

THE SYSTEM OF KENNINGS

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There is no necessity at all to substantiate the importance of skaldic poetry for the tradition of saga-writing. All the branches of saga-literature demonstrate the same highly established and elaborate artistic structure in which verse quotations complement the prose narrative, either authenticating the information provided by the saga-author, or playing a more active role in the story as integral parts of saga-episodes. The laconic prose of saga narrative devoid of any rhetorical ornamentation found its counterpoise and partner in the artificial and complex skaldic form. As to the level of literary criticism, it would be only rightful if any attempt to elucidate the nature of obscure and enigmatic skaldic language should not be considered as isolated and alien to saga studies.

Twenty years ago Bjarne Fidjestøl published an article, "*Kenningsystemet: Forsøk på ein lingvistisk analyse*"¹, to which the author of the present paper owes much more than its title. "*Kenningsystemet*" opened quite new perspectives in skaldic scholarship, as it clearly demonstrated the *langue/parole* relationship between a limited set of traditional kenning-types and an infinite number of their poetic manifestations thus revealing the language-property of the system of kennings. The aim of the present study inspired by Bjarne Fidjestøl and dedicated to his memory is to take a further step in the same direction.

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As is generally known, the kenning is a two-part poetic circumlocution applied in skaldic verses to replace nouns of the common language. So, in poetry a sword is called 'fire of battle', a man may be called 'tree of battle' or 'breaker of rings', a woman is 'pine-tree of necklace' and so on. Every kenning has a bipartite structure, it is a combination of two elements: 'the basic word', or simply 'the base' (*Grundwort, stofnorð*) and 'the determinant', or 'the modifier' (*Bestimung, kenniorð*) - the latter is either in the genitive case or forms a compound with the basic word.

The most general rule of kenning formation is usually formulated as follows: in the basic word the referent (that is a person or thing described by a kenning) must be called something which it is not. The determinant must not coincide with the referent either but it has to name a certain feature or property of the referent and thus helps to decipher the kenning. This function of the determinant will be fully revealed if we try to combine one and the same basic word with several determinants. Then, every time we shall get quite a new kenning. If as example we take the concept of 'earth' or 'ground', it turns out that 'ground of falcon' (*vals grund*) denotes a hand, whereas 'ground of necklace' (*men-fold*) is a

kenning for woman, 'ground of fish' (*síldar lauf*) is a kenning for sea and 'ground of spirit' (*hugar land*) is nothing but chest.

The "rule of incongruity" (i.e. the rule implying that the parts of a kenning must not be equal with the concept it describes) is usually regarded as a corner-stone of a kenning-definition. Accordingly, in modern scholarship the kenning is most often described as a certain type of metaphor ('a proportional metaphor' or *Metapher mit Ablenkung* to use the term introduced by Andreas Heusler). But, however important the rule of incongruity might be, it cannot exhaust the kenning-definition. Indeed, having defined the kenning just as a two-part poetic figure built in compliance with a most general structural rule, we may well expect a great variety of kennings describing an endless number of concepts or 'things'. Moreover, the very process of inventing kennings according to rules implies that skalds were free to create kennings which could scarcely be expected to have much in common with one another. However, nothing of the kind ever happened in reality.

On the contrary, most of the kennings we find in Old Norse poetry are variants of certain traditional kenning-types and not the freely composed units of poetic speech as it is suggested by their commonly accepted definition. Normally, skalds do not create entirely new kennings but constantly re-create the already existing traditional kennings providing them with a new verbal form. Hence, the art of the kenning required not only poetic skill but, first of all, the knowledge of a number of definite kenning-types for various concepts. In other words, there existed a traditional language of kennings, and skalds were expected to use it while composing their verses. The art of skaldic kennings in fact turns out to be the art of *variation*.

Although the kenning as such was not invented by skalds and kennings were used in Germanic epic poetry as well, it should be stressed that skaldic kennings had scarcely very much in common with poetic circumlocutions employed either in Anglo-Saxon or even in Old Norse epic lays. Epic poets used kennings just as other types of formulaic expressions, altering their verbal form with the help of a fixed number of traditional synonyms. Skalds, on the opposite, being self-conscious authors of their poetic production acted very much in a different way, and thus succeeded in placing the very process of synonymic variation at the service of their non-anonymous inventive art. Professional self-consciousness and the individuality of skaldic art, however, could not prevent this type of poetry from retaining its conservative traditional character. A result of this was a peculiar combination of tradition and innovation most obviously manifested in skaldic kennings.

As stated above, as a rule, the skaldic poet does not go so far as to create absolutely new kenning-types, his activity is focused merely on variation of the already existing kenning-patterns. Thus, variation of form itself becomes the only possible sphere where the poet could apply his 'lexical' craft. As neither common, nor epic language could provide skalds with a sufficient stock of synonyms for their *creative variation*, they had to invent a new type of interchangeable

poetic vocabulary, the so called *heiti* for their needs. Having very little in common semantically and hardly ever used as synonyms independently, *heiti* could secure the never-ending process of skaldic variation. An example of how it works is a kenning for sword fire of battle/wound/valkyrja or Ösinn. Varying this traditional kenning-pattern the skald could use not only different synonyms for fire, but words naming any source of light as well, that is sun (*bensól*, *Göndlar róðull*), moon (*gunnmáni*), day (*bendagr*) and even rainbow (*grár regnbogi Hnikars*). So, we may see that while varying traditional kenning-types skalds could go far away from their immediate models.

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There can be no doubt that language based on the principle of infinite formal variation of traditional invariant patterns (that is kenning-types) was bound to restrict both the number of such patterns and the number of concepts they described. And this was really the case, for skaldic kennings codify only a relatively limited range of concepts, mostly those belonging to the heroic realm, and for this purpose a rather restricted number of kenning-types are used. These traditional invariant patterns are by no means isolated from one another but form a single whole - the *system of skaldic kennings*.

The system of kennings is a hierarchical entity and as such it might be represented as a pyramid. The very top of this pyramid is occupied by the kennings for man, a group superior to the rest of the system, as poetic circumlocutions describing the man or warrior, the central personage in the heroic world, are used much more frequently than kennings for any other concept. Somewhat lower in the system the kennings for woman are located; as regards the kennings for gods and rulers, these are obviously less significant for the skaldic language than the kennings for both man and woman and, accordingly, do not occupy the highest position in the hierarchy. Below the kennings for the main concepts we may find in succession the kennings for battle, weapon and armour, ship and gold, and one story lower the kennings for raven and wolf (the bird and the beast of battle) and beside them the kennings for blood and carrion. The lower levels of this pyramid are occupied by the kennings for sea, sky and earth, fire and snake, poetry and skald. The most overcrowded level in this kenning-building is, of course, the ground-floor where we may find a mixed row of kennings describing different concepts as, for example, those of hand and chest, winter and summer, etc. This picture of a pyramid is, of course, only a most general outline of the system, for it is hardly possible to find out the actual succession of different kenning-types and thus to arrange them all on this scale in a strict order, especially, when we turn to the lower levels of this triangular construction. However, what I actually consider necessary to emphasize is the hierarchism of the kenning-system itself and it is not my aim to establish the exact address of every cell occupied by this or that kenning-type.

But since it is the question of the system of kennings it is important to demonstrate that we really have to deal with an integral whole and not with a mere sum of different kenning-patterns. First of all, this becomes evident because of the fact that various kenning-types are often related with each other in respect to their structure. So, while the sky is called 'roof of the earth' (e.g. *vall-ræfr*), the earth is named 'bottom of the sky' (e.g. *vindkers botn* 'bottom of the vessel of winds' as Egill Skallagrímsson called it in *Arinbjarnarkviða*, 18). In the same way, while the sea is described as 'earth of the fish' or 'earth of the water-bird' (e.g. *alvangr* 'meadow of the eel' and *svanfold* 'earth of the swan'), the earth is called 'sea of the beast' (e.g. *elgver* 'sea of the elk'). The pairs of kennings just mentioned are built by analogy with each other. If we take some other examples we shall see that a kenning-pattern might acquire an antonymous correlate in the system. So, while summer is 'snakes' mercy', winter, on the contrary, is 'snakes' disaster', or while gold is 'fire of the hand', silver is 'ice (or 'snow') of the hand'.

Not all of the kenning-patterns I have mentioned were widely used by the skalds and thus, could occupy a high position in the hierarchy. However, I do not think that this may be used as an argument against importance of the role played by correlation of different patterns in the system of kennings. As to the most important kenning-types in the system, that is kennings for man and woman, they also demonstrate the same principle, this time in respect to their gender - the basic words in kennings for man and woman are, as is known, words for trees (or, in another kenning-pattern, names of mythological beings), so masculine words and names are used for man, feminine for woman. For example, a man is called 'a fir-tree of riches' (*auðar pollr*), 'a grove of the necklace' (*menlundr*) or 'Njörðr of riches' (*auðar Njörðr*) and a woman, accordingly, is called 'a pine of riches' (*auðar pella*), 'a willow of the necklace' (*mens selja*) or 'Hlín of rings' (*hringa Hlín*).

In cases like these, when determinants in kennings are words for riches (gold, rings and so on), only the gender of their basic words makes it possible to clarify the type of kenning we actually have - the one for man, or the one for woman. Thus, the principle of correlation turns into another one, the highly important principle of kenning-formation, the principle of *differentiation* of kenning-patterns. Each kenning had to stand apart from the others, otherwise the verses could hardly be rightly understood by the audience and the skalds themselves would never have developed a traditional language of kennings used in the course of several centuries without, or almost without, any alterations.

A good example of how the principle of differentiation of kenning-patterns works is given by two closely related kenning-types, one for sword and one for man. Both of them use words for trees as basic words, and words for battle and armour as determinants. However, while the kenning for sword does not employ the names of living trees, showing preference to various designations of logs and twigs (cp. *vöndr* or *skia*),

the kenning for man, in its turn, avoids to use synonyms applied in the kenning for sword and normally employs heiti of living trees. There is, still, a remarkable exception that, I suppose, can very well prove the rule of differentiation of kenning-patterns. Although kennings for man avoid names of non-living trees, one of such names, nevertheless, has been accepted by the tradition and is widely used as the basic word of these kennings. The heiti in question is stafr (as in *hjalmsstafr* 'staff of the helm' or *stála stafr* 'staff of steel'). But just because this very heiti is used in kennings for man, it is never used as the basic word in kennings for sword. It should be noted that stafr does not appear in kennings for sword even in late skaldic verses where we may sometimes find some irregular kennings making both kenning-types less distinct from each other, as, for example, *bryn-palmr* 'a palm-tree of the coat of mail' employed as a kenning for sword in the verses of *Orms þáttur Stórolfssonar* (IV, 8) and *hneitis palmr* 'a palm-tree of the sword' used as a kenning for man in *Katrínardrápa*, 42².

However, not only the already mentioned principles of kenning-formation permit us to state that we really have to do with a system. There might be found another testimony to this statement which, as far as I know, have been up to now overlooked by the scholars. To reveal this testimony we have to take a better look at the range of concepts described by the language of kennings. As follows from the above, the referents of kennings are, on the one hand, the most important concepts of the heroic world that taken together form a backbone of this organism. On the other hand, we find some more or less casual concepts there. But as the system of kennings restricts the number of described concepts there is every reason to put a question about the principles of selection of what may be called the 'second-rate' kennings, that is kennings occupying the lower levels in the hierarchy.

Indeed, is it possible to explain why in poetry constantly glorifying the heroic deeds of kings such an important, one would think, group as kennings for earth does not play any significant part and thus occupies lower position in the system than, for example, kennings for snake? Or, similarly, for what reason is there no room in this system for kennings for horse or fish? I suppose that these questions are relevant, for beyond the limits of the kenning-system, among the sporadic poetic circumlocutions we shall find both kennings for horse and fish built in analogy to some well known kenning-patterns, namely, kennings for ship and snake. I mean kennings in *Sigvatr's* verses, *rastar knörr* (*Skjd.* 254, 2) 'ship of the land' (= horse), *leygjar eitrs ormr* (*Skjd.* 246, 1) 'poisonous snake of the sea' (= fish) and *Kormákr's* kenning for fish *díkis bokkr* (*Skjd.* 83, 59) 'he-goat of the ditch'. All these examples demonstrate that, when needed, such kennings could be invented by skalds. However, they have never been picked up by tradition and thus could not turn into definite kenning-types and enter the system of kennings. In what follows I shall try to prove that it is no mere chance that these circumlocutions had to remain occasional kennings, but for the moment it is necessary to dwell on these three

kennings, as they may possibly reveal the methods skalds were employing while constructing their non-traditional kennings.

First of all, it turns out that although these expressions do not reproduce any existent pattern we still cannot consider them as pure metaphors, i.e. mere products of poetic imagination, for they are also based on the system of kennings and, in fact, are nothing but results of a skillful play with this system. So, when Sigvatr names a horse *rastar knörr* 'ship of the land' he turns over a well-known kenning-pattern that describes a ship as 'a horse of the sea' (cp. *vágmarr* or *unnar hestr*). However, what Sigvatr is actually inventing here is not as unsophisticated as it may appear at first sight, for he puts this kenning of a horse side by side with another kenning, that is a kenning for *land ráðýris vörr* 'the sea of the roe' (*sparn rastar knörr / ráðýris vörr* 'the horse was treading the land'). Thus, Sigvatr, as we may well see, is constructing an opposition that looks very much like an equation - a ship (*knörr*) is related to the land (*röst*) in exactly the same manner as a roe (*ráðýri*) is related to the sea (*vörr*).

At first sight, a construction like this has hardly anything special in itself, at least if we keep in mind the correlating pairs of traditional kenning-patterns mentioned above. However, in one respect this pair of kennings is remarkable, indeed, and demonstrates the poet's great skill. I mean the way he is choosing *heiti* for these two kennings. The determinant *röst* in *rastar knörr* is not, actually, a usual *heiti* for land, for unlike other *heiti*, it does not indicate any kind of surface; *röst* denotes a measure, a part of the way between two resting stops. In the same way *vörr* is not a name for the sea by origin but means 'a pull of the oar' and thus also denotes a kind of measure. It is most likely, that although this word is used as a *heiti* for sea in poetry, Sigvatr is keeping in mind its original meaning, and if so, the constructed opposition - that of a sea-way and a land-way - is much more subtle and elaborate than it may appear at first glance.

Another occasional kenning invented by Sigvatr is also built in analogy to a traditional kenning-pattern (the one for snake), for he employs exactly the same method of kenning-formation as we have just observed. So, *leygjar eitrs ormr* 'poisonous snake of the sea' (= fish) has a well-known kenning for snake, 'fish of the land' (as, e.g., *dalfiskr* or *lyngáll*) as its model. As in the first instance, the non-traditional kenning in this stanza is used together with another one, a three-part circumlocution *lýsu vangs lyng* 'heather of the field of the fish' where *lýsu vandr* is a kenning for sea and its *lyng*, i.e. 'heather of the sea' should be interpreted as a kenning for the sea-weeds fish is hiding in. The result of such a combination of kennings is a beautiful consistent image of fish, represented as a snake, the skald is trying to pull out of the sea-weeds, represented as heather.

Sigvatr employed his kenning in a stanza about fishing - and the fish he was trying to pull out of the water, really, deserved a very good kenning as it happened to play an important part in his life, for when Sigvatr tasted it he became

skald and pronounced his first *lausavísa*. Kormákr, in his turn, invented his kenning *díkis bokkar* 'he-goats of the ditch' to name the flocks of fish (eel) that wrapped his hands and feet and nearly dragged him to the bottom while he was swimming across the strait. This last kenning is remarkable mainly for its relation to the system of kennings, as it is also based on one of the most widely used kenning-types, namely, a kenning for ship 'horse of the sea'. When varying this traditional kenning-type skalds could use not only *hestaheiti* (i.e. such synonyms as *jór*, *marr*, *vigg*, *stóð*, *hrafn*, etc.), but also names of different large land-animals (as, e.g., *dýr*, *eigr*, *hreinn*, *góltr* and even *fill* and *léón*). So, the basic word Kormákr had chosen for his kenning (*bokkr* 'he-goat') was the one suitable for a kenning for ship. However, the skald was constructing quite another kenning and thus had to destroy the traditional pattern he, at first glance, pretended to be using. While the basic word *bokkr* fitted perfectly in a kenning for ship, the determinant *díki* 'ditch' was, on the contrary, an inappropriate word as ships never sail in ditches. Accordingly, the kenning-type for ship had an important restriction of variation, which, for example, a kenning for gold, another kenning that employed the same group of *heiti* for water had never had (as gold was called *eldr allra vatna*, this kenning-pattern could embrace all kinds of water-*heiti*, among them words for ditches, puddles, etc. without any exception). As we see, Kormákr constructed a riddle-like kenning. However, to solve this riddle there is no necessity at all to rack one's brains over the puzzle what the goats swimming in ditches are. What his audience really needed was the knowledge of the skaldic language, for when constructing such a kenning the skald was playing not with reality or imagination but with the traditional poetic language.

In all these instances we may well see that when composing their non-traditional kennings skalds were filling in some empty cells left in the system of kennings. But if so there is every reason to make an attempt to investigate why all these perfectly constructed kennings had not acquired their place in the system and remained skaldic occasionalisms never accepted by the poetic language.

I suppose we shall never be able to understand how such secondary kenning-types have been selected, unless we take into account the structure of kenning as a figure of skaldic diction. As is known, every kenning is a combination of two parts - the basic word and the determinant. That does not imply, however, that kenning necessarily consists only of two nouns. The skaldic kenning may be expanded, i.e. it is possible to substitute its second part, the determinant, for a kenning and thus turn a simple kenning into an extended one, the so called *rekít*. Snorri speaks of three types of kennings: "Kennings are distinguished in three groups: the first are called *kennings*, the second *tvíkennt* (doubled), and the third *rekít* (driven). It is a kenning to call battle *fleinbrak* (clash of spears), but it is *tvíkennt* to call the sword *fleinbraks fúrr* (fire of the clash of spears), and if the expression is longer it is *rekít*"³. So, to produce a *tvíkennt* the skald has to replace a simple determinant with a kenning. To produce a *rekít* he has

to do it once again and then, if needed, several times, replacing each successive determinant with a kenning. This process of expansion is, however, limited. First of all, the skald cannot take a new step unless he has a simple kenning-pattern to replace the last determinant of the extended kenning at his disposal. Secondly, the length of a *rekit* cannot exceed the bounds of the four-line space of a skaldic helming. That is why in the *Háttatal* skalds are not recommended to use kennings of more than five elements, although it is said that ancient poets did it.

Hence, extended kenning became a cross-way for various simple kenning-patterns. Furthermore, when joined together these simple patterns inevitably had to stand in closer interdependence serving as building-parts for some new, more complicated and obviously highly appreciated constructions. It thus seems not quite unlikely that extended kenning could have played major part in the process of formation of the kenning-system. But in what way?

What has now been said permits us to conclude that *rekit* always depends on a stock of simple kenning-types, for it has to use the existent simple kenning-patterns and these cannot but predetermine the structure of extended kennings. However, *rekit*, in its turn, could once have started to exert influence on the evolution of the system of simple kenning-patterns. It seems quite plausible, that the priority of certain kenning-types describing secondary concepts, or, on the contrary, the complete absence of other kenning-types might be accounted for by a possibility to use them while expanding a kenning. For example, since ship is called 'sea-horse' and sea is called 'earth of the sea-konungr', the skald may call ship 'horse of the earth of the sea-konungr' (cp. *Meita vallar vigg*), but as the concept of horse employed as the basic word in this kenning never takes part of the determinant it is of no value to a *rekit* for, even if expressed by a kenning, it will never be expanded. Isn't it a good reason for the absence of kenning-types for horse in the system? The same may be said about some other kenning-types for secondary concepts that were of no use in the process of kenning-expansion. This explanation is, of course, a mere assumption, but it compels us to examine the problem of *rekit* more thoroughly.

Beyond all doubt, the extended kenning must have been highly estimated in the skaldic tradition because expanding a kenning always gave poets an opportunity to demonstrate their inventiveness and skill. However, it doesn't necessarily follow from this that an extended kenning was an absolutely free poetic construction, a kind of an ever-new combination of simple kenning-patterns. Although it seems doubtless that such extended kennings really existed, these free constructions should have hardly ever been anything but exceptions to certain traditional rules of *rekit*-formation. But what makes us suspect that not only simple kennings but extended kennings as well have not been just the products of individual poetic activity as they appear at first sight? Let us take a good look at their structure.

First of all, to decipher an extended kenning there is no necessity to move forward step by step, rolling up the multi-

stage determinant. The key to a *rekit* is its very structure. For example, to detect that the longest preserved skaldic *rekit*, the one which consists of seven elements, the invention of the 11th century skald Þórðr Særeksson, *nausta blakks hlémána gífrs drifu gímslǫngvir* is a kenning for man it is not at all important to ascertain that *nausta blakkr* 'horse of the boat-house' is ship, its *hlémáni*, i.e. 'lee-moon of the ship' is shield, its *gífr*, i.e. 'witch of the shield' is pole-axe, its *drífa*, i.e. 'snow-storm of the pole-axe' is battle, its *gím*, i.e. 'gem (or 'fire') of the battle' is sword and its *slǫngvir* 'sword-slinger' is man. It would be enough to find the basic word of this kenning which all by itself and in a most unambiguous manner can tell us that this is a kenning for man. In a similar way we may decipher an overwhelming majority of extended kennings. But that means that the determinant of a simple kenning and that of a *rekit* differ in their function. For, while simple kenning utilizes its determinant, in extended kenning it is used mainly as an ornamental part. Its immediate sense is not as important as its aesthetic function.

This, of course, does not imply that extended kenning by origin had some other, peculiar structure different from that of a simple kenning. Nothing of the kind. All the differences between simple and extended kennings are not innate but are rooted in the traditional use of *rekit*. As it turns out, extended kennings are applied only to a highly restricted range of referents and first of all they are kennings for man. But the word-classes used as basic words in these kennings (names of gods, trees and *nomina agentis*) cannot be applied in any other kenning-types. No wonder, then, that the basic word of every kenning for man can point to its referent by itself. As a result there could appear the so-called 'half-kennings', i.e. incomplete kennings that lost their determinants (cp. *pollr*, *lundr*).

It is important that the described property of basic words in kennings for man is not unique. In a similar way many kennings for woman, some kennings for battle, or, for example, a kenning for raven are built. However, while this type of kenning-formation was not of real importance to the system of simple, or two-part kennings and thus was never cultivated in it at the expense of other kenning-types, beyond all doubt, it was a valuable acquisition to extended kennings for it could add a lot in simplifying the very process of their deciphering. It is not unlikely, that this accounts for a tendency to expand mainly the simple kenning-patterns where the basic word could point to the referent by itself without any support of the determinant. So, I suppose, it is no mere chance that among the extended kennings for woman, for example, we shall never find a really long one (that is a five-part kenning) using *heiti* for earth as a basic word, because these *heiti* could be applied in kennings for gold as well. The extended kennings for woman evidently preferred names of goddesses and *heiti* of trees (such, e.g., as *fjarðar elgs fúrvangs Hlín* (*Skjð.* 101, 25) 'Hlín of the fire of the meadow of the fiord-elk' or *svanteigs elda björk* (*Skjð.* II 214,13) 'birch of the fire of the swan-field'). Similarly, there is no necessity at all to puzzle over the sense of such kennings as the battle-

kenning *hjörslautar hyrjar þing* (*Skjd.* 123, 31) 'thing of the fire of the hollow place of the sword' or the kenning for raven *sára þorns sveita svanr* (*Skjd.* 90, 1) 'swan of sweat of the thorn of the sore'. All the given explanations are superfluous, however, for basic words of these kennings are never used in other kenning-types.

Hence, it is obvious that the structure of extended kenning is dependent on its function of a substitute for an ordinary noun. As we could see, the complexity of this poetic figure had an important consequence - in order to simplify the deciphering of *rekit* there have been introduced certain additional formal restrictions. However, it is hardly probable that such traditional rules could be intended only for the skaldic audience. For even if the listeners of the verses were provided with a key to extended kennings and thus could avoid 'rolling up' the long and complex determinant, poets, for their part, had little use of this particular rule because their task was to 'unroll' their kennings in a correct manner. But is it impossible that tradition had elaborated certain means or rules meant for skalds themselves, something that could simplify their task?

I have already mentioned one rule of this kind. Skalds are advised not to use extended kennings of more than six elements (i.e. of five simple kennings). However, in fact the most wide-spread type of *rekit* is even shorter, it consists only of three simple kennings, i.e. has four elements. It appears that the large majority of these extended kennings are kennings for man and woman. If we analyze their structure we will find out a general mechanism of their formation. As a rule, such *rekit*-constructions are far from being free combinations of various simple kenning-types but contain a sort of ready-made traditional kenning-blocks, the so-called *tvíkennt* or 'doubled' kenning-patterns.

But what makes us think that the system of kennings consisted not only of simple kenning-patterns but of 'doubled' kenning-patterns as well and thus embraced a number of constantly reproduced traditional combinations of simple kenning-types? First of all, their recurrence, of course. A combination of two kenning-types, namely a kenning for battle 'storm of the shield' and a kenning for shield 'wall (or 'fence') of *valkyrja*' may serve as a good example. This combination of two simple kenning-patterns is used repeatedly in skaldic verses either independently (as a *tvíkennt* for battle), or as a complex determinant in extended kennings for man (cp. *Hildar garða hrið* (*Skjd.* 210, 3) 'storm of the fence of Hild', *víggarðs veðr-eggjandi* (*Skjd.* 514, 2) 'inciter of the foul weather of the fence of battle', *Göndlar veggjar glygg-Freyr* (*Skjd.* 508, 41b) 'Freyr of the wind of the wall of the wall of Göndul', etc.). Examples like these can hardly be a result of mere coincidence. However, there are also some other reasons to treat such complex kennings as reproducing what has been called 'doubled' kenning-patterns.

As a rule, a sub-system of simple kenning-patterns describing one referent or another includes several interchangeable kenning-types. So, if needed, the skald may choose between four kenning-types for hand and call it either 'branch of the

shoulder' (*axllimar*) or 'earth of the falcon' (*hauka land*), 'distress of the bow' (*dalnauð*) or 'earth of the rings' (*bauga land*). However, if we look thoroughly how all these kenning-types are actually used in extended kennings we shall find out that they are neither entirely equal, nor fully interchangeable, for only one of these kenning-types, namely, 'earth of the falcon' is regularly employed in *rekit*-constructions. Usually it serves as a part of a *tvikennt* for gold of the kind 'fire of the earth of the falcon'. But the most remarkable fact is that the kenning 'earth of the falcon', although frequently employed as a part of a *tvikennt* for gold, has scarcely ever been used independently, that is as a kenning for land itself. Hence, its main function is to serve as a part of a major construction, a *tvikennt* for gold. The latter, however, in its turn, is seldom used independently, for only one fifth of 'doubled' kennings of the type 'fire of the earth of the falcon' is applied as designations for gold itself. As to the rest, the greater part of these *tvikennt* is none other than what may be called building-blocks, i.e. complex determinants in four-part kennings for man and woman (cp., e.g., *haukstorðar fúrsendir* (*Skjd.* 365, 1) 'sender of the fire of the earth of the hawk'; *hauka háklifs elds ærir* (*Skjd.* 155, 21) 'messengers of the fire of the high cliff of the hawk'; *öglis stéttar elds þella* (*Skjd.* 110, 4) 'pine-tree of the fire of the pavement of the falcon', i.e. woman, etc.).

A similar use has a well-known kenning for snake 'fish of the earth'. We may often find it functioning as a part of a *tvikennt*-pattern for gold employed in four-part kennings for man and woman (cp. kennings for woman: *lyngs leynisíka stríndar línd* (*Skjd.* 388, 4) 'lime-tree of the earth of the hiding salmon of the heather'; *akrs síka lítjar Njörun* (*Skjd.* 487, 34) 'Njörun of the earth of the salmon of the arable land'). A remarkable phenomenon concerning this type of complex kennings, is that they never use a possibility to replace the last determinant in a chain with a kenning for earth and thus to draw *rekit* one step farther. Presumably, this may be the best evidence to prove that we really have to do with invariant traditional *tvikennt*-patterns and not with a number of free combinations of simple kennings, for it demonstrates that the *tvikennt* determinants of extended kennings for man and woman were formed once and for all and therefore were not intended to subsequent extension. In the same way the lack of simple kenning-patterns for falcon and fish in the skaldic language may be explained (cp. extended kennings for woman: *lýskála bála Ilmr* (*Skjd.* 600, 30) 'Ilmr of the fire of the hall of the fish'; *hnyssings teigs elda Lofn* (*Skjd.* II 574, 18) 'Lofn of the fire of the strip of the field of the fish'), or the fact that kennings for earth never played any important part in tradition and thus occupied one of the lower levels in the kenning-system. Although any of these concepts could, at least theoretically, take part in *rekit*-extension they, all the same, proved to be useless for traditional *tvikennt*-patterns employed as determinants of four-part kennings.

There is no room to dwell on the longest, i.e. five- and six-part extended kennings. Judging by the preserved corpus of skaldic poetry, such *rekit*-constructions were used far less

frequently than four-part kennings. Almost all of these longer kennings are circumlocutions for man and even they may hardly be regarded as entirely 'free formations' (cp., e.g., *hrægamm sávar* 'stara greddir (*Skjd.* 346, 30) 'feeder of the starling of the sea of the carrion-vulture'; *benja vala fenskuífs fæðir* (*Skjd.* 574, 27) 'feeder of the sea-bird of the fen of the falcon of the wound'), for these extended kennings also include identical combinations of simple kenning-patterns.

Summing up what has been said above, it may be concluded that the system of kennings displays a fairly complex and well organized two-level structure. As I tried to demonstrate, above the level of simple kenning-patterns there is a level of their traditional combinations, 'doubled' kenning-patterns or *tvíkennt*-models intended to be used as determinants in the most valuable figure of poetic diction, the so called *rekit*, or extended kenning. The interaction between these two levels seems to contribute a lot to the formation of the system as a whole. The language of kennings thus organized became a universal code which in the course of no less than five centuries maintained the continuity and succession of the skaldic tradition.

References

¹ Maal og Minne, h. 1-4, 1974, s.5-50.

²Skaldic citations are from Finnur Jónsson, ed. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* (København, 1912-15; rpt. 1967-73), I-II:B (hereafter abbrev. *Skjd.*).

³*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, København, 1931, s. 215; the English translation of this passage is from E.O.G.Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry*, Oxford, 1976, p. xlviii.