

OLD HIGH GERMAN UMLAUT

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The paradigm of OHG *anst* 'favor', GDsg. *ensti*, NApl. *ensti*, Gpl. *ensteo*, Dpl. *enstim* shows in a straightforward way that **a* was umlauted to *e* before a preserved *i*, but not before a lost **i*. This is supported by the paradigm of *man* 'man', GDsg. *man*, NApl. *man*, where the root vowel was not umlauted before the lost endings. It suggests that the (phonemic) umlaut of **a* to *e* was later than the loss of short endings after a long root syllable.

It has been proposed that the absence of umlaut in NASg. *anst* is due to influence from the consonant stems (Antonsen 1970). This cannot be correct because the two paradigms had no case endings in common before the apocope. The consonant stems had the same endings as the *u*-stems in the A sg., Apl. and Dpl. forms, whereas the *u*-stems merged with the *i*-stems in the Npl. and Gpl. forms, e.g. *sunī*, *suneo* 'sons', cf. Gothic *sunjus*, *sunīwe*. Thus, the influence of the *i*-stems upon the consonant stems is an indirect one, while the converse influence is recent: "Formen des G.D.Sg. ohne Endung (die mhd. sehr häufig sind) kommen im Ahd. nur äußerst selten vor" (Braune 1975: 201).

Though the conditions under which **a* was umlauted to *e* before an original **i* or **j* in the following syllable are rather well known (e.g. Braune 1975: 27f.), the development before original **e* requires some discussion (cf. Cercignani 1979, with references). It seems to me that OHG *beret* 'you bear' is the unambiguous phonetic reflex of Proto-Indo-European **bherete*. While the Monsee ending *-it* and the Alemannic ending *-at* are easily explained as analogical on the basis of the 3sg. and 3pl. endings, respectively (e.g. Braune 1975: 260), no such explanation is possible for the ending *-et* in the strong verbs because there was no model. It follows that the distinction between 3sg. *-it* < **-eti* and 2pl. *-et* < **-ete* is ancient. This is in accordance with the absence of umlaut in Old Icelandic *falleþ* 'you fall'.

There is an additional piece of evidence for the distinction between **-eti* and **-ete* in the first class of weak verbs. The absence of gemination in OHG *zelit* 'tells' and its presence in *zelleit* 'you tell' show that **j* was lost before **i* but not before **e* at a stage after the raising in **-eti*. This yields the following relative chronology:

- (1) raising of **e* to *i* before **i* and **j*,
- (2) loss of **j* before **i*,
- (3) gemination before **j*,
- (4) raising of **e* to *i* before **u*,
- (5) loss of final short vowels,
- (6) umlaut of **a* to *e* before *i* and **j*.

Stages (2)-(3) are West Germanic, while stages (4)-(6) are specifically German.¹

It follows from the above that the original paradigm of OHG *hano* 'rooster' can be reconstructed as Gsg. *hanen* < *-enos, Dsg. *henin* < *-eni, Asg. *hanun* < *-enum, Npl. **hanan* < *-ones, Apl. *hanun* < *-onuns. For the *u*-infection in the Asg. form cf. Dpl. *tagum* 'days' < *-omus (Kortlandt 1984: 106). The idea that this form had a different ablaut grade than the GDsg. forms seems highly improbable to me. It follows that the *u*-infection in Asg. *hanun* < *-enum was earlier than the West Germanic raising of *-ō to *-ū which led to the raising of **e* to *i* in NApl. *lembir* 'lambs' < *-ezu < *-esā, cf. (4)-(6) above. This chronology seems to account for the material in an adequate way.

The absence of umlaut in the subjunctive *zalti* 'told' < **zaltē* (cf. Kortlandt 1989: 105) is due to the analogical influence of the indicative.² The new umlaut which arose at the end of the Old High German period yielded a different reflex than the earlier umlaut of **a* to *e*, e.g. *māhte* 'powers', *wāhset* 'grows', earlier *mahti*, *wahsit*.

References

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- Voyles, J.B. 1991: A history of OHG *i*-umlaut. *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* (Tübingen) 113, 159-194.

¹ Dirk Boutkan points out to me that such OHG doublets as *gewi*, *gouwi* 'county' suggest the converse chronology of (3) and (5): "Wörter mit *w* vor dem *j* wie *geuui*, G.Sg. *geuues* 'Gau', *heuuu* 'Heu', *gistreuui* 'Streu', haben unumgelauteete Nebenformen: *gouwi*, *houwi*, *gistrouwi*, meist in obliquen Kasus. Das Nebeneinander richtet sich lautgesetzlich danach, ob ein *i* oder ein Verdoppelung bewirkendes *j* folgte: *gawi*-, *gawwj*-" (Braune 1975: 190). I rather think that the apocopated NAsg. form **gawwj* yielded **gawi* before the early umlaut, which was apparently blocked by the cluster **ww* in the same way as it was in *garwen* 'to prepare', *scatwen* 'to shadow'. Voyles' "alternative theory" (1991) is actually a return to pre-structuralist methodology.

² Note the following printing errors in Kortlandt 1989: p. 104, line 20, *-ēi, OE "-e" read -i ; p. 105, line 24, "suohti" read *suohtī*.