

Prosodic typological differences in West Germanic

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In dialects of Germanic one notices phonological differences that are connected with prosodic organisation. One example is syllabification across word and morpheme boundaries. Compare:

onteigenen/enteignen 'to expropriate'

o[nt.ʔɛɪ]genen (*Dutch of the Netherlands*), e[nt.ʔaɪ]gnen (*Standard German*) vs.

o[n.tɛɪ]genen (*Belgian Dutch*), e[nt.ɑɪ]gnen (*Swiss German*) ('.' = syllable boundary)

While in Dutch of the Netherlands and Standard German the final *t* of the prefix *ont-/ent-* is retained in first syllable and a glottal is inserted into the onset of the second syllable, in Belgian Dutch and Swiss German *t* is resyllabified into the second syllable. This difference can be related to the typology of syllable languages (SLs) vs. word languages (WLs) as proposed by Auer (1989, 1993).

In a SL, the central category of prosodic organization is the syllable, while in a WL, it is the phonological word. In a SL (e.g. Spanish), ease of pronunciation takes precedence over recognisability of the word and of morphological structure. As a consequence, syllable structure tends to be optimized and regularized. In a WL (e.g. Standard German), by contrast, the phonological word stands out. In such a language, morphology can lead to complex and irregular syllable structure, but the phonological word is clearly discernible by, e.g., heavy word stress and boundary signals.

The typology is scalar, so every language is located somewhere on the SL-WL scale. Nübling & Schambke (2004) show that Standard German, Danish, Standard Northern Dutch and English can be situated more towards the WL end of the scale, while Southern Alemannic, Afrikaans, Swedish and Norwegian are more towards the SL end, with Luxemburgish being in the middle.

In the course of time, languages can drift from one prosodic type of language to the other. For instance, the evolution from Old High German (OHG) to Modern High German is one from a clear SL to a WL (Szczepaniak 2007).

Here, I will show that while Old Dutch, like OHG, was a SL, Present Day Dutch of the Netherlands has gone further into the direction of a WL than Belgian Dutch has. This is illustrated by a number of differences between the two variants: (i) differences in syllabification, induced by morphological structure, (ii) productivity (NL) versus non-productivity (BE) of vowel reduction, (iii) diphthongization of medial long vowels in NL Dutch but not in BE Dutch, (iv) the historical development of apocope, (v) multiple syllable induced vowel and consonant deletions, cliticizations, in colloquial BE Dutch, much more frequent than in NL Dutch.

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