CHAPTER NINETEEN

History of the German Language 2
Old High German

The history of the German language is conventionally divided into three periods:

1) Old High German (750 - 1050 A.D.), henceforth OHG
2) Middle High German (1050 - 1350), henceforth MHG
3) New High German (1350 - present), henceforth NHG

The original periodisation was done on the basis of differences in the types of literature written in the different periods, particularly between OHG and MHG. There are also very good linguistic reasons for distinguishing these time periods.

Proto West-Germanic (PWG), the language from which English, Frisian, Dutch, and the various dialects of Low German and High German developed, has been reconstructed on the basis of the oldest occurring forms in these languages and also on the basis of present-day dialect evidence. PWG had the following obstruents (stops and fricatives):

	labial	dental[1]	velar	
STOPS	p	t	k	(voiceless)
	b	d	g	(voiced)
FRICATIVES	f	þ s	h	(voiceless)

The PWG voiced stops /*b/ and /*g/ had both stop and fricative allophones, i.e. they were sometimes stops [b, g] and sometimes fricatives [ƀ, ǥ].[2] Apparently Proto-Germanic /*b, *d, *g/ *all* had stop and fricative allophones. One of the characteristics of West Germanic as opposed to East and North Germanic is that Proto-Germanic *d became a stop in all positions in West Germanic. This applied, however, only to /*d/ among the voiced stops. The allophones of PWG /*b/ and /*g/ were distributed as follows:

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[1]*Dental* is used here to mean dental or alveolar. Dentals are distinguished from alveolars in that the contact or near contact of the tongue tip is with the upper teeth rather than with the alveolar ridge just above the upper teeth.

[2]The symbols ƀ and ǥ are not the conventional IPA symbols for these fricatives, but they are conventional in German and Germanic philology and will therefore be used here. The conventional IPA symbols are β and ɣ.

/*b/ was a stop [b] in initial position (i.e. at the beginning of a word), after the nasal /*m/, and when doubled. It was a fricative [ƀ] everywhere else, i.e. between vowels, after /*l/ and /*r/ and at the ends of words.

/*g/ was a stop [g] only when doubled or when following the nasal /*n/. Everywhere else it was a fricative [g̑], including at the beginnings of words.

Our evidence that PWG /*g/ was a fricative at the beginnings of words, between vowels and at the ends of words comes from modern Low German, Dutch and English. In Dutch the descendant of /*g/ is *still* a fricative in all positions. In Low German the descendant of /*g/ is often /j/ initially and /x/ medially and finally. In north Germany, even in standard German, *Tag* is pronounced [ˈtʰax]. English also often has /j/ or zero where German has /g/, indicating that English had a fricative in those positions. For instance, English *yesterday* [ˈjɛstədeɪ] vs. German *gestern* [ˈgɛstɐn], *Segel* vs. *sail*, *Nagel* vs. *nail*.

Our evidence that PWG /*b/ was a stop at the beginnings of words comes from the fact that its descendants in all West Germanic languages have a stop in that position, e.g. English *bee*, German *Biene*. Our evidence that it was a fricative medially and finally comes from a comparison of English with German, e.g. English *love* with /v/, German *lieben* with /b/, English *wife*, *wives* with fricatives vs. German *Weib*, *Weiber* with stops.

One way in which German differs from other Germanic languages is that in German, from the very beginning of our written records, Proto-Germanic /*b, *d, *g/ are stops in **all** positions, i.e. they show no fricative allophones, but the phenomenon which really separates German as a language from all of the other Germanic languages is the *High German Sound Shift*, known in German as *die zweite Lautverschiebung*, *die **erste** Lautverschiebung* being the Germanic sound shift.

In the High German Sound Shift, PWG voiceless fricatives became either voiceless affricates[3] or long voiceless fricatives. Before proceeding to the details of the shift we would do well to define the following positions within words:

    1) initial position (at the beginning of a word)
    2) medial position (between vowels)
    3) medial position, doubled (a double consonant between vowels)
    4) final position (at the end of a word).

All of the obstruents seem to have occurred in all four of the positions defined above. This gave a distribution like the following, where a hyphen after a phoneme indicates the occurrence of the phoneme in initial position, a hyphen both before and after indicates the occurrence of the phoneme in medial position, including medial doubled, and where a hyphen before a phoneme indicates its occurrence in final position.

	p-	-pp-	-p-	-p
LABIALS	b-	-bb-	-b-	-b
	f-	-ff-	-f-	-f
	t-	-tt-	-t-	-t
DENTALS	d-	-dd-	-d-	-d
	þ-	-þþ-	-þ-	-þ
	s-	-ss-	-s-	-s

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[3]An affricate is a combination of a stop and a fricative like the *pf* of German *Pferd*.

	k-	-kk-	-k-	-k
VELARS	g-	-gg-	-g-	-g
	h-	-hh-	-h-	-h

The phonemes have been listed from top to bottom in the order labials, dentals, velars, and within each group in the order voiceless stops, voiced stops, voiceless fricatives. From left to right they have been listed in positions of occurrence in the order initial, medial doubled, medial, final. The reason for this last patterning is that initial voiceless stops and medial doubled voiceless stops acted alike.

In the High German Sound Shift voiceless stops in initial and medial doubled position and after nasals and liquids became voiceless affricates with the same position of articulation. Thus PWG /*p-/ and /*-pp-/ became OHG /p^f/, /*t-/ and /*-tt-/ became OHG /t^3/ and /*k-/ and /*-kk-/ became /k^x/. In the other two positions, i.e. medially *not* doubled and finally, they became long fricatives: /*-p-/ and /*-p/ became /ff/, /*-t-/ and */-t/ became /ȝȝ/[4] and /*-k-/ and /*-k/ became /hh/.

In the following list of examples English will be used to indicate the original Proto West-Germanic consonants, and NHG will be used to indicate the High German changes.

PWG	*p- --> OHG p^f-	English *pepper* German *Pfeffer*
	*-pp- --> OHG -p^f-	English *drop* German *Tropfen*
	*-p- --> OHG -ff-	English *sleep* German *schlafen*
	*-p --> OHG -ff	English *sheep* German *Schaf*
	*t- --> OHG t^3-	English *to* German *zu*
	*-tt- --> OHG -t^3-	English *cat* German *Katze*
	*-t- --> OHG -ȝȝ-	English *water* German *Wasser*, OHG *waȝȝar*
	*-t --> OHG -ȝȝ	English *that* German *das*, OHG *daȝ*

In the dialect of German on which Modern Standard German is based *k- and *-kk- did not shift. This shift simply did not extend that far north. Therefore Modern Standard German has /k/ where English does in words which contained *k- or *-kk-, e.g. English *king*, German *König*, English *thick*, German *dick*. In Swiss German and in Austrian and southern Bavarian the shift took place completely, so that NHG *König* and *dick* are, in the dialect of Innsbruck, /'k^{x}enɪk/ and /'dɪk^x/. The following are examples from standard German of the two positions where the shift took place in the dialect on which the standard is based.

*-k- --> OHG -hh-	English *make* German *machen*
*-k --> OHG -hh	English *leek* German *Lauch*

A word of explanation is in order about doubled consonants, so-called *geminates*. Proto-Germanic and PWG had a contrast between a consonant pronounced short and the same consonant pronounced long. There was a similar distinction between short and long vowels. Long consonants are usually referred to as doubled or geminated. The distinction between long and short consonants, or single and double consonants, continued in German until the NHG period. As we saw in volume one, a doubled consonant in the *spelling* now indicates a preceding short vowel, but in OHG and MHG it meant a long consonant. Some Germanic languages, for instance Swedish and Norwegian, maintain a short-long distinction in the consonants, as do other Indo-European languages such as Italian. Both English and German have given up the distinction.

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[4]The symbol "ȝ" is conventionally used in German philology to indicate a voiceless dental or alveolar fricative, sounded much like English /s/. It was obviously different from the PWG /*s/ because OHG and MHG scribes distinguished the two for centuries. "t^3" is used for the dental/alveolar affricate. The scribes usually wrote "z" for both the fricative and the affricate.

The long /-ff-/ which resulted from /*-p-/ merged with the already present /-ff-/. The long /-ff/ which resulted from /*-p/ did not long remain doubled. It was simplified (shortened) to /-f/ and thus merged with the already existing /-f/.

The velars acted like the labials. The long /-hh-/ which resulted from the shift of /*-k-/ merged with the already existing /-hh-/, and the long /-hh/ which resulted from /*-k/ simplified to /-h/, which merged with the already existing /-h/.

The dentals behaved differently. The long /-ȝȝ-/ which resulted from the shift of /*-t-/ did *not* merge with the already existing /-ss-/, and the long /-ȝȝ/ which resulted from the shift of /*-t/, even though it simplified to /-ȝ/, did not merge with the already existing /-s/. We therefore had a five-way contrast in the dental series as opposed to a three-way contrast in the velars and labials. The early OHG consonant system thus differed substantially from the PWG system sketched earlier and therefore also differed substantially from the consonant system of any other Germanic language.

The High German Sound Shift did not take place in all German dialects, and in those in which it did take place it did not always take place to the same extent. It is at its most complete in the extreme south of the German-speaking area - in Switzerland, Austria and South Germany. The shift began with the Lombards (Langobardi) in northern Italy and spread northward. As it spread northward it began to break up in stages, so that the consonant system which resulted from the complete shift is not present in all NHG dialects. Nevertheless, any dialect of German which shows **any evidence whatsoever** of the High German Sound Shift is called a High German dialect. Therefore the dialect of Düsseldorf, which has only slight evidence of the shift, and the dialect of Zürich in Switzerland, which has the shift in its entirety, are both High German dialects.

Later in OHG early OHG /d/ devoiced to /t/, and /þ/ became /d/, presumably via the voiced fricative [ð]. The double consonants /-bb/ and /-gg-/ devoiced to /-pp-/ and /-kk-/, and /-þþ-/ became first /-dd-/ and then /-tt-/.

In OHG times practically the only people who could read and write were somehow connected with the church. Most of the OHG "literature" is therefore church-related. The centre of the church was Rome and the main language of the church was Latin. As a result, many words of Latin origin found their way into OHG, both before and after the High German Sound Shift. The German word *Pferd* comes from Latin *paraveredus* and was borrowed before the sound shift, as is shown by the shifted *pf*. The word *predigen* comes from Latin *praedicâre* and was borrowed after the shift. As a result of the influence of the church, the study of OHG is essentially the study of manuscripts written at or copied at various monasteries, usually in the south. The monasteries of St. Gallen (in present-day Switzerland) and Fulda (in Hessen) were of special importance. The scribes who wrote what literature we have were in the position of having to make up their own spelling systems for German using the Roman alphabet. Since OHG contained sounds which were not present in Latin, some way had to be found to represent these sounds using Roman letters. Since practically every scribe went his own way in these matters, the result is a bewildering array of spelling systems, and the challenge of OHG literature is to work out what parts of the sound shift and its successors had taken place. The literature itself is hardly of interest.

About three-quarters of the OHG literature consists of German-Latin dictionaries, the so-called *Glosses*. Our first extensive text in OHG, and therefore in German, is a translation of a Latin collection of synonyms, known as the *Abrogans*, after the first Latin word (Latin *abrogans* "humble, gentle"). This document stems from about 770. The *Glosses* have been collected in five volumes of over four thousand pages under the title *Die althochdeutschen Glossen*.

OHG apparently had five short vowels, five long vowels and six diphthongs, arranged as below:

	Short vowels		*Long vowels*		*Diphthongs*		
i	u		î	û[5]	iu io	ia	ua
e	o		ê	ô		ei	ou
a			â				

All vowels occurred in both stressed and unstressed positions in words. The following are some paradigms of nouns in OHG. Sg. = Singular, Pl. = Plural, N. = Nominative, A. = Accusative, D. = Dative, G. = Genitive, I. = Instrumental.[6]

Sg. N.A.	tag	knio	geba	gast	kraft	zunga
G.	tages	knewes	geba	gastes	krefti	zungûn
D.	tage	knewe	gebu	gaste	krefti	zungûn
I.	tagu	--	--	gastiu	--	--
Pl. N.A.	tagâ	kneo	gebâ	gesti	krefti	zungûn
G.	tago	knewo	gebôno	gestio	kreftio	zungôno
D.	tagum	knewum	gebôm	gestim	kreftim	zungôm

These are the OHG forms of the NHG words *Tag, Knie, Gabe, Gast, Kraft, Zunge*. As you can see, the unstressed syllables contained a variety of vowels whereas NHG contains only /ə/ in the unstressed syllables of the NHG counterparts. There are also quite a few other obvious differences. The conjugation of the verb also differed considerably from that of NHG. The following are parts of the paradigms of the OHG equivalents of NHG *geben, beugen, legen, salben*. 1, 2, 3 refer to 1st person, etc.

Present Tense

Sg.	1	gibu	biugu	legu	salbôm
	2	gibis	biugis	legis	salbôs
	3	gibit	biugit	legit	salbôt
Pl.	1	gebamês	biogamês	legamês	salbômes
	2	gebet	bioget	leget	salbôt
	3	gebant	biogant	legent	salbônt

Past Tense

Sg.	1	gab	boug	legita	salbôta
	2	gâbi	bugi	legitôs	salbôtôs
	3	gab	boug	legita	salbôta
Pl.	1	gâbum	bugum	legitum	salbôtum
	2	gâbut	bugut	legitut	salbôtut
	3	gâbun	bugun	legitun	salbôtun

In NHG we have /ə/ as the only vowel in unstressed syllables in verb forms. Note the variety of vowels in the unstressed syllables in the paradigms above. Note also that the 2nd person singular present tense verb forms did not end in /-st/ but rather in /-s/, and that the 2nd person singular past tense of the first two examples ended in /-i/ and had a different stem vowel from the other two singular forms. Also note that

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[5]It is conventional to mark OHG and MHG long vowels with circumflexes.

[6]The *Instrumental* case was a Germanic and Proto Indo-European case which was used for, among other things, the instrument of the action, e.g. "I broke the window with a brick". In a language like OHG or Russian "brick" would be in the Instrumental case. The Instrumental was limited, even in OHG, and it had disappeared by MHG times.

the 1st person plural and 3rd person plural are distinct in all tenses. This is still the case in some southern dialects.

By the end of the OHG period the unstressed vowels had begun to merge. In the works of Notker (who died in 1023), what appeared in earlier OHG works as unstressed -i and -u appeared as -e and -o respectively. Notker's works also contain indications that the process known as *Umlaut*, the fronting of back vowels before a following high front vowel (/i,î/) or before a following /j/ (the consonantal counterpart of vocalic /i,î/), had begun. By the time of the MHG period, almost all unstressed vowels had merged to /ə/, Umlaut was well established, and the devoicing of final voiced obstruents, known as *Auslautverhärtung*, had taken place. *Auslautverhärtung* is still with us, of course. One way that we know it had taken place in MHG is that the scribes actually wrote -c where OHG had -g, -t where OHG had -d, and -p where OHG had -b. NHG, on the other hand, has generalised, for the most part, the spellings with -b,-d,-g, especially where there is an alternation in the same word between a voiceless final and a voiced medial obstruent. The MHG spelling was phonetic. The NHG spelling is based on morphological principles.

This chapter closes with some specimen texts. The text is in every case the same, the Lord's prayer. First of all it is given in Gothic, representing East Germanic, then in Old English, representing non-high West Germanic, then in an early Alemannic, a Bavarian, a Rhine Franconian, an East Franconian and a late Alemannic version, all representing OHG. For the locations of the various OHG dialects see the map on the last page of this chapter.

Gothic - ca. 350

Atta unsar þu in himinam, weihnai namô þein. Qimai þiudinassus þeins. Wairþai wilja þeins, swê in himina jah ana airþai. Hlaif unsarana þana sinteinan gif uns himma daga. Jah aflêt uns þatei skulans sijaima, swaswê weis aflêtam þaim skulam unsaraim. Jah ni briggais uns in fraistubnjai, ak lausei uns af þamma ubilin; untê þeina ist þiudangardi jah mahts jah wulþus in aiwins. Amên.

Notes: Gothic *ei* was a long /iː/, *q* was /kw/. *Atta* "father" (*Attila* is actually a Gothic name and means "little father"), ai = /ɛ/, *weihn-* compare NHG *weihen* "consecrate" (this root also shows up in German in *Weihnachten* and *Weihrauch*), *hlaif* "bread", compare English *loaf*, *briggais* = /ˈbrɪŋgɛs/ (Gothic, following the Greek alphabet, wrote *gg* for /ŋg/). The final verse ("for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen") is not used in Roman Catholicism but is used by Eastern rite Catholics and by Protestants. The Goths were Christianised from the Eastern rite and therefore used it. The Old High Germans and the Old English were Roman Catholics and did not. Therefore that verse does not appear in the Old English and OHG versions to follow.

Old English - West Saxon - sometime before 1066

Fæder ûre þû þe eart on heofonum, sî þîn nama gehâlgôd. Tôbecume þîn rîce. Geweorþe þîn willa on eorþan swâ swâ on heofonum. ûrne gedæghwâmlîcan hlâf syle ûs tô dæg. And forgyf ûs ûre gyltas, swâ swâ wê forgyfaþ ûrum gyltendum. And ne gelǣd þû ûs on costnunge, ac âlŷs ûs of yfele.

Notes: *f, s, þ* between vowels were pronounced [v,z,ð]. *g* before and after /i, æ, e/ was [j], [g] elsewhere. "æ" and "ǣ" represented short and long versions of a vowel which was probably much like the vowel in Modern English *cat*. "y" and "ŷ" were like NHG short and long *ü*.

Old High German - St. Gallen - Alemannic ca. 790

Fater unseer, thû pist in himile, wîhi namun dînan, qhueme rîhhi dîn, werde willo diin, sô in himile sôsa in erdu. Prooth unseer emezzihic kip uns hiutu, oblâʒ uns sculdi unseero, sô wir oblâʒêm uns sculdîkêm, enti ni unsih firleiti in khorunka, ûʒʒer lôsi unsih fona ubile.

Notes: long vowels were sometimes written as double vowels, cf. **unseer**. The Sound Shift has obviously taken place - compare **oblâʒ** with Gothic *aflêt*. *qh* and *kh* in **qhueme** and **khorunka** indicate /kˣ/. Note that /ʒ/ from *t has not merged with /s/ from *s - compare **oblâʒêm** (Gothic *aflêtam*) and **lôsi** (Gothic *lausei*). *p* was used in initial and final position for the bilabial stop, cf. **pist**, **prooth** and **kip**, and *b* was used in the interiors of words, cf. **oblâʒ** and **ubile**. *þ is once written *th* and is written *d* five times, and *d is written *t*, cf. **hiutu**, **firleiti**. *g is written *k* in **kip** and *c* in **emezzihic**.

Old High German - Freising - Bavarian 850 - 900

Fater unsêr, dû pist in himilum, kawîhit sî namo dîn, piqhueme rîchi dîn, wesa dîn willo, sama sô in himile est, sama in erdo. Pilipi unsraȝ emiȝȝigaȝ kip uns eogawanna enti flâȝ uns unsro sculdi sama sô wir flâȝȝamês unsrêm scolôm enti ni princ unsih in chorunka, ûȝȝan kaneri unsih fona allêm suntôn.

Notes: *b is written *p* throughout, *g is *k* initially, *g* medially, and *c* finally. *þ is *d* throughout, and *d is *t*. *k- is *qh* or *ch*, which indicate /k^x/.

Old High German - Weißenburg - Rhine Franconian ca. 790

Fater unsêr, thû in himilom bist, giwîhit sî namo thîn. Quaeme rîchi thîn. Werdhe willeo thîn, sama sô in himile endi in erthu. Broot unseraȝ emeȝȝigaȝ gib uns hiutu. Endi farlâȝ uns sculdhi unsero sama sô wir farlâȝȝêm scolôm unserêm. Endi ni gileidi unsih in costunga. Auh arlôsi unsih fona ubile.

Notes: *b is *b*, and *g is *g*. *d is sometimes *t*, cf. **hiutu** and **broot** and sometimes *d*, cf. **gileidi** and **endi**. *þ is sometimes *th*, sometimes *dh*. There is no indication that *k- has shifted to /k^x/, compare **quaeme** and **costunga** without any *h* to the examples in the two previous OHG texts, although *-k- and *-k have shifted to *ch* (**rîchi**) and *-h* respectively, (**unsih**, **auh**). This is what we should expect, for the shift of *k- and *-kk- to /k^x/ did not ever extend as far north as Weißenburg.

Old High German - "Tatian" - East Franconian ca. 830

Fater unser, thû thâr bist in himile, sî geheilagôt thîn namo, queme thîn rîhhi, sî thîn willo, sô her in himile ist, sô sî her in erdu, unsar brôt tagalîhhaȝ gib uns hiutu, inti furlâȝ uns unsara sculdi, sô wir furlâȝemês unsarên sculdîgôn, inti ni geleitêst unsih in costunga, ûȝouh arlôsi unsih fon ubile.

Notes: *b is *b*, *g is *g*, *d is *t* and *þ is sometimes *d*, sometimes *th*. *k- has not shifted to /k^x/, which again is what we should expect, although *-k- and *-k have shifted.

Old High German - Notker of St. Gallen - Alemannic ca. 1000

Fater unser dû in himele bist, dîn namo werde geheiligot. Dîn rîche chome, dîn willo gescehe in erdo, also in himele. Unser tagelicha brôt kib uns hiuto unde unsere sculde belâȝ uns, alsô ouh wir belâȝen unseren sculdigen. Unde in chorunga ne leitest dû unsih. Nube lôse unsih fone ubele.

Notes: This is very late OHG, as is evidenced by the vowels in unstressed syllables. The Sound Shift has been carried out completely, as we would expect for St. Gallen; *d has shifted to /t/ and *þ has shifted to /d/.

The dialects of Old High German

(below heavy line)

NIEDERDEUTSCH

NIEDERLÄNDISCH

Ostmittel-deutsch

Bairisch

Schwäbisch

Ostfränkisch

Rheinfränkisch

Ripuarisch

Mittelfränkisch

Moselfränkisch

Alem

Dortmund

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