

Epic versification and word order: looking for clues in the battle books of the *Mahābhārata*

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The question of word order in epic Sanskrit should be considered as a problem *sui generis*, in the sense that the situation is neither identical to what we find in prose texts nor to the extreme freedom characteristic for the *kāvya* style. To my knowledge this topic has not been treated so far in any detail, which is perfectly understandable because without the help of the computer and especially constructed databases not much progress is possible here. There are, however, a few works on formulaic language in the Indian epics containing observations that are also pertinent for questions of word order.

My presentation will consist of two parts. In the first part I shall briefly present the Mbh databases I have compiled for the present purpose and give a general outline of the process of epic versification as far as it can be reconstructed on the basis of this material; this will also include an overview of the types of formulae found in the *Mahābhārata* and of their usage. In the main part I will give a detailed analysis of some groups of verses from the battle books that are particularly well suited for this purpose because they are both numerous and thematically highly homogeneous. It turns out that for some cases strict word order rules can be formulated taking into account the number of syllables and metrical structure of the words denoting subject and direct object; in other cases there is greater freedom, so that only certain preferences can be observed. The concrete results of these analyses are only valid for the investigated groups of verses, but they show certain parameters that seem to be of wider importance and so may serve as a model for future work of a similar kind.