

Alliteration in the Epic of "Beowulf"

Nargiz Asaf kyzy Aliyeva ¹

¹ *Baku State University*

23 Academic Zahid Khalilov Street, Baku, AZ 1148, Azerbaijan

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Corresponding Author:

anargizhm@gmail.com

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Abstract. This research investigates the role and significance of alliteration within Old English poetry, focusing on its manifestation in the epic poem "Beowulf." Through a close analysis of specific textual fragments, the study explores the semantic, rhythmic, and structural implications of alliteration, shedding light on its integral role in shaping the aesthetic and thematic qualities of the poem. The research identifies recurring patterns of alliteration, showcasing the prevalence of specific consonant sounds at the beginning of words across successive lines. Furthermore, it highlights the variability and complexity of alliterative patterns, illustrating how different consonant sounds contribute to the overall structure and meaning of the poem. By contextualizing alliterative patterns within the broader thematic and stylistic framework of "Beowulf," the study offers valuable insights into the poetic techniques and cultural context of the poem. The findings presented in the research have broader implications for studying Old English literature and the evolution of poetic forms across different historical and cultural contexts. Overall, this research enhances our understanding of the intricate relationship between language, form, and meaning in Old English poetry, reaffirming the enduring relevance of alliteration as a vital component of poetic expression.

Keywords: alliteration, line, half-line, accent, anlaut, "Beowulf".

INTRODUCTION

Examples of folk art were poetic works sung as songs in their original creation, selected with melodious rhythm and sound harmony, memorized and passed from language to language, from generation to generation and came to this day. Anglo-Saxon poetry was also of this kind and became an integral part of material and cultural history as poetic works that the people lovingly revived in leisure, in the process of work, activity, and labour. In addition to songs, the poetic language was written in verse, exhortations, historical notes, various information, and eulogy. It is believed that monks copied poetic historical writings into manuscripts in monasteries. However, poetic creativity has not only been the work of an educated minority. The works created by poets and songwriters, called "skops" in Anglo-Saxon, were loved and listened to with great interest among the people. The high social status of Skop, the fact that poetic examples as an artistic and social phenomenon occupy one of the central

positions in the life of society and several other aspects of Anglo-Saxon poetry ensured its stability. The collection of Old English poetry, which has come down to modern times, testifies to the single tradition of poetic creativity in the VII-XI centuries. Even though such examples from the first century, which passed after the adoption of Christianity, remained, the continental poetic work of the Germans continued without interruption in the British Isles.

All poetic texts of the Old English period have retained several standard features. Among these features, the equality of the number of stressed syllables in a line and alliteration occupy the most crucial place. Of course, it would not have been possible without the continuity of tradition in poetic creativity and the popularity of the poetic form.

Old English alliterative poetic creativity covers both the theme of mythological heroism and spiritual, religious and priestly issues, which the ancient Anglo-Saxons were more interested in. In

Anglo-Saxon poetry, the all-German oral poetry has found its hereditary embodiment. According to D. Moffat, poetry, which has survived to modern times in the written form, is the product of uncoordinated, uncompromised collective creativity [12, p. 805-827]. Even though the ancient English poetic monuments were written in monasteries by literate calligraphers, elements and features of the spoken language were also preserved in them [14, p. 20-21].

The fact that the features of the spoken language remain in the poetic texts of the Old English period is based on various foundations of lyrical creativity. "After creating many poetic samples, talented people memorized them by heart and later dictated and recorded them to educated secretaries. Memorization of Old English poetic texts confirms that they have an internal phonetic structure. These internal phonetic structures have become uniform for all carriers of Old English" [10, p. 5]. The maintenance of phonetic structures characteristic to the spoken language served as a continuation of the tradition of poetic creativity of a specific type and a necessary factor in understanding recipients of such poetic texts [13, p. 40-57]. Paying particular attention to sound parallelism, the rhythm of the poetic text in that historical period became mandatory for recipients of such texts in terms of comprehension, memorization, reenactment, and change of the shape of the poetic verse. All these are consistent with applying alliteration in the mnemonic function [4, p. 97].

The investigation into the role and significance of alliteration within Old English poetry, mainly focusing on its manifestation in "Beowulf," holds contemporary relevance for several reasons.

Understanding Old English literature's poetic techniques and devices enriches literary scholarship and contributes to a deeper appreciation of this foundational period in English literary history. By delving into the intricacies of alliteration, scholars can gain insights into the artistic and cultural contexts of the time.

Studying the linguistic features of Old English poetry, including the use of alliteration, offers valuable insights into the evolution of the English language. By analyzing the patterns and conventions of alliteration in Old English texts, linguists can trace historical linguistic developments and understand the roots of modern English poetic traditions.

"Beowulf" is a cornerstone of Anglo-Saxon culture and heritage. Investigating the use of alliteration in this epic poem allows scholars to explore the cultural values, societal norms, and mythic themes of the Anglo-Saxon period, providing a window into the worldview of early English-speaking peoples.

The study of Old English poetry, including its alliteration, is relevant to educational curricula in literature and language studies. By engaging with primary texts like "Beowulf" and analyzing their poetic techniques, educators can enhance students' understanding of literary history and broaden their appreciation of diverse literary traditions.

The poetic techniques employed in Old English literature continue to influence contemporary literature and poetry. By examining the aesthetic and structural aspects of alliteration in "Beowulf," writers and poets can draw inspiration from this rich tradition and incorporate similar techniques into their creative works.

Overall, the investigation into alliteration in Old English poetry remains relevant and timely, offering valuable insights into literary, linguistic, cultural, pedagogical, and artistic domains.

This investigation aims to deepen our understanding of the role and significance of alliteration within Old English poetry, specifically focusing on its application in the epic poem "Beowulf." By closely analyzing specific textual fragments, the investigation seeks to elucidate the poem's semantic, rhythmic, and structural implications of alliteration. Through this examination, the research aims to uncover recurring patterns of alliteration, identify the variability and complexity of alliterative patterns, and explore their broader thematic and stylistic implications within the context of Old English literature. Ultimately, the investigation aims to contribute to a more nuanced appreciation of alliteration's aesthetic and cultural significance in shaping the poetic expression of "Beowulf" and other works of Old English poetry.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study examines the usage of alliteration in the epic poem "Beowulf." A meticulous text analysis identifies and categorizes alliterative patterns based on linguistic features such as phonetic sounds, stressed syllables, and metrical struc-

ture. The frequency and distribution of alliteration throughout the poem are quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed, providing insights into its role in enhancing its aesthetic appeal, narrative structure, and poetic techniques. By interpreting these alliterative patterns within the context of Old English poetic conventions and cultural influences, this study sheds light on the significance of alliteration in "Beowulf." The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the poem's linguistic and literary features, enriching scholarly discussions on Old English poetry and poetic devices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In an undeveloped, illiterate society, poetic texts were created to be repeated or read. They were perceived by those who listened, not by those who read. Within the framework of the poetic line, the elements are combined not visually but acoustically. Therefore, the mnemonic function of alliteration in Old English poetic texts indicates the author and the recipient's perception of the poetic language.

Old English poetic texts continue the Germanic traditions of lyrical creativity. This tradition's most characteristic structural feature is the application of alliteration on the first stressed syllable of each half of the poetic line, more precisely, in each half-line. Alliteration was the primary unifying method in VII-XI century Old English poetic texts. It should be noted that the poets of that time rarely perceived alliteration as a means of style. Only in a few cases, if two long lines in a row had the same alliteration, could it be assumed that this was not an oversight but a particular technique. Beowulf has other methods, such as assonances and word games [9].

The phonetic system of the language and the rhythmic structure of the poetic text created in that language are closely interconnected. Despite the great possibilities of the language system, not all of these possibilities find their application in a specific poetic system. However, the characteristic phonetic structures of a poetic text usually exist in this language environment. Rhythm is linguistically conditioned for two reasons. Firstly, the language had a rich internal structure when it was not yet used in artistic, in a particular case, poetic texts. Secondly, creativity transforms the natural rhythmic organization of language into poetic texts so that these texts, according to their

forms, are chosen by themselves from the grammatically conditioned limited possibilities of universal categories [6, p. 288]. In this regard, an attempt can be made to clarify the rules for the location of the main accents in the rhythmic structure of the poetic texts of the Old English language. In languages where the emphasis falls on the beginning of the word, the developed forms of poetry based on alliteration are based on one of the basic principles of rhythmic organization. This manifests as the sameness of the location of the so-called accent and the location of the rhythmic accent. Therefore, the syllable that gives rise to alliteration must be chosen rhythmic.

Based only on the alliterativeness of stressed syllables, it can be said that the sameness of the location of the word accent and the rhythmic accent is unambiguously essential. However, sometimes, in the conditions of natural speech, unstressed syllables perform that function in the rhythmic structure of a poetic text. There are multiple similar examples in the epic "Beowulf". For instance, if in verse 197 of the epic, the phoneme "p" creates alliteration as an anlaut consonant only in syllables with an initial accent, then in verse 1395, this phoneme participates in the completion of the rhythm and the alliteration process in the unstressed position in the word "depyld" in the composition of the rhythmic structure.

The accent distribution in Old English depended on which class the word belongs to and on the morphological nature of the syllable. Here, when we talk about the morphological nature of a syllable, we mean that the syllable is the first syllable of a word or prefix. As word classes, first of all, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, infinitives and verb adjectives, verbs with internal inflexions and auxiliary words (prepositions, conjunctions and negatives) are considered. It should also be noted that auxiliary words are never stressed if verbs with internal inflexions can be stressed and unstressed. From a morphological point of view, the main difference is between root morphemes and affixes. The emphasis is on the first syllable in stressed words such as nouns, adjectives and adverbs. In auxiliary words and affixes, the norm is the absence of an accent.

Let's try to clarify the principles of the distribution of emphasis in the poetic verses of the Old English language. For this purpose, dividing

based on which classes of words the stressed syllable is recorded becomes necessary.

The emphasis falls on the first syllable of nouns, adjectives, infinitives, verb adjectives, and most adverbs. This is the norm, whether the first syllable falls on the word root or the prefix. Such examples are pretty enough in "Beowulf". Alliteration is particularly important in English since the Anglo-Saxon line was alliterative. It performed the function of a kind of metronome of the work; unstressed syllables were pronounced at approximately the same time intervals: quickly, if many, and slowly, if few. In such conditions, the beginning of the stressed syllable was the most critical part of the word, and alliteration emphasized precisely these functionally significant moments of the line [2].

It should also be noted that not all prefixes in English are accented. For example, if in English, "de" and "ve" are never accented, then the emphasis rarely falls on "for". For example:

Line 1877: *þæt hé þone bréostwylm forberan ne mehte*

Line 2006: *swá begylpan þearf Grendeles mága*

Adverbs such as Neah – near, hrape – quick, sona – soon are usually accented and can form alliteration. The possibility of creating alliterations of the mentioned adverbs depends on syntactic and rhythmic contexts. The adverb has a rhythmic accent, creating alliteration in the absence of a noun and an adjective in the first half-line, as well as an alliterated long poetic verse of Old English poetry to the left in the second half-line.

Line 1937: *handgewriþene-hrape seoþðan wæs*

The adverb does not participate in alliteration when other potentially stressed words replace the rhythmic accent.

Line 1310: *Hrape wæs tó búre Béowulf fetod*

Line 2011: *sóna mé se maéra mago Healfdenes*

2. The emphasis falls on the first syllable of the main verb. The verb prefixes are almost always unstressed. Only noun verbs are exceptions.

Line 205: *sylf in þam solere, ond ymbseteð utan*

Line 463: *þanon hé gesóhte Súð-Dena folc*

Unlike nouns and adjectives, basic verbs sometimes lose their rhythmic accent. This case occurs at the end of the first and second half-line. The following examples of verbs that lose their

rhythmic accent and are not alliterative are recorded in "Beowulf":

Line 539: *Hæfdon swurd nacod þá wit on sund réon*

Line 1236: *ond him Hróþgár gewát tó hofe sínum*

The stressed state of the verb depends on several factors. These factors include the type of the verb, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects, and rhythmic contexts. The main verbs, surrounded by auxiliary parts of speech, become rhythmically stressed and participate in alliteration.

3. The emphasis falls on the component of the compound word. One of the main stylistic features of Old English poetic texts can be considered complex word creation and the use of such words. In compound words, two aspects of an illustrative attitude converge. Calculations show that compound words in "Beowulf" comprise a third of the lexicon [3, p. 7]. In complex words, their principles of accentuation and alliteration are observed. As in modern English, the most robust emphasis falls on the first syllable of the first root.

Line 1881: *gúðrinc goldwlancc græsmoldan træd*

Since the second word in the composition of a compound word comes after the first, its emphasis is weak. This is because the root word on the left is joined to a word with a strong accent. The second-order accent of the second root morpheme can form a double rhythmic accent and a double alliteration. This happens only if the complex word is located in the first half-line of the long poetic verse of Old English.

Line 178: *wið þéodþréaum swylc wæs þéaw hyra*

Line 115: *Gewát ðá néosian syþðan niht becóm*

Examples show that the second component of a compound word participates in double alliteration only under the condition of alliteration of the first word. If the compound word is located after caesura, then the weak accent of the second root morpheme does not participate in alliteration, slightly losing its essence.

Line 5: *monegum maéþpum meodosetla oftéah*

Line 285: *gryreleoða sum. þa æt guðe sloh [5]*

Thus, a morpheme bearing a secondary accent, located in the position of the second rhythmic accent, participates in alliteration only in the first half-line and in the second half-line after caesura. In the Old English long poetic verse, it never forms alliteration.

The principles show that the first syllable is more significant and alliterating, except for rhythmically unobservable prefixes and auxiliary words.

G. Leech has suggested that the base structural element of an alliterated poetic line is division [8, p. 78-80]. The Old English alliterative line, which manifests itself as rhythmic stressed, stressed and unstressed syllables, is of Germanic origin and consists of two short lines or half-lines, forming one long line with the help of the initial stressed syllables forming caesura and alliteration. Each short line is made up of two tacts, and the first of them turns out to be stronger than the second. This shows that the accented position of the first beat is more vital than that of the second stop.

The decrease in the importance of the division in the direction from left to right occurs within the framework of a long line. In other words, if there is only one alliteration peak in the first short line, this peak is contained in the stressed syllable of the first of the two imitations. At the same time, in the second short line, the stressed syllable of the first tact enters alliteration. The second half-syllable of the stressed syllable of the second stop (the location of the rhythmic peak outside the right) is possible in rare cases and does not carry any structural tension.

The structural scheme of a long poetic verse with alliteration can be constructed as follows:

Line 4: *Oft Scyld Scéfing sceapena bréatum* — [unstressed, accented/accented, accented] / [accented, accented/accented, accented];

Line 11: *gomban gyldan·þæt wæs gód cyning.* — [accented, accented/accented, accented] / [accented, accented, accented/accented, accented];

Line 42: *on flódes aéht feor gewítan.* — [accented, accented/accented, accented] / [accented, accented/accented, accented].

Examples show that if a short line (or half-line) contains more than one (according to the norm, two) stressed syllables, the stressed syllable located to the left of it creates alliteration. If a long line is combined with an alliteration sequence in an old English poetic text, then a short line is formed by a stressed and unstressed syllables sequence. In some cases, two consecutive unstressed syllables are also recorded (e.g., "Beowulf" — line 11: *gomban gyldan .æt wæs gód cyning*).

One of the leading indicators of alliteration is that specific consonants exceed the average processing frequencies in the language, particularly cuts of the poetic text. Alliteration is parallelism in which the initial element is constant, and the final element is variational.

Poetry is a repeating sound figure, and such a "sound figure" was alliteration in Old English poetry. In alliterative poetry, rhythm is the repetition of syllables in a specific sequence. The parallelism in the poem's structure manifests in rhythm, size (repetition of a particular sequence of rhythm), alliteration, assonance and rhyme. As a result of such repetitions, the corresponding parallelism of words and ideas is formed. The more clearly parallelism finds reflection in formal structures or symbolic means of expression, the more obvious parallelism is felt in words and ideas [7, p. 445].

In alliterative poetry, alliteration essentially acts as a structural analogue of rhyme. Alliteration is a type of initial rhyming. Alliteration is an agreement between stressed elements that begin with the same consonant or have no consonant. All words that start with any stressed vowel "fit" among themselves, for example, *old and eager*. An alliterative verse is an accent verse built on alliteration, typical of German, English, Scandinavian and Celtic ancient poetry [11]. The intensity of alliteration and its participation in different figures of speech are revealed in other ways, depending on the genre of the artistic work and its thematic orientation. "In Beowulf, alliteration is the reuse of initial sounds/letters immediately after the others, which is very common in Beowulf" [1]. Let's try to clarify these issues based on examples of alliteration in the epic poem "Beowulf".

The epic begins with the following alliterative lines.

*Hwæt! Wé Gárdena in géardagum
þéodcyninga þrym gefrúnon·
hú óá æþelingas ellen fremedon.
Oft Scyld Scéfing sceapena bréatum
monegum maégbum meodosetla oftéah*

In this fragment, the alliteration of the phoneme "r" in the first line, "s" in the second, and "h" in the third is apparent. Considering the consonant used at the beginning of the line 1,2,3,4, it is evident that "g" (Gardena – geardagum), "p" (praiseprowess — people-kings), "þ" (þeodcyninga –

þrym), and "d" (of spear-armed Danes) are repeated at the beginning of words, respectively.

If in the first line, the sound "r" is used three times in the first syllable of the root morpheme, then in the second line "s" is recorded twice in the first position. The sound [s] that generates alliteration is used once in both half-lines of the line. Alliteration would not have occurred if "s" used at the beginning of the words in both half-lines occurred only in one half-line.

In the first line, the alliteration of the phoneme "r" creates a semantic connection with the word prowess – heroism, denoting the person who has the quality expressed by this word, and with the word that begins with that sound: prowess → people – kings (people's kings). Thus, alliteration units stand in the semantic centres of discourse and carry the main load of meaning in the text. In the following fragment, we are faced with the alliteration of the consonants "f", "h", and "S".

*eafoð ond ellen forðon hé aér fela
nearo néðende niða gedíge
hildelemma syððan hé Hróðgáres
sigoréadig secg sele faélsode
ond æt gúðe forgráp Grendeles maégum
láðan cynnes Nó þæt laésest wæs*

In the first line of this fragment, taken from "Beowulf", the phoneme "v" is used three times at the beginning of the word. "V" was used twice in the first half-line and once in the second half-line. The second line begins with "n" (nearo – neðende — niða) at the beginning, while the third begins with "h" (hildelemma — he — hroðgares). This line has six words, five of which are unstressed auxiliary words. In the second half line of Line 2350, after the sequence "he" and "had", the consonant "p" forms alliteration (passed a-plenty, and perils of war). Here, unstressed auxiliary words such as "a", "and", "of" are used. In Line 2352, a more complex alliteration of the phonemes "s" and "h" is created:

*2352 sigoreadig secg, sele fælsode
Hrothgar's hall he had wholly purged [5].*

By involving different fragments of the text "Beowulf" in analysis, it is possible to clarify the potential of various consonants of the Old English language to create alliteration.

The research underscores the fundamental role of alliteration as a unifying and structuring device within Old English poetic tradition. It emphasizes that alliteration served not merely as a stylistic embellishment but as a mnemonic tool

essential for oral transmission and comprehension within the illiterate societies of the time. By highlighting the prevalence of alliteration in Old English poetry, the research sheds light on the intricate interplay between linguistic elements and poetic form.

By analyzing specific examples from "Beowulf," the research demonstrates how alliteration establishes semantic connections between key concepts and enhances the verse's rhythmic flow. This dual function of alliteration underscores its integral role in shaping Old English poetry's aesthetic and thematic qualities.

The research identifies recurring patterns of alliteration within "Beowulf," showcasing the prevalence of specific consonant sounds at the beginning of words across successive lines. Moreover, it highlights the variability and complexity of alliterative patterns, illustrating how different consonant sounds contribute to the overall structure and meaning of the poem. The research enriches our understanding of Old English poetry's linguistic and aesthetic nuances by exploring the potential of various consonants to create alliteration.

The analytical approach employed in the research, which involves close examination of specific textual fragments, facilitates a deeper understanding of the mechanisms and functions of alliteration within Old English poetry. By contextualizing alliterative patterns within the broader thematic and stylistic framework of "Beowulf," the research offers valuable insights into the poetic techniques and cultural context of the poem. Furthermore, the findings presented in the research have broader implications for studying Old English literature and the evolution of poetic forms across different historical and cultural contexts.

While the research provides a comprehensive analysis of alliteration in "Beowulf," it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. The focus on specific textual fragments may limit the generalizability of the findings to the entire poem. Future research could explore additional aspects of alliteration in Old English poetry, such as its relationship to other poetic devices and its reception by contemporary audiences. Furthermore, comparative studies with other works of Old English literature could provide valuable insights into the broader literary and cultural significance of alliteration within the tradition.

CONCLUSIONS

Alliteration is not usually in the initial syllable but in the main stressed syllable of the word. This implies a greater frequency of these sounds than the average speech frequency in a given text segment or its entire length. Therefore, alliteration is parallelism in which the starting element remains the same when the last element changes. Undoubtedly, the line is, first of all, a repeated "figure of voice". And in Old English poetry, such a "sound figure" is alliteration.

In Old English verse, alliteration played an organizing rhythmic role. In essence, it represents one of the types of primary rhyme and is one of the critical factors in its rhythmic construction. In alliterative verse, alliteration acts as a structural

analogue of rhyme. The last rhymed line then replaces it.

In the course of a comparative analysis of the poetic material of the ancient and Middle English periods, it was found that by the Middle English period of the development of the English language, the compositional function of alliteration, which consisted in the structural formation of lines of poetic texts, had significantly weakened. Alliteration's expressive and semantic functions were more pronounced, which made it a means of achieving the semantic generality of alliterative lexical units. At the same time, it should be noted that alliteration has a significant impact on the lexical composition and stylistic means of English poetry.

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