

Formulaic Discourse in the *Romances*

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The title of my paper hardly conveys the import of what I feel I would like to say about formulaic/ formulistic diction in the *romances*. Up until now, formulas have been viewed as simple mnemonic devices or at best, epic clichés sprinkled about in texts for intertextual and connotative charm.¹ Regardless of their appeal as literary devices, I feel that formulas can be seen as dynamic linguistic mechanisms directly or indirectly shaping the evolution of the language.

The formula used in medieval poetry is a unique structure with privileged status. While the definitions of the classical formula dictate that it be the same in every manifestation,² when looked at in all its manifestations in the epics, *romances* and even prosified in the chronicles, the formula is malleable. I say it is malleable because it appears to adapt to the text in which it appears and to keep pace with the spoken language. Developments in language and generic transformations all exert an influence on the formula. The reaction of the formula to those influences is a sign that it maintains its oral nature regardless of the text or genre in which it is found.

Arriving at a study of the *romances* from a background of historical linguistics, I find myself unable to not view the formula as a linguistic tool that in addition to developing with the language, also manages to preserve archaic structures in the language.³ In this light are formulas epic remnants, chronicle remnants, or unique to the *romancero* tradition? Because if they hearken back to the epics, surviving prosification in the chronicles and the break up into *romances*, the linguistic miracle of textual preservation alone attests to their protected status. As an integral part of ballad poetry in Medieval Spain, the formula metonymically defines the medium. It is assumed that the same oral tradition that governed the composition and transmission of the epic accompanied the composition and transmission of the *romances*. In this paper I outline exactly what the relationship is between the epic formula and that of the formula in the *romances*. I will show, by numerous examples how the formula is affected by the evolving Spanish language in the early Middle Ages.

For a taxonomy of the formulas, I follow Ruth House Webber's classification of the six different kinds of formulas found in medieval Spanish *romances*, that is: a) formulas of introduction; b) formulas of dialogue; c) formulas of action; d) adjectival formulas; e) adverbial

¹ "De ahí que la alusión a la cita parcial de romances se convierta en una procedimiento usual para las *private jokes* de la época." (Díaz-Mas 32, emphasis in original)

² "A *group of words* which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a *given* essential idea." (Parry 1930:80 emphasis is mine)

³ Fleischman has commented, "as a linguistically oriented philologist, I am convinced that many of the disconcerting properties of medieval vernacular texts--their extraordinary parataxis, mystery particles, conspicuous anaphora and repetitions, 'proleptic' topicalizations and jarring alternations of tenses, to cite but a few -- can find more satisfying explanations if we first of all acknowledge the extent to which our texts structure information the way spoken language does, and then proceed to the linguistic literature that explores the pragmatic underpinning of parallel phenomena in naturally occurring discourse." (1990:23)

formulas; and e) miscellaneous formulas. The *romances* I am concentrating on for this study are mainly the *romances* surrounding the Cid Cycle, and the Counts of Castile Cycle. Having strong epic connections, these *romances* provide ample evidence of the oral tradition that links the epic and ballad genres as well as providing examples of formulas that are used in available (not lost) texts. There are many other *romances* whose source is unclear at best, and most likely completely lost. Therefore, finding any connections, or establishing lines of evolution for the more obscure *romances* proves futile.

The second relationship between the formulas and the evolution of the language as seen by their use in the *romances* is their use of archaisms. I would like to point out a few. In my doctoral dissertation I compiled a comprehensive list of formulas employed in French and Spanish epic poetry. There are many formulas shared by both epics and *romances* that either surfed the wave of prosification or were borrowed purposefully for intertextual reference. Some of those formulas are:

- Besar la mano* formulas
- Epithets/adjectival formulas
- Weeping/ *ojos* formulas
- Collective group formulas (i.e. *cuantos que alli son*)
- Quando lo/aquesto oyo/ojera* formulas
- Binomial formulas

What happened here was a conflation of form and function where although the formula may have long since lost a clear referent, the formulaic diction prolonged its use – this is why in the *romances* we still have these archaic forms – many of which are found embedded in formulas. For example:

The quite famous formula, *llorando/lloraba de los sos ojos*, appears in several romances (i.e. *Como se perdió España por causa del Rey don Rodrigo* (II), *Casamiento de doña Lambra con don Rodrigo de Lara*, *Romance del rey de Aragón* just to name a few) as well as in the PMC and the PFG, the *Mocedades de Rodrigo* and the *Siete Infantes de Lara*. The use of determinant/article with possessive before the nouns is an older construction not seen in Spanish past the 14th Century. Other formulas include: *los que comedes de mi pan* (Prim No 36, l.18, p54), *mentides, el rey, mentides* (Prim No 36, l.35, p54), both formulas Colin Smith claims to come directly from the epic of Bernardo del Carpio (12). In these formulas, the -d- of the 2nd person plural conjugation hangs on as a vestige of Latin. This same vestige exists in other romances in the formulas, *presto os diré la verdade* (D.M. 671.11), *callades hija callades* (Prim No 36, l.19, p 32), *no digades tal palabra* (Prim No 36, l.20, p 32), *no hagades tan gran llanto* (Prim No 50, l.24), *quando vido aquesto el rey* (Prim No 16, l.73), *bien vengades los mis hijos* (Prim 19, l.35) and *amade, putas amad* (Prim No 19, l.101). Another example worth mentioning here is the body of formulas that make use of the verb form we associate today with the imperfect subjunctive. From the 13th through the 16th centuries, this form was used for the pluperfect tense as in, “she/he had heard”, or “she/he had answered.” It is seen in the following formulas, *Doña Lambra, que esto oyera* (Prim No 19, l. 107), *El rey quando aquesto oyera* (Prim No 30a, l. 31, p 47).⁴

One of the most striking discoveries of this study is that the formulas of medieval Spanish poetry are comparable to the behavior of modern-day clichés in that they preserve archaic forms of the language but survive the cross-over from genre to genre without suffering

⁴ See Appendix B.

the alterations and adjustments for rhyme and meter. Whether formulas originated in the spoken language or in poetic language proves too difficult to ascertain given the lack of audible samples of medieval speech. However, what is more important is that this concrete connection has been found between the oral poetics of the epics and the *romances*.

If we are to consider seriously Ramón Menéndez Pidal's claim, among others⁵, that the *romances* are "fragments" of Spanish epics, we must realize that the formula can tell us a great deal about the epics that also made heavy use of formulaic discourse. "También habría conservado el romance el estilo formulístico." (Díaz-Mas 17).

Leaving out the ballads does not mean, however that some observations with regard to the presence and behavior of the formula in the *romances* are not applicable to the presence and behavior of the formula in the epics. Webber concluded in a study of what she referred to as "formulaic" diction in Spanish ballads, that

The stability of the traditional poetic language itself cannot be better demonstrated than by noticing the number of formulaic lines that appear regularly and without radical variation in the *Cid* and in the *Rodrigo* and reappear constantly in the sixteenth-century ballads. (1951:254)

I have stated before that some of the most valuable information about the language of the epic can be found in the way the epics were read by those scribes that included epics in the writing of the chronicles, however I also believe that some extremely valuable information about the epics can be found by reading the *romances* as well.

In the past I have paid particular attention to epic formulas and chose not to deal with the vast number of formulas from the *romances*, or ballad poetry in Spain and Portugal. Having reserved it for this study I found it difficult to leave them out, since so much of what we know of Spanish epics comes from the *romances*. The corpus of balladic poetry is too great to be ignored. The study of formulas in the *romances* broadens our understanding of the poetic language of Medieval Spain.

Epics, in the forms that they existed in thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Spain, were replaced by the *romances*, which Menéndez Pidal (1980) claims to have been made up of epic fragments. The best romances, he claims, are basically memorized and expanded episodes from the more popular epics.

The last point to be made concerning this feature of poetic language is not that the Paragogic *-e* or *-d-* are necessarily features of formulaic discourse, but that as features of poetic discourse they are swept along with the tradition into the chronicles and the *romances*. This is a powerful observation on the part of Armistead because it shows a) that poetic language is to a certain degree a reflection of spoken language and b) that as a reflection, older spoken forms are preserved in the chronicles.⁶

⁵ "La vinculación entre épica y romancero fue ya propuesta por Milá (1853, 1874) y por Menéndez Pelayo (1945, vols. XXII-XXIII) y defendida por Menéndez Pidal (por ejemplo, en 1899, 1917, 1927, 1951, 1953, etc.). Trabajos que vinculan aspectos concretos del romancero con la épica son los de Alonso (1953), Armistead (1957, 1958, 1984b, 1986-1987a, 1987), Deyermond (1965), Gilman (1983), Jules Horrent (1955) y Segre (1981-1983)." (Díaz-Mas 17n)

⁶ Armistead's eloquent conclusion regarding the preservation of paragogic *-d-* deserves full citation here, "It is difficult to imagine what neo-positivist argument could be advanced to negate the historical identity of the paragogic forms, *diráde* and *consejaráde* in the thirteenth-century *Roncesvalles* and *seráde* and *heráde* in two nineteenth-century Judeo-Spanish ballads – both also concerned with the battle at Roncesvaux –, forms which, in their turn, all

Además, ni siquiera es siempre lícito suponer que un romance épico deriva directamente de algún poema épico medieval, o que uno de tema histórico se compuso a raíz de los hechos que narra; muchas veces se trata más bien de creaciones eruditas tardías, basadas en crónicas (algunas de las cuales, a su vez, prosifican poemas épicos, por lo que ni siquiera es un dato concluyente que en el romance y en el poema épico reconstruido a partir de la crónica aparezcan formulaciones idénticas.) (Díaz-Mas 12)

There are three ways that formulas are related to the evolution of the language. First, formulas are not limited to use in the *romances*, epics, chronicles or any other literature for that matter. Formulas have a life of their own, like clichés that harken back to texts or former conversations, but as an individual lexical item they are not considered so 'literary' as to be excluded from every-day speech. If we are to believe that language evolves at the level of performance rather than competence, then this is a significant recognition.

Lehman and Tabusa said in an article on the Old English epic *Beowulf* in 1958 that the idea of an artificial poetic dialect that fossilizes linguistic features is not such a radical concept. There are many other supporters of this hypothesis that the formula is generated on the level of poetic competence. This reaffirms the idea that a poet, having learned certain rules with regard to the composition and maintenance of a song or poem, has the same capacity to produce coherent and metrically accurate poetry as a child who can produce coherent and appropriate discourse in a given context. Cassidy (1965), in speaking of the freedom of expression granted to poets in the composition and improvisation of the poems mentions the effect this habit has on normal speech. He says that although they might be participating in a highly elaborate tradition of composition and recitation, poets may not be conscious of how they are doing it. "It is commonplace that a native, but naïve speaker of a language knows its structural rules without knowing that he knows them" (1965, 77). Cassidy further states that "the syntactic forms, very much like Saussure's *langue* underlies the verbal formula [while] the *parole* furnishes the singer a certain area of freedom" (82). Having mastered this knowledge, skill and talent in composing poetry with relatively little conscious effort, he would apply his knowledge of the spoken language as he recited or sang a poem. He is at liberty to apply the same formulaic structure from relating the story to any given setting, as long as it was contextually applicable.

The *romances* are connected with both popular and educated poetic expression. As popular poetry, they represented popular thoughts and deeds as sophisticated poetry, they represent the best of artfully contrived expression. While the language of the *romances* is forthright and frank, it is by no means devoid of brilliant literary devices. One of those clever devices is repetition. Both popular and erudite, traditional and courtly/minstrel-like (*juglaresco*), *romances* are not immune to a kind of repetition intended for artistic effect. Where does this repetition have a greater resonance? Does such methodic repetition serve the composer or the hearer best? Anaphora and antistrophe as well as formulas are rhetorical as well as mnemonic devices that play an integral role in the evolution of the language.

Formulas are not unlike clichés in modern speech. The relationship between this poetic language and the every-day language spoken by the people at the time the poems

reach back through time to a remote tenth-century stage in the development of the oral epic, when the paragogic *-e* and the paragogic *-d-* were both living features of the spoken language" (1988:72).

were composed has not been explored in formula studies in ballad poetry. One major obstacle in determining this relationship lies in the fact that there is no existing recording of XVI Century Spanish with which the grammatical structures can be compared. Therefore we must confront the problem as you would an algebraic equation. Just as one can state, $4 \times a = 12$ and solve for a , even though it may seem unknown, one can solve for an unknown variable in the linguistic equation where the known factors are contemporary written texts, as well as pre-existing and post existing texts not to mention philological theory ascertained as a result of over a century of data compiled in historical linguistic studies in Spanish.

Appendix A
Formulaic Taxonomy

- I. FORMULAS OF INTRODUCTION
- II. EPITHETS: ADJECTIVAL FORMULAS
 - Divine epithets
 - Place name epithets
 - Personal name epithets
 - Descriptive formulas
 - Epithets with *nado*
 - Epithets of Death
- III. FORMULAS OF DIALOGUE
 - Formulas Introducing Direct discourse
 - Direct Discourse formulas with verb of saying
 - Formulas of Agreement
 - Formulas of Affirmation
 - Formulaic Oaths
 - Formulaic Curses
 - Exclamation formulas
 - Invocation formulas
 - Formulas of Gratitude
 - Liason formulas
 - Amen* formulas
 - Formulas of Epic Anticipation
- IV. FORMULAS OF ACTION
 - Battle formulas
 - Ceindre l'espee formulas
 - Traire l'espee* formulas
 - Ferir de l'espee* formulas
 - Durendal/ Joyeuse*, the sword, in Formulas
 - Other named swords in formulas
 - Brant* (instead of *épée*) Formulas
 - Bright sword formulas
 - Good sword formulas
 - Beautiful sword formulas
 - Golden sword formulas
 - Steel sword formulas
 - Formulas of swords covered with blood
 - Point of the sword formulas
 - Weeping/ *ojos* formulas
 - Speaking/ *boca* formulas
 - Homage Formulas

Appendix B
List of formulas in the *romances*

Helos, helos por do vienen	Prim 19, l. 31
Helos, helos por do asoman	D-M p 57 l. 18
Ellos en aquesto estando	Prim No 59, l. 25, p. 46
Con toda la su compañía	Prim No 19, l. 32
Buena sea tu llegada	Prim No 26, l. 14
Buena sea vuestra llegada	Prim No 55, l. 42
Bien vengades los mis hijos	Prim No 19, l. 35
Como las parió su madre	Prim No 57, l. 45
Amad, señoras, amad	Prim No 19, l. 59
Amade, putas, amad	Prim No 19, l. 101
Amad lindas damas,	
cada cual como es amada	D-M p. 59, l. 55
Mentides, el rey, mentides	Prim No 36, l. 35
Doliente, estaba, doliente	Prim No 35, l. 1
Callades, hija, callades	Prim No. 36, l. 19, p. 32
	Prim No. 50, l. 23
A grandes voces llamaban	Prim 26, l. 64
Cuando aquesto oyó el buen conde	D-M p. 64, l. 77
Doña Lambra, que esto oyera	Prim No 19, l. 107
El rey cuando aquesto oyera	Prim No 30a, l. 31, p 47
Cuando aquello oyó Rodrigo	D-M p. 61, l. 82
Desde Rodrigo esto oyó	Prim No 29, l. 53, p 50
Como Rodrigo esto oyó	Prim No 29, l. 71
Cuando vido aquesto el rey	Prim No 16, l. 73
El moro desde la vido	Prim No 55, l. 37, p 41
Que me cortaron las faldas	
por vergonzoso lugar	Prim No 19, l. 119-20,
	D-M p. 60, l. 64
Comenzara de penzar	Prim No 30a, l.32, p 47
Ni aun cuantos con él son	Prim No 36, l. 12
Cuantos en la corte son	Prim No 16, l. 12

Ni cuantos son el son	Prim No 17, l. 20
Los que comedes mi pan	Prim No 36, l. 18, p 54
Presto os diré la verdade	D-M p. 67, l. 11
Fuese donde estaba el rey	Prim No 15, l. 17
Por besar mano del rey	Prim No 29, l. 75, p 50 Prim No 52, l. 43 p 38
Para el rey besar la mano	Prim No 29, l. 62, p 50
Besaréis al rey la mano	Prim No 29, l. 50
Para al rey besar la mano	Prim No 29, l. 44
A los dos besan la mano	Prim No 15, l. 107
Cras me besarás la mano	Prim No 52, l. 42, p 38
Sin al rey besar la mano	Prim No 52, l. 58 p 38
Al buen rey besar la mano	Prim No 29, l. 2, p 49
Por que la besó mi padre	Prim No 29, l. 77, p 50
Non digades tal palabra	Prim No 36, l. 20, p 32
No hagades tan gran llanto	Prim No 50, l. 24
Allí hablara el buen rey	Prim No 16, l. 35,p 69
Allí respondiera el conde	Prim No 17, l. 15
Pero allí hablara el rey	Prim No 52, l. 37
Allí habló doña Sancha	D-M p 58, l. 34
A Conde Fernán González	D-M p. 57, l. 9
Buen Conde Fernán González	Prim No 17, l. 1
Ese buen rey don Fernando	Prim No 35 l. 2
Hijo Gonzalo González	Prim No 23, l. 55
Con la linda doña Lambra	D-M p. 57, l. 10
A doña Lambra la linda	D-M p. 57, l. 12
Los siete infantes de Lara	D-M p. 57, l. 17
Llorando de los sus ojos	D-M p. 59, l. 41 D-M p. 60, l. 59

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