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Formulaic Language in the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle

Set Phrases and Discourse Markers in Middle High German History Writing

Abstract

This paper investigates formulaic syntax in the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle (German: *Livländische Reimchronik*), a Middle High German (MHG) verse history written down around 1290. A common syntactical formula is a unit formed with the adjective *vrô* ('glad', 'happy', 'joyful') or its negative variant *unvrô*, together with the verbs *sîn* ('be') or *werden* ('become'), with a genitive object: NP-Nom + *SÎN/WERDEN* + NP-Gen + (un)*vrô* (e.g. *der meister was der rede vrô*). In almost every case the adjective (un)*vrô* occurs in end position, so that it can be rhymed with another common word, e.g. *dô* ('then') or *sô* ('thus'). An important variation is introduced with the demonstrative pronoun *des*: Pro-Dem-Gen + *SÎN/WERDEN* + NP-Nom + (un)*vrô*. The construction has the metrical function of filling a complete line, but it also functions as a discourse marker by commenting positively or negatively on an episode narrated shortly before or one which it introduces. The high frequency of the construction compared with other genres written in rhyming couplets suggests that the author was more conservative and less inventive than his contemporaries, but also that he drew more frequently on the vocabulary and conventions of heroic poetry in which formulaic language was very common. It is argued that the employment of formulaic phrasing and syntax are connected with the sociolinguistic circumstances of the recitation of the chronicle.

1. Introduction

The Livonian Rhymed Chronicle (German: *Livländische Reimchronik*), composed between the years 1290 and 1300 by an anonymous author who is generally thought to have been a member of the Teutonic Order, has a special place in the literature of both the Teutonic Order and the eastern Baltic lands.¹ A verse narrative written in Middle High German (MHG), it is the earliest work of history in the vernacular to be produced within the Order, and also the first narrative in German to be composed in Livonia, the new Christian territory where Germans provided the upper strata of nobles, clerics and burgesses among native populations who belonged to the Finnic and Baltic language groups.² Most of the chronicle's content deals with the wars fought by the Order and its predecessor, the Sword Brethren, against hostile autochthonous peoples in the period from around 1200 to around 1290. These were mostly the pagan peoples living to the south and east of its territory (Curonians, Semgallians, and Lithuanians) and the Russians of Pskov, Izborsk and Novgorod, who although Orthodox Christians were regarded by the Order as schismatics.³ The chronicle has been widely consulted by historians of the Baltic region, while some Germanists have begun to study it as a work of literature in its own right.⁴ However, the only full examination of the language of the chronicle was the dissertation by Paul Ecke, written

¹ The standard edition (to which line references are given in this essay) is the *Livländische Reimchronik*, ed. Leo Meyer (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1876). The work is sometimes known as the *Ältere Livländische Reimchronik* to distinguish it from the (*Jüngere*) *Livländische Reimchronik* by the fourteenth-century chronicler Bartholomäus Hoenecke. Meyer's text is also available in two more recent works with facing page translations into Latvian and Estonian respectively: *Atskaņu hronika / Livländische Reimchronik*, trans. Valdis Bisenieks, commentary by Ēvalds Mugurēvičs and Kaspars Kļaviņš (Riga: Zinātne, 1998), and *Liivimaa vanem riimkroonika*, trans. Urmas Eelmäe, commentary by Enn Tarvel (Tallinn: Kirjastus Argo, 2003). The English translation presented as *The Livonian Rhymed Chronicle*, trans. Jerry C. Smith and William L. Urban, 2nd edn (Chicago: Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, 2001), has no MHG text. English translations given in this essay are by the author.

² For discussion and definitions of literature produced within the Teutonic Order, see Löser 2008 and Mentzel-Reuters 2008.

³ As general background to these events, see Kala 2001.

⁴ Meyer 1873; Angermann 1986; Tarvel 1987; Kugler 1992; Murray 2001; Lazda-Cazers 2009.

at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁵ The aim of this essay is to look at linguistic aspects of the work which were not investigated by Ecke. In particular, it will try to establish how much of the language of the chronicle can be considered as formulaic in its choice of vocabulary and syntax.

2. Formulaic Language

The chronicle consists of 12,017 lines in rhyming couplets, with each line containing three or four stresses.⁶ Its language is an East Central variety of Middle High German. It does show some small influence from Low German, notably in the words *kop* ('head') and *blîven* ('remain'), which latter form occurs alongside MHG *blîben*, probably because it offered a convenient rhyme for the ethnic name *Lîven* ('Livs'), one of the converted peoples of the region who often acted as allies of the Christian crusaders.⁷ Yet, given that the vast majority of members of the Teutonic Order, and other immigrants to Livonia originated from northern Germany, it is surprising that the poem does not show greater Low German influence, and this is a point to which we shall return.

Formulaic language can be seen in various contexts. Many of the same phrases occur with great regularity, such as *daz ist wâr* ('that is true')⁸, or *als ich las* ('as I have read') and variations thereon.⁹ The apparent address to an audience, *als ir habt vernomen* ('as you have heard')¹⁰, appears alongside the similarly constructed *als ich hân vernomen* ('as I have heard').¹¹ These phrases have little significance in terms of meaning but are simply used to fill a line or part of it.

Descriptions of armour often make use of stock, repeated ideas and vocabulary, which are more telling, probably because they could be expected to appeal to men originally from the knightly classes, whether crusaders or members of the Teutonic Order:

man sach dâ helme glîzen,
ir brunjen wâren silbervar (4752-53)
'helms were seen shining there, their hauberks were like silver'

dô sach man helme glîzen,
brunjen blenken sam ein glas (8341-42)
'helms were seen shining there, and hauberks glistening like glass'

man sach helme und schilde
glîzen ûf dem gevilde,
die brunjen blenken sam ein glas (3281-83)
'Helms and shields were seen shining on the field, the hauberks glistening like glass'¹²

The demands of metrics have a major effect on the choice of phrasing. The most obvious evidence of this characteristic is the use of noun phrases which take up a complete line. This

⁵ Ecke 1910.

⁶ The uneven total number of lines occurs as a result of a triple rhyme at lines 11645-47.

⁷ Mackensen 1939: 38.

⁸ For example, at lines 296, 432, 484, 758, 2058, 3171, 4131, 5331, 5556, 5679, 5809, 6612, 6616, 6990, 7111, 7203, 7551, 7587, 7675, 7953, 8079, 8500, 8511, 8738, 8925, 8988, 9438, 9506, 9516, 9729, 9764, 10036, 10346, 10794, 11214, 11650, 11676, 11739, 11746.

⁹ Lines 250, 6060, 6908, 7122, 9664, 9778, 9831, 9849, 12007.

¹⁰ Lines 4606, 8798, 8806, 9158, 9178, 9240, 9596.

¹¹ Lines 3478, 6094, 9026, 9220, 11713.

¹² For similar examples, see lines 1085-86, 2374-75, 5018-19, 10410-11.

relates especially to recurrent nominal formulae which describe the composition of Christian armies in Livonia, which are repeated either identically or with minimal variation:

(die) burger(e) und (die) pilgerîn (4417, 10415, 10577)
‘burgesses and crusaders’

daz lantvolc und die pilgerîn (3246, 3944, 4038)
‘the country people and the crusaders’

beide arme und rîche (1046, 1345, 1646, 1880, 1940, 7029)
‘both poor and rich’

der meister und die brûdere gar (1114)¹³
‘the master and the brethren’

der meister und die brûdere sîn (1941, 3939, 3943)
‘the master and his brethren’

These noun phrases can also be combined over two lines:

der meister und die brûdere sîn,
daz lantvolc und die pilgerîn (3425-26, 3943-44)
‘the master and his brethren, the country people and the crusaders’

In the first half of the work, dealing with a period when the main native allies of the Christians were the converted Livs and Letts, their names are several times banded together in a noun phrase used to fill a complete line: (die) Letten und(e) (die) Lîven (526, 1079, 1117, 1148, 1377, 1893).¹⁴ There are also slightly extended variants: die Letten und die Lîven vro (1392) and die Letten und die Lîven mite (1185, 1252). This alliterative pair is almost invariably lexicalised in this standard order, and rhymed with the verb blîven ‘remain’, for example:

die Letten und die Lîven
zû hûs nicht wolden blîven (1893-94)
‘The Letts and Livs did not want to remain at home’.

This basic formula can also be used after prepositions: an Letten und an Lîven (907); nâch Letten und nâch Lîven (1741); mit Letten und mit Lîven (898), as well as in terms of address in direct speech: ir Letten und ir Lîven (1521).¹⁵ Each of these phrases thus fills a complete line of poetry. The recurrence of such pairs shows how the poet repeatedly resorted to existing formulae in order to construct substantive units.

3. Formulaic Syntax

Some of the basic noun phrases can be extended while still filling a complete line:

¹³ Throughout the work the word brûdere (plural) normally refers to knight brethren of the Teutonic Order, or of its predecessor, the Order of the Sword Brethren; meister normally refers to the Master of Livonia, the senior officer of the Teutonic Order in the eastern Baltic lands.

¹⁴ On the military service of Livs and Letts, see Kļaviņš 2009.

¹⁵ A rare exception occurs in line 5358: beide der Lîven und der Litten. Here the (somewhat forced) rhyme is with the word slitten (‘sledge’).

mit roube unde mit brande (6004, 6498, 6902)
 ‘with plundering and burning’

sie stiften roub und brant (1902, 2228, 2698, 2756)
 ‘they carried out plundering and burning’

When a person or place is introduced to the narrative, this is often done with a standard naming formula which is structured as NP + auxiliary verb + NP/pronoun + past participle, where the past participle is invariably *genant* (‘named, called’):

brûder Anne was er genant.
 er was meister zû Nieflant (4337-38)
 ‘he was named brother Anno; he was master of Livonia’.

brûder Walter was er genant
 von Nordecken geborn (8003-4)
 ‘he was named Brother Walter, born in Nordeck’.

einen brûder man dô kôs
 zû meister uber Nieflant:
 brûder Willekîn was er genant (9734)
 ‘a brother was chosen then as master of Livonia; he was named Brother Willekin’

The entire narrative is largely structured according to the periods of office of the masters of Livonia, so one might well expect an introductory formula to be used when these names first appear. However, the same formula is also used (especially of places and peoples) even when they have already figured in the narrative:

Ickeskule was sie genant (10443)
 ‘it was called Üxküll’.

Doblên was eine burc genant (9454)
 ‘There was a castle named Doblen’.

Sydobre ein burc was genant
 Und lac zû Semegallen lant (11430)
 ‘A castle was called Sidobren which lay in the land of the Semgallians’

daz hûs Mytowe ist genant
 und liet vor Semegallen lant (7405)¹⁶
 ‘The house is named Mitau, and lies before the land of the Semgallians’.

dâ sie eine burc vernâmen;
 die Mitowe ist sie genant (11868)
 ‘They captured a castle there; it is named Mitau’.

der Heiligeberc wart sie genant,
 ir name wart sint wol bekant. (9939)
 ‘It was named Heiligenberg, and its name has become well known since then’.

¹⁶ The word *hûs* here refers to a convent of the Teutonic Order, that is, a fortified monastic establishment, rather than a ‘house’. Mitau is the modern Jelgava, Latvia.

der Heiligeberc was er genant
und lac in der viende lant (10945)
It was named Heiligenberg, and lay in enemy territory’.

und ein hûs gebûwete
zû Semegallen in daz lant,
der Heiligenberc wart ez genant (11618)
‘... and built a house in the land of the Semgallians; it was named Heiligenberg’.

Sometimes this formula is used of names of people or places which occur so frequently that they really need no introduction or explanation, especially when they figure at a relatively late point in the narrative. Thus, after a long description of fighting against Russia (MHG Rûzen), we find the phrase:

dô sie quâmen vor daz lant,
daz dâ Rûzen is genant (7700)
‘Then they arrived at the land that is called Russia’.

Howevr, the name Rûzen has already been mentioned a dozen times in the preceding 200 lines, and there is clearly no need for explanation. The same phrasing occurs with other common names of peoples or countries even quite late in the narrative:

daz lantvolc Eisten sint genant (6725)
‘The country people are named Estonians’

dô sie quâmen vor ein lant,
daz Lettowen ist genant (11703)
‘They came to a country that is named Lithuania’.

This naming phrase using the past participle *genant* seems to be used as a convenient formula which fills a complete line, but it also functions as a discourse marker which is used to fix attention on a particular person or place which will figure as the locus of following action.¹⁷

4. The Adjective *vrô* as a Discourse Marker

One of the most commonly used words in the chronicle is the adjective *vrô*, meaning ‘glad’, ‘happy’, ‘pleased’, or ‘joyful’.¹⁸ This adjective can of course be used in simple manner as an attribute or predicate following the verbs *sîn* (to be) or *werden* (to become), and the poet repeatedly states that certain individuals or groups were happy or pleased. However, beyond this usage (instances of which are too numerous to list) we find two more specific formulae which serve the requirements of metre by filling a complete line.

4.1. NP-Nom + *SÎN/WERDEN* + NP-Gen + *vrô*

The word *vrô* is one of a group of MHG adjectives which can govern an object in the genitive case, which allows the construction of a complete line, e.g.

¹⁷ For additional examples, see lines 139, 2133, 2208, 2734, 3832, 4337, 4407, 4467, 4732, 4831, 6992, 8879, 11881.

¹⁸ Matthias Lexers *Mittelhochdeutsches Taschenwörterbuch*, 34th edn (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 1976), p. 299

der meister was der rede vrô (8281)
 ‘the master was glad to hear the speech’

Several variations of the basic form are possible. These can involve substituting the verb *werden* (‘to become’) for *sîn*, or using the negative form of the adjective, *unvrô*. Another involves changing the word order, such as placing the genitive object in the initial position.

des rates wurden sie alle vrô (1764)
 ‘they were all pleased by this counsel’

Where metrics permit, additional words may be included; typically these are adverbs or adverbial phrases. For example, the adverbial phrase *von herzen* is used to intensify the basic meaning while providing an additional stressed syllable.

er wart der mêre von herzen vrô (10139)
 ‘he was heartily pleased by this news’

This construction produces a number of different syntactic patterns whose frequency can be seen in the following table:

Pattern + line references (constructions with <i>unvrô</i> in italics)	Number
(a) NP-Nom + SÎN/WERDEN + NP-Gen + (un)vrô 418, 1643, 1174, 1738, 2088, 2100, 2138, 2338, 2810, 3266, 3497, 3551, 3563, 3696, 4749, 5036, 5409, 6069, 6647, 6661, 7037, 8281, 8315, 8333, 8643, 8889, 9209, 9564, 9721, 10139, 10540, 11101, 11118, 11425, 11549, 11588, 11870	37
(b) NP-Nom + NP-Gen + SÎN/WERDEN + (un)vrô 1343, 2000, 4419, 4609, 8329, 8840	6
(c) NP-Nom + SÎN/WERDEN + (un)vrô + NP-Gen 3630	1
(d) NP-Gen + SÎN/WERDEN + NP-Gen + (un)vrô 555, 1764, 2794, 2971, 3421, 4543, 4762, 5559, 7793, 8577, 9302	11
(e) NP-Gen + NP-Nom + SÎN/WERDEN + (un)vrô 4671	1
(f) NP-Gen + SÎN/WERDEN + (un)vrô + NP-Nom 410, 4744	2

These statistics show how the syntactical function of the phrase is subordinated to the requirements of the metrics. In almost all cases, *vrô* and its negative equivalent appear at the end of a line, and invariably rhyme with a handful of adverbs: *dô* (‘then’), *sô* (‘so, thus’) and *alsô* (‘thus, therefore’). These three words have some of the most neutral meanings in Middle High German, and thus are clearly only used to facilitate the deployment of the *vrô/unvrô* construction. This is used to express the idea that the subject is either pleased or displeased about something, although it should be noted that the positive form *vrô* occurs far more frequently than the negative form.

It is also interesting to see which words are found as genitive objects, as set out in the next table:

Object (genitive)	line refs (negative forms in italics)	vrô	unvrô	Total
armbrust ‘crossbow’	8643	1		1
bete ‘request’	5559	1		1
brûdere ‘brethren’	5036	1		1

crône ‘crown’	3563	1		1
geste ‘guests, crusaders’	2138, 2810, 2971	2	1	3
gotes êre ‘God’s honour’	1174, 2338	2		2
guter wille ‘good will’	8577	1		1
her ‘army’	5036	1		1
hûs ‘house’	5409	1		1
kumfte ‘coming, arrival’	1343, 2088, 3696, 7037, 8889, 11101, 11588, 11870	7	1	8
lôn ‘reward’	8840	1		1
meister ‘master’	4419	1		1
mêre ‘news, message’	418, 1738, 2100, 3551, 4762, 6661, 9302, 10139, 11118, 11425, 11549	9	2	11
personal pronouns	8333, 9721	2		2
rât ‘advice, counsel’	1764, 2794, 8564, 10540	4		4
rede ‘speech’	1643, 3266, 3497, 4671, 8281, 11519	6		6
reise ‘campaign, raid’	3421, 4749, 6647, 8315, 8329	5		5
schar ‘force, army unit’	4744	1		1
strît ‘conflict’	6069		1	1
trôst ‘consolation’	410, 555, 4543	3		3
vart/verte ‘way’	2000, 3630	2		2
vrîde ‘peace’	4609	1		1
warnunge ‘warning’	7793, 9209	2		2
Totals		55	5	60

The construction is most commonly used with a small number of substantives, e.g. rede (speech), mêre (news), rât (advice, counsel), reise (campaign), vrîde (peace), and kumfte (arrival). It is noticeable that many of these terms relate to discourse, either directly, by referring to speech acts, or indirectly, by referring to events – mostly political or military in nature – which are the objects of speech acts.

4.2. Clause Combining

A more complex form occurs in combining clauses. Here an unspecific genitive demonstrative pronoun *des* is used to link the construction to a complete clause which either precedes or follows it. One such example occurs when the chronicle depicts how Albrecht, count of Orlamünde, the leader of an army of German crusaders, speaks to the master of the Order of the Sword Brethren:

grêve Albrecht der sprach dô:

‘ich bin des von herzen vrô,

daz ich die heiden sûchen sol.

ich getrûwe dem gûten gote sô wol,

daz wir uns an in rechen sô,

daz **sie des nimmer werden vrô**’ (1369-74)

‘Count Albrecht spoke thus: “**I am heartily pleased** that I should seek out the heathens. I trust the good Lord so much that we should revenge ourselves on them, so that **they will never be happy as a result**”.’

Like the basic form, this more extended form appears in a variety of constructions:

(g) Pro-Dem-Gen (des) + SÎN/WERDEN + NP-Nom + (un)vrô

sie quâmen in vil kurzer stunt
den Lettowen alsô nâhen,
daz sie ir her besâhen.

des wurden sie von herzen vrô. (11892)

‘Very quickly they came so close to the Lithuanians that they could see their army; they were heartily pleased by this’.

(h) Pro-Dem-Gen + NP-Nom + SÎN/WERDEN + (un)vrô

der meister und der kunic sân
ir gelubde machten sie dô,

des die cristen wurden vrô (3504)

‘The master and the king made their vow then; all the Christians were glad of this’.

(i) Pro-Dem-Gen + SÎN/WERDEN + (un)vrô + NP-Nom

vor Semegallen bûwen dô

ein hûs, **des wurden unvrô**

alle die Semegallen (7403)

‘They built a house on the borders of Semgallia; all the Semgallians were displeased by this’.

(j) NP-Nom + SÎN/WERDEN + Pro-Dem-Gen + (un)vrô

dô im die mêre wurden bekant,

er wart des von hertzen vrô. (7151)

‘When he learned the news, he was heartily pleased by it’.

(k) NP-Nom + Pro-Dem-Gen + SÎN/WERDEN + (un)vrô

armbruste und pfile

wart in kurtzer wîle

ûf die burc gebrâcht alsô,

daz **sie des alle wurden vrô** (5428)

‘Crossbows and arrows were quickly brought into the castle, so that they were all glad of this’.

The following table shows the distribution and frequency of the different forms:

	Construction type (<i>unvrô</i> in italics)	vrô	unvrô	total
(g)	Pro-Dem-Gen (des) + SÎN/WERDEN + NP-Nom + (un)vrô 187, 750, 770, 876, 919, 1178, 1348, 1422, 1662, 2083, 2186, 2330, 2359, 2401, 2425, 2861, 2917, 2963, 3278, 3362, 4599, 5823, 6291, 6642, 6948, 6855, 7378, 7690, 7744, 7984, 8040, 8071, 8176, 8444, 9699, 9837, 9869, 9909, 9925, 9991, 11592, 11662, 11724, 11892, 12000	38	7	45
(h)	Pro-Dem-Gen + NP-Nom + SÎN/WERDEN + (un)vrô 3504, 7656, 8664, 9634	2	2	4
(i)	Pro-Dem-Gen + SÎN/WERDEN + (un)vrô + NP-Nom 7403, 7886-87	1	1	2
(j)	NP-Nom + SÎN/WERDEN + Pro-Dem-Gen + (un)vrô 179, 1371, 2487, 2593, 2620, 3463, 5488, 5902, 7507, 7151, 10388	10	1	11
(k)	NP-Nom + Pro-Dem-Gen + SÎN/WERDEN + (un)vrô	8	1	9

	1030, 1184, 1374, 1895, 2391, 5428, 7681, 8792, 10800			
		59	12	71

This variation greatly extends the syntactic capabilities of the basic construction. Most typically it is used to convey an opinion by the poet to sum up (either positively or negatively) the outcome of an event described in a foregoing section of narrative. Thus a section of 32 lines (2299-2331) is devoted to Heinrich von Heimburg, who served for the unusually short period of one and a half years as master of Livonia before resigning his office prematurely. The section ends with the lines:

dar nâch er von dem lande schiet
und kein dûtschen landen dô.

des wâren die brûdere unvrô.

dâ wart er des amtes lôs (2328-31)

‘After that he left the land and travelled to Germany. The brothers were dismayed that he had left office’.

The phrase ending with unvrô thus conveys the unsatisfactory situation in the Livonian branch of the Order on the master’s presumably premature departure. The following section (2332-62) tells of the election of his successor, Dietrich von Grünigen. It concludes by reporting how the new master decided to begin his rule with a campaign against Curonia:

er wolde heren Kûrlant.

den brûderen tet er daz bekant.

des wâren sie von hertzen vrô.

mit aller macht sie hûlfen dô,

daz ez wurde vollenbrâcht,

als der meister hatte gedâcht. (2357-62)

‘He desired to harry Curonia, and made this known to the brethren, who were all overjoyed. They did their utmost to help achieve what the master had planned’.

Thus in fairly rapid succession there are two sections of the narrative which are respectively signalled as being negative and positive in their significance. The nature of the chronicle as an account of the struggles of the Teutonic Order against its pagan and schismatic enemies means that it gives many descriptions of battles, campaigns, sieges, political negotiations, treaties and so on. Thus in practice, the phrase can be appended to almost any statement, functioning as a discourse marker to indicate how that episode should be interpreted. The highly formulaic nature of these markers is shown by the fact that many of them are similarly structured and show only minimal variation, for example:

des wâren die Semegallen vrô (9991, 11592)

des wâren rîch und arme vrô (750, 919, 1422)

des was er von herzen vrô (2963, 3278)

des wart er von herzen vrô (2401, 9837)

des wâren sie von herzen vrô (2186, 2359, 2401, 11724)

des wurden sie von herzen vrô (187, 2861, 4599, 9869, 11892)

daz sie des alle werden vrô (5428, 8792, 10800)

die pilgerîme des wâren vrô (1184, 1895)

These repetitions or near repetitions are indicative of the highly formulaic nature of these two related constructions. In total they occur 131 times in the entire Rhymed Chronicle. This means that over a total length of 12,017 lines, the frequency of the construction is roughly once every 92 lines.

We can make a comparison with the two best-known examples of the two leading genres of Middle High German epic poetry, that is, the Arthurian romance *Parzival* by Wolfram von Eschenbach, and the heroic poem the *Nibelungenlied*.¹⁹

Text	Date	length (lines)	occurrences (total)	frequency per 1000
Nibelungenlied	c. 1200	9516	13	1.36
Parzival	c. 1215	24,810	22	0.88
Livonian Rhymed Chronicle	c. 1290	12,017	129	10.73

If we calculate the number of occurrences of the construction over 1000 lines in each case, we find that Rhymed Chronicle has the highest frequency in all three of the works compared, and this difference is significant: in the Rhymed Chronicle the two constructions formed with the adjectives vrô/unvrô occur more than ten times more frequently than in *Parzival*. Wolfram von Eschenbach was celebrated for the inventiveness of his language, and evidently had little need to rely on existing formulaic syntax. Wolfram's use is more varied, with the greatest number of rhymes being with sô (11 occurrences), dô (8) and alsô (2), but remarkably on one occasion it is rhymed with Junô, the name of the classical goddess. In the *Nibelungenlied* every occurrence of the terms vrô/unvrô has the word rhyming with the unremarkable adverb dô, yet the construction is nowhere as frequent as in the Rhymed Chronicle. The relatively few occurrences of the vrô/unvrô constructions in both *Parzival* and the *Nibelungenlied* suggest that more capable or inventive poets avoided overuse of this feature, whose repetition might well have been regarded as poor style. This comparison suggests that the poet of the Rhymed Chronicle lagged a long way behind the leading poets in terms of stylistic ability and innovation.

5. Conclusions

If we accept, as most scholars have done, that the anonymous author of the chronicle was a fairly unaccomplished writer, who aimed at recording a basic historical narrative rather than impressing audiences with his style, this investigation may well suggest that in the case of the vrô/unvrô constructions we are dealing with formulaic phrases which were common in everyday usage in spoken Middle High German.

There may be a further explanation for their frequency. Older scholarship generally maintained that the chronicle was composed for internal use within the Teutonic Order, being

¹⁹ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*: Studienausgabe, ed. Karl Lachmann, 6th edn (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1965) (References to strophe and line): 23,12; 40,22; 50,13; 200,14; 209,25; 240,4; 286,16; 306,8; 416,24; 467,12; 591,7; 624,6; 624,24; 640,8; 647,27; 685,8; 694,28; 748,18; 777,24; 795,3; 806,30; 822,22. *Das Nibelungenlied*, ed. Helmut de Boor, 20th edn (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1972) (references to strophe and line): 16,2; 53,2; 164,2; 275,2; 343,2; 481,2; 655,2; 743,4; 887,2; 1441,1; 1504,2; 1677,3; 2165,2.

read aloud at mealtimes to the knight brethren, most of whom would have been illiterate.²⁰ A problem with this theory is the fact that the Rule of the Teutonic Order, which was constituted well before the composition of the chronicle, specifies that the mealtime reading should consist of the ‘word of God’ (Gotes worte).²¹ It is difficult to see how a bellicose work of history was appropriate to be listened to in silence. Indeed the Order produced many religious texts which would have been far more suitable, including vernacular translations or paraphrases of books of the Bible as well as saints’ lives and homiletic literature.²² It has been more recently suggested that, while it undoubtedly praised the deeds of the Order, the chronicle had the propagandistic purpose of appealing for support from crusaders from Germany.²³ This use would not necessarily exclude the chronicle being read or recited in the Order outside mealtimes, and one could imagine that it was employed as a historical record of the Order’s deeds, but that it could also have been used to entertain and inspire visiting crusaders.

However, it is an oddity that the work was composed in High German, the language of central and southern Germany. Almost all the knights of both the Sword Brethren and the Teutonic Order who came to Livonia originated from Saxony, Westphalia and Hesse; the vast majority of them would have been speakers of Low German. Similarly, most of the crusaders and settlers who went to Livonia originated from Saxony, Westphalia, Mecklenburg, Holstein and Pomerania, and it was Low German which became the language of government and commerce in Livonia.²⁴ It is possible that High German was chosen as the medium of the chronicle as this language had more of an established tradition of poetry and history writing than was the case with Low German, particularly since poetic forms continued longer as a vehicle for history writing in the German- and Scandinavian-speaking countries than in Romance-speaking areas.²⁵ Yet, whether knight brethren or crusaders, the audience of the work would have heard what was essentially a foreign (if related) language, and may have struggled to understand every word and nuance. The frequent repetition of formulaic phrases gave the audience the chance to learn and recognise them at later points in the narrative. Moreover, the employment of formulaic discourse markers to convey positive or negative reactions to historical episodes at regular points in the narrative may well have been a practical device designed to maximise understanding of a text among hearers who were not necessarily familiar with the language variety of the chronicle.

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²⁰ Helm and Ziesemer 1951: 28-29; Angermann 1986: 11; Arnold 1985: col. 859; Fischer 1991: 173.

²¹ Perlbach 1890: 41: Daruber sal man daz behalten in allen hūseren, dā convent von brūderen ist, daz sint zwelf brūdere unde ein commendūr zu der gezal der iungeren unseres herren Jhēsu Christi, daz man dā pflēgeliche dī lectien zu tische habe, die alle, die dā ezzent, mit swīgene sulen hōren, daz in alleine die gūmen iht werden gespīset, sunder ouch ir ōren nāch Gotes worte.

²² Fischer 2001; Necke 2008; Gärtner 2008.

²³ Murray 2001: 248-250.

²⁴ Benninghoven 1965: 420-468; Hubatsch 1971; Fenske and Militzer 1993; Piskorski 2007: 80-82; Selart 2012: 174-178; Selart 2017: 41-44.

²⁵ Michell 1998.

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