MTO 26.2 Examples: Adams, Harmonic, Syntactic, and Motivic Parameters of Phrase in Hip-Hop

(Note: audio, video, and other interactive examples are only available online)
https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.20.26.2/mto.20.26.2.adams.html

Example 1a. Kurtis Blow, "Basketball" (1984), verse 1, 0:25–0:35 (borrowed from Adams 2009)

Rhyme structure is 2+2; syntactical structure is 1 + 1 + 2:

Basketball is my favorite sport.
I like the way they dribble up and down the court.
Just like I'm the king on the microphone,
so is Doctor J and Moses Malone.

Example 1b. Eric B. and Rakim, "Paid in Full" (1987), 0:46–1:10

Syntactical groupings override rhyme groupings (rhymes are in bold):

I used to roll up: this is a hold up, ain't nothin' funny, stop smilin'.
Be still, don't nothin' move but the money.
But now I learn to earn 'cause I'm **righteous**.
I feel great, so maybe I **might just** search for a 9 to 5.
If I strive, then maybe I'll stay alive.
So I walk up the street, whistlin' this.
Feelin' out of place, 'cause man do I miss a pen and a paper, a stereo a tape or...

Example 3. Danger Doom, "Sofa King" (from *The Mouse and the Mask*, 2005), 1:12–1:48 (produced by Danger Mouse [Brian Burton])
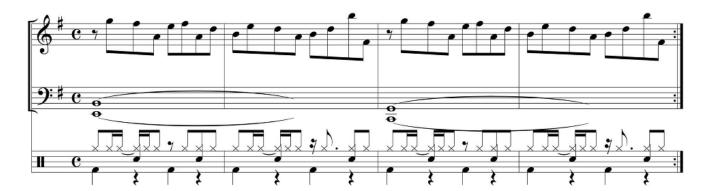
Example 4. Repetitive beat: De La Soul, "The Grind Date" (from *The Grind Date*, 2005), 0:28–0:49 (produced by Dave West)

Example 5a. Oscillating beat, alternating by second: A Tribe Called Quest, "Excursions" (from *The Low End Theory*, 1990), 0:28–0:52 (produced by Ali Shaheed Muhammad)

Example 5b. Oscillating beat, alternating by third: Aesop Rock (Ian Bavitz), "None Shall Pass" (from *None Shall Pass*, 2007), 0:15–0:34 (produced by Blockhead [Tony Simon])
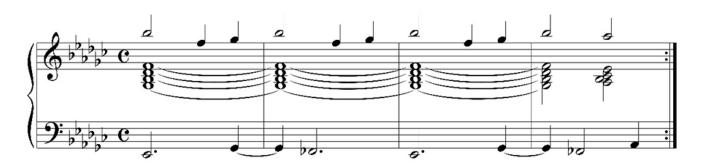
Example 5c. Oscillating beat, alternating by fourth: People under the Stairs, "Montego Slay" (from *O.S.T.*, 2002), 0:20–0:44 (produced by Thes One [Christopher Portugal])

Example 5d. Oscillating beat, sequential: Cunninlynguists, "Lynguistics" (from *Will Rap for Food*, 2001), 0:18–0:46 (produced by Kno [Ryan Wisler])

Example 5e. Oscillating beat, uneven: Migos, "Bad and Boujee," (from *Culture*, 2017), 0:15–0:30 (produced by DY and Tre Pounds [Dwan Avery and Jeffrey LaCroix])

Example 6a. Expansional beat, I → iv: Atmosphere, "The Best Day" (from *To All My Friends, Blood Makes the Blade Holy: The Atmosphere EP's* [sic], 2010), 2:17–2:41 (produced by Ant [Anthony Davis])

Example 6b. Expansional beat, i → v: The Pharcyde, "Passin' Me By" (from *Bizarre Ride II the Pharcyde*, 1993), 0:23–0:39 (produced by J-Swift [Juan Martinez])

Example 6c. Expansional beat, complete progression (i → iv → II⁷ -> V): Danger Doom, "Sofa King"

Example 6d. Expansional beat, closed: Atmosphere, "Godlovesugly" (from *God Loves Ugly*, 2002), 0:39–0:50 (produced by Ant [Anthony Davis])

Example 7a. The Chicharones, "Blessing in Disguise" (from *Boss Hogs*, 2007), 1:30–1:43 (produced by Josh Martinez [Matthew Kimber])

Example 7b. Bahamadia, "Spontaneity" (from *Kollage*, 1996), 0:21–0:46, (produced by "Da Beatminerz")

Example 8. Jurassic 5, "Jurass Finish First" (from *Quality Control*, 2000), 0:18–0:39 (produced by DJ Nu-Mark [Mark Potsic])

Example 9a. Change from open to closed expansional beat: Jemini, "Medieval" (from *Ghetto Pop Life*, 2003), 0:42–1:15
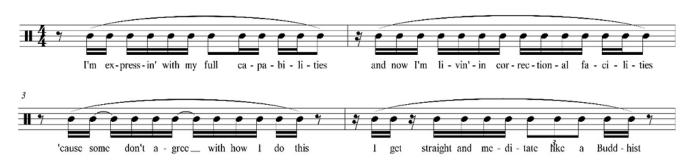
- First part of beat = open (i → V)

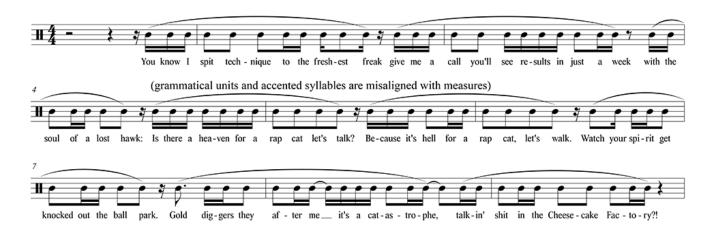- Second part of beat = closed (i → i)

Example 9b. Expansional beat, closed (a a' b a"): Noname, "Self" (from *Room 25*, 2018), 0:22–1:03 (produced by Phoelix)

Example 10. Syntactical alignment: N.W.A., "Express Yourself" (from *Straight Outta Compton*, 1988), 0:10–0:31 (rapper: Dr. Dre [Andre Young])

I'm ex-press-in' with my full ca-pa-bi-li-ties and now I'm li-vin'-in cor-rec-tion-al fa-ci-li-ties

'cause some don't a-gree__ with how I do this I get straight and me-di-tate like a Budd-hist

Example 11. Syntactical misalignment: Andre Nickatina + Equipto, "Lost Hawks" (from *The Gift*, 2005), 0:58–1:20 (rapper: Andre Nickatina [Andre L. Adams])

Example 12. Rhythmic/melodic motive aligned with rhyme: Cunninlynguists, "616 Rewind," (From *Will Rap for Food*, 2000), 0:27–1:05 (rapper: Tone Deff [Pedro Rojas])
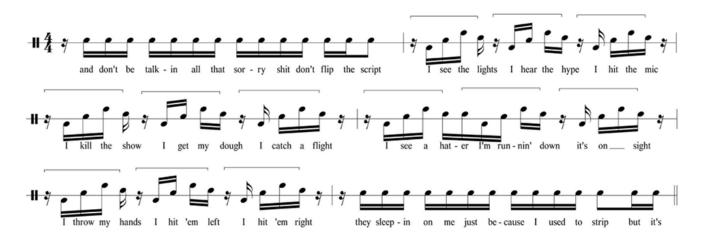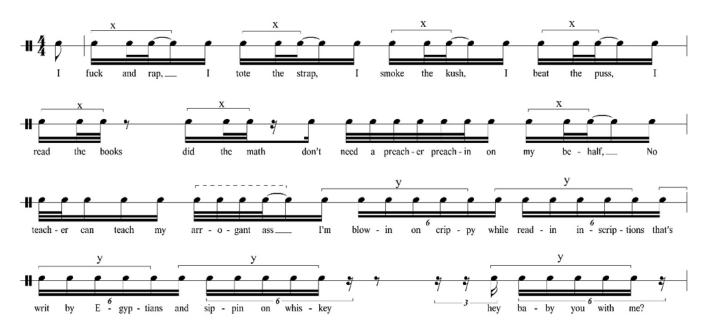

Lyrics (motivic phrase italicized):

First I sprinkle the verse
By addin' words, rhymes
Flippin 'em in a verse with lines
Then I'mma hit 'em disperse rhyme
Venom and then I'mma split 'em in half
Feelin' my wrath
Venturin' through parts of the South so dirty
You'll want to be given a bath
It's livin' a pathological lie to deny that I'm nice
And the truth hurts
Wearin' a blue shirt the Best Buy for the price
To get six guys this live and nice on the mic
So don't diss us because we're fly
It's a good try but it's like

I'm liable to slice at these emcee bastards
Leaving their knees fractured
Needin' every piece of their teeth re-crafted
So don't front cause I see past it
You're harmless like Wolverine's adamantium claws
When they're retracted
If the scene's backlit
Or seems static | we'll wreak havoc |
We'll beat batter | to keep rappin' |
A leech battle | a dream shattered |
For three nano/seconds [damn]
Count your paces, one step to Tone Deff
You're Gone in Sixty Seconds like Nicolas Cage is

Example 13. Motive reinforced by pitch contour: Cardi B, "Bronx Season" (from *Gangsta Bitch Music Vol. 2*, 2017): 0:46–1:02

Example 14. Verse subdivided by the use of two contrasting motives: Run the Jewels, "Oh My Darling Don't Cry" (from Run the Jewels 2, 2015): 1:29–1:42 (rapper: Killer Mike [Michael Render])

Example 15. The Chicharones, "Blessing in Disguise" (2007), 2:43–3:23 (rapper: Josh Martinez [Matthew Kimber])

R Slinkin' through the night on the brink of something great,
   I've given up everything for this one second
   and I'll never make a list where I state all my nevers,
   cause some things for me need to be forever.

← four-measure sentence in the lyrics overrides repetitive beat; defines a four-bar phrase.

E You can't kid a kidder, you can't yoke the joker,
   I'm an entertainer and a secondhand smoker.
   Been a center focus, my inner child opus rises
   Hope is eye to eye with truth, no surprises

← 1 + 1 + 2 organization in the lyrics supports new 4-bar expansional beat

E I'm a *Vanna White letter turner | Better Ted Turner, letter |*
   |writer book burner had a | matchbook ready
   Knight Rider sleeping bag with matching bed and I got
   Flowers on my pillow, pull the t-shirt on my head, and when I'm

← sudden acceleration in the lyrics created by 2-beat motive takes control from the beat, defines 1.5-bar phrase

R sleepin' (I'm thinkin') I'm dreamin' (no dreamin')
   On the brink some days, and goin' crazy in ways.
   Some succumb with age in the dumb day's mind
   I don't sleep 'cause sleep is the cousin of wasted time

← beat and lyrics realign, one-beat lyrical repetition matches one-beat repetitions in the music

Example 16. Mos Def, "Auditorium" (from *The Ecstatic*, 2009), 0:14–0:48 (produced by Madlib [Otis Jackson, Jr.])

⌈1.1	The way I feel, sometimes it's too hard to sit still.	← Beat defines a four-bar phrase.
1.2	Things are so passionate, times are so real.	
1.3	Sometimes I try and chill, mellow down, blowin' smoke.	
⌊1.4	Smile on my face but it's really no joke.	
⌈2.1	You feel it in the streets, people breathe without hope.	
⌊2.2	They goin' through the motion, they dimmin' down the focus.	
⌈2.3	The focus gets clear and the light turn sharp	← Two-measure sentence begins to undermine the beat, but still ends at the same time as the hypermeasure.
2.4	and the eyes grow teary, the mind grow weary.	← Overlapping rhyme scheme combined with single-bar syntactical units helps destabilize the hypermeter.
3.1	I speak it so clearly sometimes y'all don't hear me.	
⌊3.2	I push it past the bass, know nations gotta feel me.	
⌈3.3	I feel it in my bones, black I'm so wide awake	← Two 1.5-measure sentences displace the syntax against the beat.
3.4	that I'm hardly ever sleep. My flow forever deep,	
⌊4.1	and it's volumes or scriptures when I breathe on a beat.	
⌈4.2	My presence speak volumes before I say a word. I'm	
⌈**4.3**	**everywhere: penthouse, pavement and curb.**	← As a result of the earlier displacement, three-bar refrain is now misaligned with the beat.
4.4	**Cradle to the grave, tall cathedral or a shell,**	
⌊**5.1**	**universal ghetto life, holla black you know it well.**	
⌈5.2	*quiet storm*|*vital form*|pen pushed it *right across*|	← Italicized rhythmic motive strongly defines a three-bar phrase, bringing the lyrics back into alignment with the beat.
5.3	mind is a *vital force*|high level *right across*|	
⌊5.4	soul is the *lions roar*|voice is the siren (...)	
⌈6.1	I swing round, ring out and bring down the tyrant.	←Return to single-measure sentences supports the beat again.
6.2	Chop a small axe and knock a giant lopsided.	
6.3	The world is so dangerous, there's no need for fightin'.	
6.4	Suckas trying to hide like the struggle won't find 'em,	
⌊7.1	and the sun bust through the clouds to clearly remind 'em its	
⌈**7.2**	**everywhere: penthouse, pavement, and curb.**	←Three-bar refrain now properly aligned with the beat.
7.3	**Cradle to the grave, tall cathedral or a shell,**	
⌊**7.4**	**universal ghetto life, holla black you know it well.**	