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Rhymer's Microcosm

Variation and Oral Composition of the 19th Century Finnish *Rekilaulu* Couplets

The Finnish 'long 19th century's' oral *rekilaulu* singing culture is a typical example of the internationally wide-spread, multifunctional genre of rhyming couplets. I[1] will refer to this genre as 'couplets', whether conceptualized as a unit of two long lines or four short lines (a quatrain), on the basis that its chief genre-identifier is the semantic construction of two equal parts: (1) a priming part and (2) an argument part. The semantic two-part construction characteristically manifests as an inverted semantic hierarchy – the unit's central idea, its message, is disclosed at the end. (Sykäri 2017.) The relation of the priming part to the argument part varies from it being an integral part of the message, or a thematically coherent introduction, to simply priming the argument part with a line that provides a suitable end rhyme, as in the following *rekilaulu* couplet:

> Sataa lunta, sataa vettä, | sataa rakehia.
> Kaikki turhat puheet ovat | ämmäin valehia.
>
> (Laihia 1888. Juho Kotkanen 33.)

> It snows, it rains, | it is hailing.
> All groundless talks are | lies of old hags.[2]

Other characteristic aspects of the couplet unit are: (a) it encloses a self-dependent lyric image or statement; (b) the performed unit may be memorized or extemporized, (c) a standalone couplet can be performed as such or several units can form a loosely bound thematic chain, and (d) in singing events and oral communication the units are typically performed by taking turns or reciprocally, sometimes competitively, between individuals or groups. In the past oral cultures the performance contexts covered a large variety of conventional or impromptu communicative instances and in many rural areas they were sung to accompany dance, in particular ring games and round dance.

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2 All translations are by the present author.

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In Finland, the couplet format in oral song was first documented by the end of the 18th century. Rhymed and stanzaic forms entered Finnish oral poetry late and first coexisted with the alliterative, iterative runosong tradition (Kallio; Bastman; Frog, this volume). Different forms of rhymed poetry had replaced this older tradition in western Finland by the 18th century, and during the 19th century, couplets first coexisted with the runosong and then gradually replaced it also in eastern parts, becoming the most popular type of Finnish oral song until the last collective singing cultures declined during the mid-war period. During this mid-war period, the hubristic attitudes and humoristic styles characteristic of the *rekilaulu* were adopted by many professional singers and song-makers to their repertoires (Hako 1981; Henriksson 2015). Melodies and songs at the lyrical end of the stylistic continuum early became part of published song books and were largely used in youth community events, schools, and by choirs. Today, many Finnish people know several couplets deriving from oral cultures as fixed songs, but very few know anything about the past oral singing cultures, or the versatility of the form.

Despite the pervasiveness of the couplet form in the world's pre-modern oral cultures and its central place in contemporary vital oral cultures and popular music lyrics, astonishingly little attention has been given to it in international, cross-cultural research. Early German research (Meyer 1885) addressed the *Schnaderhüpfel*[3] tradition of the Tirol, and early French research the structure of the French 'dance couplet' which shares the medieval history of the round dance *carole* (esp. Verrier 1931). Basing on this French tradition, Swiss ethnomusicologist Samuel Baud-Bovy (1936: 313–394) examined in his dissertation on Greek oral song also the rhyming couplets of the Dodecanese islands. His research combined the analysis of literary sources with fieldwork, and since the textualized, chiefly dance song material analysed reflects an oral tradition accessible to most people in the 19th century and early 20th century oral communities, his observations give a good starting point to analyse the archival material disposable for the *rekilaulu*.

Even if similar oral traditions had by that time disappeared from central Europe, they continued far longer in the 'margins' – e.g., Balkans, many areas of Spain and Portugal, Russia, Karelia, and the Mediterranean islands. The communicative oral traditions of the Mediterranean areas became one central focus of the performance-centred research during the 1970s and 80s.[4] The role of these short forms nevertheless remained marginal in research on oral poetry, compared to narrative genres, such as ballads or epic. When considering how end rhyme has been conceptualized as a poetic device until the early 20th century, and in many areas much longer, short forms of oral poetry with their related productivity have certainly impacted the aesthetics attributed to its quality and role much more widely than the literary elite cultures.

3 For contemporary performances, see Europa-bat-batean 2016: Schnaderhupfel.

4 For an overview, see Sykäri 2011: 26–34.

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The purpose of this chapter is to study the role of rhyme and its relation to other structural constituents and rhetoric in order to approach the 'aesthetics of versatility' of the rhyming couplet mould. I will examine the textual microcosm of the archived Finnish *rekilaulu* couplets with a selected corpus of 150 couplet texts that begin with the same formulaic hemistich. This corpus includes popular crystallized forms, their minor and major variations, as well as couplets that employ the opening formula or the whole priming line for the creation of new arguments. Because the material comes from written archive cards, it has undergone a process of memorization, selection, and textualization and is liable to represent the crystallized rather than the situation-sensitive aspect of the stylistic continuum of verse units. However, the large amount of material allows a view to the deployment of the poetic resources provided by the tradition and readily employed by singers and composers. My analysis is also informed by many years of research on rhyming couplets and improvisation in contemporary contexts (Sykäri 2009; 2011; 2017; 2019). In particular the Cretan analogue shows us to pay attention to how the textual aesthetics of this compact format may in fact lie in the emergent textual network: in the continuation, not stability.

The Culture, Collection, and Research of the Rekilaulu

Information on the collective Finnish *rekilaulu* singing culture and the ways of composition is scarce, since these questions were seldom raised at the time when collective singing cultures were vital. During its peak time, the latter half of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, *rekilaulu* couplets were sung and created throughout the Finnish speaking area. Productive singing traditions emerged in particular in two areas, where villages were densely situated and a strong group identity prevailed: the Ostrobothnia in the west and Karelian Isthmus in the east. Ethnographic accounts, descriptions given by late 19th century self-taught authors, as well as people interviewed later in 1950s and 60s about their youth experiences uniformly note that new songs came up constantly; they were often produced on the spot, but it was also common for groups of girls and boys (separately) to gather to compose new songs to be performed in upcoming events (Asplund 1981: 95–112; 2006: 152–159; Laurila 1956; Paulaharju 2010 [1932]: 321–336; Virtanen 1965: 392–395, 408–428; 1973).

In the Karelian Isthmus area, young unmarried woman were the chief public performers of the new rhymed songs. On Sundays and holidays, they gathered at a huge village swing, the *liekku*, which had been the central performance context already for earlier generations who sung in the runosong meter (see Kallio 2013: 236–243). Young men joined them around the swing, yet rather sung their songs within their own groups. The ring games dance was normally accompanied by singing, since there were seldom instruments available. (Virtanen 1965: 408–428; 1973). In western Finland, young people gathered on Sundays and other holidays for village swings and ring games, and even if instrumental folk dance music from Sweden had become established in these areas, also here young women accompanied

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Image 1. 'Juhlasyöminkien jälkeiset leikit' [Games after feast eating]. Kokemäenjoki, Harjavalta. Photograph by U.T. Sirelius 1906–1908. Finnish Literature Society. SKS KRA. SKS 7676.

the dance by singing. While performance of dance songs required large repertoires of established couplets, communicative situations focused on presentation of new songs and compositional skills. Collective journeys to dance places are especially mentioned as situations particular to male group performance. (Paulaharju 2010 [1932]: 321–336.)

Rekilaulu song texts were noted down throughout the 19th century but first sparingly, because the Finnish folk poetry collectors opted to note down the more archaic runosong texts rather than these 'new' rhymed songs. As discussed in this volume by Kallio, the new device of rhyme was at first valued and used by intellectuals due to its religious connection. But with the emergent national romantic movement, rhyme was no longer in favour of the 19th century's scholarship, to whom the overwhelmingly popular rhymed forms of oral poetry appeared only as a threat to the more archaic runosong tradition. Moreover, the schism between many collectors' idealized ideas of 'folk' and the provocative singers of the *rekilaulu* was deep (Asplund 2006; Karhu & Kuismin 2021).

The 'new' rhymed song format indeed had become emblematic of the change of the society, where during the 19th century young and working-class people increasingly laid claims for new liberties and freedom of

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expression. The great majority of the song texts which have been saved to us express young people's interests and concerns: making and untying relationships, longing for and complaining about love and lovers, boasting of independence and protesting against gossiping and the village women's control. Some themes, like drinking, railway work, and roguery, specifically relate to the male gender, but in general both young women and men are equally rebellious. Nevertheless, in addition to stating real positions and voicing personal messages, Anneli Asplund (1981: 106) reminds that many couplets conform to the young people's chief performance environment, round game dancing, which include a constant exchange of partner during the dance. The commonly expressed argument of untying old and making new relationships, also represented in this chapter's material, is therefore highly dramatized and does not correlate with the 'high number of bastard children', as assumed by some critical voices worried about these songs' morality (Asplund 2006: 149; see also Karhu & Kuismin 2021). Mocking songs are very characteristic of the genre, but it can be assumed that the products of these more ephemeral and improvisatory practices were much more seldom textualized than they were performed (examples are given in Paulaharju 2010 [1932]: 321–336; Virtanen 1965: 408–410).

For structural analysis, the textual collection of estimated 65 000 exemplars[5] located at the Finnish Literature Society's (SKS) archives (Archive Materials on Traditional and Contemporary Culture) provides many possibilities, even if this material is currently accessible only manually in cardboard cards organized both alphabetically and thematically in boxes on the archive shelves (the process of digitizing the material has begun in October 2022 – in contrast to the runosong texts, which have been digitized and were published in 2014 as a free, public database; http://www.skvr.fi; Harvilahti 2013; Sykäri 2020). The main part of the *rekilaulu* collection was formed during the last decades of the 19th century, when the rhymed songs began to receive a more positive response and the communicative oral practices were very vital, and the mid-war period. Individual laymen and students were important collectors of the song texts. A significant amount of texts also came into the archives as a result of the first open collection call made by the SKS in 1935 (at the 100 years' anniversary of the old *Kalevala*) for people to send in any kind of folklore material.

In addition to many songs being regarded as obscene, unchaste, immoral and rude, *rekilaulu* song texts and their rhymes were generally considered to be void of poetic value by 19th century Finnish folklore collectors, who compared them unfavourably to the runosong poetry. Melodies, however, were appreciated as they varied much more than the archaic runosong melodies (cf. Kallio, this volume). Altogether 4847 folk songs with melodies were notated and published in four volumes between 1904–1933 by musicologist Ilmari Krohn (Suomen Kansan Sävelmiä, Toinen Jakso, 1904–1933, http://esavelmat.jyu.fi/), and 47,7 %, 2068 pieces, of these represent

5 The rhymed folk song card index contains approx. 130 000 cards, but this number contains cards organized in both thematic and alphabetical order (SKS archives 2021).

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the *rekilaulu* genre (Laitinen 2003: 214–215). Basing on this collection, musicologist and singer Heikki Laitinen (2003) has carried out a detailed analysis of the *rekilaulu*'s song structure. A wide collection of recorded songs resides at the Finnish Literary Society's archives, and the singing and interviews recorded and notated by Erkki Ala-Könni in 1940s–1970s provide another large and so far little researched collection situated at the University of Tampere.

While the musical value is unequivocally acknowledged, when it comes to the poetic values, the lack of them has also been a subject of complaint in current musicological research. Compared to the rich musical expression, themes are limited, texts are simple, and may seem artificial on the basis that in the short two-part structure, the first priming-part may be entirely irrelevant to the second argument-part. The oral *rekilaulu* songs do not offer obvious literary virtues – the couplet aesthetics is elsewhere: the popularity of these short units and the large micro-variation that appears in contrast to the relatively limited number of central themes tell that, in addition to the significance of the attitude, message, and symbolic value of these songs in the context of singing, there must also be a level of significance in the variation itself.

The Rekilaulu Form and Meter

The *rekilaulu* poetic meter is stress-based and metrical stresses have to coincide with the linguistic stress of the Finnish words. In Finnish, the first syllable of a word is always stressed, and words that are longer than three syllables receive a secondary stress on the third syllable, or in some long inflected words, on the fourth, and after this every second syllable. Each word in a compound word receives stress on the first syllable. The third, last syllable of a three-syllable word is 'prominent' (Leino 1986), which means that it can be stressed in poetry to fill a stressed metrical position, even if it does not have linguistic stress. This prominence is widely deployed when foreign melodies originally composed for texts in iambic meters are used since there are very few monosyllabic words in the language (see also Bastman and Kallio, this volume). However, the rekilaulu rhyme is always two syllables long, which means that the rhyme words either have to be bisyllabic or tetrasyllabic (or longer), and conform to the primary or secondary linguistic stress:

> Keitä kultani kahvia | ja keitä sä koko ***pan****-nu*
> Kun sinä olet niin monta kertaa | mun mieleni pa-hot-***tan****-nu*
>
> Brew, my darling, coffee | and brew the whole pot
> Since you have so many times | my feelings – hurt (= hurt my feelings)

This rhyme pair *pannu* : (pahot-) *tannu* has an identical rhyme, with the rhyming part (*an-nu*) beginning on the stressed vowel of the stressed syllable *pan-/tan-* and the final syllable *nu* being exactly the same. But as several other

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examples below will show, the concept of rhyme allows many dissimilarities, to which I will return after the examples.

The *rekilaulu* 'text' is commonly described (eg. Laurila 1956: 59, note 1; Asplund 2006: 146) as a couplet of two seven-stress lines that rhyme. Each long line breaks into two hemistichs of 4 + 3 stresses. The first hemistich of each line has a strict caesura in the middle (Laitinen 2003). The people of the Karelian Isthmus named[6] the unit according to their conceptualization of it as a unit of two lines, as expressed in the name *kakssananen* ('of two words', with the word 'word' meaning a line or a larger content unit, as is common in oral communities)[7]. This naming is reported by Virtanen (1965: 409–410; 1973: 148) for the parish of Rautu, and was also made explicit by Larin Paraske (1833/4–1904), a famous singer born and living in the Ishorian villages in North Ingria and Karelian Isthmus, whose metacommunication has been noted down extensively (Timonen 2004: 238–252). Paraske dated the 'two-word', the new rhymed couplet model, as having been used in the area from 1860s–1970s, and differentiated it from the 'one-word', the old iterative, unrhymed, alliterative runosong verse (Timonen 2004: 262.) My use of the term 'couplet' to depict the *rekilaulu* thus is also congruent with these oral singers' emic usages that point towards the significance of the major semantic organization of the unit.

However, when the *rekilaulu* is sung, the textually shorter second and fourth hemistichs that rhyme receive additional length from the lengthening of the penultimate, stressed rhyme syllable, as well as the last rhyme syllable, so that all the hemistichs are sung to the same length of melody. Because of this musical division of the hemistichs into equally long four lines, the rekilaulu is today chiefly referred to as a quatrain. The rekilaulu is sung to a four-line melody or two-line melody that is repeated twice. With repetitions, refrains, and trolling, the song may end up being sung to five-, six, or seven melody lines, or more commonly, to an eight-line double stanza. Despite the musical four-line structure, both Laitinen (2003: 286–287) and Asplund (2006: 149) also stress the two-part structure in the musical outcome: *pairs of lines*, rather than single lines, are central, because the boundary within the pair is fluid. (In the examples below, I have maintained the distribution of the original texts written in four lines, because that helps my focus on formulaic textual units. Yet that distribution often does not conform to how the words in the boundary areas are actually sung.)

The metrical ground structure is very clear, even if it allows very different melodies and singing styles in performance. In addition to the penultimate syllable, which is the always stressed rhyme syllable, the final syllable is also accented, giving the characteristic melodic structure to the *rekilaulu* meter.

6 These rhymed songs were elsewhere referred to as 'songs' until the term *rekilaulu,* deriving from the German *Reigenlied*, 'a round dance song', became established by early 20th century.

7 The 'word' in the oral singers' poetics can mean a half line, line, a couplet, or a formulaic unit; in general a unit that expresses something. John Miles Foley (2002: 11–21) discussed this largely with regard the epic singing, and for example the Seto singers use this expression (Virtanen 1987; Kalkun & Oras 2014), see also Ekgren & Ekgren 2022: 132.

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Laitinen (2003) who in his musical analysis speaks of song metre and *song feet* finds that both rhyme syllables represent rising feet, the penultimate being a fall-less rise, which can be filled anytime, and sometimes does. According to his analysis, all song feet except the rhyme feet can have 2–4 syllables, in special cases 1–5. The rhythm can thus be trochaic, dactylic, or a mixture, including paeonic feet. In his four-line division, there is a non-crossable song-foot boundary at the beginning of each line as well as in the middle of the first and third lines. Lines can begin with anacrusis, yet they never turn into iambs. As a result of his analysis, Laitinen (2003: 294) presents the song feet of the basic structure (excluding the possible anacrusis) as follows:

	2–4	2–4		2–4	2–4	
	2–4	2–4	1 =	1	
	2–4	2–4		2–4	2–4	
	2–4	2–4	1 =	1	

The couplet is a very common unit in the world's oral poetries, whether written in two long lines or four short. Paul Verrier (1931: 48) explains that the *couplet de dance* [dance couplet] sung by young maidens when they dance is either constructed of two long lines (*grands vers*) with a caesura in the middle, or four short lines (*petits vers*), always as two pairs. In Crete, where I have carried out a field study of the living couplet tradition (Sykäri 2009; 2011), the local couplet (*mandinadha*) is based on two iambic fifteen-syllable lines, which is the dominant verse form in all Greek poetry. Yet in most cultures, the couplet units are conceptualized as quatrains. This is so in Finland's neighbour areas, Scandinavia and Russia: as found in the historical Norwegian *gamlestev* [old stave] and the metrically revised *ny stev* [new stave], as well as the Swedish and Danish *enstrofing* [one-strophe] (Åkesson 2003; Ekgren 2009), and the Russian chastushka (Sokolov 1950; Adonyeva 2004), along which several Finno-Ugric language groups (e.g., Karelians, Setos) in the area have modelled their corresponding couplets. Scandinavian meters derive from Old Germanic meters (Ekgren & Ekgren 2022; Frog, this volume) and in Romance and Slavonic languages the quatrain form is proposed by Gasparov (1996: 107–108) to be due to the split of Latin poetry's trochaic fifteen-syllable line into eight or/and seven syllable lines. Instead of the typical couplet rhyme scheme (aa if written in two long lines and abcb if in four lines), in many of these languages, all lines can rhyme (abab or abba). Another influential model is the Persian originated quatrain *ruba'i*, which spread along with Islam to wide areas of Middle and Far East and is based on a long line and its four hemistichs rhyming aaba; therefore also referred to as a couplet, *dobait*, rhyming aa, if counted in full lines (Hämeen-Anttila 2008; 189–190; Lewis 2012: 1227).

Various reasons ranging from the history of versification, primary focus on melody lines, or singing or naming conventions in each case explain why the unit is described as a couplet or (and) a quatrain. Nonetheless, the semantic unit of improvised composition may more generally be the long line. For example, Cuban improviser Alexis Díaz-Pimienta (2014: 432, passim) explicitly states that the unit of textual creation of the eight-

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syllable line *décimas* (rhymed abba-ac-cddc) is 16 syllables, two short lines, and Mallorcan improviser Mateu Xuri recently verified the same two-line cognitive unit for the Catalan seven-syllable lines (lecture at the University of Balearic Islands, Palma, April 5, 2022). Moreover, as a *genre* these structurally self-dependent units to which I refer here as rhyming couplets normally differ in their semantic hierarchy and rhetoric structure from the exact same metrical models when used as stanzas in narrative songs, such as ballads.

Balanced Structures, Distributed and Inverted Strategies

In 1936, Samuel Baud-Bovy made an extensive analysis of the grammatical structures of the formulaic rhyming couplets of the Greek Dodecanesian islands and discussed the method and means of their oral composition, which he refers to as improvisation[8]. When it comes to the couplet structures, he found the principle of *balancing* central to them: according to him, balancing takes place between the two parts (the two long lines), as well as between the two hemistichs within a line, and between the two halves of the hemistich. We already saw that this structural principle of balancing works exactly the same way in the *rekilaulu*.

Here, I refer in particular to his analysis of the means of improvisation of the couplets. Baud-Bovy pointed to two central 'assistants' (*auxiliaires*) for the improviser: formulas and 'stock rhyme pairs'. He (1936: 341) claimed that 'the tradition's poetic lexicon' – common rhyme words and formulaic elements, such as stereotypic epithets, word pairs, and 'all-purpose hemistichs' – can be deployed in the composition of the couplets to the degree that the whole unit is crafted upon these. By word pairs he refers to common binary expressions (day–night) and to local culturally crystallized metaphors, such as the lemon tree and cypress for bride and groom. He concluded that because rhyme words govern the second hemistich, formulas and formulaic structures are chiefly located in the first hemistich.

Baud-Bovy (1936: 340) further claims that as the singers commonly start by singing just the first hemistich and only after the repetition of the choir complete it into a full line, the composition must therefore take place in hemistichs. He assumes that this performative division also means that the rhymer (always) begins to create his second line, the line that accommodates the chief meaning and argument, only once he has uttered the first line and its end rhyme word. Baud-Bovy did not take into account the inverted semantic hierarchy of the couplet structure and that in improvised composition this would mean an inverted order of composition of the two parts of the couplet: in order to know what s/he is going to say the composer has to formulate his or her argument in the mind and pick up the rhyme word *before* beginning to compose the priming line. Baud-Bovy was not an exception, since when I began to detect during my own fieldwork in Crete that linear proceeding

8 Baud-Bovy (1936) explicitly speaks of improvisation, also noting that it is not possible to research this unlimited material in the way his contemporary Milman Parry researched the Homeric epithets.

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could hardly produce good results, I had never (at that time in 1999) seen the inverted order explicitly discussed in research[9]. For example Leea Virtanen (1965: 410, translation by present author) notes about the *rekilaulu* couplets that 'the second lines often seem to have been born due to the impact of the end rhyme. On the other hand, the second lines can be created [first] and the beginning be matched with them'. Most of the examples she gives point to the latter and she also notes that 'important was indeed the latter verse line', but she does not discuss the evident consequences of her observation further.

Linear proceeding is a possible but not the most common or successful strategy when the target is to say something witty, amusing and striking *at the end*. When improvisers began to publish research on their own practice of lyrical improvisation at the turn of the Millennium, first chiefly in Basque, Spanish, and other Romance languages but then also in English, their work verified that when the couplet unit (or, more commonly in this literature, a unit of 8–10 short lines) takes form on the spot, an experienced rhymer normally first thinks up the message and finds the ingredients for the last long line or pair of short lines and the respective rhyme words (Garzia et al. 2001; Egaña 2007; Zedda 2009; Díaz-Pimienta 2014; see also Goikoetxea 2007: 180–181).[10] An opening formula may of course be chosen by an improviser to provide time in case s/he must begin the utterance without yet knowing what to say. An improviser may certainly also reach the first end rhyme word without still knowing where that will lead him/her. Yet in the improvisation of an argumentative utterance in a genre characterized by end rhyme, the most common method by far is the method of inverted composition.[11]

We may assume that in a 'folk' genre like rhyming couplets, which are sung and created in recurrent communicative situations and during dance by people with very different compositional competence, it is indeed for the inverted method that the formulaic expressions and 'stock rhymes' are commonly chosen for the priming line. Yet in such cultures repetition can also be deliberate and serve aesthetic functions: it creates intertextual links between utterances and speech events (see e.g., Tarkka 2005; 2013; Kallio 2010). I have argued elsewhere that active Cretan oral composers in the rhyming couplet genre see the textual artefacts simultaneously as entities and incentives for new creation (Sykäri 2011: 79–80). On the other hand, it

9 When writing this paper, Nigel Fabb gave me a reference written in 1958 on tonal riddles in Efik (Simmons 1958) which shows that the second part must precede the first in composition. It is clear that many fieldworkers have understood this and certainly more people have written about it. Yet in general it seems that oral composition has been a truly foreign land to researchers coming from literary cultures, and their trust on oral composers' cognitive skills has not been very high.

10 For bibliography and discussion on improvised traditions in English, see also Armistead & Zulaika 2005; The Basque special issue in *Oral Tradition* 2007; Sykäri 2017; 2019.

11 In contemporary cultures, the concept of improvisation is not equivalent to 'oral composition' in the meaning given to the practice by researchers of epic (esp. Lord 1960). Researchers who are improvisers themselves or discuss their contemporary improvisation culture, are reluctant towards the idea of recycling formulas (Díaz-Pimienta 2004; Garzia 2005; for a discussion, see Sykäri 2017: 127; 2019: 7–9).

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is often reported for the composition of the *rekilaulu* units that young people gathered purposely to compose new songs for future events (Paulaharju 2010 [1932]; Virtanen 1965), and in these occasions, the composition process was not time-bound. We may thus notice that traditions of rhyming couplets as they appeared in oral communities akin to the *rekilaulu* discussed here do appreciate but not necessarily entail improvisation; these traditions were vital in singing events where a large quantity of units were needed to hold up verbal communication or to accompany dance, and therefore also a large stock of ready made units, common formulas and formulaic structures were needed. Verbal dexterity, then, appears in an array of practices based on variation and reconstruction of memorized units, oral composition based on formulaic structures, pre-composition, as well as improvisation.

'Brew, My Darling, Coffee'

I will analyse the two-part couplet structure, the role of rhyme, the placement of formulas, and the syntactic work needed to accommodate these or to create new messages, by referring to a corpus of 150 archive texts[12] that begin with the same half-line formula 'Brew, my darling, coffee' or its close variants. As explained above, examples are divided into hemistichs according to their original archive format, which serves the textual analysis well but does not necessarily conform to the verse boundaries when sung:

> **Keitä kultani kahvia** | ja keitä (se) katti*lalla.*
> Sillä viimesen kerran astelen | sun kammaris latti*alla.*
>
> **Brew, my darling, coffee** | and brew (that) with a kettle.
> Because it's the last time I step | on your chamber's floor.

Brewing relates to the traditional method[13] of preparing coffee in large copper pots, where water was first boiled, the ground coffee added, then heated again until boiling, and let settle for some ten minutes before drinking. In Finland, drinking coffee was (and is) a major form of socializing at home environment (see Saarinen 2011; Roberts 1989) and this image is here harnessed to depict the end of an relationship as something similarly commonplace. This 'message' intrinsically belongs to the dramaturgy of changing pairs during round dance, which has obviously been the chief performance context for this couplet. At the end of the line, 'kettle' is used instead of the more convenient 'pot' to make explicit that coffee was required in large quantity – or to enhance the pervasive alliteration pattern, or initially, simply to create a rhyme.

12 Finnish Literature Society/ Perinteen ja nykykulttuurin arkistoaineistot (Archive Materials on Traditional and Contemporary Culture) / kansanlaulukortisto (folk song card index) / aakkosellinen rekilaulu-kortisto (alphabetical rekilaulu card index) > Keitä.

13 Copper pots gave way to other materials and forms before electric coffee machines became common in households in the 1970s (Saarinen 2011: 13), but brewing coffee this way was still common in rural and urban households in the 1980s.

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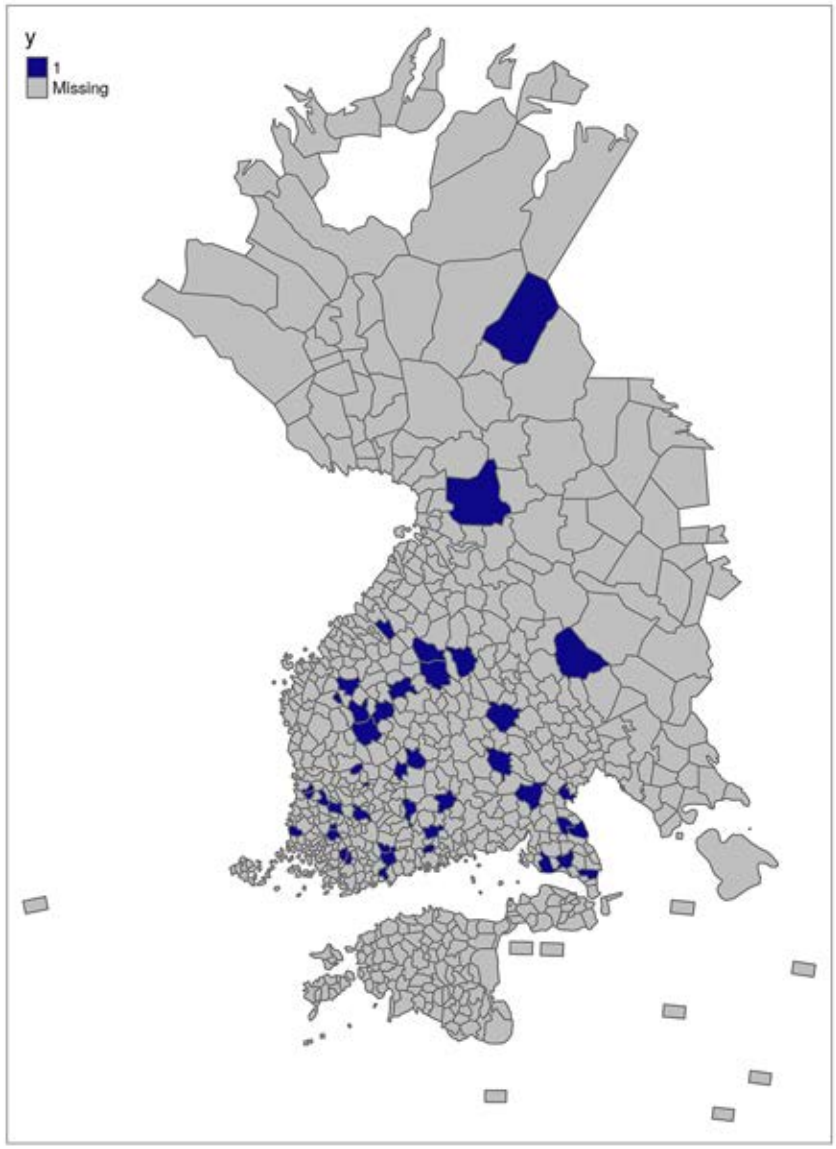

Image 2. The districts of the Finnish speaking area where the 'basic form' has been written down. First documentation is from 1859 and last from 1939. In addition to the Finnish-speaking area and present day Finland, the map covers Karelia in east and Estonia in south (the larger runosong area). Provided by Maciej Janicki, Eetu Mäkelä & Kati Kallio, FILTER project (Academy of Finland, University of Helsinki & Finnish Literature Society).

Of these 150 texts, 50 follow very closely this 'basic form'. In addition, there are some couplets that lean on this priming line but change the argument, three major clusters that maintain the whole half-line opening formula, each providing 4–10 texts, a good number of different couplets that deploy the opening formula but occur once or twice, as well as two variants of the opening formula. The presentation covers a selection of these.

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Even if we can not say much of any individual couplet's occurrences in real life, or how individual, inventive, improvised or well-known any of them were, the numbers give a good perspective on this type of versatile singing tradition: certain crystallized couplets were very widely known throughout the Finnish-speaking areas, certain variants spread more locally, texts with major or minor variation of well-known forms are current, and individual couplets were also widely produced and reported to collectors and in collections.

Variation of the Basic Text

In addition to the common dialectal variation and performative interjections and refrains, which are not considered here, micro-variation of the basic text chiefly means the exchange of substantives and verbs into other similar-meaning or alternative ones, which do not change the meaning.

Keitä (sä) **a) kultani** kahvia | (ja) **b) keitä se** kattilalla
c) Sillä viimesen kerran **astelen** | sun **d) kammaris** lattialla

Brew, **a) my darling,** coffee | **b) and brew it with a** kettle
c) Because it's the last time **I step** | on your **d) chamber's** floor

(a) The first half-line, which contains the chief opening formula, remains very stable, with changes occurring only in the term of address for the (girl) friend, to whom the request of brewing coffee is directed: instead of the non-gendered 'my darling', this may be 'my girlfriend' (*heilini*); 'lass' (*tyttö / flikka*).

(b) The second half-line, which indicates that the coffee should be brewed with a kettle, receives the largest lexical variation in either keeping the verb (brew) or, as the verb already exists in the first half-line, it is substituted with an attribute describing the kettle: 'with that shop's' / 'copper' / 'one-mark coin's' (*tuolla kaupan / kupari / markan*). None of this affects the message, and the word kettle itself, which belongs to the rhyme pair, does not change.

(c) The third hemistich begins the argument part. It consists of a formula that encapsulates the key idea of the message – for the last time – and receives some variation in the verb (step / walk / dance) as well as the largest syntactic variation: the formula 'last time' is mainly situated in middle, but also in the beginning, or at the end: 'I may walk for the last time'; 'It's the last time I dance with you' (*taidan kävellä viimesen kerran*; *viimesen kerran kanssasi tanssin*). A variant which appears three times turns the message upside down simply by changing the formula *last time* to *first time*.

(d) The fourth hemistich, which again contains the rhyme word, is very stable, with the word 'floor' changing to 'hall' (*sali*) a few times.

For a singer accustomed to the *rekilaulu*-rhythm, such changes where a word in a metrical position is replaced by another similar one represent 'sameness', even if a specific toning is intentional: they do not demand any compositional skills. The syntactic modification of the hemistich 'Because it's the last time I step' to 'It's the last time I dance with you' already takes a step further in this sense.

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Couplets that Deploy the Priming Line with a New Argument Line

Hei keitä sä kultani kahvia mulle | kuparikatti*lalla.*
Hei, kyllä mä sinun palkkasi maksan | saunan latti*alla*.
(Kokemäki, 1904. Frans Lempainen 42.)

Hey brew, my darling, coffee to me | with a copper kettle.
Hey I will sure pay your wage | on the sauna's floor.

This variant comes in three examples with minor changes in details ('I' is changed to 'the boy' and 'sauna' to the 'barn'): two, related to the same informant, from Kokemäki (1904) and one from Moloskovitsa, Ingria (1901), two different sides of the southern Finnish-speaking area. Considering that many informants may not have recited it or collectors noted it down due to its open sexual focus, it can be assumed that it has been more widely known at least to male singers (all three informants were young males).

With a change in the term of address, which also appears in one opening formula variant, the following couplet was noted down from a 13-year old female informant:

Keitä muammoni kahvii | keitä katti*lalla*
Vie sinä peräkammariin | ja heitä latti*alle*
(Salmi, 1908. V. Päivinen 92.)

Brew, my mum, coffee | brew with a kettle
Take it to the back chamber | and throw it to the floor

This type of compositions, which intend to create surprising and humoristic utterances by using a familiar priming line and then placing something unpredicted in the argument line, have most probably been very common, perhaps especially for bawdy and obscene lines, but in case of young people and children, who are learning the techniques of oral composition, also just to make fun (cf. Sykäri 2011: 163–164).

The rhyme pair 'kattilalla : lattialla' of the basic unit seems quite fixed: in order to change the message, most rhymers also had to change both rhyme words, as shown below. There is only one couplet in this cluster that rhymes the word 'kattilalla' with something else:

Keitä sä kultani kahvia | keitä se katti*lalla*
Älä sitä mairolla sekota | vaav viinalla maki*alla*
(Tottijärvi 1904. Jukka Rekola 138.)

Brew, my darling, coffee | and brew that with a kettle.
Do not blend it with milk | but with sweet alcohol.

This couplet has as its starting point the actual fact presented in the priming line: brewing coffee. It does not hold to the initial message of separation: brewing coffee at the moment of separation. The rhymer directs the point to

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how that coffee should be served, perhaps by emphasizing his male gender and the connection of alcohol with that, which is a common theme. This new argument line plays with the surprise effect, and leads to the new rhyme word very effortlessly. In fact, the main purpose here may simply be to show relative skills in creating new arguments based on play with the established priming line.

Popular Clusters of Couplets that Deploy the Opening Formula

The following couplet that is documented in western Finland ten times in a very similar form and is often reported together with the 'basic form' also directly relates to the dance context and exchange of partners. It seems to make the point that the 'girlfriend' has or has had so many 'dear ones' that a kettle is no more enough: to serve them all a bucket is needed instead:

> Keitä sä heilani kahvia | ja tua sitä ämpä*rillä.*
> Saa olla uudet ja vanhat kullat | sen ämpärin ympä*rillä.*
> (Alastaro 1911. H. Nurmio 425.)
>
> Brew, my darling, coffee | and bring it with a bucket
> The new and the old loves can stay | that bucket – around (= around that bucket)

In addition, different argument-lines with this rhyme pair are created by utilizing the formula 'for the last time' from the 'basic form' (once also substituted to 'first time'):

> Keitä sä kultani kahvia | ja tuo vaikka ämpä*rillä*.
> Kun taidan mä olla viimesen kerran | sun kahveesi ympä*rillä.*
> (Kankaanpää 1889. Antto Laiho 3 s.)
>
> Brew, my darling, coffee | and bring it with a bucket
> Since I may be for the last time / your coffee – around (= around your coffee)

> Keitä sä kultani kahvia | ja keitä ämpä*rillä*.
> Sillä viimesen kerran käteni mä laitan | sun kaulasi ympä*rille*.
> (Jämsä, 1926. Kalle Nieminen 418.)
>
> Brew, my darling, coffee | and bring it with a bucket
> Since for the last time I lay my hand | your neck – around (= around your neck)

Another popular dance couplet substitutes the 'with a kettle' with the expression 'a farewell pot', to fit the new rhyme partner which ends the new argument line.

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Keitäppäs, kultani, kahvia | keitä ero*pannu*!
Ei meiltä ennen rakkaus lopu | kuin Pohjantähti *sammuu*
(Savukoski 1929. Lauri Koskinen 513.)

Brew, my darling, coffee | brew a farewell pot
Our love will not end before | the North Star will extinguish

The argument line comes with many small syntactic variations that also lead to variance in the meaning:

Keitäppäs kultani kahvia | ja keitä ero*pannu.*
Meidän rakkaus ei lopu | **vaikka** pohjantähti *sammuu.*
(Lapua 1887. V. Palo VK 71 162.)

Brew, my darling, coffee | and brew a farewell pot
Our love will not end | **even if** the North Star will extinguish

Keitä ny kultani kaffetta | ja keitä se ero*pannu.*
Ennenkö rakkaus kylmenee | ja onnen tähti sammuu.
(Loppi 1883. Hels. suom. alkeisopiston konventti 1, XXIX, K. F. Andersson 57.)

Brew now my darling coffee | and brew that farewell pot
Before love gets cold | and the star of fortune will extinguish

There's also a variant which explicitly denies the central message of parting with a simple change in the second hemistich:

Keitä siä kulta kahvia | **vaikkei so** ero*pannu*
ennenkun meitistä ero tulee | niin pohjantähti *sammuu*

Brew, my darling, coffee | **even if that's not** a farewell pot
before we will part | the North Star will extinguish

This cluster, just as the previous, nonetheless makes it very evident that even in this type of oft-used formulaic couplets it is the first hemistich of the argument line that receives the largest syntactic variation.

The word with the rhyme syllables *pan-nu* [pot], either with the determiner 'farewell' or with changing epithets, *iso* [a big] or *koko* [the whole], combined with the idea of parting, turns out to be a very productive rhyme partner as it combines with several different argument lines:

Keitäs kultani kahveeta | ja keitäs se ero*pannu.*
Ennen kuin tuot sitä minulle | niin kaada se hopia*kannuun*.
(Hämeenkyrö, 1889. V. Kievari 10.)

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Brew, my darling, coffee | and brew that farewell pot
Before you bring it to me | pour it to a silver jug

Keitä sä heilani kahvia | ja keitä se ero*pannu*.
Kun sinä olet niin monta kertaa | mun mieleni pahot*tannu*.
(Pöytyä, 1937. Lempi Aalto KT1: 169.)

Brew, my girlfriend, coffee | and brew that farewell pot
Since you have so many times | hurt my feelings

Keitä sä kultani kahvia | keitä se iso *pannu*.
Ja anna niille riijarilles | joita olet rakas*tannu*.
(Orimattila, 1901. E. Alho VK 3: 227.)

Brew, my darling, coffee | and brew that big pot
And give to all your wooers | whom you've loved

Keitä kultani kahvia | ja keitä iso *pannu*.
Koska se tulee olemaan | iloinen ero-*kannu*.
(Eräjärvi 1904. J. Tyyskä 1597.)

Brew, my darling, coffee | and brew a large pot
Because that will be | a joyful farewell jug

All these cases are technically similar in that the composer/singer has as his starting point a fairly complete formulaic priming line, and uses his skills to vary or to create a novel argument line, in these cases in accordance with the message of parting.

Individual Couplets that Employ the Opening Formula

Many single renditions apply the opening formula and continue in the second hemistich with words that somehow relate to the idea of brewing or drinking coffee. They nevertheless build on a new rhyme pair which in most cases seems to be primarily selected according to the argument line and its rhyme word:

Keitä sä kultani kahvia | mutta älä pannua *kaada*
Tarvitsis ne friiarimiehet | punssikupin *saada*
(Siikainen, 1907. Jukka Rekola 918.)

Brew, my darling, coffee | but do not spill the pot
The wooing men would need | to get a cup of punch

Keitä kultani kahvia | sillä kahvia mä *joisin*
Jollet sinä kahvia keitä | niin minä lähden *pois*
(Lammi, 1899. J. I. Lindroth 185.)

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Brew my darling coffee | since coffee I'd like to drink
Unless you brew coffee | I will go away

Keitä kultani kahvia | ja keitä se hyvin *pian*
Et saa antaa erokirjaa | ja hakea uuden *sijaan*
(Lammi, 1899. J. I. Lindroth 205.)

Brew my darling coffee | and brew it very soon
Do not give me the parting book | and take someone new

Keitä sä kultani kahvia | noista Olströmin malta*hista*
Se lopun tekee tuskasta | ja itkun pisa*rista*
(Pyhäjärvi Ul. 1903. Evert Leino 76.)

Brew, my darling, coffee | with those malts made by Olström
That will put an end to the pain | and the drops of tears

Keitä sä flikka kahvetta | ja kaaras sä tilkka *viinaa*
Minä tuon toistet tullen | silkij ja pumpul*liinan*
(Pöytyä 1908. T. V. Lehtisalo 234.)

Brew, lass, coffee | and pour a drop of spirits
When I come again I'll bring | silk and cotton linen

Keitä sä kultani kahvia | sillä kello se on jo *kuusi*
Vai onko sun mieles muuttunut | vai onko sulla jo *uusi*
(Lapua 1911. Aaro J. Vallinmäki 384.)

Brew my darling coffee | since the clock is already six
Or has your mind changed | or do you already have someone new

Keitä sä kultani kahvia | ja keitä kuppija *kuusi*
Keitti se ennen entinen hellu | keitä nyt sinä *uusi*
(Juva 1899. T. Pasanen 1147.)

Brew, my darling, coffee | and brew of cups six
It was my old girl who brewed before | brew now you (who are) new

Mutta keitäs sä kultani kahveeta | ja keitä se sitte *kystä*
Joisin tota kupin, kaks | saa loput ketä *lystää*
(Tyrvää 1936. Aukusti Manner KRK 39:20.)

But brew my darling coffee | and brew that well-cooked
I'd drink a cup or two | anyone who likes can have the rest

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Keitä kultani kahvia | kyllä minä kahveen *annan*
Tuo se pannu kammariin | mutta älä sitä rikalla *kanna*
(Kalvola 1912. Edv. Mikkola 470.)

Brew, my darling, coffee | I'll provide the (coffee) grains
Bring that pot to the chamber | but do not carry it with a brick

These couplets employ the opening formula and continue with words related to brewing or drinking coffee and are thematically connected to relationship: the beginning, or the possible or *fait accompli* end of it, or just the event of the date. Yet they deviate much further from the 'basic form' and other relatively stable dance couplets presented above.

In most cases it is quite clear that the chosen rhyme word(s) lead the composition. Consequently, in most cases it may be interpreted that the composer was aware of his or her argument when formulating the priming line and its rhyme. Many of the rhyme pairs employed in these single renditions are commonplace: *kaada : saada* [pour : get]; *kuusi : uusi*; [six : new]; *annan : kanna* [I give : carry (imperative)]. Two units, both cited by the same informant, feature rhyme pairs, where a bisyllabic rhyme word receives a monosyllabic rhyme mate: *joi-sin : pois* [I would drink : away]; *pian : si-jaan* [soon : instead]. When singing, the monosyllabic words *pois* and *pian* can be split by pronunciation to two syllables (*poi-(j)is; pi-jan*) to conform to the requirements of the two-syllable rhyme. The rhyming of inflected forms such as the rhyme pair malta*hista* – pisa*rista* is a common way of employing the secondary word stress for the rhyme and these provide a significant means to avoid well-worn rhyme words.

Nonidentical rhymes appear in the following ways, beginning from approximately the most common (this list is based on larger material, and also contains examples not presented here):

(1) the lack of final -t or -n in one rhyme partner (*an-nan : kan-na; pan-nu : kan-nuun*);
(2) short vs. long vowel (*kys-tä : lys-tää*);
(3) consonant gemination (*saa-neet : maan-neet*);
(4) different consonants (*pan-nu : sam-muu*); commonly plosives k, p, t (*män-ty : sän-ky; yrt-ti : nyrk-ki*) and liquids l, r (*mär-kä : näl-kä*), also other consonant exchange;
(5) identical rhyme sections including the onset of the rhyme syllables, as part of four-syllable words, whose first consonants or vowels differ (ta-vak-*sen-sa :* pa-hak-*sen-sa*; äm-pä-*ril-lä* : ym-pä-*ril-lä*)
(6) elliptic vocal identity, typically with umlaut, on the final syllable (kat-ti-*lal-la* : lat-ti-*al-le*; äm-pä-*ril-lä* : ym-pä-*ril-le*; also on stressed syllable (*maal-le* : *jääl-le*);
(7) additional i-sound in one of the rhyme mates.

The first two cases (1, 2) are common in Estonian poetry (Lotman & Lotman, this volume) and also Russian poetry (Scherr 1986), and all cases except the case six (6) are typical of contemporary Finnish rap. Especially interesting is the case five (5) where the four syllable words (or longer) can be similar in what comes to all their vowels but with changing consonants.

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Such long vowel rhyme sections, either constituting of long words or several words, would according to the nomination used for Finnish rap rhymes be 'double rhymes' or 'multi-rhymes' and are very desirable as part of a rapper's competence (Sykäri 2017; 2019).

Couplet Structure as a Rhymer's Microcosm

Balancing of its structural parts was proposed above as a significant characteristic of the couplet unit: balancing takes place between the two semantic parts that create the couplet unit, between the two hemistichs of the long line, as well as within the hemistichs. With the examples presented above, it can be further claimed that the principle of balancing is not only an aesthetic solution and musically performer-friendly but for the rhymer it also entails distribution of energy insofar as it provides clear slots that need different amount of attention.

First of all, whatever is the actual order of composition, the second, last of the two equally long semantic parts needs the composer's full attention, because that part discloses the message. In the 'basic form' discussed above and many of the examples that deploy or vary its leading formula, the priming part has an obvious functional role as it coherently leads to the argument part. Yet it does not by itself tell anything about the message: why should coffee be brewed? This is what the composer/performer needs to specify in the couplet's argument line. On the basis of the popularity of the 'basic form' (50 out of 150 mentions) and several other rather fixed variants, it can be assumed that the most oft-used and memorized couplets are likely to be coherent also when it comes to the correlation between their priming and argument line. Established rhyme pairs are also very strong ties. This does not override the fact that even set couplets are subject to minor and major variation. On the other hand, an experienced composer is free to depart from any set images and to use these as raw material. In these examples where the opening formula provided a strong connection with a social event, this appeared to be in explicit or implicit intertextual connection with the given raw material. This is not always so; the priming part can very well be chosen from irrelevant stock lines or varied from one, or quickly improvised simply to provide a suitable rhyme.

Second, the two hemistiches of the long line that together create the semantic clause also have a different role: the second carries the rhyme word and is therefore partly fixed after the selection of the rhyme word. The first hemistich of any line introduces the clause that will end in the second hemistich with the rhyme word. It has more room for formulas, which can be deployed as structural and semantic construction parts. Yet as was evident in these examples, the priming part's formulaic hemistich was very stable, but the argument part's first hemistich, even when assimilating a formula, had a lot of syntactic variation. The formula 'for the last time' (*viimeisen kerran*) was easily situated in different places of the clause according to the needs of the rest of the constituents. The roles of these two 'first' hemistich are thus quite different.

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We may in fact notice that the first hemistich of the argument line is indeed the place where the composer centres his/her energy in syntactic fitting of the message: sometimes this means that s/he constructs a new clause that will lead to the chosen rhyme word, sometimes variation of an existing model. This variation can be purposeful in determining the nuance of the argument, but presumably it can also be an outcome of normal syntactic variation in verbal expression.

In what comes to the types of formulaic expressions listed by Baud-Bovy, the existence of 'all-purpose hemistiches' became very well established as a result of the versatile use of the opening formula, even if these examples, organized indeed according to their beginning, do not yet allow to comment on how such modules appear in other positions. The formula 'for the last time' (*viimeisen kerran*) exemplified another type of formula which could be positioned in different places within the clause constructions and it also provided evidence of the binary word pairs as it was sometimes changed to the opposite, 'for the first time' (*ensimmäisen kerran*) to turn upside down the message.

However, the end rhyme pair is the primary genre marker, and in case the performer does not use a ready made unit which s/he draws from memory, for fluent composition of coherent arguments the selection or creation of rhyme pair needs attention before the respective clauses can be constructed. Due to this obligatory attention, rhymes are the central point of reference even when they do not stand out as especially meaningful or innovative in themselves: rhyming is simply essential. On the other hand, proficient and creative use of rhymes can be expected to be appreciated indeed due to their position as a genre convention, and playing with rhyme expectations is one of the chief means for creating humoristic, clever, as well as bawdy messages. This is one of the significant characteristics of the inverted structure: as the punchline is awaited to come at the end, the semantic game is always also a structural and rhetorical game, and rhymed lyrical registers add to this the possibility of playing with line-final rhyme words.

Conclusions

The opening formula and the general image of brewing and drinking coffee has turned out to be a forceful image with a wide and coherent intertextual field of variation and inspiration for oral composition. This sample was selected as the result of the inspection of the alphabetical *rekilaulu* card index located at the Finnish Literature Society's archives due to its relatively large size, which allowed the examination of many types of variation related to one hemistich-length opening formula. The lack of digitizing currently makes it impossible to combine the results of this study with data on how common, for example, certain rhyme words and formulas are or how they are used elsewhere in the material. A close study of this cluster of couplets, with detailed analysis of how they appear in different villages, regions, and timelines, could help specify explicit intertextual networks between them, just as the study of the original manuscripts would show in what kind of

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repertoires they belong. However, since we do not yet have any kind of analysis of the *rekilaulu* material as regards its structural variation and methods of composition, and studies of oral composition are in general not frequent, my purpose with this study was to analyse a sample with respect to what it can generally tell us of the genre's aesthetics, rhyme, and other significant construction parts. The central epistemological frame for this enquiry was thus to understand the aesthetics of rhyme and rhyming in this type of oral tradition, where many people continuously performed and produced huge amounts of short texts.

The rhyming couplet is a short verse form chiefly identified as a standalone unit, which either directly states an argument or provides an image that reveals one. As poetic language, the rhyming couplet is essentially marked by end rhyme, often one pair of end rhymes, but when the constituent parts are made of four short lines then also it is common to find patterns where all line-ends rhyme. The *rekilaulu* unit has one rhyme pair which ties the two semantic parts together. I have referred to these semantic parts as the priming part and the argument part due to their roles in the rhetorical construction of the couplet. A structural analysis of these two semantic parts which I conceptualized here as two long lines, and their two constituent parts which I correspondingly conceptualized as hemistichs, conformed to the results presented by Baud-Bovy (1936): the structure is balanced by division in equal parts, and since the second hemistichs of the lines accommodate and are thus determined by rhyme words, the first hemistichs are more liable to include formulas.

The analysis also showed that in this sample, the formulas and formulaic phrases in the first, priming part were very stable, whereas in the argument part the use of the formulas and their location within the phrase varied much more. This is connected to the different roles of the priming and the argument part in the outcome as well as the cognitive work of the composer. As was claimed, the opening hemistich or even the whole priming line can be chosen from a selection of stable, existing units, because this priming line only plays an introductory role. The first hemistich of the argument line, in contrast, has the most variation because this is where the composer introduces his/her message: the major syntactic work done to embed the message and the final rhyme word is carried out here.

The end rhyme is the trademark of the compact structure. These couplets were sung by one person or back and forth by individuals or groups over a long stretch of time in the dance and singing events, and many were often quickly improvised. The rhyme aesthetic is equivalent to this: stock rhyme pairs, rhymes which build on inflectional word ends, and several types of nonidentical rhymes were all fine – as long as there is a sound similarity, the couplet is formally appropriate. On the other hand, proficient composers could show their relative skill by producing more variety and by playing with familiar rhymes and rhyme expectations. The constant performance and composition activities and the passing on of this knowledge during generations created the continuum on the ground of which excellence and surprise could peak. Our knowledge of what exactly was appreciated and how much this varied between persons and communities is very scarce, but

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the high percentage of the crystallized forms among the archived material and its high amount of microlevel variation on the one hand, and the versatility of forms that could deploy the same opening formula for a variety of arguments on the other, suggest that repetition and explicit intertextuality closely coexisted with the seeking of novelty.

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