The metrical structure of poetry:

English and German (and other languages) are essentially iambic; an iamb is a foot of language, composed of accented and unaccented syllables. Here is a partial list of common feet in English:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| name of foot + number of syllables | placement of accented and unaccented syllbles | sample words and phrases |
| iamb = two syllables | unaccented U + accented / | today = U /  |
| trochee = two syllables | accented / + unaccented U | never = / U |
| anapest = three syllables | unaccented U + unaccented U + accented / | understand = U U / |
| dactyl = three syllables | accented / + unaccented U + unaccented / | exercise = / U U |
| amphibrach = three syllables | unaccented U + accented / + unaccented U | appearance = U / U |
| spondee = two syllables | accented / + accented / | stop that! = / / |
|  |  |  |

Feet are combined into metrical units; here is a partial illustration:

|  |
| --- |
| dimeter = two feet |
| trimeter = three feet |
| tetrameter = four feet |
| pentamter = five feet |
| hexameter = six feet |

So for example, "Marlowe's mighty line" is typical of iambic pentameter:

"Is this the face that launched a thousand ships…" =

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Is this | the face | that launched | a thou-- | --sand ships… |
| U / | U / | U / | U / | U / |