

Workshop *Issues in Phonological Typology* @ UIT, 27/28-11-2025



Typological evolutionary paths

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What will we see?

- I. The typological model of **syllable vs. word languages**
- II. **9 processes** in the history of **High German**
- III. Interrelatedness of these processes
- IV. **9 identical processes** in the evolution of **Late Latin > Old French**
- V. Discussion, conclusions

I Typology: syllable vs. word languages

Isochrony hypothesis: the phonetic reality of the distinction between *syllable-timed vs. stress-timed languages* (Pike 1945, Abercrombie 1967) has been **disproved** at numerous occasions.

Measurements by Roach 1982:

The variability in duration of syllables and feet in “syllable-timed” languages is **as great as** in “stress-timed” languages.

Lehiste 1977, Dauer 1983, 1987: the difference is a **perceptual phenomenon**

.... the rhythmic differences we feel to exist between languages such as English and Spanish are more a result of phonological, phonetic, lexical, and syntactic facts about that language than any attempt on the part of the speaker to equalize interstress or intersyllable intervals. (Dauer 1983:55)

Perception influenced by, a.o.:

- syllable structure
- stress patterns
- distribution of vowel types:
 - quantity distinction: long/short vowels
 - centralisation: full/reduced vowels

Instead of the *phonetic, dichotomic* isochrony hypothesis (syllable timing vs. stress timing):

→ a *phonological, scalar typology* based on *prosodic categories*: the syllable and the prosodic word ←

The **syllable** vs. the **phonological word** as the most prominent/relevant prosodic unit to which processes are geared.

Continuum: Syllable languages — Word languages

Litt.: Auer 1994, Szczepaniak 2007, Nübling et al. 2008, Reina & Szczepaniak (eds.) 2014.

	prototypical syllable language	prototypical word language
syllable structure	simple, clear-cut syllable boundaries, high sonority difference between onset and rhyme	complex, syllable boundaries can be blurred
quantity distinction (if it exists)	uniform (in all syllables)	stress-sensitive or word-related (distinctive only in stressed syllables)
vocalism	little or no discrepancy between stressed and unstressed vowels	strong discrepancy between stressed and unstressed vowels; centralizations
geminates	possible	generally do not exist, only possible when created by morphology (compounds)
phonological processes	syllable-related (ex.: resyllabification across word boundaries); external sandhi	word-related (ex. word-medial allophones, invulnerable word boundaries); internal sandhi
epenthesis (Cs and Vs)	for syllable structure optimization	for enhancement of morphological structure

Further aims of this talk

- Comparison of a millennium of the history of High German (750-1750) and of Western Romance, more particularly Classical Latin > Old French (1st millennium AD)
- Explanation of the parallel changes for these periods in German and Western Romance, especially French, from the perspective of the typology of syllable vs. word languages

II. Historical processes in High German

Conventional periodization:

period	name	abbreviation
750-1050	Old High German	OHG
1050-1350	Middle High German	MHG
1350-1650	Early New High German	ENHG
1650-	New High German	NHG

We will focus mostly on OHG, MHG and ENHG

A sample of an OHG text

Dat gafregin ih mit firahim firiuuizzo meista
Dat ero ni uuas noh ufhimil
noh paum noh pereg ni uuas
ni [sterro] nohheinig noh sunna ni scein
noh mano ni liuhta noh der mareo seo

(Wessobrunn Prayer, 9th century)

English translation

That is what I have heard from the people, as the greatest miracle:
neither the earth was there, nor the heaven,
neither a tree, nor a mountain,
not a single star shone, neither the sun,
the moon did not show, and neither did the sparkling sea.

A sample of an OHG text

Dat gafregin ih mit firahim firiuuizzo meista

Dat ero ni uuas noh ufhimil

noh paum noh pereg ni uuas

ni [sterro] nohheinig noh sunna ni scein

noh mano ni liuhta noh der mareo seo

(Wessobrunn prayer, 9th century)

NHG translation:

Das erfuhr ich unter den Menschen als der Wunder größtes,

Dass die Erde nicht war, noch der Himmel über ihr,

Noch Baum noch Berg,

Noch irgend ein Stern, noch die Sonne nicht schien,

Noch der Mond nicht leuchtete, noch das herrliche Meer

OHG, in contrast to NHG: many open syllables, no complex codas.

In these texts, open syllables/complex codas: OHG:23/0 NHG: 8/8

Dat gaf**re**gin ih mit **fira**him **firiuuizzo** meista

Dat **ero ni** uuas noh uf**hi**mil

noh paum noh **per**eg **ni** uuas

ni [ster**ro**] nohheinig noh sun**na ni** scein

noh **mano ni** liuhta noh der mareo **seo**

We have already seen:

- many **open syllables**
- absence of **complex codas** (at least in this text, they do exist, but are rare in OHG)

in addition to that:

- long and short vowels in all positions (vowel length not [yet] reflected in the spelling)
(in NHG: long vowels only in stressed positions)
- full vowels in all word positions (in NHG: many reduced vowels in unstressed positions)
- presence of true **geminate**s (like in *firiuuizzo*, *sunna*)
- presence of epenthetic vowels (like in *per**e**g*)

Hence: a **big typological gap** between OHG and NHG

Some contrasting characteristics:

	OHG	NHG
i. syllable structure	simple: clusters of two consonants at most	complicated
ii. contrastive vowel length	long and short vowels in all positions (stressed <i>and</i> unstressed syllables)	long vowels <i>only</i> present in stressed positions
iii. vowel reduction	no	yes
iv. harmony processes	vowel harmony and phonological umlaut (e.g., <i>gast+i > gesti</i> 'guests')	no vowel harmony, <i>umlaut is morphological</i>
v. geminates	yes	no (instead, ambisyllabic consonants)
vi. final devoicing	no	yes

From OHG to NHG, German has evolved from a syllable language to a word language.

List of historical processes which caused this:

<i>regarding:</i>	historical process
vowels	1. syncope and apocope
	2. vowel reduction
	3. diphthongization
	4. stressed open syllable lengthening
consonants	5. intervocalic lenition (voicing and spirantization)
	6. intervocalic consonant deletion → contraction
	7. degemination
	8. advent of final devoicing
	9. consonant epenthesis at the right word edge

1. Syncope and apocope → syllable structure becomes less regular and less open

- (OHG > MHG) syncope affecting a nonfinal syllable:

OHG	MHG	
frew+ i da	vröu+de	'happiness'
gemein+ i da	gemeinde	'community'
ner+ i ta	ner+te	'fed'
off a n+unga	(ENHD/NHD) Öffn+ung	'opening'

- (OHG > MHG) syncope affecting a final syllable:

OHG	MHG	
(MHG) abent+ e s	abents	'evening' (gen. sg.)
fel i s	vels	'rock'
mil u h	milch	'milk'
mag a d	magt	'virgin'

1. Syncope and apocope → syllable structure becomes less regular and less open

- (MHG > later MHG) apocope (taking place after vowel reduction):

MHG	later MHG	
hine	hin	'to'
dane	dan	'then'
von	von	'of, from'
abe	ab	'but' (Mod. Ger. aber)
unde	und	'and'
frouwe	frouw	'woman, lady'
hirte	hirt	'herdsman, sheperd'
herze	herz	'heart'

2. (OHG > MHG) Vowel reduction → makes the stressed syllable stand out

- reduction of unstressed vowels

OHG	MHG	
'sunna	'sunn[ə]	'sun'
'himil	'him[ə]l	'heaven'
bilīban	b[ə]'līb[ə]n	'to stay' (Mod. Ger. <i>bleiben</i>)
'bota ₁ scaf	'bot[ə] ₁ schaft	'message' (Mod. Ger. <i>Botschaft</i>)
'zungōno (gen.)	(LATE OHG) 'zungōn > 'zung[ə]n	'tongues' (z = [ts])
'beini+hhīn	'bein([ə])+ch[ə]n	'little leg'

3. (Late MHG > ENHG) Diphthongization → makes the stressed syllable stand out

(Common Germanic already had diphthongs: ai, au, eu. Additional diphthongizations, 8th-9th century: ē > ia > ie; ō > uo > ue. This was undone by the so-called ENHG monophthongization)

i: > [ae] *ei*, y: > [oi] *eu*, u: > [ao] *au*

change	MHG	NHG	
i: > [ae] <i>ei</i>	mīn, 'sīte, 'schrīben, wīt, rīch	meīn, Seīte, schreīben, weīt, reīch	'my, page, (to) write, far, rich'
y: > [oi] <i>eu</i>	'liute, 'hiute, 'hiuser (<i>iu</i> = [y:])	Leute, heute, Häuser	'people, today, houses'
u: > [ao] <i>au</i>	hūs, sū, ūf, rūch, 'sūfen	Haus, Sau, auf, rau, saufen	'house, sow, on, rough, drink'

4. (MHG > ENHG) Stressed open syllable lengthening → arrival of the Bimoraic Condition

Open syllable lengthening in stressed syllables only:

MHG	ENHG	
't a ge (pl.)	['t a ːgə]	'days'
'n e men	['n e ːmən]	'to take'
'h a se	['h a ːse]	'hare'

Bimoraic Condition: 'a stressed syllable must have exactly two moras' (Dresher and Lahiri 1991, Riad 1992, Ramers 1999, also called Prokosch's Law)

(Another historical scenario for satisfying the Bimoraic Condition is amsyllabification (before *t* and *m*)

MHG	ENHG	
'k o men	['k o ːmən] (kommen)	'to come'

(‘ː’ indicates ambisyllabicity)

5. (OHG > MHG) lenition → word-internal syllable borders weaken

‘Voicing’ (~ lenition)

OHG	MHG	
ri pp a	(> rippe >ripe >) ri b e	‘rib’
bin t an	bin d en	‘(to) tie’
bru kk on (verb)	bru ck e > bru[g]e	‘bridge’
br ief es (gen. sg.)	br iev es	‘letter’

5. MHG lenition – Spirantization

(Very early on, intervocalic spirantization (of singletons only) had already applied to voiceless stops in Old High German Consonant Shift. This is immaterial to the present argument.)

Proto-Germanic	OHG	
*slēpan-	slāfan	‘sleep’
*etan-	e[s]an	‘eat’
*makān	mahan	‘make’

However, later, in MHG dialects occurrences of spirantization of ‘voiced’ (lenis) stops can be found (Weinhold 1883; Moser 1951, Goblirsch 2018:145-147)

MHG

knabe ~ knave	‘boy’
haben ~ haben	‘(to) ‘have’
sagen ~ sachen (gh = [ɣ])	‘(to) say’

6. (OHG > MHG) Intervocalic consonant deletion → contraction

→ fewer open syllables, less sonority difference between onset and rhyme

This affects voiced obstruents

sound	contraction	OHG	MHG	
g	ege > ei	getragida	getre ge de > getre ei de	'grain'
d	ade > ā	badōt	ba de t > ba ā t	'bath' (pres. 3rd pers. sg.)
b	ibe > ī	gibist	gi be st > gi ī st	'give' (pres. 2nd pers. sg.)
h	ahe > ā	slahan	sla he n > sla ā n	'(to) beat'

7. (OHG > MHG) Degemination → after long vowels degemination is needed to reduce trimoraic syllables to bimoraic ones because of the newly arrived Bimoraic Condition

(Geminates are the result of the so-called West Germanic gemination, which took place in the 3rd-4th cent. AD)

After long vowels:

OHG	MHG	
hlūttar	lūter	‘merely, pure’
rūzzan	rūzen	‘snore’

Later (MHG > NHG) also after short vowels :

(However, in the orthography the double consonants remained, with a new function, i.e. to indicate that the preceding vowel is short.)

The consonant in question became ambisyllabic, hence blocking Stressed Open Vowel Lengthening.

OHG	MHG	NHG	
mitti	mitte	Mi[̥]e	‘centre’
offan	offen	o[̥]en	‘open’

8. (OHG > MHG) Arrival of final devoicing: enhancing the right edge of a phonological word

in MHG, from the 12th century onwards

orthographic alternation		examples (genitive – nom.; –es = gen. ending)	
word medially	word finally		
b	p	lob es – lop p	‘praise’
v	f	hov es – hof f	‘court’
g	c (= [k])	slag es – slac c [k]	‘punch, stroke’
h	ch (= [χ])	hō hes – hō ch [χ]	‘high’
d	t	eid es – eit t	‘oath’

In contrast to a wide-spread idea, final devoicing takes place at the right edge of a phonological word, not of a syllable, cf. *re[d]lich* ‘honest’ (Auer 1994).

9. (MHG > ENHG) consonant epenthesis at the right word edge → enhancing the right edge of a phonological word

Mostly: *d, t*

MHG	ENHG	
māne	mant t /mand d /mond d	‘moon’
nieman	niemand d	‘nobody’
saf	saft t	‘juice’
(<i>vin</i>) <i>sec</i> > sek	sekt t	‘sparkling wine’
obez	obst t	‘fruit’
nimest	nimp st	‘take’ (2nd pers. sg. pres.)
eigenlich	[eigent t] _ω [lich] _ω	‘real, in reality’
heimlich	[heim b] _ω [lich] _ω	‘hidden’

III. Interrelatedness of the historical processes in High German

Recall of the typology: syllable vs. word languages

A *phonological, **scalar*** typology based on *prosodic categories*: the syllable and the prosodic word.

The **syllable** vs. the **phonological word** as the most prominent/relevant prosodic unit to which processes are geared.

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- Szczepaniak 2007: In the history of German, there is a typological shift from the syllable towards the phonological word.
 - In OHG, the syllable is the central domain.
 - Since MHG/ENHG, the phonological word is the central domain.
1. **Syncope and apocope:** **syllable structure becomes less regular and less open**, but the phonological word is highlighted, by the reduction of the number of feet, and by making stems monosyllabic.
 2. **Vowel reduction in unstressed syllables:** **makes the stressed syllable stand out**. This enhances the recognizability of the prosodic word.
 3. **Diphthongization in stressed syllables:** **idem** (not mentioned by Szczepaniak).
 4. **Stressed open syllable lengthening:** In ENHG, a stressed vowel in open syllables is lengthened because of the arrival of the **Bimoraic Condition** (stressed syllables should contain exactly two moras).
 5. **Intervocalic lenition/voicing:** syllable structure becomes less well clear-cut: **word-internal syllabic borders weaken**: less sonority difference between onset and rhyme).

6. **Consonant deletion** → word contraction: **fewer open syllables, less sonority difference between onset and rhyme.**
7. **Degemination**: after long vowels degemination is needed to reduce trimoraic syllables to bisyllabic ones because of the newly arrived Bimoraic Condition (Prokosch's Law).
 - After short vowels: degemination happens in a later stage (ENHG) and ambisyllabification sets in, **worsening syllabic structure but strengthening the coherence of the prosodic word.**
8. **Arrival of final devoicing**: as it stands in ENHG and NHG, final devoicing is a process **enhancing the right edge of a phonological word** (after having existed in certain OHG dialects as a syllable-determined process and in MHG as a syllable- and foot-determined process).
9. **Consonant epenthesis at the right word edge**: by the insertion of a plosive at the end of a phonological word (often with a sonority hierarchy violation), **the edges of the phonological word are enhanced.**

IV. Now, over to Romance!

Colloquial Late Latin (CLL, ± 100 AD) to Old French (OF, ±1100 AD)

Colloquial Late Latin/Proto-Romance is a relative syllable language

Processes in the evolution from Classical/Imperial Latin to Colloquial Late Latin/Proto-Romance leading to a **more regular syllable structure**, tending to open syllables, elimination of hiatus and complex onsets:

Creation of open syllables:

- loss of final *m*: 'nunk^wam > 'nunk^wa
- loss of *n* before fricatives (with compensatory lengthening): 'sponsa > 'spoːsa

Resolution of hiatus:

- unstressed front vowels become *j*, and unstressed back vowels become *w*:
'fiːlius, 'sapuiː > 'fiːljus, 'sapwiː

Elimination of complex onsets:

- If *w* is formed after a geminate consonant, it is deleted: bat^ttuere > 'battwere > 'battere
- *w* is deleted before unstressed back vowels:
'karduus, 'unguoː > 'kardwus, 'ungwoː > 'kardus, 'ungoː

Some contrasting properties of Classical Latin, Colloquial Late Latin and Proto-French

	Classical and Imperial Latin	Colloquial Late Latin, Proto-Romance	Proto-French (end of 9th century)
i. syllable structure	more closed syllable structure	more open syllable structure	more closed syllable structure
ii. contrastive vowel length	in stressed syllables; on the way out in unstressed syllables	disappearing altogether	no
iii. vowel reduction	no (but existed in a limited way in Pre-Classical Latin)	no	extensive: omnipresence of schwas
iv. diphthongs	yes	Disappeared. Later: 'Romance' diphthongization (4th century)	omnipresence of diphthongs; triphthongs
v. geminates	yes	loss of geminates (in Gallo-Roman: after 7th century)	no
vi. final devoicing	no	no	yes

An example of a Proto-French text

Text	Reconstructed pronunciation	Translation
Buona pulcella fut eulalia. Bel auret corps bellezour anima	bwɔnə pyltɛlə fyθ əylaljə bɛl avrəθ kɔrps bɛlədʒour anəmə	Eulalia was a good girl, She had a beautiful body, a soul more beautiful still.
Voldrent la veintre li deo Inimi.	vɔldrənt la veintrə li dɛə enəmi	The enemies of God wanted to overcome her,
Voldrent la faire diaule seruir	vɔldrənt la fajrə diavlə sɛrvir	they wanted to make her serve the devil.
Elle no'nt eskoltet les mals conselliers.	elə nɔnt ɛskoltəθ les mals kɔnsɛlɛrs	She does not listen to the evil counsellors,
Qu'elle deo raneiet chi maent sus en ciel.	kelə dɛə rənejəθ ki mænt sys en tsjɛl	(who want her) to deny God, who lives up in heaven.

From the *Séquence de Sainte Eulalie*, ± 880

Many closed syllables, many **complex codas**.

Let us recall the list of relevant processes in the evolution OHG > NHG
Typologically: syllable language > word language.

<i>regarding:</i>	historical process
vowels	1. syncope and apocope
	2. vowel reduction
	3. diphthongization
	4. stressed open syllable lengthening
consonants	5. intervocalic lenition (voicing and spirantization)
	6. intervocalic consonant deletion → contraction
	7. degemination
	8. advent of final devoicing
	9. consonant epenthesis at the right word edge

Do we find these processes also in the evolution from Late Latin/Proto-Romance to Old French? → **Let us find out!**

1. Syncope and apocope

Syncope: already starting in Classical Latin (where it was optional)

<i>complex onsets</i>	<i>heterosyllabic sonorant + obstruent clusters</i>	<i>heterosyllabic obstruent- obstruent clusters</i>	<i>heterosyllabic sonorant+ sonorant clusters</i>
'pop(u)lus	'cal(i)dus	'nep(o)te	'cal(a)mus
'oc(u)lum	'vir(i)de	'pos(i)tu	'hom(i)nem
'reg(u)la	'jur(i)go	'av(i)ca	'pir(u)la

Later: Gallo-Roman syncope, (i) affecting a non-final syllable

Late Latin	Old French	
*'turb <u>u</u> lat	trouble	'trouble'
'tab <u>u</u> la	table	'table'
libe' <u>e</u> rāre	[livrer]	'to liberate'

1. Syncope and apocope

(ii) affecting a final syllable:

Late Latin	Old French	
'mūr <u>o</u> s	m[y]rs	'walls'
'dēb <u>e</u> t	deift	'should, must'

(examples mainly from Fouché 1958)

Apocope:

Late Latin	Old French	
'mūr <u>u</u>	m[y]r	'wall'
'her <u>ī</u>	hier	'yesterday'
'port <u>o</u>	(je) port	'(I) carry'

2. Vowel reduction

All unstressed vowels of Late Latin (a, e, o, au) can be reduced to schwa. The process takes place over an extended period of time, often followed by complete deletion.

Appearances of vowels reduced to ə, chronology (according to GGHF: 324):

	starting from		non-initial position	initial position
a.	3rd century	e, o, au	> ə	
b.	7th century	a	> ə	
c.	11th century	e		> ə

2. Vowel reduction

Examples of attested schwas in Old French originating from full vowels in Latin:

Latin	Old French	
ornā ¹ mentu	orn[ə]ment	‘ornament’
ˈporta	port[ə]	‘door’
*quadri ¹ furcu (reconstr.)	carr[ə]for	‘road crossing’
ˈintrō (1st pers. sg.)	(je) entr[ə]	‘(I) enter’
ˈgen(e)rem	gendr[ə]	‘son-in-law’

→ Vowel reduction is productive in Present-day Catalan.

3. Diphthongization

Diphthongization in stressed open syllables ('spontaneous diphthongizations')

'Roman' and 'French' diphthongizations (resp. beginning of our era and from the 6th century onwards):

Latin	Old French	
'c <u>a</u> ru	ch <u>ie</u> r	'dear'
'p <u>e</u> dem	pi <u>ie</u> d	'foot'
'b <u>o</u> nu	bu <u>o</u> n	'good'
me	me <u>i</u>	'me'

4. Stressed open syllable lengthening

Occurred in Late Latin. Vowels in stressed open syllables were lengthened.

Classical Latin	Late Latin	Old French	
¹ fĕru	¹ fēru	fier	‘proud’
¹ căsa	¹ cāsa	case	‘house’

Loporcaro 2015: Open Syllable Lengthening (OSL), starting in Late Imperial Latin: **a stressed syllable requires two moras**. OSL supplants Contrastive Vowel Length (CVL). (But CVL is maintained for some time in Northern varieties.)

Cf. the Bimoraic Condition (Ramers 1999, Prokosch’s Law) for MHG!

5. Lenition: voicing + spirantization

Latin	voicing	spirantization	$\gamma > jj$ $\beta > v$	result	Old French	
'rīpa	'rība	riβə	rive	v	rive	'bank, shore'
'fabā		faβə	feve	v	feve	'bean'
la'vāre		laβare	laver	v	laver	'(to) wash'
'raphanu		ravanu		v	ravene	'radish'
'vīta	'vida	viðə		ð	vide	'life'
lau'dāre		lauðare		ð	lauder	'(to) praise'
pa'cāre	pa'gare	paɣare	pa jj er	jj	paier	'(to) pay'
ne'gāre		neɣare	ne jj er	jj	neiier	'(to) deny, (to) refuse'

(Adapted from GGHF:410)

6. Word internal consonant deletion → contraction

Classical Latin	Old French	
^l t epi du	tie de	‘lukewarm’
^l c ubi tu	cou de	‘elbow’
n āvi gāre	n a gier	‘(to) sail, (to) navigate’
^l r otu lu	rol le	‘little wheel’
*r ādī cīna (< radix)	rac ine	‘root’

(Adapted from GGHF:400)

7. Degemination

Degemination of heterosyllabic geminates: 7th century or later.

(Exception: *rr* is degeminated only from the 12th cent. onwards.)

Classical Latin	Old French	
'gutt a	gote	'drop'
'bull a	bole	'bubble'
'abb as	ab es	'abbot'
'mitt ere	met re	'(to) send'

8. Arrival of final devoicing (FD)

FD in Gallo-Roman, Proto- and Old French:

Old Fr. froit (*masc.*) – froide (*fem.*) ‘cold’

Cl. Lat. lunggum > *Old Fr.* lonc ‘long’

There are remnants of this process in contemporary French:

Classical Latin	Mod. French (fem.)	Mod. French (masc.)	
no <u>v</u> us	neu <u>v</u> e	neu <u>f</u>	‘new’
grand <u>i</u> s	gran[<u>d</u>]e amie (<i>liaison context</i>)	gran[<u>t</u>] ami (<i>liaison context</i>)	‘big friend’

→ FD exists also in other Western Romance languages: it is productive in contemporary Catalan, Occitan, Friulian, Ladin and Rhaeto-Romansh.

9. Consonant epenthesis at the right word edge

Does not exist in Old French (as far as we know), but does exist in present-day Central and Eastern Catalan (Reina 2014: 379, 2019: 163-6):

Present-day Central and Eastern Catalan

api	[ˈapi] ~ [ˈapit]	‘celery’
collegi	[kulˈlɛzi] ~ [kulˈlɛzit]	‘school’
tave	[ˈtaβə] ~ [ˈtaβət] ~ [ˈtaβək]	‘horsefly’
rave	[ˈraβə] ~ [ˈraβət] ~ [ˈraβək]	‘radish’
cor	[kɔr] ~ [kɔrt]	‘heart’
mar	[mar] ~ [mart]	‘sea’

9. Consonant epenthesis at the right word edge

Also in Friulian (Pellis 1910; Francescato 1966: 16, 63-65; Heinemann 2001, all three reported by Caro Reina 2019: 87-8)

Friulian		
stomi	[^l stɔmi] ~ [^l stɔmit]	‘stomach’
om	[ɔm] ~ [ɔmp]	‘man’
ğovin	[^l zɔvin] ~ [^l zɔvint]	‘youngster’
len	[lɛŋ] ~ [lɛŋk]	‘wood’

Comparison

historical process		OHG → NHG	Cl. Lat. → Old Fr.
vowels	1. syncope and apocope	+	+
	2. vowel reduction	+	+
	3. diphthongization	+	+
	4. stressed open syllable lengthening	+	+
consonants	5. intervocalic lenition (voicing and spirantization)	+	+
	6. intervocalic consonant deletion → contraction	+	+
	7. degemination	+	+
	8. arrival of final devoicing	+	+
	9. consonant epenthesis at the right word edge	+	—*

*Exists in Present-day Catalan and Friulian

Question:

Is it a **coincidence**, that we find this many parallels between the evolutions OHG > NHG and Cl.L > OF? Why and how do these changes **conspire**?

- The evolution Colloquial Late Latin > OF is just like OHG > NHG a change from a (relative) Syllable Language (SL) to a (relative) Word Language (WL).

Question:

Is the change SL > WL in High German and in Western Romance just the **result** of these 8 or 9 processes, or is there an **original force** behind these processes?

- We can assume that this is at least partially the case: a given process may change the place of the language in question on the SL-WL scale and thus setting in motion a second process, typical to the particular place on the SL-WL scale.

We can go one step further and make the conjecture:

The 9 processes of High German and Western Romance treated above are by **no means primitive changes**, but are **driven by changes in the prosodic system** of the respective languages.

E.g.: by the loss of Contrastive Vowel length (CVL) in unstressed syllables (or the loss of CVL altogether), or, more broadly, by **the change from a syllable language to a word language**.

(For an overview of the change from CVL to Open Syllable Lengthening (OSL): see Riad 1992 for Germanic, Loporcaro 2015 for Romance).

General conclusions:

1. There is a remarkable similarity between the history of High German from 750 to 1750 and that of Colloquial Late Latin → Old French from 100 to 1100.
2. For both languages, the changes are based on a similar change in prosodic organization, i.e. away from a syllable language towards a word language.
3. When studying language change, one should focus more on prosodic change – with its consequences for segmental structure – rather than on isolated segmental changes.

Thank you!

Takk!