

### *i*-Mutation in West Germanic: Phonetic and geographical gradualness

*i*-mutation in the Germanic languages is one of the most debated issues in historical Germanic linguistics (e.g. Buccini 1995, Iverson & Salmons 2004, Salmons 2008). Variables of its complexity are:

1. the contrast between primary *i*-mutation, only affecting short *\*a*, and secondary *i*-mutation, affecting *\*u*, *\*i*, *\*e*, *\*o*, *\*y*;
2. the relative order of *i*-mutation and apocope in Anglo-Frisian on the one hand and in Continental West Germanic; in Anglo-Frisian *i*-mutation became before apocope of *\*-i* after heavy syllables, in Continental West Germanic it was the other way around, hence English *men* < *\*mænni* < *\*manni*, against Old Saxon *mann* < *\*manni*.

The whole process is, however, even more complex and some patterns of its unfolding have so far not received any attention in the literature, as it seems. There are three historical *i*-mutation factors conditioning the operation of the process, namely the presence of /i/, /i:/ and /j/ in the unaccented syllable following the root vowel. The impact of these three factors turns out not to be homogeneous, but rather gradual – at least in North Sea Germanic. This gradualness is manifested in the following distributions of the effects of the process across West Germanic:

1. Old English corpus analysis shows stronger raising of *\*a* conditioned by /i:/ and /j/ than by /i/.
2. Old Frisian has various examples confirming the same contrast between /i/ and /i:/ in the *i*-stems: R. *stede* < *\*staedi*, *stidi* < *\*staed*, B. *wald* < *\*waldi*, *welde* < *\*wald*.
3. Coastal Dutch traditional dialects show *i*-mutation and unrounding of *\*u* only before /j/, hence in *-ja* and *-j* -stems, but not in *i*-stems (De Vaan 2017: 304–305).
4. The implementation of *i*-mutation in Frisian conditioned by short *-i*, overlapped with the vowel's apocope, where high-frequency items were early adaptors of *i*-mutation and low-frequency words apparently lost the *-i* before *i*-mutation was fully established, e.g. OFri. nom.acc.pl. *f t* 'feet', *\*k* 'cows' vs. *m s* 'mice', *b c* 'books' < PWGmc. *\*f ti*, *\*k i*, *\*m si*, *\*b ki* (cf. Old English *f t*, *cȳ*, *mȳs*, *b c*).
5. The impact of *i*-mutation of PGmc. *\*a* depended also on the quality of the intervening consonants, especially *\*a* before nasals (Siebs 1901: 1185, Hoekstra & Tigchelaar 2014, Kümmel 2014) or *\*-xt*, e.g. OFri. *bed* 'bed', *fane* 'peat', *frucht* 'fruit' < PWGmc. *\*badi*, *\*fani*, *\*fruxti*.

The relevance of the gradualness of *i*-mutation as conditioned by the three factors, described under point (1-5), has – to the best of my knowledge – not been addressed by other scholars except by De Vaan (see point 3 above). Apocope of short *-i* before the application of *i*-mutation – as in (4) – is the rule in Continental West Germanic. The impact of consonantal blocking environments – as mentioned under (5) – is well known from Upper High German, e.g. *Innsbruck* (not *\*-brück*). Significantly, the Dutch language area seems to be on the cross-roads of these diversified tendencies. The paper will address the geographical configuration of this varied impact of *i*-mutation, with a special emphasis on the Low Countries, which have been the contact zone between North Sea Germanic Frisian and Continental (Low) Franconian.

- Buccini, Anthony F. 1995. Ontstaan en vroegste ontwikkeling van het Nederlandse taallandschap. *Taal en tongval* (Themanummer) 8. 8–66.
- Hoekstra, Jarich & Geart Tigchelaar. 2014. *kenna - kanna*. The e/a-variation in Old Frisian and its Modern Frisian reflexes. (Ed.) Rolf H. Bremmer Jr, Stephen Laker & Oebele Vries. *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* Directions for Old Frisian Philology(73). 185–200.
- Iverson, Gregory K & Joseph C Salmons. 2004. The Conundrum of Old Norse Umlaut: Sound Change versus Crisis Analogy. *JGL Journal of Germanic Linguistics* 16(01).
- Kümmel, Martin Joachim. 2014. Über die Relevanz des Inselnordfriesischen für die Sprachgeschichte: Zur Entwicklung von voraltfriesisch *\*ai*. *Dialekte, Konzepte, Kontakte. Ergebnisse des Arbeitstreffens der Gesellschaft für Sprache und Sprachen, 31. Mai–1. Juni 2013 in Freiburg/Breisgau = Sonderheft 2014 Sprache & Sprachen: Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Sprache und Sprachen* 35–45.
- Salmons, Joseph C. 2008. What Old Frisian Can Tell Us about the History of i-Umlaut across West Germanic. *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 64(1). 367–377.
- Siebs, Theodor. 1901. Geschichte der friesischen Sprache. In Hermann Paul (ed.), *Grundriss Der Germanischen Philologie*, vol. 1, 1152–1464. 2nd edn. Strassburg: Trübner.
- Vaan, de, Michiel. 2017. *The Dawn of Dutch. Language Contact in the Western Low Countries before 1200*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.