CHAPTER 2

Phonological Evidence for Pāda Cohesion in Rigvedic Versification

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Preliminaries

The Rigvedic meters that figure most prominently in this study are the “dimeter” meters gāyatrī and anuṣṭubh.1 Both meters employ the same octosyllabic pāda (verse-line). The rhythm of the pāda is underlyingly iambic. As the poets approach the end of the pāda, they regulate syllable weight more strictly, and the iambic rhythm emerges more clearly. All pāda-final syllables count as long/ heavy. A rough approximation of the surface rhythm of the pāda will serve our current purposes: × – × – ⏑ – ⏑ –. The gāyatrī stanza consists of three such pādas, the anuṣṭubh of four.

(1) gāyatrī anuṣṭubh

a × – × – ⏑ – ⏑ – a × – × – ⏑ – ⏑ –
b × – × – ⏑ – ⏑ – b × – × – ⏑ – ⏑ –
c × – × – ⏑ – ⏑ – c × – × – ⏑ – ⏑ –
d × – × – ⏑ –

After the composition of the poems, oral editors – “orthoepic diaskeuasts” – made minor, mostly systematic changes to its phonological form, some of which disrupt the meter. Modern editors reverse those changes, thereby creating a “metrically restored” text that more closely approximates the phonological form at the period of composition. In the passages cited below, restorations are subscripted to the transmitted Saṃhitā text of Aufrecht (1877). For example, if eṣām is transmitted, and *eṣaam is to be restored, we print eṣaām.2 It is generally held that each pāda is metrically autonomous (on which more below), and in the metrically restored text of van Nooten and Holland (1994),

1 The most important and extensive works on Rigvedic meter are Oldenberg (1888) and Arnold (1905).
2 It is in fact very difficult to decide on the metrical evidence alone whether to restore *aam or *aām in genitive plural forms. We follow Kümmel (2013) in restoring the former.
Phonological Evidence for Pāda Cohesion in Rigvedic Versification

Each is printed on a separate line as above. However, in the Samhitā text, pādas \(a\) and \(b\) are treated as a unit and marked off by a daṇḍa ("|"), as are \(c\) and \(d\) in anuṣṭubh. The stanza is marked off by a double daṇḍa. We have added superscripted daṇḍas to mark the other pāda-ends.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{2) } & \quad \text{gāyatrī} & \quad \text{anuṣṭubh} \\
& \quad ab & \quad ab \\
& \quad c & \quad cd \\
\end{align*}
\]

Superscripted daṇḍas thus mark pāda boundaries, single daṇḍas mark couplet boundaries, and double daṇḍas mark stanza boundaries. A variant of the anuṣṭubh referred to as the "late" or "epic" anuṣṭubh is introduced below (11). For the structure of the "trimeter" meters triṣṭubh and jagatī, which figure less prominently in the present study, see Paul Kiparsky’s contribution to this volume.

1 A Synopsis of Previous Evidence for the Couplet in Rigvedic Composition

As a number of scholars have noted, from a standpoint of syntax and sense, the Rigvedic poets tend to compose in couplet-like structures.\(^3\) Jamison and Brereton (2014: 74) offer one of the more explicit discussions of the phenomenon:

Syntactic constituents often occupy single pādas, for example, and metrical boundaries (the beginning and end of the line, as well as the position immediately after the caesura) are favored sites for positioning emphatic elements. The hemistich [= couplet] is a particularly salient unit, dividing the verse [= stanza] into syntactic and semantic halves. In fact, we have discovered that it is almost always possible, and generally desirable, to render the hemistich division in English – that is, to translate the first half and the second half of the verse as separate units. This is reflected in the physical layout of our translation, with the second hemistich starting a new line.

In dimeter verse in particular, the four pādas of the anuṣṭubh often seem to be divided on syntactic and semantic grounds into two pāda-pairs, which we refer

\(^3\) See also Oldenberg (1909b: 220 fn. 4, 221 fn. 2); Gonda (1958, 1975: 173–175, 223); and Migron (1985: 65 et passim).
to as couplets, schematically ((ab)(cd)). Consider 5.10.1, given in (3), where each couplet conveys an utterance.

(3) a ágna ójīṣṭham ā́ bhara
  Agni:VOC most.powerful:ACC.SG here bring:2SG.IMP
b dyumnám asmábhyam adhrigo
  brilliance:ACC us:DAT never.poor:VOC.SG

c prá no ráyá páriṇasā
  forth us:DAT wealth:INS abundance:INS

d rátsi vájāya pánthāṭāṃ
  cut:2SG.IMP prize:DAT path:ACC

ab  ‘O Agni, who are never poor, bring here the most powerful brilliance to us.

  cd  With wealth and abundance, cut a path to victory’s prize for us.’
      (Jamison and Brereton 2014)4

This suggests that the metrical structure of the stanza is ((ab)(cd)), and the poets abided by a general rule: the larger the metrical boundary, the more important that it coincide with a larger prosodic boundary. Since prosodic phrasing is to a great extent determined by syntactic phrasing, we expect to find a hierarchy of coincidence of syntactic and metrical boundaries.5 Regarding utterance boundaries, for example, we expect the highest rate of coincidence at stanza boundary, then couplet boundary, then pāda boundary. Stanza 4.47.2 in (4) meets those expectations.

(4) a īndraś ca vāyav eṣaṭāṭāṁ
  Indra:NOM and Vāyu:VOC these:GEN
b sómānām pītīm arhathāḥ
  somas:GEN drinking:ACC deserve:2DU

4 We cite the Rigveda translation of Jamison and Brereton (2014) here and throughout.

5 See Hayes (1989) and Devine and Stephens (1996: 410 with further references). An in-depth study of the alignment of syntax and meter in the Rigveda was announced in a preliminary article on the topic by Dunkel (1985), but has not yet appeared.
37 Phonetic Evidence for Pāda Cohesion in Rigvedic Versification

c yuvāñ\ hí yánti\ ndavo \| you:acc.du for go.3pl drops:nom \|

d nimnám ápo ná sadhrỳàk || deep:acc waters:nom like convergingly ||

ab ‘O Indra and Vāyu, you have the right to the drinking of these soma drinks,

cd for the drops go to you like waters, converging, to the deep.’

The stanza has the following syntactic structure: [... pītīm arhatathā [ yuvāñ hí yánti\ ndavo [ nimnám ápo ná sadhrỳàk ] ] ], roughly [... you deserve to drink [ because the drops go to you [ like waters converging to the deep ] ] ]. The utterance boundary coincides with stanza end, the boundary between the main clause and the explanatory hí-clause falls between the couplets, and the boundary between the hí-clause and the comparative ná-clause coincides with the couplet-internal boundary between pādas c and d.6 The boundary between pādas a and b, however, interrupts the noun phrase [ eṣām\ somānām ] ‘of these somas’.7

Couplets are not as clearly represented in gāyatrī as in anuṣṭubh. This is noted by Oldenberg (1909b: 220 fn. 4),8 and by Jamison and Brereton, immediately following the discussion cited above (74):

The hemistich division is less important and more often syntactically breached in gāyatrī, since the division results in uneven parts: two pādas followed by one, but even in gāyatrī the third pāda is often independent of the first two.

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6 Note that in dimeter verse, the enclitic ná is virtually restricted to the 3rd and 5th metrical positions (Vine 1978), and where it occurs in the 5th, it may follow the second word in the ná-clause, e.g. 1.38.1b pitā putrām ná ‘like a father (his) son ...’. The word order thus permits interpreting nimnám as belonging to the ná-clause, and the sense seems to require it.

7 Strictly speaking, eṣām and somānām could be in apposition here ‘of these, (namely) the somas’ and in the two other occurrences of the bigram (8.93.33ab, 1.134.6ab). However, where the same phrase occurs in the nominative, it is continuous and contained within the same pāda: eté somāḥ (9.8.1a, 9.62.22a, 9.69.9a, 9.87.5a, 9.88.6a, 9.97.20a) and eté somāsāḥ (9.22.1a, 9.46.3a). Whether the phrase is versified in the same pāda or not apparently depends on the metrical-phonological shape of the words.

8 “Wenn bei dem Vers aus vier Reihen (Anuṣṭubh, später Śloka) die Gliederung 2+2 evident ist, so glaube ich jetzt (anders Hymnen des Ṛv I, 23 A. 2 [= 1888: 23 fn. 2]), daß auch bei dem drei-reihigen Vers (Gāyatrī) die von der Tradition gegebene Gliederung 2+1 dem Wesen der Sache entspricht. Satzbau und Sinnesgliederung zahlreicher Verse scheint mir darauf zu führen.”
Following them, we will assume that \( gāyatrī \) tends to exhibit an \((ab)c\) structure in terms of syntax and semantics, as in 3.11.9, given in (5), in which \((ab)\) contains the first utterance and \(c\) the second.

\[
(5) \quad a \quad \text{ágne} \quad \text{víśvāni} \quad \text{váryā} \\
\text{Agni:VOC} \quad \text{all:ACC.PL} \quad \text{desirables:ACC} \\
b \quad \text{vājeṣu} \quad \text{saniśāmahe} \\
\text{victory.prizes:LOC} \quad \text{gain:1PL.SUBJ} \\
c \quad tuvé \quad \text{devāsa} \quad \text{érire} \\
\text{you:LOC.SG} \quad \text{gods:NOM} \quad \text{have.placed:3PL} \\
\]

\( ab \) ‘O Agni, we shall gain all desirable things among the prizes of victory.

\( c \) In you the gods have placed them.’

The same holds for 9.65.7, given in (6), where the appositionally additive \( c\)-pāda could again be taken as evidence for a metrical \((ab)c\) structure.

\[
(6) \quad a \quad \text{prá} \quad \text{sómāya} \quad \text{vyaśvavāt} \\
\text{forth} \quad \text{soma:DAT} \quad \text{Vyaśva-like:ADV} \\
b \quad \text{pávamānāya} \quad \text{gāyata} \\
\text{self-purifying:DAT.SG} \quad \text{sing:2PL.IMP} \\
c \quad \text{mahé} \quad \text{sahāsracakṣase} \\
\text{great:DAT.SG} \quad \text{thousand-eyed:DAT.SG} \\
\]

\( ab \) ‘Sing forth to self-purifying Soma, as Vyaśva did –

\( c \) to the great one with a thousand eyes’

Further evidence for the couplet as a compositional unit comes from the couplet-initial localization of emphatic elements (cf. Jamison and Brereton 2014: 77), couplet-sized refrains (repeated phrases that close hymns), couplet-sized domains of concatenation (a type of linking repetition treated in Bloomfield 1916), and various other forms of stylistic repetition, which have been studied in a number of publications by Jared Klein, e.g. responsion (2006) and the repetition of deictic pronouns (2013). Migron (1985) provides an in-depth study of the structure of the trimeter stanza.

Beyond syntax and meaning, metrical/phonological evidence for couplet-like cohesion that is unambiguously attributable to the period of composition as opposed to the later transmission is scant. To be sure, in the transmitted
text, there are a number of phonological processes that regularly distinguish between pāda boundary and couplet boundary. One such process is the gemination of word-final $n$ where preceded by a short vowel and followed by a vowel-initial word, i.e. $n \rightarrow nn /  \tilde{V}_\#V$. The gemination process applies across pāda boundaries but not across couplet boundaries.

(7) pāda boundary ... *vardhāyann abhímātīḥ ...  3.62.15ab
    couplet boundary ... *akṣaran apapróthantaḥ ...  9.98.11bc

However, it is possible that the orthoepic diaskeuasts – the editors mentioned above – introduced the distinction between pāda boundary and couplet boundary to the text after its composition. Unfortunately, the nature of the meter makes it difficult if not impossible to determine whether the distinction can be attributed to the compositional period or whether it was introduced later, because pāda-final metrical positions are (relatively) indifferent to weight. As is sometimes the case with evidence of an ambiguous nature, some scholars take $n$-gemination and related processes to be clear evidence for a compositional distinction (e.g. Hale 1995: 46), and others consider the distinction to clearly post-date the compositional period (e.g. Oldenberg 1888: 392 n. 1). For this reason, we briefly sketch the issues and clarify our stance on them.

It is clear that pāda-internally, at least, the diaskeuasts applied the processes that distinguish between pāda and couplet boundary differently than the poets did. This is true of $n$-gemination. The meter shows that pāda-internally, at least, at the time when the Rigveda was composed, $n$-gemination was mostly if not completely restricted to etymologically “justified” cases, i.e. where $n$ derives from a historical cluster *nt(s) or *ns. Consider (8), where nn derives from *nt and makes the preceding syllable heavy “by position,” resulting in a regular diiambic cadence in jagatī and dimeter, respectively.

(8) *saṃvartáyanto ví ca vartayann áhā  5.48.3d
    yánti śubhrá riṇánn apáh  8.7.28c

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9   See Kobayashi (2004: 92); note that the process also applies to the velar nasal ʰ.
10  “... there is a clear contrast between the line-boundary [pāda boundary] and the hemistich boundary [couplet boundary] ...”
11  “... bei Erscheinungen, die so sicher unursprünglich sind, wie der Sandhi an der Pādagrenze ...”
12  See Oldenberg (1908: 486ff.) with references to further literature, especially Arnold (1905: 142) and Oldenberg (1888: 424ff.). “Completely” would do without further qualification were it not for a handful of frequent vocatives including maghavan, whose localization may support prevocalic maghavann; the issue requires a fresh look.
Contrast this with (9), where \( nn \) derives from \( ^*n \) and the geminate creates metrical irregularities. These include vocative singular forms of \( n \)-stems (9a) and locative singulars (9b). The gemination here post-dates the composition of the text. Undoing it restores the normal cadential rhythm in the examples in (9). By superscripting the second \( n \), we tag it as a diaskeuastic innovation. For simplicity, we present only dimeter verses, but delenda of this kind are found in other verse types, too, as expected.\(^{13}\)

(9a)  
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{sáviṣṭha vajrin}^n \text{á} \text{jasā} & \quad 1.80.1c \\
\text{pībā sū śiprin}^n \text{á} \text{ndhasāḥ} & \quad 8.17.4c \\
\text{áganma vajrin}^n \text{āśāsāḥ} & \quad 8.92.13c
\end{align*}
\]

(9b)  
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ácyutā cid vo ájman}^n \text{ā} & \quad 8.20.5a \\
\text{sām ha bruvaté ādhvan}^n \text{ā} & \quad 1.37.13b \\
\text{kṣiyánto yānto ádhvan}^n \text{ā} & \quad 8.83.6b
\end{align*}
\]

Both etymologically justified (7) and unjustified gemination (10a) take place across pāda boundaries but not across couplet boundaries. This shows us that the diaskeuasts actively made that distinction and that they introduced it into the text.

(10a)  
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{pāda boundary} & \quad \text{... r̥jīśinn | idám ...} & \quad 7.24.3ab \\
\text{couplet boundary} & \quad \text{... vajrin | áhiṃ ...} & \quad 5.32.2bc
\end{align*}
\]

This raises the possibility that the diaskeuasts, as opposed to the poets, introduced the distinction between pāda and couplet boundaries to \( n \)-gemination. However, since pāda-final metrical positions are (relatively) indifferent to weight, it is difficult or impossible to tell. The same holds for other sandhi processes that affect weight but not syllable count (e.g. prevocalic shortening), as well as for those that affect neither weight nor syllable count, e.g. voicing assimilation (exemplified by \( t \to d \) in 10b), another process that applies across pāda boundaries but not couplet boundaries in the received text. That is our view.

(10b)  
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{pāda boundary} & \quad \text{... bṛhād | índram ...} & \quad 1.7.1ab \\
\text{couplet boundary} & \quad \text{... bṛhāt | ágne ...} & \quad 1.75.5bc
\end{align*}
\]

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\(^{13}\) For example, the PP \( ájman^n \text{ā} \) ‘on the drive’ occurs finally in \( jagati \) at 1.112.17b, and \( ájman^n \text{ā} \text{ te} \) closes a \( triṣṭubh \) stanza at 6.31.2d.
What could the rationale be for departing from Oldenberg on this question? It is likewise possible that in the original text, prepausal sandhi occurred between pādas b and c most frequently, but not necessarily there and not only there; it was perhaps originally more sensitive to linguistic (i.e. syntactic/prosodic rather than metrical) structure. The diaskeuasts then generalized the most frequent pattern. We consider this plausible, and as such it can be added to the list further below, but we do not think that it is the only plausible explanation for the transmitted pattern. First, as we will argue below, phonological phenomena such as hiatus and resyllabification avoidance suggest at least a preference for metrical couplet structure at the time of composition, but these phenomena do not entail that other types of sandhi (such as the preservation of \( nn < *nt(s) \) and \( *ns \) or voicing assimilation) also occurred at those junctures. Moreover, one can imagine numerous other factors that could conceivably favor couplet-formation over time even if no sandhi occurred between couplets at composition. Such considerations include the fact that couplets tend to align with sense chunks, as we have already discussed, drift in recitational norms, substrata/contact, reversion to universal tendencies (eight syllables being on the short side for a recitational line typologically), and so forth. Since processes such as \( nn \)-sandhi and voicing assimilation are not metrically verifiable, we focus on verifiably compositional evidence in this article.

The view represented by Oldenberg is more widespread. In fact, it is conventionally assumed that stanzas exhibit a “flat” metrical structure. Macdonell (1917: 3) articulates this at the outset of his *Vedic Reader for Students*, in the note on RV 1.1.1: “The first two verses are in the Saṃhitā treated as a hemistich [= couplet]; but there is no reason to suppose that in the original text the second verse was more sharply divided from the third than from the first.” As Arnold (1905: 9) puts it, “In all metres in the Rigveda […] each verse [= pāda] (with some exceptions) is independent in structure.” The exception in dimeter verse that Arnold has in mind is the “epic” anuṣṭubh, on which see (11). The main reason to hold this view has to do with sandhi processes that affect syllable count, e.g. abhinihita sandhi, the loss or resolution of word-initial \( a \) after (what would be) word-final \( e, o, \) or \( ah \) (in the citation form). In the transmitted text, abhinihita sandhi, like \( n \)-gemination and voicing assimilation, applies across pāda boundaries but not across couplet boundaries (10c).

(10c) pāda boundary ... sādhano | yām ... 9.105.3ab
couplet boundary ... randhāyaḥ | ayām ... 6.43.1bc

We would like to thank Mark Hale for discussing this question with us at generous length.
Since abhinihita sandhi affects syllable count, the meter is informative. It shows us that abhinihita sandhi did not take place across pāda boundaries (or couplet boundaries) at the time of composition. All of the word-initial a-vowels affected by abhinihita sandhi must be restored, e.g. āyám. Oldenberg and others assume that since syllable count-altering sandhi across pāda boundaries must be undone, so must the other sandhi phenomena that regularly apply across pāda boundaries, e.g. n-gemination. This is also plausible, but not necessarily correct, since different phonological processes can be sensitive to different levels of juncture. For example, it is possible that at the time of composition, n-gemination applied across pāda boundary but abhinihita sandhi did not.

Metrical/phonological evidence for couplets that can plausibly be projected back to the time of composition may be scant, but it is not completely absent. It includes the greater incidence of departures from iambic rhythm in the cadences of α-pādas in the gāyatrī (Oldenberg 1909b: 221), and a hierarchy of hiatus avoidance at metrical-prosodic boundaries in trimeter verse (Gunkel and Ryan 2011). Moreover, perhaps the best-known case of metrical pāda cohesion in the Rigveda is the development during the compositional period of what Arnold termed the “epic” anuṣṭubh, a subtype of the anuṣṭubh in which the odd-numbered pādas begin to deviate metrically from even-numbered pādas. The epic anuṣṭubh is a nascent form of the meter that would eventually become the main vehicle of epic narrative, the śloka. The most salient manifestation of this metrical change is reflected in the development of the “semi-cadence” \(\square - - \) in pādas a and c.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{anuṣṭubh stanza} \\
\text{ab} & \quad x - x - - - - | x - x - - - - | \\
\text{cd} & \quad x - x - - - - | x - x - - - - | \\
\text{epic anuṣṭubh stanza} \\
\text{ab} & \quad x - x - \square - - - | x - x - - - - | \\
\text{cd} & \quad x - x - \square - - - | x - x - - - - |
\end{align*}
\]

15 This remark by Oldenberg, also cited by Korn (1998: 12), has to our knowledge never been verified, nor has it been taken into account in textual restoration.

16 In trimeter verse, the poets avoid vowel hiatus at boundaries between couplets < couplet-internal pādas < hemistichs (i.e. pāda-internal units separated by the caesura) < (hemistich-internal) words.

17 For the entire developmental trajectory from the early Rigvedic anuṣṭubh to the śloka, see Oldenberg (1888: 26–31, 1909b); for the *epic* anuṣṭubh of the Rigveda, see Arnold (1905: 149–174).
Further evidence for the metrical couplet, which may or may not date to the compositional period, may be sought in the traditional location of the *avadāna* ‘pause’ and in a rare sandhi process that applies across pādas within couplets. The *Ṛkprātiśākhya* 18.46–48 (Shastri 1931: 496) prescribes the following recitation practice.18

\[(12) \text{ dvābhyaṁ avasyet tripādāsu pūrvaṁ pādena paścāt kvacid anyathaitat} \]
\[\text{madhye 'vasānaṁ tu catuspadānāṁ} \text{ madhye 'vasānaṁ tu catuspadānāṁ} \]
\[\text{tribhiḥ samastair avaraiḥ paraśr vā} \]

‘In three-pāda stanzas, one should first pause after two (pādas), then again after a pāda; sometimes it’s the other way around. The pause of four-pāda (stanzas) is in the middle. (And) with three (pādas) in a group, either the first or the last (three).’

The order of presentation in the *Ṛkprātiśākhya* shows that the default or usual location of the *avadāna* is *ab|c* and *ab|cd*, which is reflected in the location of the daṇḍa (“|”) in the Ṣaṃhitā text. It is not clear what the exceptions refer to, but it seems unlikely to us that they refer to a manner of recitation in which the *avadāna* was intimately related to high-level syntactic/prosodic boundaries, since the *Ṛkprātiśākhya* only recognizes all the possible pāda-groupings involving a *single* pause. In other words, the rule does not permit a mode of recitation in which an *avadāna* is realized at each pāda-final utterance boundary in stanzas such as 3.41.2, where two or more stanza-internal pāda boundaries coincide with an utterance boundary, as in (13), where the stanza likely includes three independent utterances.

\[(13) \text{ a sattó hótā na rvívās} \]
\[\text{seated:nom.sg Hotar:nom our timely:nom.sg} \]
\[\text{b tistiré barhír ánusák} \]
\[\text{has.been.strewn:3sg ritual.grass:nom in.due.order:adv} \]
\[\text{c áyujran prêtár ádrayāḥ} \]
\[\text{were.yoked:3pl in.morning:adv pressing.stones:nom} \]

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18 We would like to thank Tim Felix Aufderheide for discussing prescriptions regarding *avadānas* with us.
ab  ‘Our Hotar was seated at his season; the ritual grass has been strewn in due order.

c  The pressing stones were yoked in the early morning.’

To judge by Uvaṭa’s commentary, the exceptions (a|bc, abc|d, a|bcd) refer to relatively rare and/or difficult meters in which the location of the daṇḍa in the Saṃhitā text has little or nothing to do with the syntactic and semantic structure of the stanza.¹⁹

According to Oldenberg (1909a: 33–34) and Lubotsky (1993), the sandhi phenomenon that converts pāda-final -ā to -ā m̐ before pāda-initial ē- and ō- within couplets should be attributed to the diaskeuasts, since the poets themselves would have produced *upásthāv to avoid hiatus at 1.35.6ab, where the Saṃhitā text reads

(14) ab  tisró dyávah savitúr dvá upásthāṁ | ékā yamásya bhúvane virāṣāt |

ab  ‘There are three heavens: two are the laps of Savitar, one is the hero-vanquishing one in the world of Yama.’

While the R̥kprātiśākhya’s rules regarding avasāna and this particular sandhi phenomenon may both post-date the compositional period, it is possible that the default organization into ((ab)c) and ((ab)(cd)) originates – at least to a certain extent – with the poets.

2  New Compositional Evidence for Couplet-Like Cohesion: Hiatus

Some clear phonological evidence for cohesion datable to composition comes from the study of vowel hiatus across pādas. Despite the conventional view that hiatus was not felt across pāda boundaries,²⁰ the Rigvedic poets do avoid it, and they do so more strictly couplet-internally (at pāda boundary) than couplet-externally (at couplet/stanza boundary), as one would expect if the former exhibits a lower level of juncture (cf. Gunkel and Ryan 2011). Consider, for instance, 4.47, where hiatus occurs once couplet-internally V |! V, and three

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¹⁹  Uvaṭa’s examples are more accessible in Müller’s edition (1889: 350).

²⁰  Arnold (1905: 71): “Each verse in the Rigveda is an independent metrical unit as regards Sandhi: a final vowel may therefore stand at the end of any verse, whether the next verse begins with a vowel or not, without hiatus arising.”
times couplet-externally, i.e. between two couplets $V \parallel V$ or between two stanzas $V \parallel V$.

(15) ab vāyo śukrō ayāmi te | mádhvo ágram dīviṣṭiṣu $|$ cd 
á yāhi sómapītaye | spārhó deva niyútvatā $|$ 
ab índraś ca vāyav ēsā añ | sómānām pitim arhathaḥ $|$ cd 
yuvaṁ hi yānti índavo | nimnām āpo ná sadhryāk $|$ 
ab vāyav índraś ca śuṣminā | sarāthaṁ śavasas pati $|$ cd 
niṣṭvantā na ītāya | á yātañ sómapītaye $|$ 
ab yā vāṁ śanti purusprho | niyúto dāṣuṣe nara $|$ cd 
asmē tā yajñavāhasā | īndravāyu ni yacchatam $|$ 
ab ‘Vāyu, the clear (soma) has been held out to you, the foremost of the honey, at the rituals of daybreak. 

cd (Since you are) craved, drive here to drink the soma, o god, (on a chariot) with a team. 

ab O Indra and Vāyu, you two have the right to the drinking of these soma drinks, 

cd for the drops go to you like waters, converging, to the deep. 

ab O Vāyu and Indra, tempestuous ones, lords of power, on the same chariot, 

cd provided with teams, drive here to help us, to drink the soma. 

ab Your teams, craved by many, which are for the pious, o men, 

cd stop them by us, o Indra and Vāyu, you whose vehicle is the sacrifice.’

In the present study, we compare the incidence of hiatus across couplet-internal pādas to that across couplet-external pādas. For the purposes of this test, the dimeter corpus includes all and only the stanzas of the Rigveda that meet the following criteria: (1) every pāda has exactly eight syllables; (2) the stanza comprises either three or four pādas; and (3) the stanza is not considered to be either trochaic gāyatrī or epic anuṣṭubh. We also exclude the Vālakhilya. We will refer to the corpus as “standard” dimeter. The tests here rely on two electronic texts of the Rigveda, namely the “Sāśapāṭha,” a Padapāṭha-like text created by Alexander Lubotsky, which serves to approximate its underlying

21 In trochaic gāyatrī, the penultimate position is preferentially implemented with a heavy syllable.

22 The hymns of the Vālakhilya (8.49–59) are a later supplement to the Rigveda and consequently excluded.
phonological form (as employed by Lubotsky 1997), as well as a metrically restored text, derived from van Nooten and Holland (1994) via the slightly improved version provided by Thomson and Slocum (2006).

As before, for the purposes of these tests, couplets are defined as (ab) in gāyatrī, and (ab) as well as (cd) in anuṣṭubh. Non-couplets are defined as b/c in both meters, c∥a in gāyatrī, and d∥a in anuṣṭubh. Hiatus is defined as an underlying vowel-vowel juncture, as assessed by the Sāśapāṭha. This excludes surface [V#V] from underlying /VC#V/, e.g. [sutā̂|úpa] < /sutā̂ḥ|úpa/ (1.2.4ab). We will use “§” as the cover symbol for all three types of juncture, pāda (“|”), couplet (“|”), and stanza (“‖”).

In order to control for the possibility that the poets might have exercised a weight preference (for either a heavy or a light syllable) in pāda-final position, however slight or unlikely such a preference might be, we consider only the junctures V̆§V vs. V̆§CV, i.e. a short-vowel-final pāda followed by a pāda that begins with either a null or simple onset. V̆§V is counted as hiatus, V̆§CV as non-hiatus, and all other junctures are set aside. V̆§V and V§CC+V are set aside because these are both contexts for which there is a possibility (however likely or unlikely) of weight-altering phonology, namely, prevocalic shortening for the former and leftward resyllabification for the latter. The poets might therefore avoid (or prefer) these sequences for reasons independent of hiatus. By considering only V̆§V vs. V̆§CV, we preclude any possible interference from those factors.

The usable dimeter corpus – “standard” anuṣṭubh or gāyatrī only, as characterized above – comprises 2,594 pādas (1,297 pairs). Of the pairs, 421 are couplets, e.g. a and b, while the remaining 876 are adjacent pādas that belong to different couplets, e.g. b and c. These couplet-internal vs. -external counts are not simple multiples of each other due to the exclusions listed in the previous paragraph.

Hiatus is found to be avoided significantly more within couplets than between them. The couplet-internal rate of hiatus is 24%, vs. external 36%, as summarized in (16).

\[(16) \text{couplet-internal rate of hiatus: } 24\% \quad (99 \text{ hiatus vs. } 322 \text{ no hiatus})
\]
\[(16) \text{couplet-external rate of hiatus: } 36\% \quad (319 \text{ hiatus vs. } 557 \text{ no hiatus})\]

The odds ratio here is 0.54, meaning that if a poet closes a pāda with V̆§, the odds of him opening the next pāda with a V-initial word, as opposed to a CV-initial word, are only 0.54 times as great couplet-internally as they are -externally. The corresponding p-value is less than 0.0001, meaning that there
is less than a 1 in 10,000 chance that an asymmetry this great or greater arose by chance, assuming the null hypothesis that the poets treated internal and external contexts identically. That null hypothesis can be securely rejected.

In sum, then, on the evidence of hiatus, the poets treat the couplet-internal juncture more like a pāda-internal position than the couplet-external juncture, providing phonological evidence for ((ab)(cd))((a ... in anuṣṭubh and ((ab)c)((a ... in gāyatrī, as illustrated in (17).
(19) ab yā ānayat parāvātah | sūnītī turvāśaṃ yādum |
    c īndraḥ sā no yūvā sākhā || 6.45.1

ab ‘Who with good leading led Turvaśa and Yadu here from afar,
c  he is Indra, our youthful comrade.’

That said, as the next test will reveal, the poets treat junctures which have the potential to resyllabify (i.e. VC§V) differently, depending on whether they are couplet-internal or -external. In particular, they avoid “setting up” VC§V more stringently within couplets than between them. Possible explanations for this discrepancy follow the discussion of the test results.

Taking the same dimeter corpus as in the previous section, we now compare the incidence of ČV§V (potential resyllabification) to that of ČV§C (no potential resyllabification) couplet-internally vs. -externally. Č does not include diphthongs. The results of this test are summarized in the table below (20). Within couplets, the poets apparently avoid ČV§V, where resyllabification could take place, more than they avoid that juncture couplet-externally.

(20) couplet-internal rate of ČV§V: 25% (512 vs. 1,532)
couplet-external rate of ČV§C: 34% (686 vs. 1,311)

The odds ratio in this case is 0.64, meaning that if a poet closes a pāda with ČV§, the odds of him opening the next pāda with a V-initial word, as opposed to a C-initial word, are approximately two thirds as great couplet-internally as they are couplet-externally. This asymmetry is once again highly significant ($p < 0.0001$).

We have shown that poets avoid ČV§V more within couplets, though the explanation for this avoidance is not as obvious as in the hiatus case. First, it could be the case that resyllabification across a pāda boundary is marked per se. Second, it is also plausible that resyllabification after a short vowel is avoided because it results in a light pāda-final syllable, while the poets prefer (however weakly) to implement that position with a heavy one.

If the poets avoid resyllabification across pādas per se, we would expect to find similar results for VC§V vs. VC§C junctures, where resyllabification would also take place, but the pāda-final syllable would remain heavy. This is not the case, as (21) reveals.

(21) couplet-internal rate of VC§V: 29% (78 vs. 189)
couplet-external rate of VC§C: 29% (51 vs. 127)
Here, the odds ratio is 1.03, meaning that if a poet closes a pāda with ŹC§, the odds of him opening the next pāda with a V-initial word, as opposed to a C-initial word, are virtually the same couplet-internally as they are couplet-externally. The difference in this case is nowhere near significant, with \( p = 0.90 \). Thus, the poets appear not to be avoiding resyllabification per se, rather the final light syllable that results from it.

Indeed, an iambic cadence such as that of dimeter verse implies a heavy final position on some level, even if the general license of *brevis in longo* masks this polarity on the surface. If *brevis in longo* is licensed by pause, one might expect it to be less applicable under cohesion, potentially explaining the greater avoidance of ŹC§V within couplets than across them. Finally, note that even if this explanation is incorrect, the sizable discrepancy between couplets and non-couplets with respect to ŹC§V junctures remains, and the asymmetry itself supports the reality of the dimeter couplet.

### 4 Cohesion in Dimeter vs. Trimeter Verse

We have seen that the poets’ treatment of hiatus and resyllabification supports greater cohesion between couplets in dimeter verse. The same holds for trimeter verse, where the effects are significant, but weaker. The smaller the odds ratio in (22) and (23), the greater the avoidance within couplets vs. couplet-externally. All odds ratios are significant unless otherwise noted.

(22) Odds ratios for hiatus avoidance in dimeter vs. trimeter (*triṣṭubh* and *jagatī*)
- 8-syllable (dimeter): 0.54
- 11-syllable (trimeter): 0.70
- 12-syllable (trimeter): 0.74

(23) Odds ratios for resyllabification avoidance in dimeter vs. trimeter
- 8-syllable (dimeter): 0.64
- 11-syllable (trimeter): 0.80
- 12-syllable (trimeter): 0.86 (non-significant)

The data display a correlation between verse length and couplet cohesion, with greater cohesion in the shorter dimeter verses.
Some Notes on Diachrony

We can refer to a diachronic increase in couplet-like cohesion of pādas as “copulation” (a precursor to syzygy). The development of the early Rigvedic anuṣṭubh to the later Rigvedic epic anuṣṭubh sketched above, and eventually to the epic Sanskrit śloka is a textbook case. Did copulation also take place in “standard” dimeter? Comparing the incidence of hiatus avoidance in books 2–7 to that in book 10, and excluding any verses identified as epic anuṣṭubh or trochaic gāyatrī from both subcorpora, we find that the numerical trend suggests greater avoidance in book 10. This is consistent with a greater degree of cohesion in that (presumably later) subcorpus, which is what we would expect to find if copulation took place between the composition of the (presumably earlier) Family Books (2–7) and the composition of book 10. However the sample sizes are reduced considerably when subsetting by book in this manner, and the difference is non-significant (Fisher’s $p = 0.40$), as reinforced by the overlapping error bars in the plot in (24).

![Hiatus](image)

This apparent null result raises the question of why copulation (then syzygy) obtained for the anuṣṭubh > epic anuṣṭubh (then > śloka) but not for the gāyatrī or trimeter meters. We offer two speculative answers here to be taken up in future research. First, the even parity of the anuṣṭubh may have facilitated the reinterpretation of the two pādas as a single metrical unit; in gāyatrī, the final odd pāda underscores the autonomy of the eight-syllable unit. Second,
this cohesion might have been more likely in the dimeter than the trimeter because each pāda of the latter is longer. Indeed, as we saw in the previous section, trimeter couplets appear to be less cohesive than dimeter couplets judging by hiatus and resyllabification.

6 Conclusion

In terms of syntax and sense, Rigvedic verse seems often to be composed in pāda couplets. Further evidence from metrics and sandhi supports the same conclusion, though some of it cannot be reliably projected back to composition. We provide new phonological support for the existence of the couplet at composition based on two tests. First, the poets avoid hiatus more within couplets than between them. Second, the poets avoid ĺC#V junctures, where the C could potentially be resyllabified, more within couplets than between them. Both results can be explained if one assumes a lower-level metrical/prosodic boundary within couplets as opposed to between them at the time of composition.

References


