

The Oral Composition and Transmission of Early Buddhist Texts

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It is generally agreed that early Buddhist literature, of which the Pāli texts of the Theravāda canon are the most numerous and best preserved examples, was composed and transmitted orally.<sup>1</sup> This is considered to be the case for the following reasons:

1. There is no reference to writing or writing materials in the principal Pāli *nikāyas*,<sup>2</sup> though there are many references to learning and reciting discourses (see below).<sup>3</sup>
2. Although there are a few passages in the Pāli *Vinaya* which indicate that the art of writing was known at the time when these *Vinaya* texts were put into their present form, these do not refer to texts and their preservation.<sup>4</sup>
3. Despite detailed rules governing the use of all items used by monks and nuns, the *Vinaya* has no rules governing the use of writing materials.<sup>5</sup>
4. There is no archaeological evidence for the use of writing in India during the early phase of Buddhism, that is, before the time of Aśoka<sup>6</sup> – although this view may have to be revised in the light of recent finds in Sri Lanka of Brāhmī characters on potsherds dating from this period.<sup>7</sup>
5. Finally, many of the stylistic features of these texts indicate an oral origin.<sup>8</sup>

As just noted, there are many passages in Pāli canonical texts depicting monks and nuns learning and reciting the Buddha's teachings and discourses, which seem to indicate that during the Buddha's lifetime material was formulated so that it could be remembered and recited. In a passage occurring in the *Vinaya* and *Udāna*,<sup>9</sup> for example, it is reported that the Buddha asked the monk Soṇa to expound the Dhamma. In response Soṇa

recited the *Aṭṭhakavagga* (*sabbān' eva aṭṭhakavaggikāni sarena abhāsi*), the name now given to a group of verse *suttas* in the *Suttanipāta*.<sup>10</sup> In the *Vinaya* mention is made of monks who are expert in the *suttas* chanting a *sutta* (*suttantikehi suttantaṃ saṃgāyantehi*).<sup>11</sup> In the *Saṅgītisutta* of the *Dīghanikāya* a distinction is made between the Buddha teaching the Dhamma, a monk teaching the Dhamma to others as he has heard and learnt it, and a monk reciting the Dhamma as he has heard and learnt it (*sajjhāyaṃ karoti*).<sup>12</sup> In the *Suttavibhaṅga* of the *Vinaya* there is a particularly interesting *pācittiya* rule which prohibits those who have not taken the higher ordination from being taught the Dhamma by being made to recite it word by word (or "line by line", *padaso dhammaṃ vāceyya*).<sup>13</sup> The formulation of this rule arose because certain monks were teaching some laymen in this manner. The old commentary takes this as a particular form of recitation, almost in the manner of Vedic chanting. The commentator Buddhaghosa (Sp 74r) interprets this passage as referring to a particular manner of reciting verse. Although it is somewhat obscure, it certainly seems to imply that students were made to learn fixed texts by heart. Again, there are many references to reciting the *Pāṭimokkha*. On one occasion, for example, the Buddha refused to recite the *Pāṭimokkha* because the assembly of monks was not pure.<sup>14</sup> And finally, there are many passages which refer to monks being learned, having heard much, grasping and remembering the Dhamma, and so on.<sup>15</sup>

Despite these references, we do not know what material was actually composed during this period, nor the form and manner in which it was composed. Nor do we understand the relationship of this material to the original discourses, or the relationship of these initial compositions to Buddhist texts as we have them today.<sup>16</sup>

All schools of Buddhism agree that soon after the death of the Buddha a council, or *saṅgīti*, was held to confirm and rehearse the Buddha's teaching.<sup>17</sup> Some schools also maintain that *saṅgītis* were held at other times in the history of the Buddhist community. Also, the Theravāda tradition, for its part, considers that after the first *saṅgīti* a tradition of specialisation arose whereby groups of monks, called *bhāṇakas*, began to specialise in the knowledge and recitation of particular collections of texts.<sup>18</sup>

What material was rehearsed at the first *saṅgīti* (and at those which followed) and whether, in fact, fixed texts were "recited" on these occasions is likewise uncertain. We do not yet understand the way in which the *bhāṇaka* system worked, nor its impact on the material being transmitted.<sup>19</sup>

The Theravāda tradition maintains that its texts were first written down in the 1st century BCE in Sri Lanka, while information about the use of writing in the other Buddhist schools is generally lacking.<sup>20</sup> The Theravāda account, occurring first in the *Dīpavaṃsa*, is extremely brief, consisting of two verses only.<sup>21</sup> We do not know whether writing was utilised as an aid to composition or transmission before this time; but it has been suggested that there is some evidence for a manuscript tradition in the case of certain

texts before this date.<sup>22</sup> Again, we do not yet fully understand what impact writing, or the writing down of the canon, had on the material and its transmission.<sup>23</sup>

The period of oral composition and transmission can probably be measured in centuries. R. Gombrich has suggested "three to four centuries".<sup>24</sup> But as S. Collins has argued, the Buddhist tradition also remained in various ways an oral/aural one, despite the introduction of writing; that is, the monks and nuns recited and listened to oral as well as written texts.<sup>25</sup>

With early Buddhist texts being composed and transmitted orally it is not surprising that they exhibit so many striking features which appear alien to the modern reader and which, as stated earlier, are generally taken to be indicative of the oral status of this material. Stylistic features alone do not prove that a given text was originally oral, for written texts can, for various reasons, deliberately mimic the style of texts belonging to an earlier, oral phase of the tradition. Besides, the impact of the new medium on the style of the texts being composed would not have been immediate.<sup>26</sup> But as there are other reasons for taking this to be an oral literature, we can regard the stylistic features of these texts as being, at least in part, a product of their oral origins.

For some decades now a field of study has developed in the West which has attempted to understand the way in which oral literature is composed and identify its peculiar characteristics. Particularly important to the foundation of this field were Milman Parry's studies of Homeric epic verse.<sup>27</sup> Parry argued that many of the stylistic features of these texts indicated that this literature had its origins in an oral tradition, and he developed the theory that in an oral epic tradition the poet creates his poems as he performs with the aid of what he referred to as formulas and themes, which are the building blocks of the performance.<sup>28</sup> In consequence, every performance of the poem was a new creation, although each version may have been very similar. In an attempt to confirm these ideas Parry and A. B. Lord conducted field work in what was then Yugoslavia where a living tradition of oral epic verse survived. After Parry's death, Lord continued these studies and further developed this theory. Most importantly, he emphasised the improvisatory nature of oral performance, regarding "oral" to be "formulaically improvised".<sup>29</sup> He therefore argued against the conception of fixed, memorised texts in oral traditions, stating, for example, that "sacred texts which must be preserved word for word, if there be such, could not be *oral* in any except the most literal sense".<sup>30</sup> In response to this, some have considered that the rote learning of a lengthy text and its verbatim repetition is the product of a culture which knows writing for, they argue, it is only through a fixed, written text that we can have the notion of word-for-word fixity.<sup>31</sup> But Lord's tendency to see his model as universally valid and his attributing of particularly restricted meanings to certain terms have been criticised by a number of scholars.<sup>32</sup> The Parry-Lord model may

describe what occurs in the Homeric or Yugoslav traditions, or even be appropriate to oral epic traditions in general, but oral traditions are diverse, and what holds true for one may not be appropriate for another.

Many factors can influence the character of an oral literature and its method of composition and transmission: the nature of the information being relayed; the attitude towards this material and the extent to which accuracy is required; the character of the performers or composers, their status in society, the type of training they have undergone and the circumstances under which they perform; the nature of the audience and its expectations and therefore its demands on the performer or performers; the medium used (verse or prose) and whether the performance requires musical accompaniment.

The Buddhist and Yugoslav-Homeric traditions differ in virtually all of these factors. In epic verse traditions the medium is verse, and for the most part, epics portray the lives and activities of heroes. They are often performed to musical accompaniment, and in the Yugoslav case at least, they are primarily performed for entertainment. Also, performances are very much public events and the audience has an important influence on what is performed, or at least, on what episodes are performed and the degree to which each is elaborated. The status of the performers is also particular: they are bards or poets who perform individually, not communally, and they have usually acquired their performance skills through a long period of training. In contrast, in the early Buddhist tradition prose is by far the most dominant medium. The function of the literature is to preserve the teaching of a religious leader and the rules deemed necessary to guide the conduct of the members of that religious community. The information being transmitted is often complex, consisting of descriptions of practices and detailed analyses of concepts and psychological processes, all of which require a high degree of accuracy.<sup>33</sup> The "performers" were monks and nuns, and increasingly they were members of monastic institutions. They came from diverse social backgrounds: some were brahmans who presumably had undergone their traditional training, others would have had no formal training in literary/performance skills. And finally, material was performed communally, as well as individually and privately.

This last factor seems to be one of the most overlooked. Yet it is particularly important, for communal or group recitation or performance requires fixed wording. It is not possible for more than one individual to perform at the same time in the manner described by Parry and Lord without producing utter chaos, for in that method each individual creates his compositions anew each time he performs.

The first application of the ideas of Parry and Lord to early Buddhist literature was L. S. Cousins' article "Pali oral literature" (1983). Cousins argued that in the earliest phase in the production of Buddhist literature the monks performed accounts of the Buddha's discourses and presented his

teaching in the manner proposed by the Parry-Lord model, that is, with “a strong improvisatory element” (p. 9). With time this material then came to be fixed due to its religious authority (p. 6). The differences between accounts of the same event or teaching found in different collections within the Pāli canon and between the parallel material belonging to different schools are evidence for an initially improvisatory stage, for such variations, he states, “are too frequent to arise from the natural variation of a manuscript tradition or even from a rigidly memorised oral tradition” (pp. 5–6).<sup>34</sup>

R. Gombrich, in a paper entitled “How Mahāyāna began” (1990b),<sup>35</sup> argued against the improvisatory stage proposed by Cousins, seeing early Buddhist texts as “deliberate compositions which were then committed to memory, and later systematically transmitted to pupils” (p. 24), because, he states, “the whole purpose of the enterprise ... was to preserve the Buddha’s words” (p. 22). Further:

The early Buddhists wished to preserve the words of their great teacher, texts very different in character from the general run of oral literature, for they presented logical and sometimes complex arguments. The precise wording mattered” (p. 21).<sup>36</sup>

An investigation of the stylistic features of early Buddhist texts can, I think, make an important contribution to this debate.<sup>37</sup> As part of my Ph.D. research a number of the most prominent stylistic features of the prose portions of Pāli canonical *sutta* texts, and more specifically, of the prose of the *Dīghanikāya*, the first book of the *Suttaṭṭhāna*, were investigated.<sup>38</sup> The following discussion is based on this research.<sup>39</sup>

One of the most dominant characteristics of the prose portions of Pāli canonical *sutta* texts is the use of standardised phrases or passages to express or depict a given concept, action or event. These standardised phrases have been variously called “formulas”, “ clichés”, “stock expressions”, “stock phrases” and “stereotyped phrases”. For the most part I will use the term “formula”.<sup>40</sup>

The narrative portions of Pāli *sutta* texts contain numerous passages which depict someone approaching another person, and the phrases used to depict these approaches are formulaic. The material encountered is extensive and diverse, and I will therefore restrict myself here to a discussion of those approach-formulas which are based on the unit *yena...ten’ upasaṅkami, upasaṅkamitvā*, “*x* approached *y*, having approached (he did such and such)”.<sup>41</sup>

The material in the *Dīghanikāya* can be divided into two groups. The formulas of the first group depict someone approaching the Buddha, a monk or another person, and a monk approaching the Buddha or another monk. The simplest formula within this group depicts the approach of the visitor, then his or her interaction, usually verbal, with the person approached. In the more complicated formulas the visitor approaches,

shows some form of respect, adopts a particular posture (standing or sitting), then speaks with the person approached. A particular range of fixed units of meaning is employed within each division of this overall structure to construct distinct formulas. Which units of meaning are employed, and hence which formula type and specific formula is used, depends on the narrator, the classification of the person approaching and the person approached, their attitude towards each other, and the purpose of the visit.

So, for example, when a brahman is depicted approaching a king, the following combination of units will be used:

(Then)<sup>41</sup> + the brahman approached the king. Having approached + he said this to the king.<sup>42</sup>

In contrast, the formula used to depict a brahman approaching the Buddha in order to question him will be:

(Then) + the brahman approached the Bhagavat. Having approached, + he exchanged greetings with the Bhagavat, and having exchanged agreeable and courteous talk (with him), + he sat down to one side. + Seated to one side, the brahman + said this to the Bhagavat.<sup>43</sup>

This is characterised by respect being shown and the showing of this particular form of respect, by the brahman sitting down rather than standing, and by the brahman speaking first. There are also certain forms of address associated with this interaction.

Again, the following combination of units will be used to depict a monk approaching the Buddha when he has been summoned by him:

(Then) + the monk approached the Bhagavat. Having approached, + having paid homage to the Bhagavat, + he sat down to one side. + To the monk who was seated to one side + the Bhagavat said this.<sup>44</sup>

In contrast to the previous formula, this is characterised by the monk showing this particular form of respect and by the Buddha speaking first. Again, there are certain forms of address encountered in such an approach.

The second group of formulas depict the Buddha approaching someone and a monk approaching someone other than the Buddha or another monk. Here the situation is quite different. Not only do the structures of these formulas differ from those of the previous group, but these formulas also utilise a completely different range of fixed units of meaning. Although the factors which determine the use of particular fixed units of meaning, and hence the overall formula, are the same, their relative importance differs markedly from the first group. Here the purpose of the approach is the fundamental determinant of the formula used, with the wording of approaches of different purposes differing greatly from each other. We have in effect "purpose built" formulas.

So, for example, the formula used to depict the Buddha visiting an ascetic is:

Then the Bhagavat approached the ascetic. Then the ascetic said this to the Bhagavat: 'May the Bhagavat come, venerable sir. Welcome to the Bhagavat, venerable sir. It is long, venerable sir, since the Bhagavat took the opportunity to come here. May the Bhagavat, venerable sir, be seated. This seat has been prepared.' The Bhagavat sat down on the prepared seat. Having taken a lower seat, the ascetic sat down to one side. The Bhagavat said this to the ascetic who was seated to one side.<sup>45</sup>

But the formula used to depict the Buddha attending a donor's meal is:

Then the Bhagavat, dressing in the morning and taking his bowl and robe, approached the house of the brahman together with the community of monks. Having approached, he sat down on a prepared seat. Then the brahman personally satisfied and served the community of monks headed by the Buddha with the finest hard and soft food. Then, when the Bhagavat had finished his meal and had washed his bowl and hands, the brahman took a lower seat and sat down to one side. The Bhagavat said this to the brahman who was seated to one side.<sup>46</sup>

The formulas of this category are generally characterised by the following features: (1) the Buddha or monk is depicted getting dressed and taking his bowl and robe when the visit is a public one; (2) the approach is to the place of the person who is approached rather than to the actual person; (3) the Buddha or monk does not show respect to the person visited; rather, some gesture of respect or subordination is shown by the person approached; (4) the Buddha or monk sits down on a prepared seat; and finally, (5) such approaches usually occur in *sutta*-narrator passages. Features 2, 3 and 4 tend to subordinate the person being approached to the Buddha or monk who is approaching.

The study of the material in the *Dīghanikāya* shows that the wording of passages which depict the common event of someone approaching another person has been standardised in this text to the extent that only a limited range of stock phrases or formulas is exhibited.<sup>47</sup> These formulas have set structures and are composed of a variety of possible fixed units of meaning. As mentioned, which units are employed, and hence which formula type and specific formula is used, depends on certain factors. Given a knowledge of these determining factors, the wording of a particular approach is, in the majority of cases, predictable.<sup>48</sup> At minimum, this indicates that there is an overall homogeneity to the narrative portions of this collection of *suttas*.<sup>49</sup> Whether there was a tendency to use a standardised diction from the beginning, or whether standardisation was undertaken at the great *saṅgīhis*, or councils, or later by the *bhāṇaka* tradition or when the canon was written down, is yet to be determined.

There are two principal, alternative methods for the composition of oral literature and therefore for early Buddhist texts. The first is that proposed by Parry and Lord for oral epic verse and taken by Lord as the only method possible in oral cultures. In such an improvisatory method no two performances are exactly alike. If the early phase of Buddhist literature was one of composition-in-performance, then those texts which we consider to be representative of this period must be seen to be 'frozen' versions of a particular performance.<sup>50</sup> The second method entails the composition of a fixed text which is then memorised and transmitted verbatim.<sup>51</sup>

The standardised diction outlined here can be seen as an aid to composition within both of these methods: whenever a particular approach needed to be portrayed, the wording was already available. In other words, these formulas acted as prefabricated building-blocks.<sup>52</sup> In addition to this, the use of a standardised and predictable diction would also have aided the learning by heart and recitation of a large body of fixed material; that is, within a tradition of the composition and transmission of fixed texts this feature would have a mnemonic function.<sup>53</sup>

This research on the formulaic diction of these texts becomes particularly interesting when the wording of passages which depict similar concepts, actions or events found in different *Suttapiṭaka* and *Vinayapiṭaka* texts are compared. For example, the event of Māra approaching the Buddha towards the end of the Buddha's life is found in the *Dīghanikāya*, *Udāna*, *Samyuttanikāya*, and *Aṅguttaranikāya*.<sup>54</sup> In the *Dīghanikāya* and *Udāna* occurrences we have the fullest formula with Māra approaching the Buddha, standing to one side, then speaking:

Then, not long after the venerable Ānanda had departed, Māra the evil one approached the Bhagavat. Having approached, he stood to one side. Standing to one side, Māra the evil one said this to the Bhagavat.<sup>55</sup>

In the *Samyuttanikāya* we have a briefer formula with no mention of Māra standing to one side:

Then, not long after the venerable Ānanda had departed, Māra the evil one approached the Bhagavat. Having approached, he said this.<sup>56</sup>

But in the *Aṅguttaranikāya* the passage is so brief as not even to mention the approach, merely reading:

Then, not long after Ānanda had departed, Māra the evil one said this to the Bhagavat.<sup>57</sup>

Here, as in other instances, it is seen that the *Dīghanikāya* and *Udāna* are the most wordy texts. This means that, although the *suttas* of the *Dīghanikāya* are longer than those to the *Aṅguttaranikāya* primarily because of differences in their structure, the use of a more elaborate and detailed diction by the former is certainly a contributing factor.

We saw earlier that the formula used in the *Dīghanikāya* to depict the Buddha or a monk approaching an ascetic is characterised by the ascetic showing respect to the Buddha or monk and not vice versa, by the ascetic addressing the Buddha or monk in a reverential manner, and by the ascetic taking a lower seat; all of which tends to subordinate the ascetic to the Buddha or monk. Further research shows that this formula is particular to the *Dīgha-* and *Majjhima-nikāyas*. In contrast, the *Samyuttanikāya*, *Anguttaranikāya* and *Vinayaṭṭakāya* use a simpler formula which depicts the Buddha or monk greeting the ascetic, sitting down to one side, then speaking to him.<sup>58</sup> When depicting such encounters with ascetics, the authors of the *Samyutta*, *Anguttara* and *Vinaya* seemed to have considered it unnecessary to portray the Buddha or monk being honoured in such an exaggerated manner.

Again, differences exist between the various canonical texts in their wording of the “going to an invited meal” approach-formula mentioned earlier. In contrast to the previous example, the same basic formula is used in each text, but the syntax of the fixed units of meaning and presence of particular units differs from text to text. For example, in the *Dīghanikāya* and *Udāna* we have the Buddha approaching the donor’s house “together with the community of monks” and sitting down, while in the *Majjhimanikāya*, *Anguttaranikāya*, *Suttanipāta* and *Vinayaṭṭakāya* we have the Buddha approaching the donor’s house, then sitting down “together with the community of monks”; that is, these latter texts associate the unit “together with the community of monks” with the verb depicting the action of sitting down rather than with the verb portraying the approach.<sup>59</sup> Also, in the *Dīghanikāya*, *Majjhimanikāya*, *Udāna* and *Suttanipāta* we have the donor “taking a lower seat and sitting down to one side” after the meal, while the *Samyuttanikāya*, *Anguttaranikāya* and *Vinayaṭṭakāya* fail to include this “taking of a lower seat” phrase.<sup>60</sup>

The situation seems to be quite complex, with a text such as the *Udāna*, for example, following the diction of the *Dīghanikāya* with regard to some formulas, but not others. It is possible that such differences may have resulted from the *bhāṇaka* tradition, or period of specialisation. Alternatively, differences in diction may have resulted from the way in which each text was used by the Buddhist community. In other words, it is possible that different texts were intended for different audiences and had different functions and that their wording was modified accordingly. Or again, in some cases these differences may be due to the different manuscript traditions of these texts. Further research certainly needs to be undertaken to properly identify and understand such differences.

Another common feature of the prose portions of Pāli canonical *sutta* texts is the tendency to proliferate similar word elements and units of meaning to form sequences or “strings”. We frequently encounter sequences of two, three or more adjectives or adjectival units qualifying the same noun,

a number of nouns all acting as the subject of the same sentence or as the object of the same verb. We encounter sequences of adverbs modifying the same verb, or a number of parallel verbs occurring together in the same sentence, and so on. Wherever such sequences of parallel word elements or units of meaning occur, they are arranged according to what will be referred to here as the Waxing Syllable Principle; that is, in sequences which consist of similar word elements or units of meaning of an unequal number of syllables, the words or units of meaning of fewer syllables must precede (to use an expanded form of Pāṇini's phraseology, via Caland).<sup>61</sup> For example, in the *Udumbarikasihanādasutta* we find an ascetic telling the Buddha that he had challenged him "as he was foolish, confused, and unskilled": *yathā-bālena yathā-mūḷhena yathā-akusalena*.<sup>62</sup> This consists of a string of three adverbial expressions. The first has 5 syllables, the second 5 syllables and the third 7 syllables; that is, the pattern is 5+5+7. This arranging of elements according to an increasing syllable length tends to produce a crescendo effect in these sections of the text, and to a certain extent parallels enumeration, another important stylistic feature of this literature.

The exception to this general principle is where a sequence, and especially a long sequence, can or must be divided into groups on the basis of associations in meaning or grammatical or morphological form, in which case the Waxing Syllable Principle only works within each group, restarting again with the next group. For example, the stock description of the lowly-talk engaged in by ascetics,<sup>63</sup> which also occurs in the *Udumbarikasihanādasutta*, consists of a long list of topics of conversation. This list can be divided into groups on the basis of associations in meaning: *rāja-kathaṃ cora-kathaṃ mahāmatta-kathaṃ*, "talk of kings, thieves and ministers". This has a 4+4+6 syllable pattern. This group is then followed by *senā-kathaṃ bhaya-kathaṃ yuddha-kathaṃ*, "talk of armies, fear and battle" (4+4+4 syllables); *anna-kathaṃ pāna-kathaṃ vattha-kathaṃ sayana-kathaṃ*, "talk of food, drink, clothing and bedding" (4+4+4+5 syllables); *mālā-kathaṃ gandha-kathaṃ ñāti-kathaṃ yāna-kathaṃ*, "talk of garlands, scents, relatives and vehicles" (4+4+4+4 syllables); *gāma-kathaṃ nigama-kathaṃ nagara-kathaṃ janapada-kathaṃ*, "talk of villages, towns, cities and districts" (4+5+5+6). And so on. The pattern of this list so far is thus 4+4+6, 4+4+4, 4+4+4+5, 4+4+4+4, 4+5+5+6.

This ordering principle is not only apparent in the more obvious sequences of adjectives and adjectival units, nouns and noun phrases, adverbs and verbs, but it also seems to be operational in the ordering of parallel units of meaning which occur in different, but nonetheless closely associated, clauses, sentences and paragraphs, and in the ordering of sequences of parallel sentences or semi-independent units of meaning, as well as a number of other structures, such as those involving *saddhīm*. A number of examples encountered in the material studied have problematic patterns. Solutions to these can often be found if certain amendments are

accepted – a *svarabhakti* vowel not scanned or a word thought to be a later insertion omitted – or if only the immediately parallel units are compared. It also seems that conceptual considerations or the desire to produce a particular word play may occasionally override the Waxing Syllable Principle. A few examples await plausible solutions.

It is particularly common in these sequences for the component elements, and especially the initial members of the sequence, to share sound and metrical similarities.<sup>64</sup> In the above example of *yathā-bālena yathā-mūḷhena yathā-akusalena*, it is seen that, apart from the obvious sound similarities due to *yathā-* being the first member of each compound, the endings of all three are virtually identical: *-lena/-ḷhena/-lena*. Again, the first two compounds differ only in their core syllables: *-bā-* and *-mū-*, which are both labial consonants in conjunction with long vowels. The two initial compounds of this sequence therefore share the same metrical patterns and are virtually identical in sound. The *-ū-* of the second member (*-mūḷhena*) is also echoed in *-akusalena* of the third. Hence, there is a tendency in these texts to proliferate similar word elements and units of meaning, that is to expand the wording, while at the same time there is a tendency to bring this expanded wording closer together by choosing words which share sound and metrical similarities.

This phenomenon of ordering similar word elements according to their syllable lengths has been known for some time, but an analysis of the nature and extent of its application within Pāli texts has not been undertaken before.<sup>65</sup>

The proliferation of similar word elements and units of meaning and the ordering of the member elements of such sequences according to the Waxing Syllable Principle, which thus produces an overall crescendo effect, tends to give a rhythm and homogeneity to this material. This rhythm and homogeneity is then greatly enhanced when, as is frequently the case, the member elements also share sound and metrical similarities. The presence of rhythmical patterns in prose, and especially in long prose texts, must have been extremely important to those who performed or recited this material, and may be functionally parallel to the rhythm produced in verse by metre.

As with the use of formulas, the structures briefly discussed here would, by acting as an organisational principle, function as aids to composition within both of the compositional methods outlined above. However, within a tradition of the composition of fixed texts, which are designed to be memorised, this combination of stylistic features would also have functioned as a mnemonic aid, for it is surely easier to remember a sequence of words arranged in this manner according to syllable length. Similarly, it is easier to remember two different words when they share sound similarities and have the same metrical patterns. And again, the presence of some form of rhythm would also have facilitated the memorisation and recitation of this

material. But whichever method we consider to be that utilised for the composition of these texts, it is seen that the choice of words and their arrangement was heavily influenced by the fact that these texts were composed and transmitted orally.

The final stylistic characteristic that will be discussed here is repetition. By repetition I mean the repetition of sentences, passages or whole sections of the text, and the repetition of set structures. This discussion is based on the study of repetition in one *sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*, the *Udumbarikasihanādasutta*, the 25th *sutta* of this collection.

In order to establish the degree to which this particular *sutta* is repetitive, the text of the PTS edition was scanned into a word processor and all abbreviated passages were reconstructed. It was then possible to establish the word count for the complete *sutta* and for those sections which were being repeated, and hence to calculate what percentage of the text was repetitive.<sup>66</sup>

In order to quantify repetition, the level at which the repetition is occurring within the text and the type of repetition involved must be established. Repetition can occur at a number of levels. A passage is repetitive at a primary level when it does not form part of a passage which is itself repeated within the text. If it does, then it is repetition at a secondary level. Sometimes repetition at a tertiary level is discernible.

In this study five categories or types of quantifiable repetition were established. They are: Verbatim Repetition (VR), Repetition with Minor Modifications (RMM), Repetition with Important Modifications (RIM), Repetition of Structure Type-1 (RS-1) and Repetition of Structure Type-2 (RS-2).

In Verbatim Repetition a passage is repeated word for word with no modifications needing to be made by the one who recites or performs this material. For example, the stock description of the lowly-talk engaged in by ascetics mentioned earlier is repeated verbatim four times in this *sutta*, representing about 5% (4.5%) of the text. Or a long passage which describes three stages of what the Buddha considers to be true ascetic practice, and which represents about 6% of the text, is repeated verbatim three times, making up about 17% of the *sutta*. In total 30% of the *Udumbarikasihanādasutta* involves Verbatim Repetition at a primary level.

Passages which are repeated with alteration to only a small proportion of their wording were classified as Repetition with Minor Modifications. For example, it is not uncommon to form the opposite of a passage expressing a positive or negative state by merely repeating that passage and adding or omitting certain prefixes or particles.<sup>67</sup> Just under 35% (34.5%) of this *sutta* involves this kind of repetition on a primary level.

The third category, Repetition with Important Modifications, involves repetition of a passage, but with important changes to the wording, whether in syntax, grammatical number, tense or person, or enlargement

or contraction of the wording. Material of this category represents about 4% (3.8%) of the *sutta* studied.

Two types of repetition of structure were also established. In the first type a structure is repeated along with virtually all of its wording, but with key elements replaced to produce differences in meaning. So, for example, in the common passage which depicts the practice of the four *brahmavihāras*, or divine abidings, the same structure and wording is repeated four times, first for loving kindness (*mettā*), then for compassion (*karuṇā*), then sympathetic joy (*mudītā*), and finally, for equanimity (*upekkhā*).<sup>68</sup> In this way each repetition differs by only one word.

In many passages of this class, the elements which differ in each repetition share morphological, sound or metrical similarities, or similarities in structure (or some combination of these), thereby minimising the impact of the changes being made. For example, in this *sutta*, after defeating the ascetic Nigrodha in debate, the Buddha criticises him for not having the following thought:

Enlightened (*buddho*) the Bhagavat teaches the Dhamma for enlightenment (*bodhāya*); tamed, or controlled (*danto*), the Bhagavat teaches the Dhamma for control (*damathāya*); calmed (*santo*), the Bhagavat teaches the Dhamma for calm (*samathāya*); crossed over (*tiṇṇo*), the Bhagavat teaches the Dhamma for crossing over (*tarāṇāya*); extinguished (*parinibbuto*), the Bhagavat teaches the Dhamma for extinguishing (*parinibbāṇāya*).<sup>69</sup>

The initial element of each parallel sentence (*buddho*, *danto*, *santo*, *tiṇṇo*, *parinibbuto*) is a past participle. The first four have the same number of syllables and equal metrical patterns, and sound similarities are evident at least in *danto* and *santo*. In the second group of elements which differ in each repetition, *damathāya* and *samathāya* are morphologically parallel, share the same number of syllables and have the same metrical pattern. They differ, in fact, only in their initial letter. Similarly, the last two elements in this group, *tarāṇāya* and *parinibbāṇāya*, are morphologically similar. In this way, the elements which differ in meaning within each repeated structure appear similar in outward form. The effort involved in making the required modifications is thereby minimised for the reciter.

A total of 16% of this *sutta* is composed of material of this RS-1 category.

In those passages which were classified as Repetition of Structure Type-2, a basic structure is repeated, but with far less repetition of the wording, or in some cases, with modification to the structure of the wording which is replaced. Material of this category represents nearly 3% (2.5%) of this *sutta*.

In total almost 87% (86.8%)<sup>70</sup> of the *Udumbarikasihanādasutta* involves quantifiable repetition of one kind or another at a primary level. This is surely a significantly high proportion of the text. It must also be noted that the verbatim end of the scale is particularly well represented.

Repetition is undoubtedly a mnemonic device. This is based on the simple observation that the more frequently a passage, unit of meaning or word is repeated the more likely it is to be remembered. Or as a verse in the *Dhammapada* states: “non-recitation is the rust of incantation”.<sup>71</sup> The repetition encountered in Buddhist texts has frequently been taken to have a mnemonic function, but few have elaborated on their statements or investigated repetition in any systematic manner.<sup>72</sup>

I have so far argued that the first two stylistic features discussed in this paper could have functioned as aids to composition both within a tradition of composing material during the performance in an improvisatory manner and in a tradition of composing fixed texts which were to be transmitted verbatim. In addition to this, it was proposed that these features would also have had a mnemonic function within the latter tradition. In contrast to this, it is difficult to see the gross forms of repetition just discussed – the repetition of whole passages, with or without modification, and the repetition of structures with the replacement of various proportions of their wording – and the scale on which this is pursued, that is the proportion of the text involved, as anything other than proof, or at least as a very strong indication, that these texts were designed to be memorised and transmitted verbatim.<sup>73</sup> In contrast, material such as the contemporary Yugoslav epics studied by Lord (1960) or the contemporary Indian epics studied by Smith (1991), Beck (1982) and Roghair (1982), which is composed “during the performance”, although exhibiting many forms of repetition, does not exhibit the form of gross repetition encountered in Pāli *sutta* texts.

The five categories of repetition established in the study upon which the above discussion of repetition in the *Udumbarikasihanādasutta* is based can be graded according to the degree to which they each facilitate the learning and retention of this material. Verbatim Repetition obviously represents the greatest aid to memory. The greater the percentage of a text that is verbatim repetitive the easier it is to learn and remember. At a primary level, 30% of the *Udumbarikasihanādasutta* consists of repeated passages of this classification.

The remaining four types of repetition each encompass a range of differences. In terms of the modifications to be made by the reciter, and hence the effort involved in making such changes, the Repetition with Minor Modifications and Repetition of Structure Type-1 categories on the one hand, and the Repetition with Important Modifications and Repetition of Structure Type-2 categories on the other, are seen to be parallel and to encompass a similar range of differences.

As mentioned, almost 35% of the *sutta* studied involves Repetition with Minor Modifications at a primary level. Another 16% involves Repetition of Structure Type-1. Together these two categories, which are similar in terms of their mnemonic significance, represent about 51% (50.5%) of this *sutta*.

The study also showed that almost 4% of this *sutta* involves Repetition with Important Modifications at a primary level and that approximately 3% involves Repetition of Structure Type-2. Together these two parallel categories represent about 6% (6.3%) of this *sutta*.

As 87% of the *Udumbarikasihanādasutta* involves some form of quantifiable repetition on a primary level, 13% of this text is therefore only encountered once. Much of this consists of the opening and closing sections of the *sutta*. Although not occurring again, the passages and elements which make up this 13% commonly involve non-quantifiable forms of repetition (as do those which are repeated again) and may be found in other *suttas* of the *Dīghanikāya*.

Many of the passages which are repetitive at a primary level in the text are themselves composed of or incorporate quantifiable repetitive elements, which is repetition at a secondary level. For example, a passage which is repeated verbatim may itself be composed of a passage repeated verbatim twice. This secondary passage therefore occurs four times in the text. This secondary repetition would further increase the familiarity of the material being learnt and facilitate recitation.<sup>74</sup>

This study has focused on one *sutta* in the *Dīghanikāya*. But much of the material found in both the repetitive and non-repetitive passages of this *sutta* is also encountered elsewhere in the *Dīghanikāya*, which of course is significant if a body of *suttas* such as are contained in the present *Dīghanikāya* was learnt and transmitted by a particular group of monks or nuns. This repetition decreases the uniqueness of the material which is not repeated again within this *sutta*, and increases the familiarity of those passages which are.

Further, various forms of non-quantifiable repetition are an integral part of all passages, whether these passages are repeated again within this particular *sutta* or not, whether they are found in other *suttas* or are unique to this *sutta*, whether classified as being repetitive at a primary or secondary level. Passages are built up through the proliferation of similar word elements, units of meaning and structures. Many elements share sound and metrical similarities. Vocatives of address and particles such as *atha kho* and *kho* are continually used as markers throughout the *sutta*. Certain verbs are repeated in their non-finite forms to resume the following clause.<sup>75</sup> The wording used to express or depict a given concept, action or event is standardised, and diversity of vocabulary is avoided. And so on. In this way, although we have been able to quantify gross repetition of certain classifications, there are many forms of repetition employed by this class of Pāli text which cannot be quantified, yet which must also be considered to facilitate greatly the learning and recitation of this material. Repetition thus thoroughly permeates every dimension of this class of Buddhist literature.

The characteristics of the prose portions of Pāli canonical *sutta* texts discussed in this paper show that the authors of this material attempted to minimise differences and maximise similarities. They did this by using a

standardised diction (which we have referred to as formulas), by proliferating similar word elements often chosen for their sound and metrical similarities, and by pursuing repetition on a truly large scale, to mention but a few. Of these stylistic features, it is gross repetition which provides the greatest evidence that these texts were composed as fixed texts which were to be memorised and transmitted verbatim. As previously mentioned, these stylistic features do not prove that this literature was essentially an oral one, for written texts can utilise or mimic characteristics of an earlier oral tradition. Nor do they prove that these texts were conceived as fixed texts. But when combined with such historical factors as accounts of communal recitation, events which required a fixed text, then we are surely on firmer ground.

Although I have attempted to show that the early Buddhist *sutta* texts were, in the words of R. Gombrich, “deliberate compositions which were then committed to memory”,<sup>76</sup> I would certainly agree that accounts of what the Buddha is supposed to have said and discourses on his teaching would have been given by the monks and nuns after the Buddha’s death in an improvisatory manner, at times drawing heavily on memorised material, or as R. Gethin (1992) has argued, by using lists as a foundation. Such discourses may then have become the basis of later fixed texts. But these accounts and discourses were fundamentally different from the essentially fixed, memorised texts transmitted by the community, however imperfectly. Finally, the Parry-Lord model does not exhaust the oral or literary/performance dimension of oral cultures. In ancient, pre-literate India there was a strong tradition of composing fixed, religious texts which were designed to be memorised and transmitted verbatim.

## Notes

1. O. von Hinüber, 1990, chap. V (esp. p. 22), p. 30, chap. XIV; K. R. Norman, 1993a, p. 280; R. Gombrich, 1990a & 1990b; L.S. Cousins, 1983, esp. p. 1; S. Collins, 1992.
2. R. Gombrich, 1990b, p. 27; O. von Hinüber, 1990, esp. p. 30.
3. S. Collins, 1992, esp. pp. 124–25; R. Gombrich, 1990b, p. 26.
4. T. W. Rhys Davids & H. Oldenberg, 1881, pp. xxxii–xxxv; cf. R. Gombrich, 1990b, pp. 27–8.
5. T. W. Rhys Davids & H. Oldenberg, 1881, pp. xxxii–xxxiii; R. Gombrich, 1990b, p. 28.
6. R. Gombrich, 1990b, p. 27. For the most recent views on writing in India, see O. von Hinüber, 1990, esp. pp. 54, 72 and K. R. Norman, 1993b, esp. pp. 243, 245–47.
7. See R. A. E. Coningham, 1993. S. U. Deraniyagala dates these finds to 600–500 BC; R. Allchin/R. A. E. Coningham tentatively date them to 400–450 BC.
8. O. von Hinüber, 1990, pp. 22–3; R. Gombrich, 1990a, pp. 7–8; 1990b, pp. 21–2; L. S. Cousins, 1983; G. von Simson, 1965; 1977, p. 479.
9. References to Pāli texts are to the Pāli Text Society’s editions. Abbreviations of titles of works and of terms and signs follow the Epilegomena to Vol. I of the Critical Pāli Dictionary.
10. Vin I 196–7. Ud 59 reads *soḷasa atthakavaggikāmi sabbāṇ’eva sarena abhaṇi*; cf. S. Collins, 1992, p. 125.

11. Vin I 169.
12. D III 241f. cf. S. Collins, 1992, pp. 126-7.
13. Vin IV 14-5; cf. PED s.v. *pada* (*padaso*).
14. Vin II 236-41 = Ud 51-6.
15. E.g. *bahussuto hoti sutadharo sutasannicayo* (M I 356); *so ca bhikkhu bahussuto hoti āgātāgamo dhammadharo vinayadharo mātikādharo paññito vyatto medhāvī lajjī kukkuccako sikkhākāmo* (Vin I 337). Cf. S. Collins, 1992 (for a brief description of the teaching and learning process, see esp. p. 124).
16. Cf. O. von Hinüber, 1990, pp. 26, 28.
17. O. von Hinüber, 1990, chap. VI; K. R. Norman, 1989, p. 29.
18. E. W. Adikaram (1946, chap 3) remains the standard reference for the *bhāṇaka* tradition. Cf. K. R. Norman, 1989, pp. 32-4; R. Gombrich, 1990a, p. 7; 1990b, pp. 25-6; S. Collins, 1992, pp. 124-5; L. S. Cousins, 1983, pp. 4-5.
19. For examples of differences which may be due to the *bhāṇaka* tradition, see below. See also G. von Simson, 1977, p. 486; O. von Hinüber, 1990, chap. X; K. R. Norman, 1989, pp. 34, 50.
20. A. K. Warder (1980, p. 294) mentions Bu-ston's account which states that all schools committed their texts to writing in the 1st century CE or earlier. Warder (pp. 345-6) also refers to the Sarvāstivādin account which states that they wrote theirs down c. 100 CE.
21. *piṭakattayapālīn ca tassā atthakathaṃ pi ca mukhapāṭhena ānesuṃ pubbe bhikkhū mahāmatī hāniṃ disvāna sattānaṃ tadā bhikkhū samāgatā ciraṭṭhitathaṃ dhammassa pothakesu likhāpayaṃ* (Dīp XX 20-1 = Mhv XXXIII 100-101). Most scholars seem to uphold the validity of this account. Cf. H. Bechert, 1991, pp. 9-10; 1992, esp. p. 52; K. R. Norman, 1983, p. 5; 1989, p. 36-8; R. Gombrich, 1992, p. 160; L. S. Cousins, 1991, p. 55; S. Collins, 1990, p. 96ff. 1992, p. 128; T. W. Rhys Davids & H. Oldenberg, 1881, pp. xxxv-xxxvi.
22. J. Brough, 1962, pp. 28-9, 218-19. The Pāli version of the verse to which Brough refers has *va sayatī*, where the other versions support an original *sa vyatī*. Brough (*ibid.*, p. 218) dismisses the possibility that such a transposition of syllables could have occurred in the course of purely oral transmission as, he states, "such a supposition would indeed imply an unbelievably slipshod *paramparā*. But in manuscript copying this is a common and readily understandable error." However, such a transposition seems equally possible in oral transmission. Cf. S. Collins, 1990, fn. 25.
23. See K. R. Norman, 1993b.
24. R. Gombrich, 1990b, p. 21; cf. 1992, p. 160. T. W. Rhys Davids & H. Oldenberg, (1881, p. xxxvi) suggest "about three hundred years". I. B. Horner (1992, p. 186), speaking of the *Vinaya* rules, states that the "rules were formulated orally and transmitted orally for probably more than 200 years".
25. S. Collins, 1992, esp. p. 121; cf. O. von Hinüber, 1990, p. 9, chaps. XIV & XV.
26. G. Bonazzoli (1983, esp. p. 267) and H. Bakker (1989, pp. 330-32) both argue that, in the case of the *purāṇas*, stylistic features do not necessarily indicate oral composition. They both see the *purāṇas* as resulting from an interplay between oral and written transmission. For examples of the criticism of the use of stylistic features or formulaic density as an indicator of oral or written origins which are encountered in the wider field of oral literature research, see for example, A. B. Lord, 1975, pp. 12-20; 1986, p. 478f; 1987; J. M. Foley, 1985, pp. 26-7, 42, 50, 56.
27. For a brief overview of Parry's work, see H. Lloyd-Jones (1992) and the introductory essay to J. M. Foley (1985).
28. Parry defined the formula as "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea", a definition which has remained prominent in the discussion of oral literature. This has obvious limitations for our purposes for we are dealing with prose and the metrical dimension or requirement is therefore inappropriate. A number of scholars have argued for the exclusion of the metrical component from the definition of a formula. See, for example, P. Kiparsky, 1976, pp. 84, 87; M. O'Conner, 1980, pp. 104-106; G. H. Rognair, 1982, pp. 60-6; O. M. Davidson, 1988; cf. J. D. Smith, 1987, esp. pp. 596-7, 602.
29. In the introduction to his important and influential publication *The Singer of Tales* (1960, p. 4), Lord set out his definitions: "stated briefly, oral epic song is narrative poetry composed in a manner evolved over many generations by singers of tales who did not know how to write; it

consists of the building of metrical lines and half lines by means of formulas and formulaic expressions and of the building of songs by the use of themes. This is the technical sense in which I shall use the word 'oral' and 'oral epic' in this book."

30. A. B. Lord, 1960, p. 280.
31. I. M. L. Hunter, 1985. But lengthy verbatim recall could, in fact, be verified by a group of specialist reciters. As will be shown in the following studies, there are also many stylistic features which can aid the oral transmission of a fixed text.
32. See, for example, J. D. Smith, 1977. Lord's response to Smith's criticism is found in A. B. Lord, 1987, p. 65ff.
33. Although not thought to be a memorised text, the contemporary oral Indian epic of Pābūji exhibits a high degree of stability, which J. D. Smith (1987, pp. 600–602; 1989, p. 33) attributes to the religious status of the hero. Thus a religio-philosophical dimension may result in an even greater degree of stability, or even fixity.
34. There is, in fact, much scope for such changes to occur within a "rigidly memorised tradition". This is discussed in greater detail in the conclusion to my Ph.D. thesis (see note below).
35. This article first appeared in 1988 in the *Journal of Pāli and Buddhist Studies*.
36. The only other work which has attempted to address the question of the method used by the early Buddhists for the composition of their texts is R. Gethin's "The *Mātikā*: memorization, mindfulness and the list" (1992). Gethin, like Cousins, considers the delivery of discourses and accounts of what the Buddha said to have been an improvisatory affair, and the differences between parallel versions of the same text as resulting from such a method. The various versions of the *Dasuttarasutta* (*/Dasottarasūtra*), for example, differ in their inclusion or omission of certain lists because they represent different performances of what is essentially the same list-giving discourse (*ibid.*, pp. 157–8). Other publications which have discussed the orality of the early Buddhist tradition are: O. von Hinüber, *Der Beginn der Schrift und frühe Schriftlichkeit in Indien*, 1990 (especially Chap. V "Die Mündlichkeit der ältesten buddhistischen Texte" and Chap. XIV "Die mündliche Textweitergabe bei den Buddhisten") and *Untersuchungen zur Mündlichkeit früher mittelindischer Texte der Buddhisten*, 1994; S. Collins, "Notes on some oral aspects of Pali literature", 1992; and R. Gombrich, "Recovering the Buddha's message", 1990a.
37. The most important studies of the style of Buddhist or Brahmanical literature are H. Oldenberg, *Zur Geschichte der altindischen Prosa*, 1917, esp. pp. 39–52; G. von Simson, *Zur Diktion einiger Lehrtexte des buddhistischen Sanskritkanons*, 1965; J. Gonda, *Stylistic repetitions in the Veda*, 1959. Of less importance are S. Weeratunge, "Some significant stylistic traits of Buddhist Sanskrit prose", 1992 and P. Kwella, "Some remarks on the style of some Buddhist Sanskrit texts", 1978.
38. The thesis title is *Some stylistic features of the prose portions of Pāli canonical sutta texts and their mnemonic function*. It was submitted to the University of Cambridge in September 1994.
39. These studies were restricted to an analysis of prose, because, as stated, this is by far the most dominant medium used by the early Buddhists. It is also particularly interesting as most oral literature is verse. I chose to work with Pāli canonical *sutta* texts, not because they are the oldest, but because they represent the most complete and best preserved body of texts representative of the early phase of Buddhist literature.
40. This diversity of terminology in part reflects a general uncertainty as to what actually constitutes a "formula", "stock phrase", and so on, and whether, say, a "formula" is different from a "stock phrase" or "stock expression". A detailed discussion of the terminology and definitions is presented in my Ph.D. thesis.
41. The inclusion of the unit "then", *atha kho*, depends on the context.
42. E.g. D II 237 *atha kho bhō Mahāgōvindo brāhmaṇo yena Reṇu rājā ten' upasaṅkami, upasaṅkamitvā Reṇuṃ rājānaṃ etad avoca.*
43. E.g. D I 236 *atha kho VāsetṭhaBhāradvājā māṇavā yena Bhagavā ten' upasaṅkamiṃsu, upasaṅkamitvā Bhagavatā saddhiṃ sammōdiṃsu, sammōdaniyaṃ kathaṃ sārāṇiyaṃ vitivāretvā ekamantaṃ nisidiṃsu. ekamantaṃ nisinno kho Vāsetṭho māṇavo Bhagavantaṃ etad avoca.*
44. E.g. D II 144 *āyasmā Ānando ... yena Bhagavā ten' upasaṅkami, upasaṅkamitvā Bhagavantaṃ abhivādetvā ekamantaṃ nisīdi. ekamantaṃ nisinnaṃ kho āyasmantaṃ Ānandaṃ Bhagavā etad avoca.*
45. E.g. D I 178–9 *atha kho Bhagavā yena samayappavūḍako tindukācīro ekasālako Mallikāya āramo ten' upasaṅkami. ... atha kho Bhagavā yena Poṭṭhapādo paribbājako ten' upasaṅkami. atha kho Poṭṭhapādo*

*paribbājako Bhagavantaṃ etad avoca: 'etu kho bhante Bhagavā, sāgataṃ bhante Bhagavato, cirassaṃ kho bhante Bhagavā imaṃ pariyāyam akāsi yadidaṃ idh' āgamaṇāya, nisidatu bhante Bhagavā, idaṃ āsanaṃ paññattan' ti. nisīdi Bhagavā paññatte āsane. Poṭṭhapādo pi kho paribbājako aññatarāṃ nīcaṃ āsanaṃ gahetvā ekamantaṃ nisīdi. ekamantaṃ nisinnaṃ kho Poṭṭhapādaṃ paribbājakaṃ Bhagavā etad avoca.*

Note that the ascetic addresses the Buddha as 'bhante'.

46. E.g. D I 226-7 *atha kho Bhagavā pubbaṃhasamayāṃ nivāsetvā pattacivaraṃ ādāya saddhiṃ bhikkhusaṃghena yena Sālavatikā ten' upasaṃkamaṃ. ... atha kho Bhagavā yena Lohiccassa brāhmaṇassa nivesanaṃ ten' upasaṃkamaṃ, upasaṃkamitvā paññatte āsane nisīdi. atha kho Lohicco brāhmaṇo Buddhapaṃukhaṃ bhikkhusaṃghaṃ paññāna khādaniyena bhōjanīyena sahatthā santappesi sampavāresi. atha kho Lohicco brāhmaṇo Bhagavantaṃ bhuttāviṃ oṇīpattapaṇiṃ aññatarāṃ nīcaṃ āsanaṃ gahetvā ekamantaṃ nisīdi. ekamantaṃ nisinnaṃ kho Lohiccaṃ brāhmaṇaṃ Bhagavā etad avoca.*
47. The situation is generally the same in other canonical texts, though the formulas used may differ (see below).
48. The examples not mentioned in this paper of complicated and particularly detailed approaches, and of those which do not quite conform to the norm, show that these structures were not blindly imposed upon the material. The authors of this material were fully capable of breaking with the norm where necessary. Meaning was still the ultimate determinant of diction.
49. Cf. B. J. Manné, 1992, p. 163.
50. See L. S. Cousins, 1983 and R. Gethin, 1992.
51. See R. Gombrich, 1990b.
52. Cf. J. Gonda, 1959, pp. 41-3.
53. Cf. G. von Simson, 1965, pp. 142-3; 1977, pp. 479-80.  
But as mnemonic means "aiding memory", it therefore not only includes "aiding the remembering of what is memorised", but also "aiding the remembering of non-memorised elements", for example, the course of events or the appropriate, or approximate, wording. We therefore find formulas and other elements of composition in an improvisatory setting being referred to as "mnemonic aids" (B. A. Rosenberg, 1987, pp. 82-3) and "mnemonic elements" (J. D. Smith, 1989, p. 40). It is used in this paper in the sense of "aiding the learning and recall of a memorised text" (A. B. Lord, 1987, p. 67, makes the distinction between remembering and memorising; cf. J. D. Smith, 1989, pp. 36-7).  
The stylistic features discussed in this paper may have had other functions besides aiding composition. However, space does not permit a discussion of these here.
54. D II 104; Ud 63; S V 260; A IV 310.
55. *atha kho Māro pāpimā acirapakkante āyasmante Ānande yena Bhagavā ten' upasaṃkamaṃ, upasaṃkamitvā ekamantaṃ aññāsi. ekamantaṃ ṭhito kho Māro pāpimā Bhagavantaṃ etad avoca (D II 104).*
56. *atha kho Māro pāpimā acirapakkante āyasmante Ānande yena Bhagavā ten' upasaṃkamaṃ, upasaṃkamitvā etad avoca (S V 260).*
57. *atha kho Māro pāpimā acirapakkante āyasmante Ānande Bhagavantaṃ etad avoca (A IV 310).*
58. E.g. S II 32-3 *atha kho āyasmā Sāriputto yena aññatitthiyānaṃ paribbājakaṃ ārāmo ten' upasaṃkamaṃ, upasaṃkamitvā tehi aññatitthiyehi paribbājakehi saddhiṃ sammodi, sammodaniyaṃ kathaṃ sārāṇiyaṃ vītisāretvā ekamantaṃ nisīdi. ekamantaṃ nisinnaṃ kho āyasmantaṃ Sāriputtaṃ te aññatitthiyā paribbājaka etad avocaṃ.*
59. E.g. Ud 82 & 89 read *atha kho Bhagavā pubbaṃhasamayāṃ nivāsetvā pattacivaraṃ ādāya saddhiṃ bhikkhusaṃghena yena* [house of host] *ten' upasaṃkamaṃ, upasaṃkamitvā paññatte āsane nisīdi*, while M II 146, Sn p. 111, A IV 187 and Vin I 217-8 read *atha kho Bhagavā pubbaṃhasamayāṃ nivāsetvā pattacivaraṃ ādāya yena* [house of host] *ten' upasaṃkamaṃ, upasaṃkamitvā paññatte āsane nisīdi saddhiṃ bhikkhusaṃghena.*
60. E.g. D II 97 reads *atha kho Ambapālī gaṇikā Buddhapaṃukhaṃ bhikkhusaṃghaṃ paññāna khādaniyena bhōjanīyena sahatthā santappesi sampavāresi. atha kho Ambapālī gaṇikā Bhagavantaṃ bhuttāviṃ oṇīpattapaṇiṃ aññatarāṃ nīcaṃ āsanaṃ gahetvā ekamantaṃ nisīdi*, while its parallel at Vin I 233 reads *atha kho Ambapālī gaṇikā Buddhapaṃukhaṃ bhikkhusaṃghaṃ paññāna khādaniyena bhōjanīyena sahatthā santappetvā sampavāretvā Bhagavantaṃ bhuttāviṃ oṇīpattapaṇiṃ ekamantaṃ nisīdi.*
61. W. Caland, 1931, p. 59; cf. J. Gonda, 1959, p. 61.
62. D III 54 *saccaṃ bhante bhāsīti me evā vācā yathā-bālena yathā-mūḷhena yathā-akusalēnā ti.*
63. D III 36-7 *seyyathidāṃ rājakathaṃ corakathaṃ mahāmatkathaṃ senākathaṃ bhayakathaṃ yuddhakathaṃ annakathaṃ pānakathaṃ vatthakathaṃ sayanakathaṃ mālākathaṃ gandhakathaṃ nātikathaṃ yānakathaṃ gāmakathaṃ nigamakathaṃ nagarakathaṃ janapadakathaṃ itthikathaṃ [purisakathaṃ] sūrakathaṃ viśikkākathaṃ kumbhaṭṭhānakathaṃ pubbapetakathaṃ nānattakathaṃ lokakkhāyikaṃ [kathaṃ] samuddakkhāyikaṃ [kathaṃ] itihavābhavakathaṃ iti vā.*

- Most other occurrences of this formula omit *purisakatham*. All occurrences read *lokakkhāyikaṃ samuddakkhāyikaṃ itibhāvābhavakatham*. Cf. D I 7-8, 66, 178-9; III 54; M I 513; II 1, 23, 30; S V 419ff; A V 128-9; Vin I 188; IV 164.
64. The identification of specific classes of sound similarities, such as alliteration, assonance, homoioteleuton, etc., are not important here, for, as noted by J. Gonda (1959, pp. 376-7), such distinctions were probably not made. What mattered was the repetition and similarity of sounds.
65. See W. Caland, 1931; J. Gonda, 1959, e.g. pp. 60-4, 125f. G. von Simson, 1965, e.g. §§ 2.3, 2.7, 8.4-6; H. Smith, Epilegomena to the Critical Pāli Dictionary, p. 35\* wax. comp.; O. von Hinüber, 1990, chap. VII; 1993, pp. 104-113. O. von Hinüber (1994) is the most detailed study so far published. Unfortunately, it arrived on my desk after my own studies were completed and the current paper was delivered.
66. The complete text is 34% larger than the abbreviated PTS version.
67. For example, the passage *puna ca paraṃ Nigrodha tapassī tapaṃ samādiyaṭi, bhojanesu vodāsaṃ āpajjati "idaṃ me khamati, idaṃ me na-kkhamati" ti. so yaṃ hi kho 'ssa na-kkhamati taṃ sāpekho pajahati, yaṃ pan' assa khamati taṃ gathito mucchito ajjhāpanno anādinavadassāvī anissaraṇapaṇīto paribhūjati* (D III 43) is later repeated as *puna ca paraṃ Nigrodha tapassī tapaṃ samādiyaṭi, bhojanesu na vodāsaṃ āpajjati "idaṃ me khamati, idaṃ me na-kkhamati" ti. so yaṃ hi kho 'ssa na-kkhamati taṃ anapekho pajahati, yaṃ pan' assa khamati taṃ agathito amucchito anajjhāpanno ādinavadassāvī nissaraṇapaṇīto paribhūjati* (D III 46).
68. E.g. D III 49-50.
69. *'tassa te Nigrodha viññussa sato mahallakassa na etad ahoṣi: "buddho so Bhagavā bodhāya dhammaṃ deseti, danto so Bhagavā damathāya dhammaṃ deseti, santo so Bhagavā samathāya dhammaṃ deseti, tūro so Bhagavā taraṇāya dhammaṃ deseti, parinibbuto so Bhagavā parinibbānāya dhammaṃ deseti" ' ti* (D III 54-5).
70. The complete *sutta* has a word count of 5,871. The word count for the passages which have been classed as VR is 1,761. The word counts for the other four categories are: RMM 2,028; RIM 222; RS-1 937; RS-2 149. The five categories have a total word count of 5,097, which represents 86.8% of the text.
71. Dh 241 *asajjhāyamaḷā mantā* (Nārada Thera's translation).
72. G. von Simson (1965, esp. p. 142ff.) is the exception. Cf. T. W. Rhys Davids, 1881, pp. xxii-xxiii; R. Gombrich, 1990b, p. 24; W. B. Bollée, 1970, p. 172; L. S. Cousins, 1983, p. 9; G. von Simson, 1977, p. 480; A. Syrkin, 1983, p. 160; J. Gonda, 1959, pp. 78, 351.
73. Cf. T. W. Rhys Davids, 1881, p. xxii; R. Gombrich, 1990a, p. 7; 1990b, p. 24.
74. For example, of the passages which are VR at a primary level, 78.9% consists of quantifiable repetition of one kind or another. In total 53.4% of the material which is repetitive on a primary level involves quantifiable repetition on a secondary level.
75. In the above discussion of approach-formulas, for example, *upasaṅkami, upasaṅkamitvā* ("... he approached. Having approached") and *ekamantaṃ nisīdi, ekamantaṃ nisinno* ("... he sat down to one side. Seated to one side") were encountered.
76. R. Gombrich, 1990b, p. 24.

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