

Variation of vowel length in German

Stefan Tröster-Mutz

s.troester-mutz@uni-koeln.de

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Outline

Aims

- Existence of variations in vowel length in spoken German
- Which words are affected?
- Multiple conditions
- Necessary conditions?
- Getting some new ideas from you

Data

- Variation in *Bad, Glas, Gras, Rad, grob*
'bath, glas, grass, rough'
- no variation in *Rat, rot, tot*
'counsel/advice, red, dead'
- Variation in *Rost, Bruch*
'grid/rust, break/mire'
- no variation in *Tod, Lob, Stab*
' death, praise, rod'

- Variation in *Krebs, Obst, Magd, Jagd*
'crab, fruits, maid, hunt'
- Variation in *Distel, Dusche*
'thistle, shower'

- no occasional forms, but those can be found too
- items found in surveys on spoken German (Viëtor, König)
- items from pronouncing dictionaries (Siebs, Duden etc.)
- some cases discussed in the preface of those dictionaries
- ⇒ certain items seem to be accepted

Examples of variation within one sentence:

(1) ... *ich versuche Sp[a]ss zu haben, und wenn man Sp[a:]ß hat, hat man auch Erfolg.*

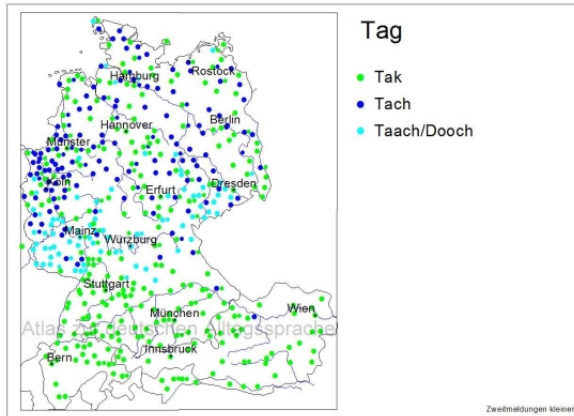
'I try to have fun, and having fun, one has success' (Marcel Hacker, Sportler, 15.9.02, SWR1)

(2) ... *als was Rad [ra:t] in 'radfahren' [ratfa:rən] anzusehen ist...*

'... how to analyze "wheel" in the word "cycling" ' (heard from a speaker at a linguistic conference)

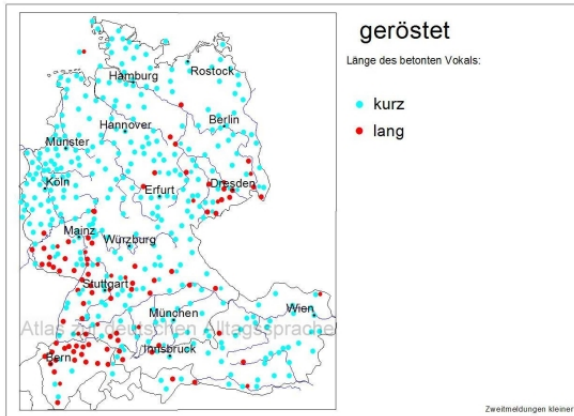
Geographics

Map from ADA "Atlas zur deutschen Alltagssprache":
Tag 'day', MHG: *tac*



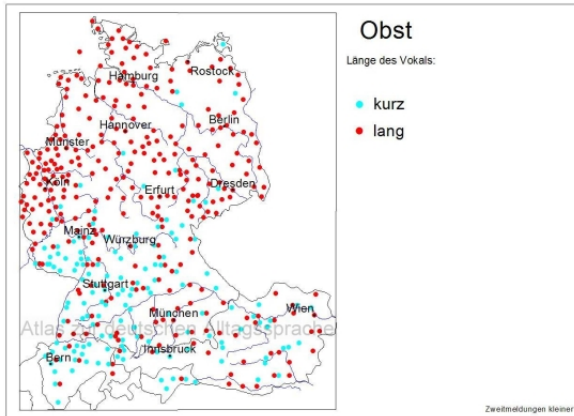
Geographics

Map from ADA "Atlas zur deutschen Alltagssprache":
geröstet 'roasted'



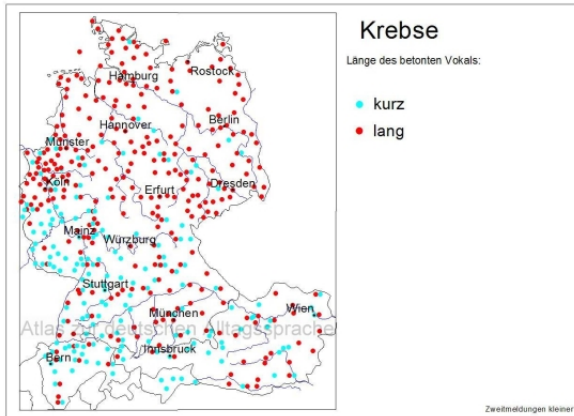
Geographics

Map from ADA "Atlas zur deutschen Alltagssprache":
Obst 'fruit' MHG;*obes(t)*



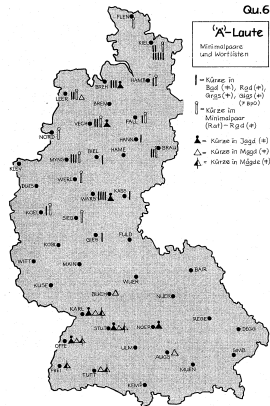
Geographics

Map from ADA "Atlas zur deutschen Alltagssprache":
Krebse 'crab (pl.)' MHG *krebes*



Geographics

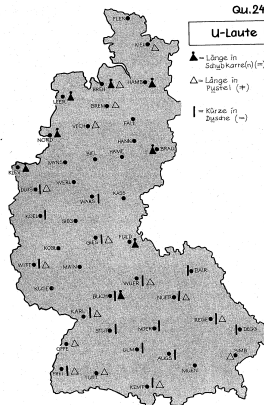
Map from König: "Atlas zur Aussprache des Schriftdeutschen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland" *Rad 'wheel'*



Geographics

Map from König: "Atlas zur Aussprache des Schriftdeutschen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland"

Dusche 'shower'



Open Syllable Lengthening (OSL)

- starting in OHG, more intense in MHG and almost finished in Early Modern German
- process of change in syllable structure
- change from length opposition to syllable cut prosodies
- short vowels in open syllables became long vowels
- later allomorphic forms with short vowel were lengthened
- lengthening of monosyllabic words in the south (cf. Maas 2006:200)

- Szczepaniak (2007): German changed from a syllable language to a word language (also Maas 2006)
- Change in the structure of the stressed syllable is connected with the reduction in unstressed syllables
- Open syllable lengthening
- Emergence of ambisyllabic consonants
- Development of syllable cut prosodies

Comparison of vowel quantity

MHG long, NHG long

rât, buoc, mâs

Rat, Bug, Maß

'counsel, bow, measure'

MHG short, NHG var.

rat, bat, grap, grop

Rad, Bad, Grab, grob

'wheel, bath, grave, rough'

MHG long, NHG var.

schôn, rôst

schon, Rost

'already, grid'

MHG short, NHG long

lit, lop, phat, wec, lache

Lid, Lob, Pfad, Weg, Lache

'(eye)lid, praise, path, way, puddle'

MHG long, NHG short

glôse, schuop

Glosse, Schuppe

'gloss, scale'

Summary historical phonology

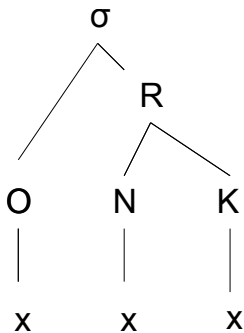
- all types of changes happened
- some induced by paradigmatic levelling
- further processes in different dialects
- how to do a synchronic analysis?

- Becker (2002) claims that the change to syllable-cut prosodies is finished by the end of the Middle Low German period
- speakers of Low German started speaking High German using their own (i.e. Low German) prosodic system
- thus we have to assume that we do not have concurring prosodic systems
- phonology should explain both variants

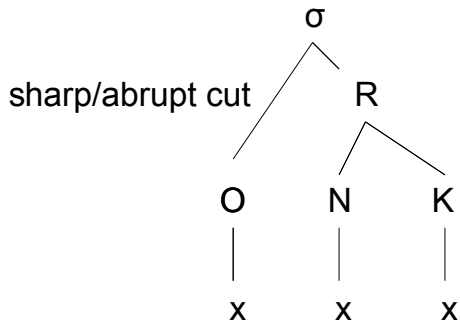
- Variation in monosyllabic words
 - preference of [+lenis]-codas
 - many items with /a/ (no quality change involved), but also with other vowels
- bisyllabic words
 - more frequent before <st, ch, sch, tz>
 - with [+lenis] consonants
- before <r> loss of length opposition due to vocalization of [r]

Model of the syllable

O and K are allowed to take more than one x, N can take only one x, following Maas 2002;2006, Lenerz 2002

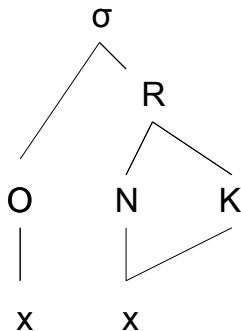


Syllable cut



Syllable cut

smooth cut

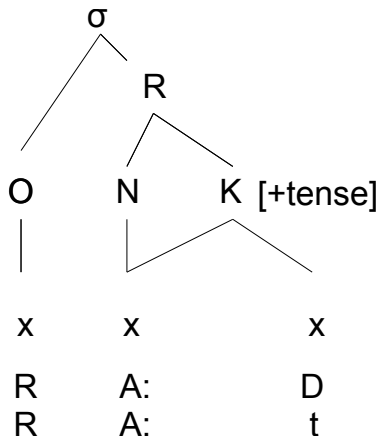
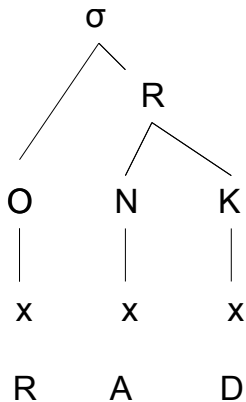


Conditions

- variants are two forms with different underlying syllable cut prosodies
- smoothly cut syllables can be lengthened under stress (Lenerz 2002:84) \Rightarrow long vowel on the surface
- association with coda-position assigns [+tense]
- in monosyllabic words the last consonant is associated to K, thus [+tense]
- a consonant with inherent [+tense] prefers a [+tense] vowel, thus less variation here

Syllable cut

Lenerz 2000,2002



Influence of spelling

- Normally stable quantity, when lengthening or sharpening (Dehnung oder Schärfung) is orthographically marked
- Variation occurs often:
 - when a single vowel-letter stands in open syllable
 - when a single vowel-letter stands with <st>
 - when a single vowel-letter stands with <r>

Influence of spelling

- Long vowels written, but variation in quantity:
- *vierzehn, vierzig*
'fourteen, forty'
- stress on first syllable, compound character only in the first item
- *vielleicht*
'maybe'
- stress on second syllable

unexpected exceptions

- in Austria the spellings <Spaß> / <Spass>
- typically, in Austrian German [ʃpas] is not used
- but for some areas in the Inn-Valley and Vienna the pronunciation with short vowel is reported

Compounds

- compound forms only with one quantity?
- *Radkasten, radfahren, Schwimmbad*
'wheel case, cycling, public swimming pool'
⇒ both quantities possible
- Which form in placenames?
- *Bad Zwischenahn, Bad Harzburg ...*
⇒ both quantities possible
- *Lokstedt (Hamburg), Lübeck*
⇒ both quantities possible, historically *Lokstedt* with long vowel. The <c> in *Lübeck* was understood as lengthening-sign, but now the pronunciation is rather with short vowel

Homonymy

- Use of variation to disambiguate homonyms?
- Homophones: *Rat – Rad, Barsch – barsch*
⇒ not used
- Homophones and homographs: *Bruch, Rost*
⇒ not longer used, but formerly used: *Bruch* with V: 'mire', with V 'break'; *Rost* with V: 'grid', with V 'rust'
cf. MHG: *rost, rust* 'rust', *rôst* 'grid, grill'

Pragmatic use of variation

- *Viel Spaß!* 'Have fun!'
- *Da haste Spass, was?* 'There you have fun, have you?'
- Use of regional forms to show sympathy
- *Gutn Tach*

Conclusions

- Only necessary conditions can be established
- There are multiple factors
- Regional factors are important, but not sufficient to explain variation

Questions

- Is there a phonological model fitting to describe the variations?
- How is the situation in other languages, esp. Dutch and Frisian?

Thank you

Dank u wel
Dankewol