

Þorgeir Sigurðsson,  
University of Iceland<sup>1</sup>

*The alliterative, rhythmic  
and stanzaic constraints on verbs  
in dróttkvætt lines*

**Abstract:** The *dróttkvætt* meter in poetry from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century places a constraint on alliteration by verbs. The rigidity of this constraint has gone unnoticed. It complements two laws set forth by Hans Kuhn (1933/1969) for verbs and rhythm in clauses. I show that the alliterative constraint enables a reformulation of Kuhn's two laws into one rigid constraint on verbs and rhythm. In the process, I also separate from Kuhn's second law a constraint for verbs at the beginning of stanzas, which gives an effect that Kuhn saw as reflecting different requirements for verbs in main clauses and subordinate clauses in Old-Norse. These three constraints refer

---

<sup>1</sup> This work was supported in part by a grant for a doctoral study in year 2015 by the University of Iceland Research Fund.

only to conditions within one *dróttkvætt* metrical line and can be verified independently.

**KEYWORDS:** Hans Kuhn, *dróttkvætt* syntax, alliteration, *dróttkvætt* rhythm, *dróttkvætt* stanzas.

### 1. THE ALLITERATIVE CONSTRAINT

In this article, I use terminology from Hans Kuhn (1933/1969), who made a distinction between bound and unbound clauses in alliterative Germanic poetry. A bound clause is a clause preceded by a conjunction or some other connecting word or a connective which enables a clause to be continued by another clause. Like Kuhn, I use the word *Bindewort* (plural *-wörter*) to denote such a word. However, I digress from Kuhn's terminology in that instead of distinguishing between verbs in bound and unbound clauses, I distinguish between bound and unbound verbs in a metrical line of *dróttkvætt*. If a *Bindewort* precedes a finite verb within a *dróttkvætt* line, the verb as a metrical constituent is bound, otherwise the verb is unbound.

Kuhn used his terminology to specify that finite verbs in bound clauses were exempt from a requirement to stand in one of the first positions of a clause (see a recent discussion by Haukur Þorgeirsson (2012, 235–236) where deviations from this requirement in poems in the Old-Norse *fornyrðislag* meter are analysed). In section 5, I present a rule on the first metrical line of *dróttkvætt* half-stanzas that produces this effect and is also applicable to the *fornyrðislag* meter. It does so in conjunction with two additional rules on alliteration and rhythm which I describe first. These rules do not have clauses as their domain.

The Verb-Alliteration rule (VA-rule) states:

*A non-initial, unbound verb in a dróttkvætt line cannot alliterate. To determine whether a finite verb is unbound, it is sufficient to scan the line for Bindewörter.*

It is well known that alliteration avoids finite verbs, especially in main clauses, but this has been understood as a preference and not a strict ban related to the ability of a word class to carry stress, see e.g. the hierarchy of stress presented by Kari Ellen Gade (1995, 37–38). In hierarchies of stress, nouns are always listed at the top and finite verbs in main clauses are assumed to be less stressed and less likely to carry alliteration than those in subordinate (bound) clauses. The VA-rule is, however, not a rule of preference. It is a rigid rule to be strictly obeyed and for any given line, the rule is easily verified. I have tested it on a large part of the *dróttkvætt* corpus, including all *dróttkvætt* stanzas by the tenth century poets Egill Skallagrímsson and Gísli Súrsson as well as the eleventh century court poet Þjóðólfr Árnason, and I did not find any breaches of the VA-rule in their poetry (all in Finnur Jónsson's B1 edition, 1912–1915).

Most finite verbs cannot alliterate. According to the VA-rule, the only instances where finite verbs may take part in alliteration are when they are line-initial or bound line-internally as in the following examples where *Bindewörter* are italicized and finite verbs are both bolded and italicized. Bound verbs are usually immediately preceded by a *Bindewort* but not always, as shown in (1):

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>(1) <i>en fullhugi <b>fellir</b></i><br/> <i>Sigvatr, lausavísa 22, line 5</i><br/> <i>Finnur Jónsson B1 (1912–1915, 251)</i></p> | <p>but [en] a brave-heart<br/>         [fullhugi] sheds [fellir],<br/>         i.e. a courageous man<br/>         sheds (a tear)</p> |
|--|--|

Here the conjunction *en* ‘but’ binds the alliterating finite verb *fellir*.

(2) exemplifies the use of the very common *Bindewort sás* (composed of a pronoun and a relative particle, *sá+es*).

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (2) <b>Gekk</b> , <i>sás</i> óðisk ekki<br>Egill, lausavísa 10, line 1<br>Finnur Jónsson B1 (1912–1915, 44) | Went [gekk], the one who<br>[sás] feared nothing [óðisk<br>ekki], |
|---|---|

Here the *Bindewort sás* binds the finite verb *óðisk* that alliterates.

Conjunctions that connect main clauses count as *Bindewörter* as in:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| (3) Knútr <b>réð</b> <i>ok</i> <b>bað</b> bíða<br>Liðsmannaflokkur, stanza 4, line 1<br>Finnur Jónsson B1 (1912–1915, 392) | Canute decided [Knútr<br>réð] and bid [ok bað] wait<br>[bíða], |
|--|--|

Here the coordinating conjunction *ok* ‘and’ binds the alliterating finite verb *bað*. Kristján Árnason (1991/2000, 137) noted that finite verbs that alliterate in the fourth syllabic position of a *dróttkvætt* line are very rare. He listed seven exceptional lines with such verbs, one of which is the line in (3). In every case the verb is bound.

Obviously, a finite verb at the beginning of a *dróttkvætt* line is always unbound, as no conjunction (*Bindewort*) can precede it, yet it may alliterate according to the VA-rule, as in:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (4) <b>Brunnu</b> beggja kinna<br>Kormákr, lausavísa 2, line 1<br>Finnur Jónsson B1 (1912–1915, 70) | Burned [brunnu] both<br>[beggja] cheeks [kinna]<br>(part of a kenning for eyes) |
|---|---|

Here a finite verb *brunnu* stands at the beginning of a line and alliterates.

*Dróttkvætt* lines that violate the VA-rule are few in number, and when they occur, the question arises of whether they are corrupt, for instance as a result of inaccurate copying in later centuries. This may apply to the following line. I use an asterisk to denote a line that violates a constraint on unbound verbs.

- (5) \*þrøngvimeidr of þryngvi                      a man [þrøngvimeidr] (a  
 Vellekla, stanza 25, line 3                      kenning for man) forces  
 Finnur Jónsson B1 (1912–1915, 121) [of þryngvi]

Here the finite verb þryngvi is unbound and yet it carries alliteration. Finnur Jónsson A1 (1912–1915, 128) quotes manuscripts with the conjunction áðr ‘before’ as a variant to the filler word *of*. This variant would avert the violation of the VA-rule. This is, however, not a matter of a simple replacement of one word, since more changes would be needed to the stanza in question, and I therefore mention two other possibilities: 1) The filler-word *of* (expletive particle) may here be significant. In the earliest *dróttkvætt* stanzas it could be a prefix or a place-holder for a lost prefix (see Kuhn, 1983, 123 and his *Das Füllwort um-of*, 1929) that possibly affected the status of the verb with respect to the VA-rule and 2) in parts of the *dróttkvætt* corpus, perhaps as an irregularity in its oldest part, a verb may be bound by a *Bindewort* in another line. I leave these interesting topics for future research.

In the following example the manuscripts give no helpful variants:

- (6) \*hverr **veit** *nema* ek **verða**                      Who knows [hverr veit]  
 Haraldr harðráði, lausavísa 2, line 7    unless I [nema ek] will  
 Finnur Jónsson B1 (1912–1915, 328)    become [verða] (famous)

In (6), the finite verb **veit** is unbound and yet it carries alliteration (the latter verb **verða** is bound by *nema*). In a recent edition of this stanza, Gade (2009, 44–45) renders the line as *hverr veit, nema verðak* and states the following: “The l. is unmetrical and the insertion of the expletive particle *of* would restore the reading (*hverr of veit, nema verðak* ‘who knows if I won’t become’).”

Line (6) may be corrupt in some way but I also find it possible that it displays a genuine, original mistake that may be blamed on the immaturity of the poet, who was only 15 years old when he composed this line, after the battle of Stiklestad.

## 2. THE DEMISE OF THE VA-RULE

The VA-rule was abandoned in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and it is alien to modern Icelandic alliterative poetry.

In the young *dróttkvætt* poem *Pétursdrápa*, the following lines demonstrate alliteration that had previously been forbidden (alliterating finite verbs are in bold and italicized, the lines have no *Bindewörter*). The dating of the poem is not certain. Kristján Árnason (1980, 134) has suggested that it might be from the 15<sup>th</sup> century rather than the 14<sup>th</sup> century. A parenthesized asterisk indicates a violation of a constraint that is no longer in effect.

- |                                       |              |   |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|---|
| (7) (*)borgin <i>bar</i> sú, mǫrgu,   | st. 9, l. 3  | The city [borgin] carried [bar] that [sú] many [mǫrgu]      |
| (8) (*)Baptista <i>hlaut</i> hæstan   | st. 13, l. 1 | Baptista received [Baptista hlaut] highest [hæstan]         |
| (9) (*)Hvess <i>leiti</i> þit ljósir? | st. 14, l. 1 | For what [hvess] look you [leiti þit], light ones [ljósir]? |
| (10) (*)Postula sveitir <i>sátu</i>   | st. 22, l. 1 | Disciples' [postula] groups [sveitir] sat [sátu]            |

Finnur Jónsson B2  
(1912–1915, 545–558)

The VA-rule was not adopted in the meters of the *rímur* genre, which were introduced in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and eventually replaced the *dróttkvætt* meter. The following is an example from one of the earliest *rímur*, preserved in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century velum codex *Flateyjarbók*.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (11) (*)Kongrin <i>bio</i> med Hneiti þaa<br>Ólafs ríma Haraldssonar, stanza<br>48, line 1<br>Sigurður Nordal (1944, 9) | The king [kongrin] hew [hjo] with Hneiti then [med Hneiti þaa] ( <i>Hneitir</i> is a sword's name). |
|---|---|

Here the unbound verb *hjó* 'hew' carries alliteration.

The VA-rule demonstrates that the concept of an unbound verb enables the creation of a rigid constraint on alliteration. In the next section I will use this concept and the VA-rule to reformulate two laws of Hans Kuhn into a similarly rigid constraint on rhythm.

### 3. THE RHYTHMIC CONSTRAINT ON VERB LOCATION

Hans Kuhn set forth two laws that restrict the placement of finite verbs in clauses with respect to rhythm. They are (I use an English translation by Gade, 1995, 21):

Kuhn's First Law, 'The Law of Sentence Particles' (*Satzpartikelgesetz*): "Die Satzpartikeln stehen in der ersten Senkung des Satzes, in der Proklise entweder zu seinem ersten oder zweiten betonten Worte." Kuhn (1933/1969, 23).

'sentence particles (i.e., all unstressed or weakly stressed words that are not syntactically bound but function as syntactically independent constituents) stand in the first dip of the sentence, proclitically to either the first or the second stressed word'.

Kuhn's Second Law, 'The Law of Sentence Introduction' (*Satzspitzengesetz*): "Im Satzauftritt müssen Satzpartikeln stehen." Kuhn (1933/1969, 51).

'sentence particles must stand in anacrusis'.

Kuhn assumed that his laws were valid for all alliterative Germanic poetry. The laws rely on metrical rules to provide information on dips and stressed positions. For this, the five-type system of Eduard Sievers (1893) has usually been employed, e.g. by Gade (1995).

On occasions, the validity of Kuhn's laws has been called into question, and in his later work, Kuhn himself (1983, 1999–202) expressed doubts about the validity of the first law with respect to *dróttkvætt* poetry. Already in 1933, he listed a large number of systematic breaches of it (see Kuhn, 1933/1969, 42–44). The validity of the second law in Old English poetry has also been questioned (see Rachel Mines, 2002). Gade (1995, 21) remarks, "Despite the fact that Kuhn's laws and rules demonstrably contain inherent contradictions and weaknesses, however, most



scholars accept and reproduce them in their work on skaldic poetry...”

In place of Kuhn’s two laws, I propose simplified versions that I have found to be strictly valid, and I use in conjunction with the VA-rule to create a single rule for rhythm and verbs. They are simplified in that they apply to unbound verbs rather than sentence particles and have a single *dróttkvætt* line as their domain rather than a clause. As a further simplification I dispense with the statement that sentence particles stand proclitically to the first or second stressed word.

I relate the word *senkung* ‘dip’ to those syllabic positions that are weakly stressed in a *dróttkvætt* line. If two weak syllabic positions stand side by side, the dip consist of two syllabic positions. As an example, in the line þreklundaðr *fell þundar* (Egill lausavísa 10, l. 3, in Finnur Jónsson B1, 1912–1915, 44) the unbound verb *fell* is in the first di-positional rhythmic dip of the line. The line begins with a di-positional rhythmic peak (þreklund-). *Dróttkvætt* lines have either two or three rhythmic dips. The last dip is line-final and can only contain an ending of a word. Kuhn’s definition of the term *Satzpartikel* ‘sentence particle’ is translated by Gade (1995, xix) to denote “all unstressed or weakly stressed words that are not syntactically bound (formwords) but function as syntactically independent constituents.” Finite verbs and connectives are listed among the sentence particles by Gade (1995, 40) but from the definition it is clear that this only applies when they are in dips.

Referring to my premises above, I extract from Kuhn’s first law the condition that an unbound verb cannot be in the second rhythmic dip of a *dróttkvætt* line.<sup>2</sup> Kuhn’s first law actu-

<sup>2</sup> Gade (2007, 685) seems to know this rule as she used it to amend the text *glóða Ná fekk græðis* in the edition of Finnur Jónsson B2 (1912–1915, 528) where the unbound verb is in the fourth syllabic position of a trochaic line. She does, however, not attribute it to Kuhn’s first law but notes that similar lines don’t exist: “That l. is syntacti-

ally forbids all finite verbs from the second dip (bound verbs as well) but Kuhn (1933/1969, 42–43) invalidated that himself by listing under *Verletzung des Satzpartikelgesetzes* ‘breach of the law of sentence particles’ a number of lines with bound verbs in the second dip. He stated that there were 150 lines like: *borr, en hlust es þorrin* (Jónsson, B1 1912–1915, 52) in the corpus of *dróttkvætt* stanzas before year 1200 (*es* is bound by *en*, both are in dipo). For unbound verbs, however, this simplified version of Kuhn’s first law is not only valid for the first line of a half-stanza or for a line starting a new clause; it holds for any line. It means that in a line with trochaic rhythm, an unbound verb is never in position number four, except in the rare cases when it is the second unbound verb in the line, as in the following example:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| (12) Hingat <i>skalt, kvað</i> hringa<br>Gísli Súrsson, lausavísa 24, line 1<br>Finnur Jónsson B1 (1912–1915, 101) | Hither shalt [Hingat<br>skalt], said woman [kvað<br>hringa] ( <i>hringa</i> is part of<br>a kenning for a woman) |
|--|--|

The unbound verb *kvað* is here in the second dip of a trochaic line, but it is the second unbound verb, the first is *skalt*.

For Kuhn’s second law, I take the words anacrusis and upbeat to be synonyms, denoting a weak syllabic position followed by a strong one at the beginning of a *dróttkvætt* line. In regular *dróttkvætt* stanzas, lines with upbeat are only found in odd-numbered lines (because even lines have alliteration in the first syllable). The syllabic position in the anacrusis is not ignored in the syllable count of a *dróttkvætt* line (this is different from younger Icelandic poetry). Kuhn and others have taken

---

cally and metrically impossible: in the corpus of *dróttkvætt* poetry there is no other sentence-introductory Type-A l. in which a trisyllabic cpd in position 1-3 is followed by the finite verb.”

the anacrusis to be the first dip of the line and Kuhn's second law has been understood as meaning that if a clause begins with a dip, that dip must contain a sentence particle (see e.g. Mines, 2002, 239). I find this to be true for all *dróttkvætt* lines with anacrusis at the beginning of half-stanzas. It is true in the sense that these lines always have either a finite verb in the first syllabic position or a *Bindewort*. Both of these are sentence particles when they are in dipo.<sup>3</sup> The finite verb in these lines is unbound because it is line-initial and without a preceding *Bindewort*.

The simplified second law for *dróttkvætt* lines that I described above, can be separated into two components: 1) There is always an unbound verb or a *Bindewort* in lines with upbeat when these lines are at the beginning of a half-stanza and 2) the *Bindewort* or the unbound verb, when present, are in the upbeat of such lines. The first statement is true for lines with any type of rhythm as I discuss in section 5 and this statement is thus not specifically true for lines with anacrusis. The second statement is true for lines with anacrusis at the beginning of half-stanzas but it is also true when the line is placed anywhere else. Thus an unbound verb is only allowed in the first syllabic position of a line with anacrusis. I use that statement as input to the Verb-Rhythm rule below.

Kuhn's laws do not predict the following: When an unbound verb is in syllabic position number five, the rhythm seems never to be trochaic. An example with a non-trochaic line follows:

- |      |   |   |
|------|---|---|
| (13) | þingmenn n̄sum <i>stinga</i><br>Bersöglisvísur, stanza 12, line 8<br>Finnur Jónsson B1 (1912–1915, 237) | men of the assembly<br>[[þingmenn] noses stick<br>[n̄sum stinga]. |
|------|---|---|

3 The reverse is not true. Line-initial verbs and *Bindewörter* do not need to be unstressed and in a dip.

The word þingmenn ‘assembly-men’ has two long syllables in a di-positional rhythmic peak while the word *nǫsum* ‘noses’ has two short syllables in a di-positional rhythmic dip.<sup>4</sup> The unbound verb *stínga* ‘stick’ is in a syllable adjacent to the first dip of the line.

Kuhn’s first and second law as elucidated here for unbound verbs, together with my observation regarding the fifth position of trochaic lines, and taking the VA-rule into account, are equivalent to the following rhythmic constraint (see (14) for an illustration of where unbound verbs can be located for different rhythmic types):

The Verb-Rhythm rule (VR-rule):

*The first unbound verb stands early in a dróttkvætt line and begins at the latest in the syllable following the first rhythmic dip. To determine whether a finite verb is unbound, it is sufficient to scan the line for Bindewörter.*

The VR-rule appears to be another rigid rule of *dróttkvætt*. It holds for any line that has an unbound verb, not only lines that begin a clause.

Note that the VR-rule does not prohibit unbound verbs from the second syllabic position of lines with an upbeat, a position where unbound verbs do not occur. Unbound verbs are also not found in the fifth syllabic position of odd-numbered lines,<sup>5</sup> even when the rhythm is non-trochaic, but again this is not due to the VR-rule. In both cases it is the requirement of alliteration in these positions that makes it impossible to fill them with unbound verbs according to the VA-rule.

4 See Kristján Árnason (1991/2000, 124) for an analysis of a rhythmically similar line: *Suðrvík Dǫnum kuðri*.

5 Kristján Árnason (2002, 201) seems to ascribe this to Kuhn’s laws.

For the purpose of the VR-rule the Sievers-five type system for rhythm is unnecessarily detailed. Listed below are the three rhythmic types proposed by Kristján Árnason (1991/2000, 124–126). S and W denote strong and weak syllabic positions. Positions where an unbound verb can begin in accordance with the VR-rule are marked in bold. Previously discussed lines are given as examples for the rhythm.

- |                                   |                |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| (14) a) <b>WSSWSW</b> Upbeat line | (1)            |
| b) <b>SWSWSW</b> Trochaic line    | (2), (4), (12) |
| c) <b>SSWWSW</b> Two-dip line     | (3), (13)      |

Classifying *dróttkvætt* lines according to the scheme of Kristján Árnason is unproblematic. In a regular *dróttkvætt* meter, an upbeat rhythm is only found in odd numbered lines, and it is always recognisable by alliteration in the second syllabic position. The remaining issue is only to identify lines with trochaic rhythm.

I have not tested the VR-rule as extensively as the VA-rule, but I can nevertheless state that clear violations of it are not easily found. In regular *dróttkvætt* poetry by Egill Skallagrímsson (nearly 50 stanzas) the following line seems to be the only offender:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| (15) *Blundr, ek slíkt of <b>undrumk</b><br>Egill, lausavísa 43, line 8<br>Finnur Jónsson B1 (1912–1915, 52) | Blundr [Blundr] (proper name), I that [ek slíkt] wonder [undrumk] (i.e. that surprises me). |
|--|---|

This line appears to have trochaic rhythm and an unbound verb in the fifth syllabic position. The stanza is present in all three main versions of Egils saga. The text in (15) is based on the A-version in *Möðruvallabók*; in the other two versions a

conjunction precedes *ek*, binding the finite verb and legitimizing the line with respect to the VR-rule. The conjunction is *en* ‘but, and’ in the B-version (W-manuscript) and *né* ‘nor’ in the C-version (K-manuscript), see Finnur Jónsson A1 (1912–1915, 59).

In the poetry of Gísli Súrsson (37 stanzas), I have only noted the following breach of the VR-rule:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (16) *grundar fit <i>vitum</i> sitja<br>Gísli, lausavísa 25, line 6<br>Finnur Jónsson B1 (1912–1915, 101) | Woman [‘grundar fit’ is<br>part of kenning] we know<br>[vitum] sits [‘sitja’ is infinitive] |
|---|---|

In this line, which also appears to have trochaic rhythm, the unbound verb is in the fourth syllabic position (it has seven syllables, thus two short syllables must occupy one position, which is e.g. allowed for position four in lines with trochaic rhythm, see Árnason 1991/2000, 126–128). All the manuscripts that Finnur Jónsson A1 (1912–1915, 106) consults for this text have lines with non-trochaic rhythm, e.g. *gullfit vitum sitia* that would make the line in order with respect to the VR-rule.

In summary: The VR-rule forbids unbound verbs from being in syllabic positions four and five in trochaic lines. For lines with an upbeat (14a), it forbids unbound verbs from any position except the first two, but the VA-rule excludes them from the second position. Finally for lines with two dips (14c), there are no restrictions by the VR-rule, but because odd-numbered lines with two dips always have alliteration in position number 5, the VA-rule effectively restricts the use of that position for unbound verbs to even-numbered lines. The sixth position in *dróttkvætt* lines is used only for word-endings but here the

placement of unbound verbs is excluded by the VR-rule for any of the rhythmic types in (14).

#### 4. AN EXCURSUS ON SKJÁLFBENT

The exceptional variant of *dróttkvætt* called *skjálfhent* ‘the meter of shivering’ seems to provide examples that violate the VR-rule. Hans Kuhn (1933/1969, 41 fn 61) chose to exempt the *skjálfhent* meter from his law of sentence particles. Nine half-stanzas are preserved from a poem from the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century demonstrating this variant. Two of them have a line with an unbound verb in the fifth position, one of them is given below:

- (17) (\*)heinlands hoddu**m** *grandar*              wheat land’s [heinlands]  
          Hallvarðr, Knútsdrápa, stanza 4, line 3    (part of kenning for a  
          Finnur Jónsson B1 (1912–1915, 294)      king) wealth [hoddu**m**]  
    destroys [grandar]

This line was recited to Canute the great lauding his generosity. *Grandar* ‘destroys’ is an unbound verb in the 5<sup>th</sup> syllabic position.

The line has alliteration in the first and third syllable, which normally clearly indicates that a line has trochaic rhythm. According to the VR-rule, an unbound verb may not appear in the 5<sup>th</sup> position of such lines. The line does, however, also have rhyme in the second syllable, which indicates a strong syllable, typical of the *skjálfhent* meter (the rhyme is *land* : *grand*). By assuming that the *skjálfhent* lines were not trochaic but rather had the exceptional rhythm SSSWSW, a violation of the VR-rule is avoided (see an analysis of *skjálfhent* in Þorgeir Sigurðsson 2014, 55–67). I have therefore placed a parenthesized asterisk before line (17). The triple syllabic peak of *skjálfhent*

is probably the cause of the shivering that gives this *dróttkvætt* variant its name.

### 5. THE STANZA CONSTRAINT

The VR- and the VA-rules apply to any *dróttkvætt* line with an unbound verb but do not prescribe that any line must have such a verb. In section 3, however, I noted that lines with anacrusis always begin with a *Bindewort* or an unbound verb when these lines initiate a half-stanza. Furthermore, this seemed to be prescribed by Kuhn's second law. I have found this to be a general requirement regardless of the rhythmic type (14). This is stated by the following rule.

The Verb-Stanza rule (VS-rule):

*The first line of a half-stanza must either contain an unbound verb or a Bindewort that is linked to a clause in the preceding half-stanza.*

Like the VA- and VR-rules, the VS-rule was strictly enforced. *Dróttkvætt* lines that violate the VS-rule are also few in number and likely corrupt.<sup>6</sup> This applies to the following line at the beginning of a half-stanza:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| (18) *at veg jǫtna vitni<br>Vellekla, stanza 15, line 5<br>Finnur Jónsson B1 (1912–1915, 119) | At way [at veg] of giants<br>[jǫtna] witness [vitni] |
|---|--|

The line has neither a *Bindewort* nor an unbound verb. It has alliteration in the second syllabic position which marks it as a line with anacrusis. The stanza is preserved in several manuscripts, but only one has the text above; all other manuscripts

<sup>6</sup> A younger variant of *skjálþent*, called *twiskelft* respects neither the VS-rule nor the VA-rule. The use of this variant is first attested in the poem *Rekstefja*, assumed by Finnur Jónsson B1 (1912–1915, 525) to be from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. See Sigurðsson (2016).





(20) (*)Bollr á byrðar stalli	A ball [bollr] on a pedes-
Gísli Súrsson, lausavísa 6, line 1	tal of burden [á byrðar
Finnur Jónsson B1 (1912–1915, 97)	stalli]

Line (20) comes from a stanza with only two lines, which is exceptional. Such couplets do, however, normally respect the VS-rule. I find it likely that the fault with this couplet is intentional (therefore a parenthesized asterisk in (20)). In the saga of Gísli it comes in response to another couplet by Gísli's adversary, a certain Þorgrímr that also violates the VS-rule. The non-adherence to the VS-rule indicates that something is missing from the exchange of information (i.e. two initial lines are missing). Both stanzas seem to refer to killings without naming the killer or the victim.

The VS-rule has the effect that the first line of a stanza or of a four line half-stanza, either starts a new clause or refers to a preceding half-stanza. In the former case, and due to the VR-rule and VA-rule, its finite verb will stand early in the line (never go beyond syllabic position number four), while in the latter case, the first finite verb in the half-stanza can appear late in the line (because it will be bound line-internally) or appear in some other line of the half-stanza. It will thus appear that a finite verb in an unbound clause must always appear early in a clause, while finite verbs in bound clauses can appear late. Hans Kuhn (1933/1969, 64 fn 129) saw the couplets by Þorgrímr and Gísli as exceptions. The couplets appear to contain complete clauses that violate a rule that he saw as a linguistic rule in Old Norse.<sup>8</sup>

8 The rule Kuhn (1933/1969, 63–64) apparently describes is the so-called V2-rule, which prescribes that a verb must be in the first position or second position of a clause. The line *Bollr á byrðar stalli* can, however, be taken as occupying only one sentence position, and since the next line continues with a finite verb, the couplet does not necessarily violate the V2-rule. Lines like these do, however, violate the VS-rule and were clearly forbidden as first lines of stanzas.

## 6. DISCUSSION

Here my main goal was to present a set of rigid constraints on verbs in *dróttkvætt* that are easily verified in an unambiguous manner, even for those with limited understanding of Old Norse. The rules are meant to clarify earlier insights regarding, on the one hand, verbs in alliterating positions and, on the other hand, restrictions on the placement of verbs within the rhythmic pattern of *dróttkvætt* lines, – restrictions that were previously subsumed under Kuhn’s two laws of sentence particles and sentence introduction, which, to quote Gade (1995, 21), “demonstrably contain inherent contradictions and weaknesses.” I have achieved this with three independent constraints or rules. Two of these rules (the VA-rule and the VR-rule) have only one line as their domain, while the third rule (the VS-rule) only applies to the first line of a half-stanza. This reference to metrical constituents, i.e. lines and half-stanzas, makes the task of verifying the validity of these rules much easier than in the case of rules that refer to syntactical constituents such as the clause. Comprehensive testing of the rules should lead to a clear conclusion, they will either be rejected or validated, perhaps with some modifications and clarifications. For instance regarding which words can function as *Bindewörter*. The rules have the potential to become useful tools for checking corrupt poems dated before 1300 without the need to subscribe to any particular metrical or linguistic theory. They may, however, also be of some theoretical value.

In formulating the constraints, I have taken note of two articles by Nigel Fabb (2009 and 2010) where he puts forth some generalisations on poetic constraints. One is that they should not be able to see syntactic structure (see Fabb, 2010, 1231). For the *dróttkvætt* meter, Fabb’s condition appears to be invalidated

by the laws of Kuhn because they refer to syntactic clauses. It seems that the syntactic structure of the often very convoluted *dróttkvætt* stanzas must be established for it to be clear where clauses begin. In the present approach, however, an unbound verb is subject to positional constraints that are only subject to conditions within one metrical line. This does not require a meaningful syntax to be laid down. If it proves possible to maintain this approach, Fabb's condition stays intact. It would nevertheless still be interesting how the rules of *dróttkvætt* are sensitive to different word classes (verbs, conjunctions, nominals), not only for the rules discussed here but also for the Law of Craigie, see a discussion by Kristján Árnason (2009, 39–59).

The VS-, VR- and VA-rules together create the effect that finite verbs in unbound clauses appear early in the beginning of half-stanzas. Hans Kuhn saw this as a linguistic law, independent of his two laws on rhythm. I see the VS-rule as a way of setting up a stanza structure in poems. See also a discussion by Þórhallur Eyþórsson (2009, 61–77).

The scope of this article was limited to the very regular *dróttkvætt* meter. I do however expect the VA-, VR- and VS-rules to be relevant to other Old Norse meters as well, although to different degrees and with modifications.

## REFERENCES

- Árnason, Kristján. 1980. *Quantity in Historical Phonology: Icelandic and Related Cases*. Cambridge Studies in Linguistics 30. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1991/2000. *The Rhythms of dróttkvætt and other Old Icelandic metres*. Reykjavík: Institute of Linguistics, University of Iceland.
- . 2002. Kuhn's Laws in Old Icelandic Prose and Poetry. *Journal of Germanic Linguistics* 14 (3): 201–241.

- . 2009. On Kuhn's laws and Craigie's Law in Nordic poetry. In *Versatility in Versification: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Metrics*, edited by T. K. Dewey and Frog, 39–59. Berkeley Insights in Linguistics and Semiotics. New York: Peter Lang.
- Eyþórsson, Þórhallur. 2009. The Syntax of the Verb in Old-Icelandic: Evidence from Poetry. In *Versatility in Versification: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Metrics*, edited by T. K. Dewey and Frog, 61–77. Berkeley Insights in Linguistics and Semiotics. New York: Peter Lang.
- Fabb, Nigel. 2009. Formal Interactions in Poetic Metre. In *Versatility in Versification: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Metrics*, edited by T. K. Dewey and Frog, 147–165. Berkeley Insights in Linguistics and Semiotics. New York: Peter Lang.
- . 2010. Is Literary Language a Development of Ordinary Language? *Lingua* 120 (5): 1219–1232.
- Gade, Kari Ellen. 1995. *The Structure of Old Norse dróttkvætt Poetry*. *Islandica* 49. London: Cornell University Press.
- Gade, Kari Ellen (ed.). 2007. Mariúvísur I. In *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages VII. Poetry on Christian Subjects*, edited by Margaret Clunies Ross, 678–700. Turnhout, Brepols.
- . 2009. Haraldr III hardráði. Lausavisur. In *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages II. Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 2*, edited by Kari Ellen Gade, 42–46. Turnhout, Brepols.
- Jónsson, Finnur (ed.). 1912–1915. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*. A1. Copenhagen: Villadsen and Christensen
- . 1912–1915. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*. B1. Copenhagen: Villadsen and Christensen.
- . 1912–1915. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*. B2. Copenhagen: Villadsen and Christensen.
- Kuhn, Hans. 1929. *Das Füllwort of-um im Altwestnordischen*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- . 1933/1969. Zur Wortstellung und -betonung im Altgermanischen. Reprinted 1969. *Kleine Schriften I*, edited by Dietrich Hoffmann, Vol. 1, 18–103. Berlin: de Gruyter.

- . 1983. *Das Dróttkvætt*. Heidelberg: Winter.
- Marold, Edith. 2012. Einarr Skúlason. Vellekla. In *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages I. Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1*, edited by Diana Whaley, 283–329. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Mines, Rachel. 2002. An examination of Kuhn's second law and its validity as a metrical-syntactical rule. *Studies in Philology* 99 (4): 337–355.
- Nordal, Sigurður (ed.). 1944. *Flateyjarbók*. Vol. 1. Akranes: Flateyjarútgáfan.
- Sievers, Eduard. 1893. *Altgermanische Metrik*. Halle a.S.: Niemeyer.
- Sigurðsson, Þorgeir. 2014. Nýjar skjálfhendur á 12. öld. *Són, tímarit um óðfræði* 12: 55–67.
- . 2016. Tvískelfdur háttur og Rekstefja (a submission in *Són, tímarit um óðfræði* 14).
- Þorgeirsson, Haukur. 2012. Late Placement of the Finite Verb in Old Norse *Fornyrðislag* Meter. *Journal of Germanic linguistics* 24 (3): 233–269.