllables without metrical accent. In Czech verse, types a) and b) coalesce, type c) does not exist. English verse is richer in the different types and degrees of stress than Czech verse. This gives some justification to the 3 degrees of intensity distinguished by J. B. Mayor, or the 4 degrees distinguished by Geo. R. Stewart Jr. (though hardly to the 9 degrees of A. J. Ellis). These distinctions are not suitable for Czech prosody.

The tension between the metrical pattern and the pattern of word-stresses is greater with Pope than with Vrchlický; it is reduced to a minimum in those types of English verse which avoid the use of stressed syllables in the thesis:

O Prince, o chief of many Throned Powers,
That led th'imbatteld Seraphim to Warr,
Under thy conduct, and in dreadful deeds
Fearless, endanger'd Heaven's perpetual King;

x X x X x X x X x X
x X x X x X x X x X
X x x X x x x X x X
X x x X x X x X x X

(J. Milton, *Paradise Lost*)

These lines offer a closer analogy to the normal type of Czech verse than those by Pope, since Milton wrote on the "foot" principle: his line presents a succession of "feet", i.e. of groups containing one (or more) unstressed

syllables and one stressed syllable (stressed by its phonetic nature or “by position”). This closest analogy to Czech verse is felt, from the accentual English point of view, as “syllabic”; the verse of *Paradise Lost* was described as syllabic by R. Bridges (as well as by E. A. Sonnenschein and P. Barkas) [cp. 2, p. 27, 91], and was depreciated by the extreme exponent of accentual English rhythm, E. Guest [15, p. 220, 238–39].

B. SYLLABIC VERSE

In syllabic verse, the lines are either isosyllabic, or two or more types of verse alternate according to a regular pattern within the stanza, (e.g. 6 8 4 8 6 8 4 8). The whole of Czech folk poetry and the greatest part of the irregular verse of Czech Romantic poets was written on this principle:

Chodí děvčátko po dvoře	XxXxxXxx	8	III
plače a nařiče sobě,	XxxXxxXx	8	III
dva ptačkové ho těšili:	xXxxxXxx	8	II
Neplač děvče, jedě mily.	XxXxXxXx	8	IV

(Folk ballad)

Vstávej, pane můj, chyba v odkladě	XxXxxXxXxx	10	IV
tvá lilie se vláčí po sadě;	xXxxxXxXxx	10	III
pospěš, nemeškej, pravýt nyní čas:	XxXxxXxXxx	10	IV
tvá lilie si divný vede hlas!	xXxxxXxXxx	10	III

(K. J. Erben, *Lilie*)

It is a most interesting thing to witness how difficult it was for Czech prosodists to find out which was the dominant principle of this type of verse. The poets of the era of the Nation Revival (c. 1780–1850), inspired by popular poetry and sharing its prosodic principles, could not be mistaken by any *a priori* theories; that the verse of Czech popular poetry was syllabic was stated in 1818 by Fr. Palacký and P. J. Šafařík, in 1835 by J. Kollár, in 1860 by K. J. Erben, and later on by the philologists H. Jireček and J. Truhlář, in 1862 and 1872 respectively [41, p. 101; 30, p. 479; 11, 26, p. 70 ff.; 49, p. 402 ff.]. It was only after the importance of the accentual principle in Czech verse was asserted by J. Durdík and in later years by J. Král, as a reaction against the experiments with quantitative versification, that the verse of Czech popular poetry started to be described — quite mistakenly — as accentual. This opinion was expressed by a unbroken series of illustrious philologists and critics: by J. Fejfalík in 1860, L. Quis 1872, J. Durdík in 1880, J. Jakubec in 1883, J. Zubatý in 1886.² The syllabic principle of Czech popular poetry was rediscovered by Zd. Nejedlý in 1907, J. Letošník in 1909, L. Janáček in 1909, R. Jakobson in 1934, K. Horálek in 1942, V. Úlehla in 1949, and others [38, p. 20; 33, p. 40 ff.; 24, p. 965 ff.; 22, p. 242; 18, p. 304; 50, p. 305]. It is evident that the mistaken interpretation of Czech

² [12, p. 64]; L. Quis quoted in [31, p. 478]; [9, p. 363; 23, p. 75; 54, p. 19–35].

popular poetry, sponsored by the prosodic theory of J. Král and the poetic practice of J. Vrchlický, and his school, was corrected only when a new generation of poets and philologists, sharing a different prosodic norm, appeared after 1900. — Though hardly any doubts remain as to the real nature of the rhythm of Czech popular ballads and songs, descriptions of the rhythm of those Czech poets of the era of National Revival who adhered closely to folk poetry have remained uncorrected to this day. Even so erudite a critic as O. Fischer — probably led astray by his intimate knowledge of German beat verse — asserted in 1930 that Erben's verse is based on a fixed number of beats, and was followed in this error by K. Čapek in 1931, A. Grund in 1935 and J. Haller in 1936 [O. Fischer in 10, p. 97; 8, p. 130; 14, p. 69; 16, p. 179 ff.]. The most important contemporary prosodists, J. Mukařovský, spoke in 1934, and again in 1948, of the "purely accentual" verse of the Romantic poets Fr. L. Čelakovský and J. Langer [37, II, p. 114—115]. In reality, the rhythm of K. J. Erben is a model of syllabic verse (the only exceptional poem in *Kytice* being "Záhořovo lože"; it is written in lines irregular both in the number of syllables and of beats). The same is true of J. Langer (*Básně, Kopřivy, Bajky, Krakoviačky*). The poems by Fr. L. Čelakovský are written on several different principles: a) *Ohlas písní českých* is written in strict syllabic verse corresponding to the syllabic verse of Czech popular poetry; b) *Ohlas písní ruských*, too, contains poems in strict syllabic lines ("Rusové na Dunaji r. 1829", "Do-vtipný milý", "Odšedivělý", "Láska nad bohatství", "Píseň dětská", "Smrt milé") or in lines with a tendency to isosyllabism (e.g. "Svatební"); c) in those poems of *Ohlas písní ruských* which present the closest analogy to Russian "byliny", the attempt to imitate Russian accentual rhythm resulted in lines with an irregular number of both syllables and beats ("Bohatýr Muromec, Ilja Volžanín etc.).³

A morphological analogy of the traditional syllabic type of Czech verse will hardly be found in traditional British or American poetry. It is only among the experimental poets that instances of this pattern appear — as a conscious reaction against the principles of the prevalent English beat-verse:

Openly, yes,	4
with the naturalness	6
of the hippopotamus or the alligator	13
when it climbs out on the bank to experience the	13
sun I do these	4
things which I do, which please	6
no one but myself. Now I breathe and now I am sub-	13
merged; the blemishes stand up and shout when the object	13

(M. Moore, *Melanchthon*)

³ Cp. the results of recent research on the rhythm of Czech and of Russian folk poetry: a) as has been demonstrated by K. Horálek [19, p. 365 ff.] a strong tendency to isosyllabism asserted itself even in Czech translations of Russian accentual poetry by Fr. L. Čelakovský; b) A. V. Pozdnjejev [43, p. 405 ff.] finds a strong tendency to a regular allocation of beats even in the "syllabic" types of Russian verse.

Though analogous in form to the Czech syllabic verse, the texture is different. The English specimen intentionally underlines the contrast between the syntactic pattern and the artificial division according to a system which, for the English ear, is purely numerical; the artificiality of this division is underlined by the absence of block letters at the beginning of lines, by the verse-limit inside the word, as well as the widely different lengths of lines. From the English point of view, this is free verse, for all its regularity in the number of syllables.

The absence of syllabic verse, in the proper sense of the term, in the English prosodic tradition is confirmed e.g. by P. Barkas: in an enumeration of 12 types of English verse, the hypothetical syllabic verse is introduced with a mark of interrogation only, and no specimens are quoted [2, p. 90].

C. ACCENTUAL VERSE

In accentual verse, either the number of beats is constant in all lines, or two or more types of verse alternate according to a regular pattern within the stanza (e.g. in "ballad measure": IV III IV III). This is the prevalent form of English popular ballads and of the irregular verse of English Romantic poets:

He hádna gáne a stép, a stép,	8 IV
A stép but bárely áne,	6 III
When a bót flew out o the gúde ship's síde,	10 IV
And the sáut sea it cam' in.	

(*Sir Patrick Spens*)

Húsh, béating héart of Christabel!	8 IV
Jesú, María, shíeld her wéll!	6 IV
She fólded hér árms benéath her cloák,	8 IV
And stóle to the óther síde of the óak.	10 IV
Whát sées shé thére?	4 IV

(S. T. Coleridge, *Christabel*)

An analogy of this traditional type of English verse will hardly be found in Czech poetry. The beat principle is indistinguishable for a Czech ear and can become the basis of rhythm only if it is reinforced by some extra-prosodic factors, e.g. an exaggeratedly strong scansion, as in the following children's nonsense verses:

Enyke denyke dupl né	9 IV
dývl dávl domine.	8 IV

*

The confrontation of a few analogous types of English and of Czech verse is insufficient to give any comprehensive view of the two versifications, but it may be sufficient to excuse the formulation of one or two distinctive traits of the two systems.

The main line of development of English poetry took place in an area

the extreme points of which are accentual verse (beat verse) on one side, and accentual-syllabic verse (foot verse) on the other side. The main line of development of Czech poetry oscillated between syllabic verse and accentual-syllabic verse (foot verse):

English verse:		beat verse		foot verse		
Czech verse:				foot verse		syllabic verse

English rhythm is dominated by accent, English regular verse (foot verse) is accentual-syllabic; Czech rhythm is dominated by the number of syllables, its regular verse (foot verse) is syllabic-accentual. The two extreme cases of the English and of the Czech versifications — beat verse and syllabic verse — are not different in principle from the corresponding foot verse; they are organized by the dominant principle only, while the secondary one (variant) is neglected.

The two types of English verse are well-known to prosodists; cp. the distinction between Beat-Verse and Foot-Verse made by J. Schipper (and E. Smith) and that between Stress-Verse and Syllabic-Verse made by G. Young. Some of the prosodists tend to exaggerate the difference between the two types and to overlook their essential unity. Others, by adopting one type as the basis of their rhythmical feeling, tend to disparage the second type (Classicist poets disparage the “barbaric” irregularities of beat verse) or to interpret the foot verse as “syllabic”.

As an example of the dependence of prosodic theory on the point of view of the investigator, the different explanations of the irregularities of English verse may be quoted:

a) Poets and students of versification who insist on the strict accentual-syllabic type of English verse (E. Bysshe) try to explain away the super-nummerary syllables by elision (th' ocean, ta'en) and the deficient syllables by an amplification of the syllabic extent of words (pilègrim, attackèd). This is the prosodic theory underlying the poetry of J. Milton, A. Pope, and their contemporaries.

b) Modern adherents of the foot theory (G. Saintsbury, M. R. Alden, J. B. Mayor, J. C. Anderson) have devised laws of substitution or of equivalence to explain the irregularities of English beat verse; the underlying belief is that “feet” of different types are equivalent under certain circumstances and therefore interchangeable.

c) “Accentual” prosodists (starting with E. Guest) explain that super-nummerary syllables are slurred in pronunciation and that a group of two or more stressed syllables produces hovering accent — a prosodic counterpart of level stress. This last view is supported by the characteristic traits of English rhythm.

The two types of Czech verse are not so clearly distinguished by Czech prosodists. Under the influence of foreign accentual prosodic theories (especially German), or of music, some of them mistakenly described Czech syllabic verse as accentual. The exaggerated attention to the accentual principle was partly repaired in the 20's by R. Jakobson's insistence on the importance of quantity and of “phrasing” in Czech verse, and by the heightened importance of intonation in the poetry of K. Čapek, V. Nezval

and their contemporaries. What remains to do is to call attention to the relevance of the syllabic principle.

Conclusion. The accepted division of European versification into 3 groups (accentual, syllabic, accentual-syllabic) gives only a very rough idea of their actual relations. In the poetry of the main European literatures, two basic principles are operative: accent and the number of syllables. Differences in the function of the two principles in the single languages are gradual, resulting in a series of versifications, each a little different from the others:

	Accentual	Accentual-syllabic	Syllabic	
ACCENT	O. English			SYLLABISM
	O. Norse	German		
	O. High German	English Russian Czech	Polish Spanish French	

An analysis on a considerably broader scale would be necessary to place the remaining European systems of versification with any accuracy. The confrontation of the two considerably different systems (English and Czech) may have given a hint of the strong dependence, not only of poetic rhythm but also of prosodic theory, on the characteristics of the national language. A comparison of less distinctly different systems (e.g. German – Russian or Polish – Spanish) will undoubtedly give greater prominence to non-linguistic, historical aspects.

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