

Metrical pattern in Noakhali Bangla: an OT account

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Noakhali Bangla (NKB), an eastern dialect of Bangla spoken in Tripura (India) and Bangladesh, has prosodic properties listed as below.

- i) Every content word is a prosodic word.
- ii) Binary trochees are constructed from left-to-right.
- iii) Strict iterative footing is not allowed.
- iv) Rhythm is ternary: every third syllable after the initial prominence is assigned stress.
- v) In three and six syllable words the right most syllable remains unfooted.
- vi) In four syllable words the two right most syllables remain unfooted.
- vii) In five syllable words a second foot is constructed aligned with the right edge of the word.
- viii) Primary stress is mandatorily assigned to the left most syllable.
- viii) Maximum size of a word with light (CV) syllables is of six syllables; and with CVC the size is four syllables.
- ix) There is no quantity distinction among syllables: CV, CVC, CVV, CVVC are all Light.
- x) Morphological structures or boundaries have no bearing on stress distribution: every word is a single prosodic unit.

Location of stress (primary and secondary) has been determined with perceptual evidence collected from informants including the native-speaker-author himself.

Within the dispensation of Optimality Theory (OT), the entire story of the NKB metrics can be captured in terms of the following grammar.

a) For CV sequences the projected constraint hierarchy is:

GrWd=PrWd, FT-BIN, ONSET, TROCHEE, ALIGN-L, *FTFT >> PARSE- σ >> ALL-FT-L, DEP- μ -IO

The constraint *FTFT: 'Feet must not be adjacent.', (not proposed first here) is crucially needed to avoid successive foot construction in NKB.

b) For sequences containing CVC, CVV and CVVC with or without CV the *comprehensive* OT grammar is

GrWd=PrWd, FT-BIN, ONSET, NUCLEUS, TROCHEE, ALIGN-L, *FTFT >> PARSE- σ >> ALL-FT-L, DEP- μ -IO >> NoCoda

(b) provides scope for comparing and contrasting NKB with Tripura Bangla (TB) as the latter is quantity sensitive though ternary in rhythm. Absence of quantity distinction among syllables in NKB calls for a serious consideration in terms of "Movement towards the 'Unmarked' since compared to Standard Colloquial Bangla (SCB), *reportedly* strictly binary along with quantity sensitivity, this emergence of weakening in metrification in NKB, and TB, can be contended as a characteristic mark of difference between standard and non-standard varieties. Certainly, the movement towards the 'Unmarked' continues in a new guise (iterative \rightarrow non-iterative) and one can track the route from the 'Marked' to the 'Unmarked' through SCB \rightarrow TB \rightarrow NKB. This *tripartite* comparison is however not the focus here.

Ternary rhythm is a marked phenomenon in prosody across the world. Invocation of *Lapse (in its varied incarnations, replacing *FTFT) is well known in literature, though well challenged as well. Keeping the controversy at bay, the present study offers a straight forward account of the phenomenon attested in NKB with binary trochees dispersed by one upbeat in penta- and hexasyllables even as rhythmicity is ensured. Appropriate ranking of relevant constraints does the wonder.