

Foot Structure in Early North Germanic

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When describing the prosodic foot structure of a language, there is a checklist of issues to determine: what foot type is used, whether feet are built iteratively from the left or right edge of the word (direction of parsing), which foot (if any) carries the primary word stress (end-rule), what elements (if any) count as extrametrical, and what other licences (such as the tolerance of 'degenerate', non-optimal feet) are allowed. I apply this 'metrical stress' perspective to early North Germanic c. 500 to 800, an important and dynamic period of relatively rapid change, which saw a number of prosodically constrained sound changes – including vowel reductions and losses, and the phonologization of various types of umlaut. Some aspects of foot structure are relatively easy to determine, such as the foot type and direction of parsing, while the remaining points are more difficult to assess. I take as my central problem the question of whether word-final consonants should be analysed as extrametrical during any stage of North Germanic, and argue that patterns of vowel reductions and later poetic evidence (from c. 900-1100) both suggest that final *-s* and *'-R'* (some kind of palatalized rhotic) are extrametrical and invisible to foot parsing, while – in contrast to what several recent analyses have claimed – all other final consonants are fully metrical. I make no attempt to address the possibility of degenerate feet, resulting in a typological profile for early North Germanic foot structure that is moderately detailed, but with some non-trivial questions that remain undetermined.