

## MT PAPER IV: MIDDLE HIGH GERMAN

### MAJOR PHONOLOGICAL CHANGES FROM MHG > NHG

#### 'eNHG' Diphthongisation

*mîn niuweȝ hûs* > *mein neues Haus*  
*m[i:]n n[y:]weȝ h[u:]s* > *m[ai]n n[ɔɪ]es H[au]s*

#### 'eNHG' Diphthongisation

*liebe müede bruoder* > *Liebe müde Bruder*  
*l[i:]be m[y:]de br[u:]der* > *L[i:]be m[y:]de Br[u:]der*

#### Open syllable lengthening (OSL)

OSL lengthened stressed short vowels in open syllables, e.g. MHG *tage* [ta.gə] > NHG *Tage* [ta:.gə] 'days'. This change often resulted in length alternations within paradigms, (monosyllabic forms remained short, whilst disyllabic forms would lengthen as a result of resyllabification). These alternations have since been levelled out via analogy (usually in favour of the long vowel). Note that OSL was blocked by medial geminate consonants (which have since been shortened), e.g. MHG *machen* [max.xən] > NHG *machen* [maχən] 'to do, make'.

- a) Comparison of MHG and NHG singular and plural nouns with originally long and short stem vowels (short: *Stab* 'stick' and long: *Rat* 'advice')

	SG	PL
MHG (pre-OSL)	stap ra:t	'stæ.bə 'ræ:.tə
MHG (post-OSL)	stap ra:t	'stæ:.bə 'ræ:.tə
NHG	ʃta:p ʁa:t	'ʃtɛ:.bə ʁɛ:.tɛ

\*Here, OSL lengthens the stem vowel in the disyllabic plural form, *stæbe*, with this long stem vowel subsequently levelled out into the monosyllabic singular form via analogy (highlighted).

- b) Comparison of MHG and NHG ablaut verbs with originally geminate and singleton medial consonants (*sprechen* 'speak' and *geben* 'give')

	INF	3SG.PRET	3PL.PRET	PST.PTCP
MHG (pre-OSL)	'sprɛx.xən 'gɛ.bən	sprax gap	'spra:.xən 'ga:.bən	gə'sprɔx.xən gə'gɛ.bən
MHG (post-OSL)	'sprɛx.xən 'gɛ:.bən	sprax gap	'spra:.xən 'ga:.bən	gə'sprɔx.xən gə'gɛ:.bən
NHG	'ʃpʁɛçən 'gɛ:.bən	ʃpʁa:x ga:p	'ʃpʁa:.xən 'ga:.bən	gə'ʃpʁɔçən gə'gɛ:.bən

\*Note that we find levelling (highlighted) within the preterite for both verbs. This results in a long vowel in every form of *geben*, where the infinitive and past participle lengthened, but an alternation has survived in *sprechen*, where the medial geminate consonant prevented OSL in the infinitive and past participle.

### Schwa loss (apocope and syncope)

Schwas were lost in many words from MHG to NHG. Within a word, this loss is referred to as syncope, e.g. MHG *saget* > NHG *sagt* 'says', and at the end of a word it is termed apocope, e.g. MHG *vorhte* > NHG *Furcht* 'fright'.

\*N.B. This is a separate process to the reduction of unstressed syllables which began in late OHG and is characteristic of MHG (as opposed to schwa apocope and syncope, which started in late MHG and are characteristic of NHG).

### Degemination

In MHG, double consonants were actually long. These geminates sounded like those found in modern Italian (e.g. *fatto*) but have been shortened to single consonants in NHG, where the double spelling has been reinterpreted as indicating a preceding short vowel, e.g.:

OHG	<i>fallan</i> [fal.lan]	<i>offan</i> [ɔf.fan]	<i>zeihhan</i> [tʰeɪx.xan]
MHG	<i>fallen</i> [fal.lən]	<i>offen</i> [ɔf.fən]	<i>zeichen</i> [tʰeɪx.xən]
NHG	<i>fallen</i> [falən]	<i>offen</i> [ɔfən]	<i>Zeichen</i> [tʰsaɪçən]

\*Note the lowering of the diphthong /ei/ > /aɪ/ in *Zeichen* between MHG and NHG.

## TYPES OF CHANGE

### SYNCRETISM

Essentially the product of morphological merger. Syncretism is when functionally distinct word forms are identical. In other words, multiple cells in a paradigm have exactly the same form. This may be the result of historical changes (due to regular sound change, phonological erosion or analogy), but can also describe a situation where there was never any distinction in the first place.

### The declension of the noun *Tag* 'day' in OHG, MHG and NHG

An example of syncretism as a result of phonological erosion. In NHG, nominal inflexion is mostly restricted to number marking (except for GEN.SG.M/N and DAT.PL).

	OHG		MHG		NHG	
	SG	PL	SG	PL	SG	PL
NOM	tag	tagā, -a	tac	tage	Tag	Tage
ACC	tag	tagā, -a	tac	tage	Tag	Tage
GEN	tages, -as	tago	tages	tage	Tag(e)s	Tage
DAT	tage, -a	tagum, -om; -un, -on	tage	tagen	Tag(e)	Tagen
INSTR	tagu, -o					

\*The 'Dativ-e' is more of an eNHG feature, almost extinct in contemporary NHG, where it survives mainly in phrases such as *zu Hause, im Jahre* &c. (it is much more common in Luther's writing, for example).

### Extensive syncretism: The indicative and subjunctive of weak verbs

For the weak verbs, the indicative and subjunctive forms are identical in both the present and the preterite tense, as with the -jan verb *brennen* 'to burn':

			INDICATIVE	SUBJUNCTIVE
PRESENT	SG	1	brenne	brenne
		2	brennest	brennest
		3	brennet	brennet
	PL	1	brennen	brennen
		2	brennet	brennet
		3	brennent	brennent
PRETERITE	SG	1	brante	brante
		2	brantest	brantest
		3	brante	brante
	PL	1	branten	branten
		2	brantet	brantet
		3	branten	branten

What do we find instead in NHG? Periphrastic constructions with the preterite subjunctive form of *werden*, e.g. *ich würde brennen*

### GRAMMATICALISATION

The movement from a (more) lexical to a (more) grammatical meaning/word/form, e.g. from a lexical verb to an auxiliary, or from a derivational to an inflexional affix. Movement in the other direction is very scarce, such that the very existence of 'degrammaticalisation' is controversial.

Grammaticalisation is a gradual process involving movement along a continuum (or 'cline'), with purely lexical content at one end and purely functional content at the other:

Content word > function word > clitic > affix > phonological material > null

It is often regarded as being related to the competing drives for 'economy' (saying something as 'easily' and briefly as possible) and 'clarity' (being easily understood).  
 → In this way, gradual phonological erosion generally accompanies grammaticalisation, until clarity is impaired and periphrastic material is added to counter this, eventually becoming subject to erosion itself (cf. 'Jespersen's Cycle').

\*For more information on clines and cycles (including the grammaticalisation cline and Jespersen's cycle), see Hock (2021: 351–366).

## Phonological erosion: The reduction of vowels in unstressed syllables

The reduction of unstressed syllables (which began in late OHG) can be seen in the following paradigm for *ēra* 'honour':

		OHG	MHG	NHG
SG	NOM/ACC	ēra	êre	Ehre
	GEN	ēra, -u, -o	êre	Ehre
	DAT	ēru, -o	êre	Ehre
PL	NOM/ACC	ērā	êre	Ehren
	GEN	ērōno	êren	Ehren
	DAT	ērōm, -ōn, -on	êren	Ehren

## Syntactic changes to MHG verbs: Tense, mood and voice

In German, grammaticalisation can be seen in the development of *werden* as an auxiliary in periphrastic constructions expressing the future tense, passive voice and conditional meaning (of weak verbs, where the preterite subjunctive and indicative forms were identical). This contrasts with the inherited (synthetic) tenses and moods, e.g. the preterite, present and subjunctive, which were marked via verbal inflexion.

The following notes, from Wright (1955: 60f.), provide a useful (and brief!) overview of the syntax of tense, mood and voice in MHG. This should provide you with some useful examples of periphrastic constructions for use in your essays (which will help your answers to stand out from those relying only on the lectures!). Consider the ways in which these structures are different from NHG.

\*For a more detailed overview, see Jones & Jones (2019) and Paul (2007). See also MT 8's MHG lecture (already available online).

**Tenses:** In MHG, the future simple is expressed by *sol*, *muoz*, *wil* and the infinitive, or simply by the present.:

- *ich sol gân* 'I shall go'
- *bin ich gnislîch, sô genise ich* 'if I am curable, I shall recover'

For the future perfect, the perfect is used:

- *daz ist schiere getân* 'that will soon have been done'

The perfect is expressed either by the simple preterite or the past participle and the verbs *hân* or *sîn*; in subordinate sentences the preterite often has pluperfect meaning:

- *dô du von ir schiede, zehant sie starp* 'she died immediately after thou hadst taken leave of her.'

The prefix *ge-* can be added to almost any verb and gives it perfective force, implying completion of the action: *sitzen* 'to be sitting', *gesitzen* 'to sit down'. When the meaning of the verb is already perfective, it forms the past participle without *ge-*: *brâht*, *komen*, *worden*. Added to the present tense, it often gets a future perfect meaning:

- *swenne iuwer sun gewahset* 'when your son has (=shall have) grown up'

With the preterite, it has pluperfect force:

- *dô ich in gesach* 'when I had seen him'

The present participle with *sîn* is sometimes used to denote continuous action, as in English:

- *da3 er im bitende wese* 'that he may continually pray for him'.

NOTE: The use of *werden* to express the future occurs in later MHG, but at first with the present participle: *ich wirde sehende* 'I shall see', and afterwards with the infinitive: *ich wirde sehen*. In late MHG, even the past *wart* is used in this way: *er wart lachen* 'he began to laugh'. *Beginnen* (preterite *begunde*, *begonde*) as an auxiliary is usually merely periphrastic [*by this he does not mean a grammaticalised periphrastic construction, but rather circumlocutory/expressing the same idea with a combination of words*]: *er begunde rîten* = *er reit* 'he rode'.

**Mood:** The subjunctive is much more widely used in MHG than in NHG. Its use after an imperative should be noted:

- *nu sehet wie genæme er ê der werlte wære* 'now see how pleasing he was to the world before'

It is also often used after generalising indefinite pronouns:

- *swer da3 tuo* 'whoever does that'

and after comparatives:

- *und wirde werder danne ich sî* 'and I shall become more worthy than I am'

In wishes *müeze* = NHG *möge*:

- *din sêle müeze wol gevarn* 'may thy soul fare well'

Unreal conditions are expressed by the simple preterite subjunctive:

- *du vertrüegest doch wol mînen tôt* 'thou wouldst yet easily bear my death'

The construction with *würde*, as in NHG, does not exist in such cases, but *wolde* (subjunctive) is used with the perfect infinitive as in English:

- *er wolde in erslagen hân* 'he would have slain him'

The preterite subjunctive is used to express unreal conditions in the past:

- *und sæhe ez niht her Hartmuot* 'if Sir Hartmuot had not seen it'

**Voice:** The present and preterite passive are expressed by *werden* and the past participle, and the corresponding perfect tenses by *sîn* and the past participle.

Pres. *ich wirde gelobet*  
 Pret. *ich wart gelobet*  
 Perf. *ich bin gelobet*  
 Plupf. *ich was gelobet*  
 Inf. *gelobet sîn.*

## ANALOGY

Analogy can be seen as change whereby a similarity in meaning leads to a similarity in form (it is distinct from simple regularisation, but it generally results in greater regularity). In contrast to regular sound change (such as OSL or diphthongisation), which is blind to morphology and can thus introduce irregularity into paradigms, analogy reinforces regularity and transparency, but is itself irregular and sporadic.

### Analogical levelling within a paradigm: Strong verbs

The changes we see in the strong verbs present a complex picture, with paradigms affected by the reduction of unstressed syllables (from OHG to MHG), open syllable lengthening (from MHG to eNHG) and extensive analogical levelling, as well as various changes to vowel quality. The details vary depending on the local circumstances of each verb, usually in line with the ablaut series to which it belongs (but also sometimes due to the particular sounds the verb happens to contain). However, some examples of analogical levelling are given below:

In Class II verbs, e.g. *bieTEN*, the stem vowel of the indicative present tense plural has been levelled out to the present singular forms, e.g. MHG *ich biuge*, *er biuget*, *wir biegen*, *sie biegent* > *ich biege*, *er biegt*, *wir biegen*, *sie biegen*

	INFINITIVE	1SG.PRESENT	3SG.PRETERITE	3PL.PRETERITE	PAST PARTICIPLE
OHG	biogan	biugu	boug	bugum	gibogan
MHG	biegen	biuge	bouc	bugen	gebogen
NHG	biegen	biege	bog	bogen	gebogen

\*Note also the levelling of the past participle's stem vowel to the preterite forms (following OSL: /gəbɔgən/ > /gəbɔ:gən/).

Similarly, for Class III (with *e* in the infinitive), Class IV and Class V, the stem vowel of the indicative 1SG.PRES form has changed on analogy with the stem vowel of the infinitive and PL.PRESENT forms, e.g. *nemen* (NHG *nehmen*):

			OHG	MHG	NHG
PRESENT	SG	1	nīmu	nīme	nehme
		2	nimis, (-st)	nimest	nimmst
		3	nimit	nimet	nimmt
	PL	1	nememēs, (-ēm, -ēn)	nemen	nehmen
		2	nemet	nemet	nehm(e)t
		3	nemant	nement	nehmen

Note also that in MHG there was often a length alternation between the vowel of the 1/3SG.PRET and PL.PRET forms that was inherited from OHG (and had nothing to do with OSL). In NHG, this has been levelled out in favour of the plural's long vowel: /nam~na:men/ > /na:m~na:men/. The long /e:/ of the infinitive and PL.PRES (which spread to the 1SG.PRES form) is the result of OSL, however: /ne.mən/ > /ne:.mən/.

	INFINITIVE	1SG.PRESENT	3SG.PRETERITE	3PL.PRETERITE	PAST PARTICIPLE
OHG	neman	nimu	nam	nāmum, (-un, -umēs)	ginoman
MHG	nemen	nime	nam	nâmen	genomen
NHG	nehmen	nehme	nahm	nahmen	genommen

\*In OHG, long vowels were indicated by a macron (ā), in MHG a circumflex (â) and in NHG by a following single consonant or a 'silent h' (ah, eh).

## ARTICLES IN MHG

### The indefinite article

The indefinite article was declined like a strong adjective, but typically had no ending for the NOM.SG forms of all genders (where the strong adjectives may end *-er, -iu, -ez* respectively) or the neuter ACC.SG (where adjectives would have *-ez*):

	M	F	N
NOM	ein	ein	ein
ACC	einen	eine	ein
GEN	eines	einer(e)	eines
DAT	einem(e)	einer(e)	einem

### The definite article

What has become the NHG definite article (*der, die, das...*) served in MHG as both definite article and demonstrative pronoun/determiner (i.e. 'the' vs. 'that'/'that one' &c.). In MHG, they look much the same as NHG, except for the forms *daz* and *diu*. Notice the high degree of syncretism in the MHG definite article (especially compared to OHG).

OHG:

		M	F	N
SG	NOM	der	diu	daz
	ACC	den	dea, dia (die)	daz
	GEN	des	dera, (deru, -o)	des
	DAT	demu, -o	deru, -o	demu, -o
	INSTR			diu
PL	NOM	dē, dea, dia, die	deo, dio	diu, (dei)
	ACC	dē, dea, dia, die	deo, dio	diu
	GEN	dero	dero	dero
	DAT	dēm, dēn	dēm, dēn	dēm, dēn

MHG:

		M	F	N
SG	NOM	der	diu	daz
	ACC	den	die	daz
	GEN	des	der(e)	des
	DAT	dem(e)	der(e)	dem(e)
PL	NOM	die	die	diu
	ACC	die	die	diu
	GEN	der(e)	der(e)	der(e)
	DAT	den	den	den

## HELMBRECHT

I have included here a section of *Helmbrecht* (l.1429 onwards). Practice translating it into English (try to do so without referring to the NHG translation in Reclam's edition, then compare it to your own translation). To help you, use the *Helmbrecht* dictionary and the MHG dictionaries on <https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de> (*Lexer* and *BMZ*).

Think about the sort of things you would pull out in a linguistic commentary. Can you find examples of any of the linguistic features discussed above? For example:

- vowels which would diphthongise
- vowels which would monophthongise
- vowels which would lengthen
- diphthongs which have changed quality
- geminates
- (un)syncopated or (un)apocopated schwas
- any forms which are distinct in MHG, but identical to other forms in NHG
- periphrastic constructions
- ablaut verbs (has the form changed in NHG?)
- syntax which is otherwise different from standard NHG, e.g. cases, tenses or moods used in a way which is different to the modern language.
- the present tense used for the future

There is not a good example of every syntactic construction in this short section, so see if you can find one elsewhere in the text, e.g. *werden* + present participle, *muoz/sol/wil* + infinitive expressing future, *wolde* + past infinitive, an obsolete use of the genitive etc. These will be useful for essays.

I have highlighted a number of words in red and, in the right-hand column, I have noted their spelling as they appear in two *Helbrecht* manuscripts. Unlike the standardised, cleaned-up modern edition, manuscripts are a lot more varied in their orthography (as we've discussed). What do these spellings tell you about the dialects of the scribes who



copied *A* and *B*, or how do these spellings relate to the linguistic changes we have discussed? What is interesting linguistically?

Der vater niht der rede vernam  
noch diu muoter alsam.  
der bruoder wart ze râte  
mit der swester drâte,  
daz si im **volgete** von dan.                      *volgte B*  
«ich gibe dich dem selben man,  
swie leit ez dînem vater sî;  
dû geligest Lemberslinde bî  
wol nâch dînen êren.  
dîn **rîchtuom** sol sich mêren.                      *reichait B*  
**wilt dûz**, swester, enden,                      *wiltu des B*  
ich wil dir her wider senden  
mînen boten dem dû volgen solt.  
sît dû im bist und er dir holt,  
iu **beiden** sol gelingen                      *beden A*  
vil wol an allen dingen.  
ouch füeg ich dîne hôchzît,  
daz man durch dînen willen gît  
wambîs unde röcke vil;  
für wâr ich dir daz sagen wil.  
swester, nû bereite dich;  
Lemberslint sam tuot er sich.  
got hüete dîn; ich wil dâ hin.  
mir ist der wirt als ich im bin.  
muoter, got gesegene dich!»

Hin fuor er sînen alten strich  
und sagte Lemberslinde  
den willen Gotelinde.  
vor freuden kust er im die hant,

umbe und umbe an sîn gewant, vmb vnd vmb (vñ vñ) A,B seinē [i.e. seinen] B  
er neic gegen dem winde naigte A  
der dâ wâte von Gotelinde.

Nû hoert von grôzer freise. horet/hôret A,B  
manec witewe unde weise witbe A, wittwe B vnd A,B  
an guote wart geletzet  
und riuwec gesetzt,

dô der helt Lemberslint  
und sîn gemahel Gotelint  
den briutestuol besâzen. Preutstûl A, brautstûl B  
swaz si trunken und âzen,  
daz wart gesamnet wîten.

bî den selben zîten Zu B  
vil unmüezec si beliben: beleiben B  
die knaben fuorten unde triben vnd A,B  
ûf wagen und ûf rossen zuo vnd fuorten auf A  
beide spâte unde fruuo spat vnd A,B

in Lemberslindes vater hûs.  
dô der kûnec Artûs  
sîn frouwen Ginovêren nam,  
diu selbe hôchzît was lam  
bî der Lemberslindes:  
si lebten niht des windes.

Dô ez allez wart gereht,  
sînen boten sante Helmbreht, senndet A, sant B  
der vil balde gâhte Das er B  
und im die swester brâhte. sein B

## Glossary

vernemen  
ze râte werden  
drâte

vernehmen  
reach a decision  
quickly

leit	<i>leid</i> unpleasant, painful, distressing
geligen	<i>liegen</i>
rîchtuom	wealth, prosperity
mêren	increase
bote	<i>Bote</i>
volgen	<i>folgen</i>
holt	loyal/devoted to
füege	get something done, set it into action
gît	= <i>gibt</i>
wambîs	doublet, jacket, jerkin
sam	likewise
hüeten	<i>behüten</i>
strich	direction, path, course
wille	will
freise	danger, tribulation, distress
riuwec	remorseful, distressed, sorrowful
gemahede	bride
briutestuol	bridal chair
unmüezec	diligent, busy
ross	steed, mount, horse
spâte	<i>spat</i>
lam	<i>lahm</i> tame
gâhen	hurry, hasten

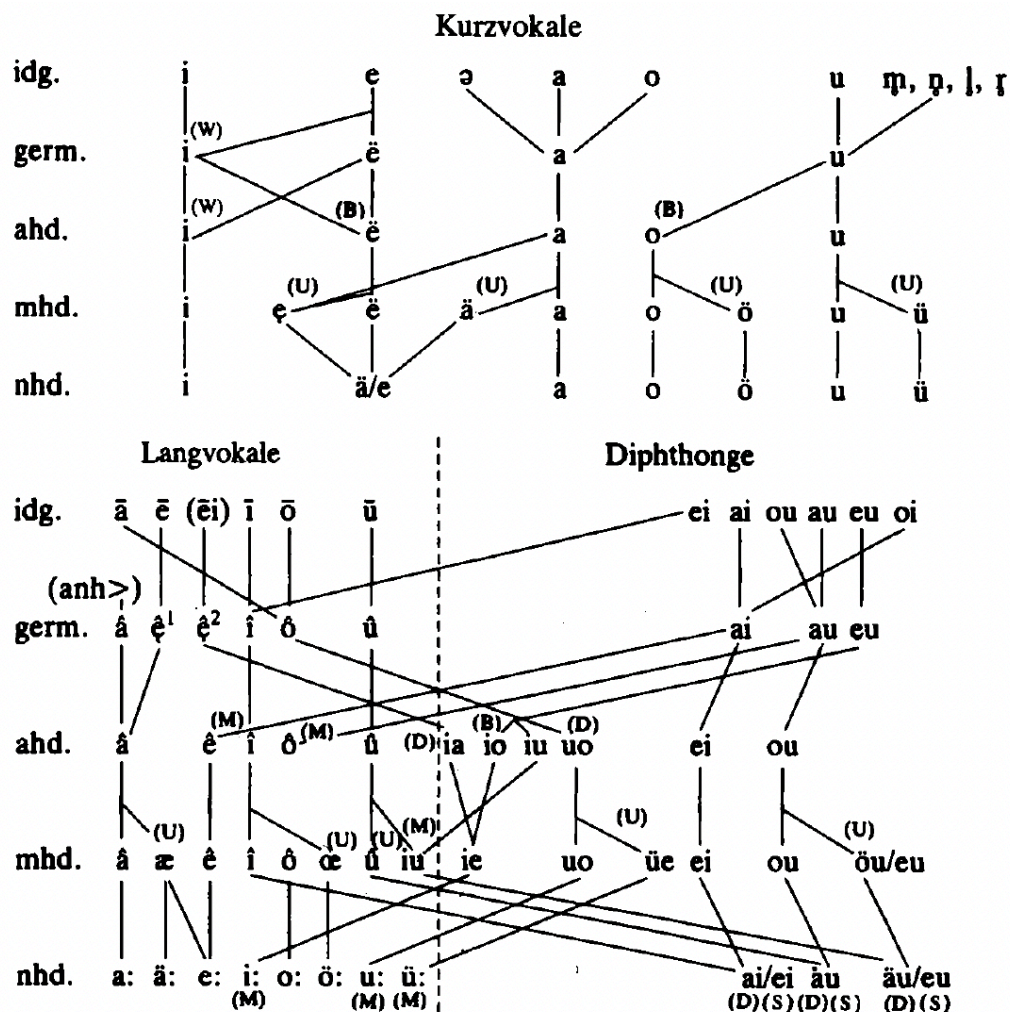
## Charts from Paul (2007: 62–3,116)

Important for our purposes are mhd. (MHG) to nhd. (NHG).

In the first chart, note the three short *e*-sounds (from inherited *e* and the products of *Primär- und Sekundärumlaut*) have fallen together as /ɛ/.

For the long vowels, note that monophthongisation produced a new set of long high vowels to replace the old ones (which had diphthongised) and that these new diphthongs (in standard NHG) merged with the old /ei, øʏ, ou/ (which had become /ai, ɔɪ, au/). However, these did not merge in all dialects: for example, in Bavarian, they have remained distinct. In other words, (b) became (c), (a) became (b) and then (in the standard) merged with (c), but not all dialects completed the last step. Meanwhile, <ie,üe,uo> /iə,yə,uə/ became (a) (but again, Bavarian did not undergo monophthongisation):

- |     |              |              |           |
|-----|--------------|--------------|-----------|
| (a) | <î> /i:/,    | <iu> /y:/    | <û> /u:/  |
| (b) | <ei> /ei/,   | <öu> /øʏ/    | <ou> /ou/ |
| (c) | <ai/ei> /ai/ | <eu/äu> /ɔɪ/ | <au> /au/ |



\*idg. = 'indogermanisch' (Proto-Indo-European), germ. = 'germanisch' (Germanic) and ahd. = 'althochdeutsch' (OHG).

	Kurzvokale			Langvokale			Diphthonge		
Ahd.	/i/		/u/	<i>ī</i> /		/ū/	/ia~io/	/iu/	/uo/
	/e/		/o/	<i>ē</i> /		/ō/	/ei/		/ou/
		/a/			/ā/				
Mhd.	/i/	/ü/	/u/	<i>ī</i> /	/ū/	/ū/	/ie/	/üe/	/uo/
	/e/			<i>ē</i> /	/ō/	/ō/	/ei/	/öü/	/ou/
	/ɛ/	/ö/	/o/	<i>ē</i> /	/ō/	/ō/			
	/ä/		/a/	<i>ā</i> /		/ā/			
Nhd.	/i/	/ü/	/u/	<i>ī</i> /	/ū/	/ū/			
	/ɛ/	/ö/	/o/	<i>ē</i> /	/ō/	/ō/		/oe/	
		/a/		( <i>ā</i> /)		/ā/	/ae/		/ao/

\*Paul's symbols are not proper IPA, but the intended sound should be clear from the above discussion.

In the next chart, note that geminates have merged with singleton consonants, [w] has become /v/ and that the two s-sounds, <ʒ> and <s> have merged as /s/, which is voiced to [z] before a vowel and becomes [ʃ] initially before a plosive, e.g. *spielen*:

Zeit	Affrikaten	Plosive						Frikative (einschließlich h)	Sonore										
		Tenues		Mediae	Mediae aspiratae		Liquidae Nasale												
Vorgermanisch		p	t	k	b	d	g	b <sup>h</sup>	d <sup>h</sup>	g <sup>h</sup>	s		r	l	m	n			
1. Lautverschiebung (und Verners Gesetz)		p	t	k				f	β	x	s	b	d	g	z	r	l	m	n
Germanisch		p	t	k	b	d	g	f	β	x	s								
2. Lautverschiebung (ca. 6.-8. Jh. n. Chr.)																			
Ahd.	pf z [ts] (k)ch [kx]	p/pp	t/tt	k/kk	b	d,th	g	ff/f	zz/z	ch	h	s/ss	s+k		r	l	m	n	
Mhd.	pf z [ts] kch, ch (nur obd.)	p/pp	t/tt	k/kk	b	d	g	fff	zz/z	ch	h	s/ss	sch		r	l	m	n	
Nhd.	pf z [ts]	p	t	k	b	d	g	f	ch	h	s	[z]	sch		r	l	m	n	

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