# Restrictions on Alliteration and Rhyme in the Swedish System of Personal Names in the Light of Old Germanic Parallels

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## Abstract

I intend to demonstrate that the Swedish surname system is characterized by certain morphophonotactic restrictions, including a reluctance to use rhyme and alliteration in dithematic surnames, as for example in the following, actually existing names: *Aldal* (*Al-* + *-dal*), *Engren* (*En-* + *-gren*) and *Backberg* (*Back-* + *-berg*), *Stenstedt* (*Sten-* + *-stedt*). Restrictions of the latter type apply in cases of perfect alliteration. Combinations of elements with imperfect alliteration, on the other hand, such as *Karlkvist* (*Karl-* + *-kvist*) and *Spångstedt* (*Spång-* + *-stedt*), are not avoided. As for double first names in Swedish, it appears that many alliterating formations either have not been used, e.g., *\*Alf-Anders*, *\*Bengt-Börje*, or have few bearers, *Hans-Håkan*, *Lars-Lennart* etc., all of these examples being men's names. Rhyme is not found in this category of men's names, as in the relevant names the accent always falls on the first syllable of the last element. In women's double names, which have a different accentuation, both alliteration *\*Hanna-Helen*, *\*Maj-Märta*, and rhyme, *\*Ella-Bella*, *\*Maria-Sofia*, are avoided. Identical restrictions in the Old Germanic name system are also discussed in this study.

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As far as I am aware, it is generally accepted by personal name researchers that, taken as a category, dithematic personal names originate from designations for men and epithets for heroes in Indo-European and Germanic heroic poetry (Andersson 2003: 592). It has long been observed that different kinds of restriction applied to the formation of ancient dithematic men's and women's names. From investigations mainly of old West Germanic personal names, it has been concluded that name formations with alliteration and rhyme (in the sense of perfect rhyme), such as *Baldoberht*, *Berhtbald*, *Bodoberht*, *Gergund*, *Hildhelm*, *Hildheri*, *Raderich*; *Ratflat*, *Waldbald* and *Wolfolf*, were generally avoided. There are, however, some names that defy such name formation principles, including *Baldwald*, *Berdbertus*, *Liuplind* and *Waldwald*. The names *Godgod* and *Wulfulf* have been found among the Anglo-Saxons (Bach 1952: 91).

In a study originally published in 1940, the German scholar Edward Schröder (1944: 15 ff.) devotes a few pages to the effect of alliteration on the formation of West Germanic dithematic personal names. He mentions that, of the 30,000 individuals with names included in his collection, at most 300, i.e., 1%, bear names with alliterating first and last elements, and that he has not found any names with rhyming elements.

Restrictions on rhyme, alliteration etc. in Swedish dithematic surnames have been treated by Hagåsen (2007). For a very short research history, I refer to that study, the corpus of which I have since extended. The original and the extended corpus comprise both surnames that have been recorded and unrecorded names, constructed from the first and last elements of existing names. In this study I will confine myself to the slightly more than 7,500 surnames that have monosyllabic first elements. There are 244 such elements, and 31 last elements.

Apart from surnames, male and female double first names will also be examined in the present paper. The term *alliteration* will be used for cases where one of the alliterating syllables

bears the primary stress, while the other has heavy secondary stress, e.g., *Ste`nste'dt*, *\*Mo`na-Mä'rta*, or weak secondary or no stress at all, e.g., *Gu´ll-Gre˙t*, *My´rma˙n*, *Pe˙r-Pa´trik*. There are also instances where neither of the alliterating syllables bears the stress, e.g., *Mari`-Margre't*. (´ = single-tone primary stress, ` = double-tone primary stress, ' = heavy secondary stress, ˙ = weak or no secondary stress.)

As regards my corpus of dithematic surnames, non-existent names make up 38% of the entire corpus, under-represented ones 27%, those of average frequency 17%, and over-represented names 18%. The dividing line between under-representation and average frequency has been drawn at 50% of the average permillage, calculated on the basis of numbers of bearers, for the last element in question. The dividing line between average frequency and over-representation is set at the same percentage above the average permillage. I do not consider it necessary to apply this subdivision when treating double first names below.

When it comes to perfect alliteration (213 cases), there are 144 non-existent names, i.e., 68% of the total, such as *\*Bo`kbe'rg*, *\*Kva`rnkvi'st* and *\*Rö`nnro't*. As just noted, the figure for the corpus as a whole is 38%. The 54 under-represented names here, i.e. 25% of the total, correspond fairly well to the overall figure of 27%, which could be taken to mean that there is no restriction on alliteration in these cases: *Ba`ckbe'rg*, *Bo`be'rg*, *Ste`nste'dt*, *Vä`stva'll*, *Vi`va'll* etc. However, more than two-thirds of the names showing perfect alliteration have been added to the Swedish onomasticon since 1920, possibly paving the way for the high frequency of cases of alliteration under the pressure to coin new surnames in 20th-century Sweden. In the two remaining frequency groups, the 10 cases of average frequency (4.7% of all cases of perfect alliteration) and the 5 over-represented names (2.3%) represent much lower percentages than the overall figures for these two categories, 17% and 18%. In spite of the normal distribution of under-represented names, my conclusion is that perfect alliteration has been a hindrance to the creation of many surnames, but it is also important to scrutinize whether the relevant names are of old date or have been adopted in more recent years.

Among the 51 cases involving both perfect alliteration and some kind of assonance, e.g., *Bä`ckbe'ck*, *Be`rgbä'ck*, *\*Gra`ngre'n*, *Ma´rkma˙n*, *Va`ssva'll* etc., there are 45 non-existent names, i.e. 88% compared with 38% for the entire corpus, and 6 under-represented ones, i.e., 12% versus 27%. No cases of average occurrence or over-representation have been found here. There is no doubt that a combination of perfect alliteration and assonance is subject to restriction in dithematic surnames.

Imperfect alliteration, in cases like *\*Bli`dbä'ck, \*Brä`nnblo'm, Ka`rlkvi'st* and *Spå`ngste'dt*, characterizes 252 of the surnames in my corpus; 108 of them have not been used, i.e., 43% versus 38% for the total corpus, 76 are under-represented, 30% versus 27%, 36 are in the average zone, 14% versus 17%, and 32 are over-represented, 13% versus 18% overall. In other words, imperfect alliteration cannot be regarded as a disturbing factor.

Rhyme occurs in 32 names, e.g., *\*Fa`lda'l*, *Ste`ngre'n*, *\*Su`ndlu'nd* etc., of which 27, 84%, have not been used and 5, 16%, are under-represented names. There are no average or over-represented names with rhyming syllables. Thus, in the formation of Swedish surnames, rhyme has been avoided to a greater extent than would have been expected. The 5 rhyming names found are *E`ngre'n*, *Re`ngre'n*, *Ste`ngre'n*, and *A`lda'l*, *Va`lda'l*.

Alliteration also seems to be avoided in male and female double first names in Swedish. In the case of men's names, I will focus on the most typical category, those with a monosyllabic, more or less unstressed first element and a disyllabic or polysyllabic, heavily stressed last element, e.g., *Be˙ngt-A`rne*, *Ha˙ns-I´ngemar*, *Kje˙ll-E`rik*, *Ni˙ls-O`lov*, *Sve˙n-Gu´nnar*. No cases of final stress in the last elements have been found, and therefore, on the whole, rhyme is not a relevant consideration in the case of male double first names.

There are a great many potential alliterative combinations that I have not found, including: *\*A˙lf-A`nders*, *\*Be˙ngt-Bö`rje*, *\*Ge˙rt-Jo`han*, *\*Jo˙hn-Gö`ran*, *\*Ke˙nt-Kri´ster* and *\*Knu˙t-Kri´stian* (the *G-* of the examples being pronounced as if written *J-*). Some other cases of

alliteration that actually exist have a low frequency in relation to the average for their last elements: e.g., *Geˑrt-Gö`ran* and *Jaˑn-Gö`ran* with frequencies of 3.6‰ and 0.4‰, compared with an average of 91‰ for the last element *-Gö`ran*; further, *Laˑrs-Leˊnnart* and *Leˑif-Leˊnnart* with 0.4‰ and 1.4‰, despite 13‰ on average for *-Leˊnnart* as a last element. Similar observations can also be made regarding *Haˑns-Hå`kan*, *Peˑr-Paˊtrik* etc. Among names containing *Mats-* as a first element, my corpus of double first names includes the alliterative *Maˑts-Mi`kael*, which is borne by two individuals, giving a frequency of 1.7‰, compared with an average for the last element *-Mi`kael* of 6.8‰. The absence of the names *\*Maˑts-Maˊgnus* and *\*Maˑts-Maˊrtin*, on the other hand, can probably be put down to the occurrence of both alliteration and assonance.

It is also worth noting that the relatively infrequent last element *-Stu`re*, with an average frequency of 2.2‰, can serve as an example of how alliteration is nevertheless readily tolerated when other reasons for doing so exist. The name *Steˑn-Stu`re*, with its 69 bearers, accounts for 35‰ of all the names with *Sten-* as their first element. Among the names with *-Sture* as their last element, the alliterative *Sten-Sture* is the one that is borne by most people. This is evidently not a coincidence, but rather a reflection of the fact that *Sten Sture* – with *Sture* as an additional name – was borne by two Swedish magnates, known from the 15th- and 16th-century union wars between Sweden and Denmark and, further back in Swedish tradition at least, regarded as national heroes. Greater weight has been attached to the noble associations evoked by the double name *Sten-Sture* than to the possible disturbance caused by an already existing alliteration.

The structure of female double first names in Swedish is much more diversified than that of their male counterparts, in terms of both the number of syllables of the first and last elements and the position of their primary and secondary stress: examples include *A`nn-Karoliˊn*, *A`nna-Li`sa*, *Bri`tt-Mariˊ*, *I`nga-Li`ll*, *Iˊng-Briˑtt*, *Le`na-Mariˊa*, *Ma`j-Li`sa*, *Mari`a-Heleˊna*, *Mari`a-Piˊa*, and, with *-Iˊnger* as a last element, *Bri`tt-Iˊnger* or *Briˑtt-Iˊnger*, *Gu`n-Iˊnger* or *Gu`n-Iˊnger.* However, I have found no instances of a combination of a polysyllabic first and a monosyllabic last element, such as *\*Mari`a-Gu`n*.

I consider it practical at this point to divide cases of alliteration in women's names into two groups, one where either the primary or the secondary stress falls on one of the alliterating syllables, and the other where neither of them falls on an alliterating syllable. The first group comprises 226 possible names, of which 223 do not exist, including *\*Briˊtt-Be`ll*, *\*E`lsa-Eleˊna*, *\*Ha`nna-Heleˊn*, *\*Ka`jsa-Klaˊra, \*Ma`j-Mäˊrta*, *\*Ma`ja-Margareˊta*, *\*Mari`-Ma`j*, *\*Mari`-Ma`ja*, *\*Mari`a-Mo`nika* and *\*Mä`rta-Mari`a*. Only three names in this group are used, namely *Le`na-Li`ll*, *Li`se-Lo`tt* and *Li`se-Lo`tti*. In spite of its alliteration, *Lise-Lott* is completely dominant among the names whose last element is *-Lott* and might be considered an adoption of German *Lieselott(e)*, as has been suggested for its Danish equivalent *Liselotte* (*Lise-Lotte*) (Meldgaard 2002: 218 s.v. *Lise*; cf. Søndergaard [2000]: 91 s.v. *Liselotte*). If *Lise-Lott* has been borrowed ready-made from German, it has not been subject to the morphophonotactic restrictions of Swedish name formation.

The second group consists of names where the alliterating syllables bear neither primary nor secondary stress. There are 16 potential names here, none of which is in use. All of them have a first element containing the name *Mari* or *Maria*. This group includes *\*Mari`-Magreˊt*, *\*Mari`-Margareˊta*, *\*Mari`a-Margareˊta* and *\*Mari`a-Margreˊt*.

When it comes to rhyme, there are altogether 21 women's names in my corpus, of which 18 have not been found, among them *\*A`nn-Mariaˊnn*, *\*E`lla-Be`lla*, *\*Mari`a-Sofiˊa*, *\*Mä`rta-Be`rta* and *\*Sti`na-Kari`na*. Three names have gained some currency: *Mari`-Sofiˊ*, *Mari`a-Piˊa* and *Pi`a-Mariˊa*. From a general quantitative point of view, it should be said that these three names have few bearers: *Mari-Sofi* 34, *Maria-Pia* 17 and *Pia-Maria* 27. In relation to the average frequency of their last elements, *Mari-Sofi*, which is documented in Sweden from at least the 1870s (Berg 1913: 232), is somewhat under-represented, at 3.0‰, compared with the average frequency of 4.3‰ for *-Sofi* as a last element, whereas the other two are strikingly over-represented: *Maria-Pia*

309‰ versus an average of 10‰ for *-Pia*, and *Pia-Maria* 141‰ compared with 13‰ for *-Maria*. *Mari-Sofi* also occurs in Germany and France, for example, and at the beginning of 2006, it was borne by 2,186 Frenchwomen (http://meilleursprenoms.com/stats/prenom.php3/marie-sophie; see MeilleursPrenoms… in the references). Judging from the Italian and German telephone directories on the Internet, *Mariapia* is probably a fairly frequent name in Italy, but not *Piamaria*, whereas both of them, written either without or with a hyphen, are found in Germany. Several occurrences in the German telephone directory of *Maria*(-)*Pia* are, it should be noted, combined with Italian-looking surnames. Therefore, the existence in Sweden of *Mari-Sofi, Maria-Pia* and *Pia-Maria* with rhyming elements might be put down to influence from the name systems of other languages. If anything, these names have been introduced into Swedish as complete name formations.

It is quite natural that, in double first names, first and last elements that are etymologically closely related frequently alliterate and demonstrate identical assonances. These include, by way of example, names containing two elements going back to *Johaˊnnes* or *Kristiˋna*: *Jaˈn-Joˋhan*, *\*Jaˈn-Joˊnny*, *Jeˈns-Joˋhan*, and *\*Stiˋna-Keˈrstin*, *\*Stiˋna-Kristi'n* and *\*Stiˋna-Kristi'na*. Certainly in many cases semantic instinct has prevented combinations of this type. In spite of this, and in spite of the need for more statistical data regarding my corpus of double first names in particular, I find it clear even now that restrictions on alliteration and rhyme apply to this category of names as well.

By way of conclusion, I would like to refer to Gottfried Schramm's argument (1957: 17, 37) that the avoidance of alliteration in Old Germanic dithematic names is due to their stress pattern, characterized by primary stress on the first element and secondary stress on the last element. Consequently, names of this type are not congruent with the poetic principles of alliteration in Germanic heroic poetry, which imply primary stress on all alliterating elements.

For obvious reasons, the reluctance to use alliteration, including phoneme repetition in general, in modern Swedish dithematic surnames and double first names is to be interpreted in a different way – as is the avoidance of rhyme. I do not know whether any references have been made to the demands of poetry to explain restrictions on rhyme in the Old Germanic system of personal names. As is well known, it was only in a later period that alliteration gave way to rhyme in Old Germanic poetry.

If the purpose of alliteration and rhyme is to provide a feast for the ear in poetry recitation and give the impression of playfulness and verve in speech, such effects have apparently not been very desirable in the Swedish name categories discussed here. In the formation of dithematic names in Old Germanic, on the one hand, and in Swedish from later centuries down to the present, on the other, the rejection of rhyming elements should certainly be ascribed to people's anxiety about forming names that might make a conspicuous and even ridiculous impression. As regards the reluctance to use alliteration in the dithematic personal names of Old Germanic, it would therefore be legitimate to ask whether the avoidance of consonant repetition of this type could, for ordinary people at least, have sprung from euphonic rather than aristocratic poetic considerations and, moreover, from an aspiration to dignity in name formation. Which motive was the stronger and decisive one may of course have varied chronologically and socio-onomastically over the long period in which these phenomena have been active.

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