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The Spread of the OHG Consonant Shift

The conventional assumption is that the suite of historical changes known as the (Old) High German consonant shift began in the southern part of OHG speaking linguistic territory and spread north in a wave-like monogenetic change, losing some features of the change as it went. But two other views have emerged in recent years. One view, developed by Vennemann (1984), assumes that the consonant shift originally took place uniformly within the area V. calls *Streng-Hochgermanisch*. Thereafter, some of the features of the shift were pushed back along the linguistic border with non-shifted varieties (the so-called *Zurückdrängungstheorie*). An alternative theory, represented most notably by Lange (1998) and elsewhere, sees the High German consonant shift as having taken place to some extent independently in the (West) Franconian area via palatalizations that occurred in various environments in these dialects and via influence from the (Gallo-)Romance varieties with which West Franconian was in contact for long periods in its development. The apparent sporadic nature of the affrication and spirantization caused by the shift in this area, particularly of pre-OHG /p k/, is to be explained by a process of de-affrication in some areas.

The present paper contends that the conventional notion of the High German consonant shift as a monogenetic change beginning in the southern part of OHG linguistic territory and spreading north is still the most likely view. The motivation for the shift is to be found in the interplay of the Syllable Weight Law and the Head Law in the initial stage of the shift (Davis and Iverson 1995), whose effects can be observed in the geographically marginal dialect of *Wermelskirchen* in the north (Hasenclever 1905), in which the shift occurs only after short vowels. The wider geographical spread of the shift of pre-OHG */t/ as opposed to pre-OHG */p k/ is linked to the more complex feature geometry of the labial and velar segments (Davis, Iverson and Salmons 1999). Dialect evidence in the Rhineland (Venema 1997; Davis 2002) is consistent with the view that the shift of /t > ts/ spread first and farthest, but that even this part of the shift may have ground to a halt in border areas. Finally, the manuscript evidence for West Franconian varieties is consistent with a monogenetic change, since West Franconian seems to preserve the affricated outcomes of pre-OHG /p t k/ in all environments (even postvocally), which corresponds to an early phase of the High German shift (Gusmani 1996).

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