

## **A received idea lacking typological foundation: the case of Gallo-Romance stress.**

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In the historical phonology of French, an increase of the intensity of stress around the fifth century A.D. is generally seen as the cause of the processes of vowel reduction of unstressed vowel to schwa and also syncope processes (e.g., Richter 1934). It is a received idea that this increase of the intensity of stress in the Gallo-Roman period was due to the Frankish superstrate: Frankish would have had a heavy expiratory accent and this stress intensity would have been transferred to Gallo-Romance around the 5th century (e.g., Pope 1952: 15, 76, 102, 107, Von Wartburg 1965, Zink 1986: 37 and various others). In the various places where one finds this received idea, there is no reference at all to research supporting the claim that Frankish or other Germanic dialects had indeed a heavy expiratory character at the time. The purpose of this paper is to show that the idea of an influence of Frankish stress as a cause of vowel reduction is simply wrong, and this on typological grounds.

To do this, reference will be made to a revised version of well-known typological distinction between syllable-timed and stress-timed languages. In acoustic experimental phonetic investigations, this distinction, introduced by Pike (1945) and Abercrombie (1967), has been refuted on several occasions (for French, e.g., by Wenk and Wioland 1982 as well as by Roach 1982). However, perceptual research (Dauer 1983, 1987) has given rise to the re-installment of this typology by Auer & Uhmann (1988) and Auer (1993, 1994, 2001), be it in a slightly different way: Auer and Uhmann propose a gradual, multi-factorial typology between syllable counting languages (also called simply syllable languages, where the syllable is the basic prosodic unit) and stress counting languages (or word languages, with the word as the basic prosodic unit). In this typology, several indicators are used for positioning a language on the continuous scale between the syllable language prototype and the word language prototype. These indicators include, among others, complexity of syllable structure, the occurrence of geminate clusters, tonal phenomena, the occurrence of vowel harmony or metaphony, epenthesis, vowel reduction and deletion, liaison, the occurrence of internal and external sandhi, as well as morphological reanalyses. A more detailed description of this typology will be given during the talk.

It will be shown that an investigation of the earliest sources of Early Old French and Frankish (e.g., the Strasbourg Oaths of 842, which is a parallel Old-French / Frankish text), using the diagnostics offered by the syllable/word language typology, reveals that Early Old French was more of a word language than Frankish. In word languages, vowel reduction under the influence of word stress is a common phenomenon, while in a syllable language one does not find this (for this reason, in the later development of towards a syllable language in Middle and Modern French, reduction of unstressed full vowels to schwa has disappeared as a productive process). Moreover, studies of the Early High German syllable structure (e.g., Frey 1988) reveal that High German, at its early stages, was very much a syllable language, hence a language without heavy word stress. Also, vowel reduction in West-Germanic under the influence of stress took place only in the 11th century, in the transition from Old to Middle High German and from Old to Middle Dutch, hence much later than in Gallo-Romance.

It will then become clear that around the sixth century (the period of the putative Frankish influence), Old Frankish must have been very much a syllable language, with relatively weak word stress. In addition, word accent was probably still initial and not yet quantity sensitive, as in

present day West-Germanic. Hence, if Frankish had indeed imposed its stress characteristics onto Gallo-Romance, stress would not have intensified and, in addition, word stress would have become initial (which was not the case).

One is thus forced to conclude that the intensive expiratory stress of Gallo-Roman cannot have had a Germanic source. Rather, it must have been an independent development.

In this talk yet other factors, involving segmental processes will be presented that confirm that in the 1st millennium, French was more of a word language than Frankish.

The evolution from late Old French to Modern French can be described as the final stage of the well-known pendular movement (see, e.g., Jacobs 1992), i.e. as an evolution from a word language towards a syllable language. By contrast, in the same period, the character of (continental) West-Germanic has evolved in the reverse direction, i.e., from that of a syllable language to that of a word language. It seems that scholars like Pope and others were unaware of this latter change and have bluntly assumed that the character of the West-Germanic dialects of the 19th and 20th centuries with respect to syllable structure and stress (with Dutch and German being clearly word languages with heavy word stress) was identical to that of the 5th century, so that it would offer an explanation for the increase in Gallo-Romance word stress.

The moral of this all is that, before one wishes to invoke language contact in order to explain language change, one should carefully study the history of *all* the languages involved.

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