

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

History of the German Language 4 New High German

Historical Background

The Holy Roman Empire was at its peak under Frederick I (1152 - 1190) and his son Henry VI (1190 - 1197). But when Henry died suddenly in 1197 his son Frederick was only three years old. What followed was eighteen years of civil war as the various pretenders to the throne fought out their claims. Eventually (1208) Otto IV was triumphant, only to fall afoul of the Pope and be excommunicated. Finally Frederick, who had grown up in Italy with his Sicilian mother in the meantime, invaded and displaced Otto in 1215. Frederick II ruled until 1250, but his orientation was towards Italy rather than Germany, which he never understood and never really wanted to understand. By the time he died the Empire was coming apart. An Interregnum ensued which lasted until 1273. At the same time the Austrian ruling house of Babenberg died out and an Interregnum ensued there as well, which lasted until 1282. Austria was part of the Holy Roman Empire, of course, but it had been ruled by the one family for so long that it was practically an independent duchy.

The Holy Roman Empire in fact consisted of a bewildering number of principalities (*Fürstentümer*), duchies (*Herzogtümer*), counties (*Grafschaften*) and kingdoms (*Königreiche*), each with its own ruler and its own laws. It took a strong Emperor indeed to hold such a loose confederation together. With the Interregnum many of the rulers of the smaller states found that it was not at all in their interests to have an Emperor, since a strong Emperor curtailed their principal activity, legalised banditry. Most of the rulers were robber barons in the true sense of the term. By the time a convincing Holy Roman Emperor was in place again chivalry was dead, as was the literature of chivalry.

The *Dichtersprache* of the best Middle High German poets was, as was pointed out in the last chapter, reasonably uniform in all parts of the German speaking area. The *Minnesänger* modified their native speech in favor of a supra-regional form of German acceptable at any court, presumably because they wished to be able to ply their trade at any court in the empire, and extreme regionalisms would have hindered their ability to do so. An extreme case of adherence to this norm is presented by Heinrich van Veldeke, a native of Limburg in what is now Belgium. Veldeke's native language was a dialect of Low German, unaffected by the High German Sound Shift. Veldeke was scrupulous in making certain that the rhymes he used would still be pure rhymes when translated into High German. For instance, he rhymed **tît** "time" and **wît** "wide, far", but not **tît** and **wît** "white", even though they rhymed in his native language. In Middle High

German his **tît** was **zît** and his **wît** "far" was also **wît**, which rhyme, but his **wît** "white" was MHG **wîz**, which, although it rhymes with **tît** in his native language, does not rhyme with **zît**, or, for that matter, with **wît** in MHG. He also rhymed **lîden** (MHG **lîden** "leiden") with **snîden** (MHG **snîden** "schneiden") but did not rhyme either with his native **rîden**, MHG **rîten** "reiten", because the MHG rhyme would not have been satisfactory. The Swabian Hartmann von Aue avoided rhyming **kam** and **nam** in his later works, presumably because the past tense of **komen** was **kom** in some other dialects, particularly in Bavarian.

When the Empire declined and chivalry with it, so too did the literature of chivalry and with it the language it was written in. The fairly uniform type of German in which *Minnesang* was written was peculiar to the social class which used it and had never spread to the population in general. Thus when the ideals of knighthood and the literature which was written about those ideals died, the first "standardised" form of High German also died. The writings of the late Middle High German period (1250 - 1350) and of the first part of the New High German period were in local and regional dialects. The modern standard form of German does not descend from the language of the *Minnesänger* but rather from the language of the imperial and territorial chanceries.

The chancery was the level of administration directly under the head of state. The chanceries (*Kanzleien*) were in charge of issuing *Urkunden* (edicts, charters etc.). The chanceries were staffed by members of the petty nobility (*der niedere Adel*), many of whom did not know Latin. By 1300 the chanceries of most of the southern part of Germany were writing their *Urkunden* in German rather than Latin.

When the Luxemburger Charles IV became Emperor in 1347, he moved the imperial chancery to Prague, where it continued to reside for the rest of his reign and for the reigns of his sons Wenceslas (1378 - 1400) and Sigismund (1410 - 1437). The language of the Prague chancery was based on the local Bohemian dialects of German and had many of the distinctive phonological features of the modern standard language. By the end of the fifteenth century this *Prager Kanzleideutsch* had spread to the chanceries of Upper Saxony, Thuringia and Silesia. Even when the imperial chancery was moved to Vienna under the Hapsburgs the Prague influence on the language of the imperial chancery continued to such an extent that when Maximilian I (1493 - 1519) established a uniform written language for *all* chanceries in the empire, the form of German chosen was very close to that which had been used in the imperial chancery at Prague and was still used in Saxony. Between 1464 and 1525 the Saxon chancery was located in Dresden, which is very close to Bohemia and hence to Prague. The language of the Saxon chancery was basically that of Prague, and it was the language of the Saxon chancery which was used as the model by Martin Luther, the single most important figure in the development of the modern German standard language, when he translated the Bible into German. The New Testament appeared in 1522, the complete Bible in 1534. Luther's translation of the Bible became the most widely published and read book in German printing history. Thus the type of German which he used was spread throughout the German-speaking area. Luther himself wrote about the type of German he used: "Ich habe keine gewisse sonderliche, eigene sprach im teutschen, sondern brauche der gemeinen teutschen sprach, daß mich beide Ober- und Niderländer verstehen mögen. *Ich red nach der sächischen cantzeley...*"

Saxony is in the dialect area referred to as East Middle German, whereas the forms of German we know from the MHG period come from the dialect area known as Upper German. The modern standard language is based on the same dialect which Martin Luther used, the language of the Saxon chancery of the early 16th century, i.e. on an East Middle German dialect.

Upper and Middle German

As you know, the distinction between Middle and Upper German is based primarily on one feature - the extent of the shift of West Germanic *-pp-. In Upper German (Alemannic, Bavarian, East Franconian) *-pp- shifted to /p^f/, whereas in Middle German it did not shift. Middle German (which includes the dialect of Prague and that of Dresden) is divided into East Middle German and West Middle German on the basis of the shift or lack of shift of West Germanic *p-. In West Middle German it does not shift - in East Middle German it shifts to /f/. Thus *Apfel* is [ˈapəl] in both East and West Middle German, but *Pfund* is [ˈpʊnt] in West Middle German and [ˈfʊnt] in East Middle German. Middle German occupies the area between the so-called *Appel-Apfel* line and the *ik-ich* line, which is the boundary between Low German to the north and High German to the South.

Modern Standard German includes the shift of *p- and *-pp- to /p^f/, which is an *Upper German* feature, but as for the rest it is primarily Middle German.

The Principal Features of New High German

There are two principal sound changes which distinguish Modern Standard German from classical Middle High German, and several other "lesser" changes.

First of all, let us look again at the stressed vowel system of classical Middle High German. There were 9 short vowels, 6 long vowels and 6 diphthongs.

Short			Long			Diphthongs		
i	ü	u	î	iu	û	ie	üö	uo
e	ö	o	ê	œ	ô	ei	öü	ou
ë								
ä		a	æ		â			

Modern Standard German, on the other hand, has 7 short vowels, 7 long vowels and three diphthongs, which are presented below, using the phonetic/phonemic transcription used in volume one.

Short			Long			Diphthongs	
ɪ	ʏ	ʊ	i	y	u		
ɛ	œ	ɔ	e	ø	o	ɔɪ	
	a		ɑ			aɪ	aʊ

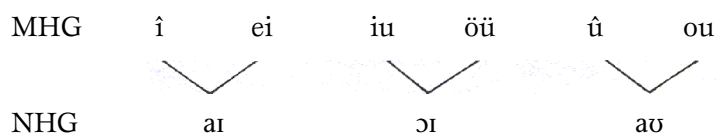
There are quite obviously more MHG vowels than there are NHG vowels. The reduction in the number of vowels was obtained largely by means of mergers, but the two major differences between Middle High German and New High German concern phonetic changes, one of which only incidentally involved mergers.

1) Beginning already in the 12th century in southeastern Austria the MHG long high vowels **î**, **iu** (**ü**) and **û** began to diphthongise to /aɪ, ɔɪ, aʊ/. By the 16th century this *New High German Diphthongisation* had spread to most, but not all, of the High German area (see map on page 132). Most Swiss German is unaffected, as is Riparian (principally the area around Bonn,

Cologne and Düsseldorf). When the MHG vowels **î**, **iu**, **û** diphthongised they also merged with the MHG diphthongs **ei**, **öü**, **ou**, resulting in the loss of three vowels from the system.

MHG *mîn niu hûs* --- > NHG *mein* /mam/ *neu* /nɔɪ/ *Haus* /haʊs/
 MHG *heiz böume boum* --- > NHG *heiß* /hais/ *Bäume* /bɔɪmə/ *Baum* /baʊm/

We can represent these mergers schematically as follows:



2) The MHG high diphthongs **ie**, **üö**, **uo** monophthongised to NHG **i**, **y**, **u**. The long high front unrounded vowel which resulted from the monophthongisation of MHG **ie** is still written "ie", but it is now the monophthong /i/.

MHG *liep fuoz füözə* --- > NHG *lieb* /lip/ *Fuß* /fus/ *Füße* /fʏsə/

The monophthongisation began in West Middle German and proceeded eastwards to include all Middle German dialects. Upper German dialects are largely unaffected by this change. East Middle German, the source of Modern Standard German, has both the **New High German Monophthongisation** and the New High German Diphthongisation. Swiss German has neither. Bavarian and Austrian German and Swabian have the diphthongisation but not the monophthongisation, and Ripuarian (Cologne, Bonn, Düsseldorf) has the monophthongisation but not the diphthongisation.

The new monophthongs did *not* merge with the old monophthongs **î**, **iu**, **û** in the standard language, although this did happen in some dialects.

In addition to the New High German Diphthongisation and the New High German Monophthongisation there were several other changes of note:

3) Discussing the next change requires that we once again use the terms *open* syllable and *closed* syllable (see part I, p. 45). An open syllable is a syllable which ends in a vowel, and a closed syllable is a syllable which ends in a consonant. As was pointed out in volume one, a single consonant between vowels goes with the second vowel. Thus the first syllable of a word like *Tages* /'taɡəs/ is open because the /g/ is the first sound of the second syllable. If there are two consonants between vowels the syllable division is between the two. Thus the first syllable of *Mächte* /'mɛxtə/ is a closed syllable. We can indicate syllable division with a hyphen. *Tages* and *Mächte* with their syllable divisions can thus be transcribed as /'ta-ɡəs/ and /'mɛx-tə/.

Now, MHG short vowels in *open* syllable were lengthened. The MHG short vowels **i**, **ü**, **u** merged when lengthened with the monophthongs which resulted from the NHG monophthongisation of **ie**, **üö**, **uo**. This means that no new vowels were added to the system, but the distribution of short and long vowels was changed. MHG words like *leben* and *leder* with short vowels became NHG *Leben* and *Leder* with long vowels.

This change seems to have begun in *Low* German and to have spread into High German, never reaching extreme southern Bavarian and Alemannic.

4) The next change was the opposite of the previous one, in a manner of speaking: long vowels in *closed* syllables were shortened. Thus MHG **hâst**, **hât** "hast, hat" became NHG /hast, hat/.

5) At some point after short vowels in open syllables had been lengthened, double consonants were simplified to single consonants. Thus all of the consonants which had been written **-ll-**, **-rr-**, **-tt-**

etc. and had been pronounced long continued to be written that way but were now pronounced short. Since double consonants between vowels had resulted in preceding *closed* syllables, short vowels which preceded double consonants had not been lengthened. Thus the double spelling came to be a convention to indicate a preceding short vowel. Vowels before a single intervocalic consonant were invariably long as a result of change 3) above. Therefore the spelling with a single consonant came to be a convention to indicate a preceding long vowel.

6) By the end of the 13th century MHG **-ss-** and **-s** (from PWG *-ss-, *-s) had merged with MHG **-zz-** and **-z** (from PWG *-t-, *-t). The result was that MHG **gewisse** "gewiss" and MHG **wizzzen** "wissen" now had the same consonantism. MHG **-s-** and **s-** became /z/ in Middle German dialects, and MHG morpheme-initial **s-** before **l, m, n, p, t** merged with MHG **sc** /ʃ/ to NHG /ʃ/ - sometimes written **s**, sometimes **sch**.

There are other changes which could also be mentioned. For instance, the MHG short vowels **e**, **ë** (ε) and **ä** merged to NHG /ɛ/, and the MHG long vowels **ê** and **æ** merged to NHG /e/. When lengthened in open syllable, all three of the MHG e-like sounds became NHG /e/. MHG **w** /w/ became /v/ in Middle German dialects (but not in all Upper German dialects). MHG single /h/ between vowels was lost (i.e. disappeared) and the symbol **h** between vowels came to indicate, in the writing system, a preceding long vowel.

The results of these changes are the consonant and vowel systems of Modern Standard German. The vowel system has already been shown. The consonant system looks like this:

	Labials	Alveolars	Palatals	Velars	Uvular	Glottal
Stops	p- -p- -p	t- -t- -t		k- -k- -k		
	b- -b-	d- -d-		g- -g-		
Fricatives	f- -f- -f	-s- -s	ʃ- -ʃ- -ʃ	x- -x- -x		h-
	v- -v-	z- -z-	ʒ ¹ - -ʒ-			
Nasals	m- -m- -m	n- -n- -n		-ŋ -ŋ		
Liquids		l- -l- -l			r- -r- -r	
Semivowel			j- -j-			

Since some analyses of Modern Standard German present the affricates /pf/ and /ts/ as phonological units /p^f/ and /t^s/, I should perhaps explain at this point why I do not. First of all, as should be clear by now, an analysis which deals with all instances of a given phenomenon in the same way is to be preferred to an analysis which deals with the same phenomenon in two or three different ways, unless compelling evidence can be brought that the latter type of analysis is necessary and therefore preferable.

The phonemes /p/, /f/, /t/, /s/ are already necessary in an analysis of German. Presenting the phonetic sequence [pf] as the phonemic sequence /pf/ is simpler than analysing it as a unit, since analysing phonetic [pf] as phonemic /p^f/ adds a new phoneme to the system, thereby complicating it. The same is true of [ts]. I suspect that analyses which treat [pf] and [ts] as unit phonemes do so because they developed historically from unit phonemes. Historical considerations, however, are best avoided in a description of a language at one point in time, a so-called *synchronic* description, as opposed to an analysis of a language at two or more points in time, a so-called *diachronic* description. It is possible to find sequences of [pf] in German which *must* be analysed as the phonemic sequence /pf/. For instance, *Abfall* [ʔapfal] would be described as containing two morphemes, {AB} and {FALL}, since it is derived from the verb *abfallen*, a verb with a separable

¹The symbol ʒ is used here in its ordinary IPA use, i.e. to indicate the voiced counterpart of ʃ, as in *Garage* and *Rouge*.

prefix with forms like (*es*) *fällt ab*, where the /f/ at the beginning of *fällt* and the /p/ at the end of *ab* have to be analyzed as separate phonemes due to their discontinuity. The phonetic sequence [pf] in *Abfall* is identical with the sequence in *Apfel* [ʔapfəl], which contains only one morpheme and is an example which would be analysed as containing a unit phoneme /p^f/ by linguists who prefer that type of analysis. As a starting point we should try to treat phonetic sequences which are identical in the same manner. Analysing both sequences as the phonemic unit /p^f/ would mean that in *Abfall* a morpheme boundary would run right through the middle of a phoneme, and it would also be inconsistent with the analysis of the verb forms in which the /p/ of *ab* is not contiguous with the initial /f/ of the verbal root. If, however, we analyse both instances as /pf/ the morpheme boundary is between two consonants, which is a much more satisfactory analysis. Since we are forced by other considerations, namely morphemic boundaries, to analyse one instance of [pf] as /pf/, there is no compelling reason to analyse the other instance as a unit phoneme, since another analysis is available which does not complicate the system and which covers *all* instances of [pf].

Similar arguments can be brought for [ts]. German speakers often contract the morpheme *es* when it directly follows a verb. Hence careful *Er hat es* becomes more colloquial *Er hat's*. The contraction is phonetically [hats]. This rhymes with *Schatz*, which contains the phonetic sequence [ts] and is an instance where people who analyse German like this would analyse [ts] as the unit phoneme /tʰ/. The preferable analysis would be one which treats both of these identical phonetic sequences in the same way. To treat [ts] in *hat's* as a unit phoneme would put a morpheme boundary in the middle of a phoneme. To treat [ts] in *Schatz* as /ts/, on the other hand, covers the facts and does not add a phoneme to the system, since /t/ and /s/ can be shown independently to be necessary members of the system. The preferable analysis therefore sees the phonetic sequence [ts] as the phonemic sequence /ts/ wherever it occurs.

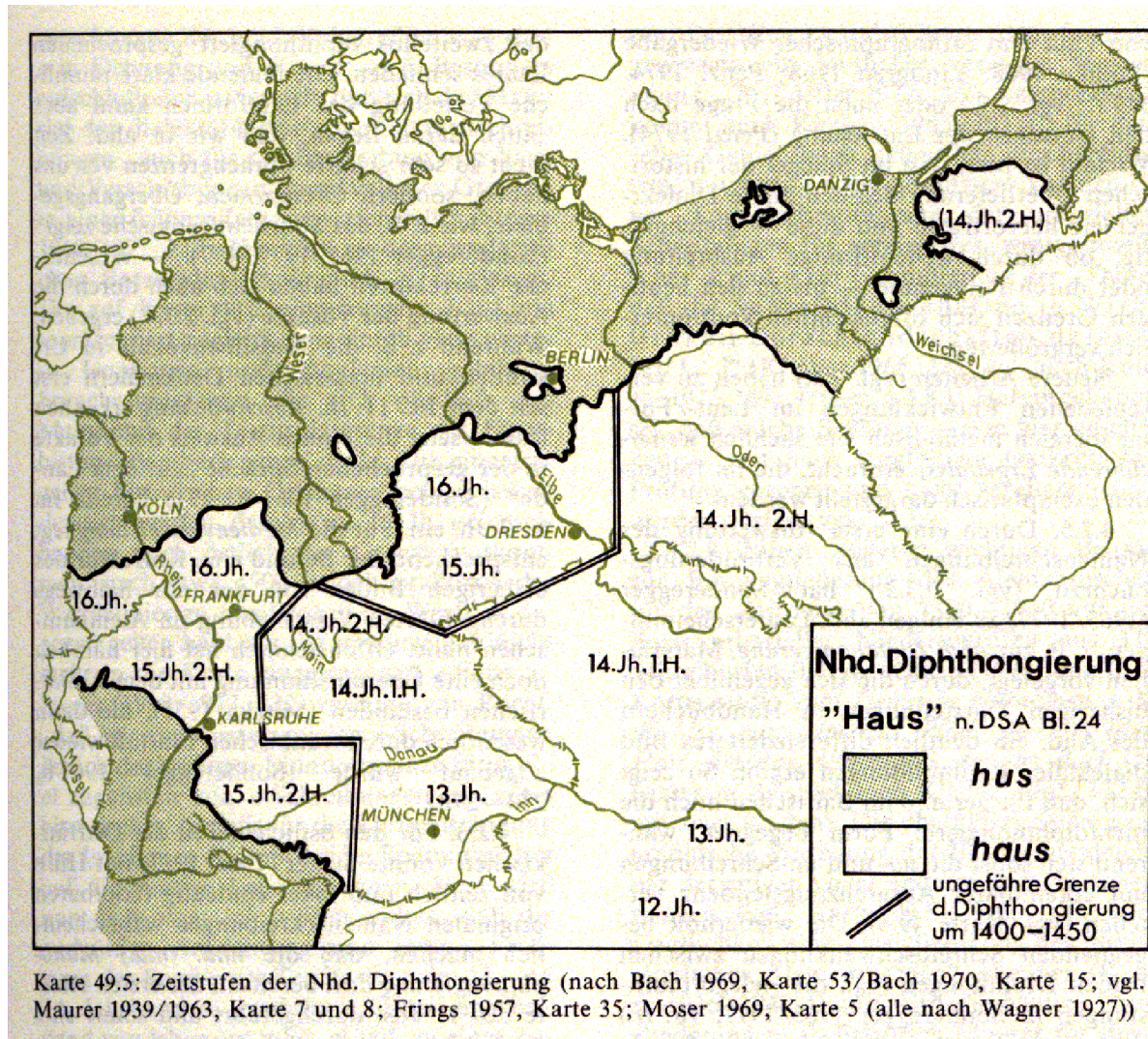
Furthermore, German has a number of other affricates, e.g. /ps/ in *pseudo*, *psycho-* etc., /ks/ in *Xanten* and *sechs*, /tʃ/ in *Tschechien* and *Deutsch*. The initial [ps] in *pseudo* is identical with the phonetic sequence in *Ich hab's*, where there is a clear morpheme boundary between the [p] and the [s]. Using an argument like that in the previous paragraph, we would want to analyse the [ps] of *Ich hab's* as /ps/. The simplest analysis would then analyse the [ps] of *pseudo* as /ps/. Also, initial [ps-] is clearly an atypical phonetic sequence in German, one which occurs only in words of foreign origin. Nobody could argue seriously that [ps] is actually /p^s/ since that phonetic sequence was, at one time, a phoneme in Greek, the language from which these words are borrowed. Initial [ks-] and [tʃ-] are also atypical and the result of borrowing. Analysing other instances of [ks] as unit phonemes falls afoul of the same arguments used for /pf/ and /ts/, e.g. *Ich leg's ab*. Non-initial sequences of [tʃ] occur in e.g. *mitschicken*, where a morpheme boundary occurs between /t/ and /ʃ/. Since /p, t, k, s, ʃ/ are all necessary anyway, there is nothing to be gained and much generality to be lost by analysing all occurrences of phonetic affricates as unit phonemes. There is therefore no ultimate reason to argue for /tʃ/ and /p^{tʃ}/ as opposed to /ts/ and /pf/, regardless of their history.

One last thing which should be mentioned is that East Middle German did not have the shift of PWG *k- and *-kk- to /k^x/, with the result that /k^x/ was never incorporated into the dialects which became the basis of the modern standard language and therefore does not occur in the standard language.

We have looked at German from a historical point of view. We have seen the various historical stages of German and the systems involved at these stages. In the first volume of this set we looked at the modern standard language exclusively. Now we have seen how the standard language came to be and how its phonology has developed. Obviously many other phenomena have taken place. The NHG noun and verb classes have been totally reformed, many words have changed their meanings, reflecting the change of emphasis from the *Hof* to the *Amt*, and the way that words are put together to form sentences has changed as well. Unfortunately historical morphology, historical semantics and historical syntax are beyond the scope of this work.

As a final note let us look at the sorts of words which people used in the early NHG period. I quote from Waterman (1976: 135f).

The language of the ENHG (Early New High German) period is in many ways a study in contrasts, ranging from the elegant rhetoric of the early Humanists and the simple majesty of the Bible to the awkward verbosity of the chancery writ and the unadorned prose of the folk literature. Most notably, however, when measured by the standards of the High Medieval era, the dominant esthetic tone of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is almost unbelievably crude and vulgar. Indeed, a special "patron saint" of vulgarity, St. Grobianus, was invented as a symbol characteristic of the times. His protection was frequently invoked in the contemporary literature... Whereas Wolfram von Eschenbach in his *Willehalm* (ca. 1215) could not bring himself to translate *putaine* literally as *Hure*, referring to it obliquely as the word used of women who "die Minne feilhalten," the ENHG authors labored under no such restraint, sprinkling their dialogue liberally with such expressions as *Hurenjäger*, *Hurensohn*, *Hurenvertreiber*, and the like. Nor were the theologians of the time reticent about abusing one another in language that we now associate only with the barnyard or the gutter. They were especially fond of distorting one another's names: Luther was called *Luder* by his Catholic adversaries. He in turn converted the title and name of one of his most nettling opponents, Dr. Eck, into simply *Dreck*. The Jesuits were nicknamed the *Jesuwider*, and both Protestants and Catholics took turns calling each other names like *Teufelsgeschmeiß*, *Teufelskinder*, *Teufelsmäuler*, *Schlängenbrut*, and similar terms of forbearance and charity.



(Legend: Jh. = Jahrhundert, i.e. century, 1.H. = erste Hälfte, i.e. 1st half, 2.H. = zweite Hälfte, i.e. 2nd half)

The spread of the NHG Diphthongisation according to written evidence

From Debus (1983), p.939. Used with permission.