

Glide Epenthesis in Gothic and Old High German

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Gothic and Old High German (OHG) both exhibit a sporadic process of intervocalic glide epenthesis, yielding forms like Gothic *sijum* ‘we are’ and *fijands* ‘enemy’ (alongside *sium* and *fiands*, respectively) and OHG *fiant* ‘enemy’ (alongside *fiant*) and *hīwen* ‘to marry’ (alongside *hien*). Previous research has treated the Gothic and OHG developments separately, and has labeled this development a sporadic sound change (Barrack 1997), linked it to rule ordering and rule extension (Armborst 1979), or connected it to the influence of the Onset Principle (Szczepaniak 2014). Here I build on Szczepaniak’s approach, synthesizing it with the Prosodic Change Hypothesis (PCH) of Page (1999). I first present data illustrating the problem, give an overview of previous research on the topic, and sketch Page’s PCH, before offering my own solution.

Page (1999) argues for a distinction between sound change and prosodic change. In his view, sound change “affects only the phonetic features of a segment, whereas prosodic change consists of a change in the rhythmic structure of a language.” In this case, then, a prosodic change took place in Gothic and OHG, specifically the emergence of the Onset Principle. Glide epenthesis in Gothic and OHG can therefore be characterized as a response to this prosodic change, in that glide epenthesis provided onsets for otherwise onsetless syllables, à la the approach to OHG taken in Szczepaniak (2014). The apparent irregularity of glide epenthesis then falls out from the distinction between sound change and prosodic change: because prosodic change is “phonetically abrupt but lexically gradual” (Page 1999), it can result in “irregular changes on the segmental level” (Page 1999). In this case, the “irregular change on the segmental level” is reflected in the unpredictable occurrence of glide epenthesis, as illustrated by the existence of forms like Gothic *fiands* ‘enemy’ alongside *fijands* mentioned above.

The analysis developed here improves upon earlier solutions in a number of ways. First, it provides a unified account of the Gothic and OHG material. Second, it provides a more principled account of the irregularity of the change, rather than just labeling it sporadic as Barrack (1997) does, or not considering its irregularity, as Szczepaniak (2014) does. Finally, it is more straightforward than the somewhat convoluted approach of Armborst (1979).

References

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