THE METRICS OF ITALIAN NURSERY RHYMES

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In recent years some transformational grammarians have turned their attention to the analysis of poetry. Some of the most important contributions have been made by Halle and Keyser, Maling, and Kiparsky.\(^1\) In this work the metrical theory advanced by Halle and Keyser is applied to the analysis of Italian nursery rhymes. When suitable, examples are taken from other oral traditions including the religious carol and the proverb. Throughout this work standard Italian orthography is used when possible for rhymes in dialect as well as in standard. Many of the nursery rhymes have several variations. In such cases the choice of which variation to present was largely arbitrary, given that the metrical patterns of the variations were substantially the same.

When speaking of metrical patterns, there are at least two levels of representation to which one must refer. One is the abstract metrical pattern, which is a series of strong (S) and weak (w) positions in the line. The other is the surface pattern, in which the abstract underlying pattern is realized and in which the normal linguistic rules of stress of the language are observed. In these nursery rhymes the surface pattern is a sequence of stressed (') and unstressed ( ) syllables. The correspondence rules map the abstract pattern into the surface pattern. It is the correspondence rules evident in these rhymes to which we will turn our attention.

When speaking of nursery rhymes we often find a third level of representation. This level is a second surface pattern, in which the abstract pattern may impose itself on the surface representation in such a way that the linguistic rules of stress may be violated, giving three levels: abstract pattern, surface pattern (in which the linguistic rules of stress are observed), and surface II (in which the linguistic rules of stress may be violated). For example, in Italian and in the various dialects of Italy illustrated in this paper, clitic pronouns\(^2\) and articles never receive stress by the normal stress rules. But in these nursery rhymes both clitic pronouns and articles often receive stress. In all such cases the clitic pronoun or article corresponds to an underlying S position; that is, the abstract pattern imposes itself on the surface. Thus, the abstract pattern of a nursery rhyme may be more immediately apparent than the abstract pattern of a poem of another genre. It is this imposition of the abstract pattern onto the surface which gives nursery rhymes their sing-song quality. In the examples given in this paper this third level of representation, surface II, is pointed out whenever suitable.

The major interest of this paper is the correspondence rules of Italian nursery rhymes. Halle and Keyser, in "On The Theoretical Base of Metrical Verse," characterize the abstract metrical pattern of English nursery rhymes as shown in (1)

\[
(1) \quad (wS)^n (w) \quad \text{where} \quad n = 2, 3, 4.
\]

(1) has the three expansions shown in (2):

\[
(2) \quad \begin{align*}
& a. wS\, wS \\
& b. wS\, wS\, wS \\
& c. wS\, wS\, wS\, wS \\
\end{align*}
\]

In (2a) \(n=1\); in (2b) \(n=2\); in (2c) \(n=3\). The first line of (2a), (2b), and (2c) does not have the optional final w position; the second line does. \(w\) in this formula may correspond to 0, 1, 2, or 3 syllables. Guéron presents a similar proposal for English nursery rhymes, with the difference that she claims that \(n\) in (1) is precisely 4 and that a halfline analysis (which she compares to the analysis of Old English alliterative verse in Halle and Keyser's "English Stress") can often be justified.\(^3\) Guéron claims that formula (1) gives the abstract metrical pattern for French comptines, and that \(w\) corresponds to 0, 1, 2, or 3 unstressed syllables in French as well.\(^4\)

For the Italian nursery rhyme, however, (1) would be a plausible but misleading characterization of the abstract pattern. It is shown in the examples below that most Italian nursery rhymes have an iambic or trochaic meter. Thus a better characterization of the abstract metrical pattern for the Italian nursery rhyme is seen in (3):

\[
(3) \quad \begin{align*}
& a. \text{iambic} \quad (wS)^n (w) \quad \text{where} \quad n = 2, 3, 4 \\
& b. \text{trochaic} \quad (Sw)^n (w) \quad \text{where} \quad n = 2, 3, 4 \\
\end{align*}
\]

(3a) appears to be identical to (1). However, in (3a) \(w\) corresponds to zero or one syllable only (or more if synalepha\(^5\) is exhibited). The fact that \(w\) in (3a) and (3b) corresponds to zero or one syllable is a major difference between (3a) and (1).

In (1), besides the correspondence rule that \(w\) can be realized by 0, 1, 2, or 3 syllables, the only other correspondence rule given by Halle and Deyser is that stress maxima may not appear in \(w\) positions. A stress maximum is a tonic (stressed) syllable of a major category word (noun, verb, adjective, adverb, exclamation) which is located between two unstressed syllables within the line.
Thus in (1) an underlying S position may be realized by a stressed or unstressed syllable. An underlying w position may be realized by any combination of 0, 1, 2, or 3 stressed or unstressed syllables. But if a w position is realized by a stress maximum, the line is unmetrical.

In Italian, as well, the correspondence rule that stress maxima may not appear in w positions is observed. However, various other correspondence rules also operate. These rules are pointed out below as the relevant examples are brought up.

Let us begin by examining some rhymes whose abstract pattern and surface realizations are very similar. (4) is a nursery rhyme in a dialect from Calabria, in southern Italy:

(4) 'A gàllina zoppa, zoppa
Quànta pèpe trépe 'ngróppa
È ne tene vèntiquáttro
Una, due, tre e quattro.

The hen limps
How many feathers does it have in its hind?
It has twenty-four of them.
One, two, three, and four.

The diacritics above the line show the stressed syllables one hears when children recite the rhyme. The pattern of unstressed (U) and stressed (I) syllables to the right of each line above shows which syllables would receive stress by the linguistic rules of stress of the dialect. I will argue that synalepha is exhibited in the boxed-in syllables.

By comparing where the stress is actually heard and where the linguistic rules assign stress, we can see that in lines 1 and 3 there are instances in which a syllable which is not assigned stress by the normal linguistic rules appears with stress:

(5) line 1  A gàllina zoppa zoppa
line 3  È ne tene vèntiquáttro

The circled syllables in (5) are not assigned primary stress by the normal linguistic rules of the dialect.

Thus (4) is an example of a rhyme which has three distinct levels of representation. What we actually hear is marked above the line, what the linguistic rules of stress would produce is marked to the right side of the line, and the abstract pattern is what we must still determine. If we contrast the diacritics above the line to the pattern to the right of the line, we find that every violation of a linguistic rule of stress yields a stressed syllable before an unstressed syllable. The pattern we actually hear (surface II) is given in (6):

(6) /U/U/U/U/
/U/U/U/U/U/
/U/U/U/U/U/
/U/U/U/U/U/
well-known metrical pattern immediately emerges. Still, it is possible to say that what we have in (14) are trochaic lines, as seen in (15):

(15) \(\text{\underline{W}} / \text{\underline{W}} / \text{\underline{W}} / \text{\underline{W}} / \text{\underline{W}}\)
\(S \text{ w} \text{ S} \text{ w} \text{ S} \text{ w} \text{ S} \text{ w}\)

Although the analysis of (14) as trochaic is perfectly in accord with all the preceding discussion, one would not want to stop with (15). The fact that the same strong positions in lines 1 and 2 are realized by unstressed or stressed syllables and that all the weak positions are realized by unstressed syllables does not seem to be an accident.

Looking back to (4), we find that once synalepha is assumed in the proper place, Ss are realized by stressed syllables and ws are realized by unstressed syllables. On the other hand, in the religious carol in (8) the first and second S positions in the line are sometimes realized by unstressed syllables. It is clear that usually w positions are realized by unstressed syllables and S positions by stressed syllables. The major question, then, is whether there is a regularity to be found in those instances when a w position is realized by a stressed syllable (a phenomenon of which we have not as yet seen any examples) or an S position is realized by an unstressed syllable. We have already mentioned one regularity—and that is that stress maxima may not occur in w positions. As to the distribution of unstressed syllables in S positions, however, we have not yet found any generalization. And in (8), the carol, no clear generalization emerges. However, in (14) a certain regularity appears.

Looking at (14), we note that internal rhyme or repetition is not present here. Instead we find parallelism, the recurrence of syntactic elements. Each line begins with a conjunctive element, a second-person reflexive clitic, and a second-person indicative verb. According to Kiparsky, "those syntactic elements which are counted as parallel for purpose of verse are, at some point in the derivation, counted as same according to transformational grammar" (p. 236). The beginnings of both lines clearly fulfill this requirement in surface structure. It is possible to argue that the lines end, as well, in parallelism in surface structure, in that both noun phrases and prepositional phrases have been analyzed as dominated by NP in surface structure.

Using parallelism as a key toward understanding the structure of this couplet, we can propose that each line consists of two half lines, the major break coming after the verbs:

(16) O ti mangi / sta minestra
O ti ietti / da finestra

We see, then, that each half line consists of the surface pattern \(\text{\underline{W}} / \text{\underline{W}} / \text{\underline{W}} / \text{\underline{W}}\). At this point we can propose the following generalization:

(17) The first S position of a trochaic half-line is realized by an unstressed syllable.
When we look at other children's rhymes, we find that we must modify the above generalization. Consider the following tongue twister:

(18) Sul tagliare l'aglio taglia
Non tagliare la tovaglia
La tovaglia non è l'aglio
Se la tagli fai uno sbaglio

On the cutting board cut the garlic
Don't cut the table cloth
The table cloth is not garlic
If you cut it you're making a mistake

If we assume synalepha in the boxed-in syllables of line 4 (fai uno), lines 2, 3, and 4 have exactly the same surface pattern as that found in (14). Parallelism is not present here. However, even without the clue of parallelism we can distinguish a natural point at which to divide the full lines in (18), and that is precisely after the fourth syllable. Note that the break between the fourth and fifth syllables not only equally divides the line, but also coincides with a word boundary. Thus (18) may be analyzed as consisting of the following half lines:

(19) Sul tagliare / l'aglio taglia
Non tagliare / la tovaglia
La tovaglia / non è l'aglio
Se la tagli / fai uno sbaglio

and each half line of lines 2, 3, and 4 consist of the surface pattern \(0000\). Again we have a trochaic half line and the first S position is realized by an unstressed syllable. Line 1, however, has a stressed syllable in the first S position of the second half line (\(0000\)). This variation from the other lines strengthens the hypothesis that what we have here are trochaic lines, since the variation is a stressed syllable coming precisely where we have proposed an underlying S position. Thus we might modify (17), as in (20):

(20) The first S position of a trochaic half line is optionally and frequently realized by an unstressed syllable.

Example (18) displays many interesting poetic factors besides metrical ones. Remember that in (4) we noted internal repetition, and in (14) we noted parallelism. Here again we find a line-internal relationship. This tongue twister is built on the repetition of the sound \(g\) (\(g\)) in the various forms of the verb tagliare (taglia, tagliare, taglio) and in the nouns taglia, tovaglia, aglio, and sbaglio. Note that the first half line of line 3 is a repetition of the second half line of the preceding line. Looking back to the religious carol in (8), we find this same kind of repetition (\(e\) nato at the end of line 1 is repeated at the beginning of line 2) as well as parallelism (in lines 3 and 4). From this point on, such non-metrical relationships will not be pointed out unless they are particularly interesting or revealing. However, the reader will find that all of the examples in this paper display such relationships. Certainly these relationships are not unique to oral poetry, whether it be religious or children's or some other type. However, it seems to me that such relationships are more prevalent in the children's poetry I have examined than in the more "literary" poetry with which I am familiar. I would suspect that repetition, both of sounds (internal rhymes, etc.) and syntactic structures (parallelism), is an integral part of the nursery rhyme.

Using the correspondence rule (20), we find that some more complex examples than those examined thus far now lend themselves to an analysis in which they are composed of trochaic half lines.

Consider (21), another religious chant from the Trentino, and (22), a Neapolitan nursery rhyme.

(21) I angiolìni i pregàva
La Madonà la predícava
El Bambín en ginocchion
El disèva le cazzion
Chi le sà e chi le dà
El nata en Paradís.

The angels they begged
The Madonna she preached
The Baby on his knees
He said the orations
He who knows them and who says them
He will go to Paradise.

(22) Arri Arri A
E si mònica osvàdi
E i clugi non potè
E si mònica acciarèv

Arri Arri A
A holy monk was riding
The mule wasn't able
The holy monk killed him.

In (21), assuming synalepha in the boxed-in syllables, we find trochaic half lines whose first S position is realized as an unstressed syllable. We note, also, two other phenomena.

First, in the first half line of line 2 there is an extra final unstressed syllable. This corresponds to the optional final w position in the abstract pattern for trochaic lines and half lines given in (36) above. Without a half-line analysis for (21), line 2 would be an irregular line under any metrical analysis. However, with a half-line analysis, the extra weak syllable is allowed since it falls at the end of the half line. Thus, this variation offers further support for our half-line analysis.

Second, in the second half line of lines 3, 4, 5, and 6, the final w position
is not filled. This is the first instance we have seen thus far in which w corresponds to something other than one unstressed syllable. At this point we may be tempted to propose that only line final w can be realized by zero syllables. However, we will see in (26) below that such a proposal would fail.

In (22), the first line acts to herald the poem and is entirely uninformative as to the metrical pattern. It could well be a trochaic line with its final w position unrealized in surface representation. Or it could be an iambic line with its initial w position unrealized in surface representation. Lines 2, 3, and 4, however, are clearly trochaic (thus suggesting that line 1 is also trochaic), with the first S position of each half line being realized by an unstressed syllable. Again the half-line analysis explains the presence of the extra unstressed syllable at the end of the first half line of lines 2 and 4. One might argue that line 4 does not have an extra w position, but rather that synaesthesia occurs in this line thus:

(23) E si monica acciarev
S w S w S w S

In this way only line 2 has an extra weak syllable at the end of its first half line. However, there is at least one argument against proposing synaesthesia here. Note that the first half lines of lines 2 and 4 are identical. Thus one would expect them to have the same metrical analysis at all levels. Since the environment for synaesthesia is not met in line 2, one would seem to be denying the very obvious fact that lines 2 and 4 have identical first half lines if one were to propose synaesthesia as in (23). Thus, I have assumed line 4 has an extra final w position in its first half line.

In (22) we find also that the final w position of the second half line in lines 2, 3, and 4 is unrealized.

At this point it is clear that (20) seems to be a reasonable approximation of a needed correspondence rule in Italian nursery rhymes. Still the questions remain whether the first S position in whole lines is also optionally realized by an unstressed syllable and whether this correspondence rule is limited to trochaic lines or is valid for iambic lines as well. The second question is answered by an analysis of (24), a Trentino rhyme:

(24) Quando la Paganella la gá 'l capél
Oh ch'el fa brút oh ch'el fa bèl
When the Paganella (a mountain) has its hat (snow)
Either it will be ugly weather or it will be pretty weather.

The second half line of line 1 (assuming synaesthesia counts the syllabic l together with the preceding syllable as one syllable) and both half lines of line 2 are clearly iambic, and we find that the first S position of these half lines may be realized by an unstressed syllable. At this point we may replace (20) with (25), noting that (25) applies to both trochaic and iambic verse:

(25) The first S position of a half line is optionally and frequently realized by an unstressed syllable.

Returning to (24), we see that the first half line of line 1 has an extra final unstressed syllable, corresponding to the optional final w in the abstract pattern for iambic lines (given in (3a) above). There is another extra element in this half line that does not appear in the three other half lines: an extra inverted foot at the beginning of the line. Inverted feet are frequently found at the beginning of iambic lines, thus this foot is no surprise. An interesting fact, however, is that the correspondence rule in (25) counts the first S position following the inverted foot as the first S position of the half line, allowing it to be realized by an unstressed syllable.

In all the examples thus far both S and w positions have been realized in the surface by one syllable (with synaesthesia now and then) except for those cases in which a final w was not realized (as in lines 3, 4, 5, and 6 of (21) and lines 2, 3, and 4 of (22)). In (26), a Trentino rhyme, we find lines in which various w positions are not realized:

(26) Róssio di sêra
Buôn têmpo se spéra
Róssio di matína
La piòggia s'avvicina
Quándo 'l pióvé e 'l tonéga
Sátti fur dla vanéga

Red in the evening
One hopes for good weather
Red in the morning
Rain is nearing
When it rains and thunders
Jump out from the (cultivated) fields.

It is perhaps easier to analyze this poem from the bottom up. Starting with line 6, we see a clearly trochaic verse emerging, with the first S position of the second half line realized by an unstressed syllable (in accordance with rule (25)). Line 5 is metrical identical to line 6, assuming synaesthesia in the boxed-in syllables.

Line 4 presents a new problem in that the trochaic line begins with an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one. There are several possible ways to analyze the first half line of line 4. First, the initial unstressed syllable may correspond to an underlying w position with the initial S position being unrealized. Under this analysis this would be the first instance we have come across in which an S is not realized in the surface. Alternatively, the initial unstressed syllable may correspond to an underlying S position, and the following w position may be unrealized. Another possibility is that there is an
extra optional w position at the beginning of the line in the abstract pattern for trochaic verse. However, this would be the first instance we have come across in which the optional w is at the beginning rather than the end of a line or half line, and such an optional w would greatly increase the difficulty of distinguishing between trochaic and iambic verse. Still another possible analysis is one in which diphthongs in Italian are counted as two syllables. Thus line 4 would have the syllable pattern seen below:

(27) La pioggia s'avvicina

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{S} & \text{w} & \text{S} & \text{w Sw} \\
\end{array} \]

Under this analysis, the first half line of (27) presents no new problems, since correspondence rule (25) tells us that the initial unstressed syllable is the realization of an underlying S. Note that saying that diphthongs are two syllables presents no problem for the analysis of all the previous rhymes in this paper, since synalecta can be called upon in all those cases to count the diphthong as one position. This last alternative seems the most reasonable to me. With it we can maintain the correspondence rule that S positions correspond to precisely one syllable in the surface representation and w positions correspond to one or zero syllables in the surface.

With the analysis that lines 4, 5, and 6 consist of trochaic half lines, we can view lines 1, 2, and 3 as also having an abstract pattern of trochaic half lines. We see, first, that the second half line of every verse of (26) is identical in the surface metrical pattern, with the exception that line 5 has synalecta. The first half line, however, varies. It is interesting to note that with this rhyme we can see that the division into half lines is a purely metrical division. There is no need of a caesura or even a word boundary between the two half lines. In line 3 we have only Sw instead of SwSw. In line 2 we have SwSw, but both ws are not realized in the surface. In line 1 we have Sw, but again the w is not realized in the surface.

(26) is an example of a very common poetical technique, that of ending the poem with a series of regular metrical lines. Halle and Keyser as well as Smith and others point out how this technique acts to bring a closure to the poem.\footnote{11}

While (26) displays a certain amount of surface metrical irregularity, it is clearly trochaic. Not all nursery rhymes, however, are clearly trochaic or iambic. Consider (27), a Trentino rhyme:

(27) Ócio bé\l
Só fradél
Recédna bé\l\a
Só soré\l\a
Campanel\l\ d'arzênt che fé
Din dón din dón dín dón

Pretty eye
Its brother

Pretty ear
Its sister
Little bell of silver that goes
Ding dong ding dong ding dong.

At a quick glance we can see that lines 1 and 2 are totally uninformative as to whether the meter is trochaic (with the final w not realized) or iambic (with the initial w not realized). Line 3 leads us to believe the meter is iambic, if we are to maintain the generalization that optional w positions come only at the end of lines and half lines and not at the beginning. But line 4 turns right around and contradicts line 3 by being a clear trochaic line. To order to analyze line 4 as iambic, we would have to say that the initial w was not realized and a final optional w was present—a metrical contortition that seems to have no purpose other than to impose an analysis as iambic on a trochaic line. Line 5 brings us back to an iambic meter, with the first strong position being realized by an unstressed syllable. And line 6 is clearly iambic.

Rhymes such as (27), which “lead you up the garden path” with some verses (such as line 4), are not unusual. Part of the overall point of the meaning of this particular rhyme is to hold you in suspense until the end and then surprise you. The rhyme is accompanied by hand gestures. As you say line 1, you point to a child’s eye; with line 2, to the other eye; with line 3, to an ear; with line 4, to the other ear; with line 5, you slowly move your finger from the bridge of the nose down to the tip; and with line 6, you wiggle the nose between your fingers, one time for each syllable. The hand gestures, thus, move from one side of the face to the other and back, finally coming to concentrate on the center of the face. The metrical lines, likewise, alternate between iambic and trochaic, finally settling down to iambic as the hands point to the child’s nose. We have here an example of the way meter may be used to parallel and thus point out nonphonetic aspects of a poem.

Rhyme (27) also answers a question posed earlier, with respect to correspondence rule (25). The question was whether this rule applies only to half lines or to full lines as well. From line 5 of (27) we can see that the rule applies here to a full line, allowing the first S position to be realized by an unstressed syllable. Thus we may alter (25) in the following way:

(28) The first S position of a line or half line is optionally and frequently realized by an unstressed syllable.

Thus far we have examined the correspondence rule seen in (28) which tells us which S positions may be realized by unstressed syllables. Other types of metrical regularities are often found in these rhymes as well. In (29) we find an example of metrical “merging”; that is, the two outer lines (1 and 4) have identical metrical patterns and the two inner lines (2 and 3) have identical metrical patterns distinct from those of the outer lines.

(29) Giro giró tondo

Pretty eye
Its brother
Cascia il mondo
Cascia la terra
Tutti giù per terra
Spin spin around
The world falls
The earth falls
Everyone down on the ground.

Lines 1 and 4 are clearly trochaic. Line 2 would be a pure trochaic line if synalephs were called upon to reduce the two internal unstressed syllables to one:

(30) casca mondo

However, if we employ synaleph in line 2, we lose the obviously intended metrical identity with line 3 (an identity that matches the syntactic parallelism). Thus, I conclude that synaleph is not to be employed in line 2.

The problem, then, is how to account for the second internal unstressed syllable in lines 2 and 3. If the poem were analyzed as consisting of half lines with the second half line of each verse being a trochee, then the extra unstressed syllable in lines 2 and 3 would be a realization of the underlying optional final w position (see 3b above). The analysis is strengthened by the fact that the last two syllables of each verse are lengthened when children sing them, setting them apart from the preceding syllables. (29) is sung as children hold hands in a ring and then all fall down, as in the English nursery rhyme “Ring Around the Rosie.” And like rosie in the first line, tondo in the first line of (29) is emphasized. Also, as the children fall with the last line, the intonation of the line descends, starting from a higher peak than the other lines:

(31) tondo
ti giù per ter ra

An alternative way to explain lines 2 and 3 is to propose that they are trochees with the second s position being realized by an unstressed syllable and the second w position not being realized. Such an analysis allows s positions which are not the first s of a line or half line to be realized by an unstressed syllable and thus reduces correspondence rule (28) to vacuity. For this reason, combined with the fact that the song makes a clear break before the last two syllables of each verse, I reject this proposal in favor of the half-line analysis.

Note that the metrical nesting in (29) does not parallel the rhyme scheme. The metrical nesting has the pattern abba, while the rhyme scheme is aabb. In (32) we see another instance of metrical nesting, but this time the metrical pattern and the rhyme scheme are identical, both being abcb:

(32) Ambra bà cioci écucco
Tè ciocci aji compì
Che facevano l’amore
Ciof fiofia del doctore
Il doctore le egitò
Ambra bà cioci écucco

Eeny meeny miney mo
Three little birds on a dresser
Who were making love
With the daughter of the doctor
The doctor shouted at them
Eeny meeny miney mo.

First note that (32) is an example of a rhyme whose surface stress pattern (shown to the right of the lines) violates the rules of linguistic stress (that is, a rhymed with a surface II). In lines 1 and 6 the word Ambra bà, a nonsense magic word, receives final stress. However, its initial syllable is said with equal stress to the final syllable. By normal rules of stress, we would expect only a secondary stress on the first syllable. In line 3 the final syllable of facevano would not receive stress by the linguistic rules of stress. The same is true of if and le in line 5. Sul of line 2, che of line 3, coda and del of line 4 all may receive emphatic stress, but in an unemphatic reading of those lines would not receive stress. Thus in this rhyme the underlying metrical pattern is imposed on the surface to a large extent. This fact comes as no surprise when you consider that (32) is a counting rhyme (just as the English “Eeny Meeny Miney Mo” is). Thus a strong surface beat is essential.

There are at least two reasonable ways to analyze (32). One is to say the poem is basically iambic, as the boxed-in section in (33) shows:

(33) / / / / / / / / / /

Lines 1 and 6, under this analysis, begin with an inverted foot. Lines 2, 3, 4, and 5 have an initial w position that is not realized in surface. And lines 3 and 4 have the optional final w position.

Alternatively, one might say (32) is basically trochaic, as the boxed-in section in (34) shows:

(34) / / / / / / / / / /
would not receive stress by the normal rules of stress.

Looking at (35) we find that in lines 1 and 2 unstressed syllables come back to back in the center of the line. Such an occurrence is typical of a verse made up of half lines. If we call a trochaic half line A (2/2/2 // (w) = A) and an iambic half line A' (2/2/2 // (s) = A'), then we can see that (35) has the following underlying pattern:

\[
\begin{align*}
(36) & \quad A & A' \\
& \quad A & A' \\
& \quad A' & A' \\
& \quad A' & A'
\end{align*}
\]

In line 1 we have a perfect trochaic half line followed by a perfect iambic one. In line 2 the first w position is not realized and the second half line has the final optional position for many speakers. In line 3, if synalepha occurs in the boxed-in syllables, we have two perfect trochaic half lines. And in line 4 we find iambic half lines with the second having the final optional w position. (35) is thus built of various combinations of iambic and trochaic half lines. Lines 1 and 2 are composed of mirror-image half lines. Lines 3 and 4 are composed of like half lines.

In this paper I have claimed that, for Italian nursery rhymes, underlying S position is usually realized by a stressed syllable and underlying w position is usually realized by an unstressed syllable, although it may be realized by zero syllables. Furthermore, there is a correspondence rule (see (28)) that says that the first S position of a line or half line may be realized by an unstressed syllable. We have also seen examples of rhymes whose metrical pattern is based on a system of nesting or of mirror images. I do not want to leave the reader with the false idea, however, that all Italian nursery rhymes have very complex metrical patterns. Thus, I will end with two examples of rhymes that are unlike all the previous examples.

In (37) we have a Milanese counting rhyme:

\[
\begin{align*}
(37) & \quad \text{Pin pin oculin} \\
& \quad \text{Soff' al pe' de' ta'lin} \\
& \quad \text{Pah moh pin fresc} \\
& \quad \text{Indovina che l'e} \\
& \quad \text{Chesto chi' }
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Pin pin little bird} \\
\text{Under the foot of the table} \\
\text{Soft bread fresh bread} \\
\text{Guess what it is} \\
\text{This one here!}
\end{align*}
\]

As usually happens in counting rhymes, stress is assigned to syllables which would not receive stress by the normal linguistic rules of stress. Thus the stresses on the first syllables of ocevin (line 1), tatil (line 2), and indovina (line 3), plus

Under this analysis lines 3 and 4 are perfect trochaic lines. Lines 1, 2, 5, and 6 have the final w position not realized. Lines 1 and 6 also have the first S position in the box realized by an unstressed syllable and have an extra initial S position followed by a w that is not realized in the surface. With this analysis, correspondence rule (28) must somehow count the second S position of lines 1 and 6 as though it were initial.

The iambic analysis has the advantage that no new correspondence rules need to be proposed, nor do any old ones need to be modified. We have already seen inverting initial feet in iambic verse (see (24) above), as well as words that are not realized in the surface. However, there is no one line of (32) that is a "perfect" iambic line, in that we never have wSwSwSwS with all the Sws being realized by stressed syllables and all the ws being realized by unstressed syllables.

The trochaic analysis has the advantage that lines 3 and 4 are perfect trochaic lines. However, this analysis has the disadvantage that correspondence rule (28) must treat the second S position as if it were the initial S. But if we look back to (24), we see there an example of the same phenomenon. In (24) the first line begins with an inverted foot and the second S position is counted as initial S position by rule (28). It may be that when the initial foot of a line is defective in some way (in (24) it is inverted; in (32) it consists of an S followed by an unrealized w), correspondence rule (28) applies to the second S position instead of the first S position. Or, instead, it may be that when a given line of a poem has an extra initial foot, correspondence rule (28) applies to the second S position rather than the first. At this point I do not have evidence to choose between these two alternatives.

Considering the above factors plus the observation that every verse of (32) begins with a stressed syllable, the trochaic analysis seems the most likely to me.

Besides nesting, there is another relationship one may find between the lines and fial lines of a rhyme. In (35), a Calabrese nursery rhyme, we see this new relationship:

(35) Tessa jessa 'ncap 'ncap
Ngo niama do'ya la napa (na)
Cara trong pan e casa
E po' ne pizzica lu nazo

She weaves, weaves, sings(?)
Let's go where Granny is
She gives us each bread and cheese
And then she paches our nose.

Again we are dealing with a rhyme in which the linguistic rules of stress are violated. For example, both ne of line 2 and the final syllable of pizzica in line 4
che (line 3) and the last syllable of chesto (line 4), are all violations of the normal stress rules, since these syllables would not ordinarily be assigned primary stress.

It would be possible to analyze (37) as a trochaic poem. However, the pattern that emerges there is not one in which both stressed and unstressed syllables play an equal metrical role. Rather, the overriding metrical fact of (37) is that each line has precisely four stressed syllables, except for the last one, which has only three. The effect of the lack of a fourth stressed syllable in the last line is to jar you, an effect which matches perfectly the meaning of the poem. The last syllable of the last line is said as you point to the person who now becomes "it" in whatever game you are playing. The similarity between the first two lines of (37) and the first two lines of the English rhyme "Rain, Rain Go Away" (analyzed by Halle and Keyser in "On the Theoretical Bases of Metrical Verse") is striking.

More interesting than the metrics of (37) is the intricate scheme of sound relationships between the words. Pin is a nonsense word, chosen precisely for its sound. It rhymes with osin and tailin and an internal part of indovina. Pin and pan echo each other, with only their internal vowels contrasting. Pin enters into alliteration with the second pin, pè, pan, and the second pan. In the last two lines the words che, chesto, and chi alliterate. The first line has its first two syllables enter into parallelism. The third line has its first two syllables parallel to its last two syllables. The second stressed syllable of line 2 rhymes with the third and fourth stressed syllables of line 4.

And finally, there are brief nursery rhymes which seem to have a random metrical system, such as this Calabrese one:

(38) Giòggio
Chile chi i véé vò

Giòggio [boy's name]
Whatever he sees he wants.

It is possible to say that (38) is iambic with an inverted initial foot in both lines. Alternatively, one might say that the poem is made of half lines where the first half line of each verse is trochaic and the second half line is iambic and line 1 is missing its second half line. There are many other (equally far-fetched) analyses one could propose, I am sure. But with just two lines to judge by, this rhyme defies a definitive analysis.

In conclusion, we have seen that Italian nursery rhymes require correspondence rule (28) in addition to Halle and Keyser's rule that a stress maximum may not fall in a w position. We have also seen examples of metrical mirror images and metrical nesting. Insofar as various lines of a poem have the same underlying abstract pattern but different surface realizations in a precise pattern such as nesting (see (34) where lines 2, 3, 4, and 5 have identical underlying patterns, but 2 and 5 are realized in a different way from 3 and 4), we have examples of correspondence rules.

While it may be possible to support the hypothesis that there is a universal abstract pattern for all nursery rhymes, such a hypothesis would be basically uninteresting, since it is precisely the correspondence rules (which may differ vastly from language to language) that give nursery rhymes their highly regular, often sing-song, surface realizations. Thus the proper focal point for a student of metrics looking at nursery rhymes is the correspondence rules.

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AT CHAPEL HILL

Thanks go to Paul Kiparsky, Joan Maing, Morris Halle, Lella Gardini, and Giulio Lepischy for comments on an earlier version of this work.


2. A clitic pronoun is a weak (or stone) pronoun. For example, in la redo, la is a clitic pronoun. But in redo le, le is not clitic.


5. Synalepha is a metrical convention which allows adjacent vowels (and certain other elements) to be counted as a single syllable. This does not mean that the vowels will be pronounced as one syllable. Synalepha is a convention by which surface syllables may correspond to positions in the abstract pattern. It is a purely metrical device and does not entail any elision or slurring in the spoken verse.

6. The syllabic n is the result of an optional rule which here dropped the initial vowel / before n in the prefixe. Thus /grappa/ is a reduced form of /ingrappa/. Another example of syllabic n is discussed in footnote 13. Examples of syllable / are seen in examples (24) and (26).

7. In (4) and throughout this paper diphthongs are treated as one syllable. In example (8) in line 3, pannert is treated as though it has four syllables. However, the third and fourth syllables are shown to exhibit synalepha. Thus, if one were to argue that pannert has only three syllables (the last being a diphthong), the same metrical analysis proposed for (8) would still apply.

See the discussion in the text following (26) and (27) as well as footnote 14 for further remarks about the handling of diphthongs.


9. Notice that the half-line break is a metrical abstraction which need not (and in (21) does not) correspond to a surface caesura. For further examples or half lines without corresponding caesuras, see (26) and the discussion following it.

10. Perhaps at a level before truncation rules in the phonology take place this is filled by an unstressed syllable. For example, ginactio (line 3), oation (line 4), dis (line 5), and Parado (line 5) may have underlying ginacelio, oationio, dit, and Paradoio. At this pre-truncation stage, Bambino (line 3) would have an underlying Bambino, making the first half line of line 3 an extra final w position (just as line 2 does).

11. It would be interesting if we could argue that all w positions must be realized by one syllable at some point in the derivation, but in surface a w may correspond to zero syllables. However, an examination of examples (26) (line 2), (52) (lines 1 and 6), and (37) (lines 4 and 5) shows that such a proposal must fail.


12. Note that the pattern of stressed (') and unstressed ( ) syllables to the right of each line in (32) is the pattern one hears and not the pattern produced by the linguistic rules of stress. Thus this pattern is not surface II, in contrast to (4) above, where the pattern to the right of each line is for surface II.

13. In the first line of (35) we have syllable n in  hva. The syllable n here is the result of the same rule discussed in footnote 6.

14. Were we to count the diphthong in mi as two syllables, we would have a perfect trochaic half line as the first half line of (35).