Palatalization in Eastern Low German Dialects Inheritance, Contact, or Endogenous

Roslyn C. Burns

April 26, 2012

Abstract

While some scholars have argued that consonant palatalization in West Germanic is the result of language contact, others have made the argument that it is inherited (Hußl911; Weise 1911; Teuchert 1913; Koerth 1914; Gréb 1921; Jacobs 1996; van der Hoek 2010). Additionally, one must consider that palatalization could have been innovated independent of contact as it is a common cross-linguistic development. In this paper, I argue that within the eastern most reaches of the Low German speaking territory of the 20th century, palatalization should be understood to be due to inheritance, contact, and endogenous change. One can come to this conclusion on the basis of the geographical distribution of segments which undergo palatalization and the segment outcomes and compare that with cross-linguistic tendencies and regional socio-political evidence.

1 Introduction

Most handbooks on German dialectology do not list palatalization as a major feature of Low German dialects. I will argue in this paper that this used to be a feature common to Eastern Low German (ELG) varieties. The following table represents the segment invetory that is commonly found in Low German varities. The cells in black represent segments which are common to ELG varieties, but not to other Low German varieties.

	Bilabial	Labio-Dental	Dental	Alveolar	Post-Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stops	p, b		t, d			c, ɟ	k, g	
Nasal	m		n			ɲ	ŋ	
Fricative		f, v		s, z	ʃ, ʒ	ç	x	h
Trill			r					
Approx						j		
Laterals			l					

Table 1: Composite Consonant Inventory of Low German Varieties

All of the cells in black are consonants at the palatal place of articulation that have velar counterparts. In some varities though (such as Plautdietsch)

the velar series contrasts with the palatal series meaning the palatals belong to different phonemes.
A fairly standard view of the Middle Low German consonant inventory is presented in the following table.

	Bilabial	Labio-Dental	Dental	Alveolar	Post-Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stops	p, b		t, d				k, g	
Nasal	m		n				ŋ	
Fricative		f, v		s, z		(ç)	x, (ɣ)	h
Trill			r					
Approx						j		
Laterals			l					

Table 2: Middle Low German Consonant Inventory

Given the continuity between the segments that are listed in the white cells of Table 1 and the cells of Table 2, it becomes clear why scholars might fail to identify velar palatalization as a feature of Modern Low German. In this paper, I argue that the palatal series found in ELG is due to both Germanic inheritance and language contact with Slavic languages on the basis of three types of evidence: geographical distribution, typological tendencies, and socio-historical interaction between Slavic speakers and Germanic speakers.

2 Palatalization

Palatalization is a context sensitive change whereby a consonant moves to a palatal place of articulation. Palatalization can be described in terms of gesture, triggers, and targets.

Gesture: The gesture of palatalization is either primary or seconday.

Type	Example
Primary: Primary place of articulation shifts towards the palate.	k>c, g>ɟ
Secondary: A secondary off-glide is produced.	k>kʲ, g>gʲ

After this initial gestural change, further development can occur due to a perceptually motivated innovation (e.g, k>tʃ), but this is not the context sensitive palatal change.

Triggers: The tiggers of palatalization are segments which catalyze the gestural change.
Triggers of palatalization are often front vowels and high vowels. The segment [j] is also a common trigger.

TARGETS: The targets of palatalization are the segments which undergo the gestural change.
The most common segments to undergo primary palatalization are velars and alveolars. There most common segments to undergo secondary palatalization are velar, alveolar, and bilabial segments.

3 Eastern Low German

- ELG: The variety of Low German spoken in Russia (by way of Prussia), Prussia, Posen, and the easternmost parts of Pomerania.
- Anachromisms: Pomerania is defined as it stood in 1938 after the annexation of territory from Posen, West Prussia, and Brandenburg. Posen is defined as it stood in the 1910's.
- Represenation of Reflexes of Palatlization: The propsed change will be in broad IPA transcription, but the reflexes of citation words will be in narrow transcription based on the data source.
- Extra: Mennonite Low German, which comes from Prussia, is the only known living variety of ELG under the definition used here.

3.1 Pomerania

Pomerania is the westernmost region with palatalization under investigation. Pomerania is bordered by the Baltic Sea to the north, West Prussia to the east, Brandenburg to the south, and Mecklenburg to the west. The data from this section comes from the *Pommerisches Wörterbuch*.

	j < g	ɟ < g	c < k	ɲ < ŋ
/_$V_{[+front]}$	jɛvəl 'gabel'		tʃeːs 'cheese'	
/_$CV_{[+front]}$	jrents 'border'		tʲniːf 'knife'	
/$V_{[+front]}$_	brɛən 'brain'	brʏədʑ'bridge'	dɪtʃ 'dam'	diɲtʲə 'to think'
/$C_{[+liquid]}$_	galjən 'gallows'		faːtɕə 'farrow'	

Table 3: Phonological Environments of Eastern Low German Palatalization

- The typologically odd g>j is very wide spread in the region
- The typologically common g>ɟ and k>c is heavily restricted in its distribution to areas that were either annexed after 1938 or on the border with Poland.
- All locations with the more common typological outcome have a complete series of palatals that developed from velars.
- All locations with the more common typological outcomes also have the less common typological outcome of palataliztion, but the reverse is not true.

3.2 Posen

Posen was situated to the south of Pomerania, to the east of Brandenburg, and to the west of Prussia. Eventhough Pomerania annexed part of Posen in 1938, the data in this section does not come from the *Pommerisches Wörterbuch*, but rather three documents made at the turn of the 20th centrury: Koerth (1913; 1914) and Teuchert (1913).

	j < g	ɟ < g	c < k	ɲ < ŋ
/_V[+front]	jelt 'money'		kɛlvə 'calves'	
/_CV[+front]	jrʏt 'grout'		kleːt 'dress'	
/V[+front]_	kɛːjə 'cone'	reɟɔ 'rain'	ɪk 'I'	diŋkt 'to think'
/C[+liquid]_	fɔljɔ 'to follow'		zooəc 'coffin'	

Table 4: Phonological Environments of Posen Palatalization

Even though there are all of the segments of ELG, Teucher speculates that segments such as used to be more widespread in their distribution in the past, but he admits that he has no direct evidence for this claim (1913:10).

	Bilabial	Labio-Dental	Dental	Alveolar	Post-Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stops	pʲal 'peel' bʲan 'feed rack'		tʲalɔ 'to count'				kʲal 'ladel'	
Nasal	mʲɔl							
Fricative		fʲaːste 'window' vʲɔːta 'root'						
Trill			rʲɔnɔ 'to run'					
Approx						jaːp 'to help'		
Laterals			lʲɔːsʃtaʃ 'axel'					

Table 5: Posen Sencondary Paltalization Segment Inventory

Both Koerth (1913:281) and Teuchert (1913:37) believe that this particular change was from Slavic influence. The segments which produced secondary palataization were really breaking vowels e>ja and ø>jɔ.

3.3 Prussia and Russia

Prussia is a region which was home to the Hanseatic city of Gdánsk (formerly Danzig). Low German speakers of the Mennonite Anabaptist movement entered the region in the mid 16th century and began to leave the region in the late 18th century at the invitation of Queen Cathrine the Great of Russia. At this time, they took the variety of Low German which they had picked up from Prussia with them into Russia.
Documentation from Prussia comes from Mitzka (1922), Mitzka (1924), and Mitzka (1928). Documentation of Russian communities first begins with

Quiring (1928) who is subsequently followed by Mitzka (1930) and many more. Plautdietsch forms which are used in this text come from Theissen (1977) and Rempel (1995) who are both native speakers of this variety.

	j < g	ɟ < g	c < k	ɲ < ŋ
/_V$_{[+front]}$	Plaut: jelt 'money' Pruss: jiɲc 'went'		Plaut: tɕɪmt 'child' Pruss: cʲɔːrʃ 'cherry'	
/_CV$_{[+front]}$	Plaut: jlesʊ 'glasses' Pruss: jlik 'like'		Plaut: tɕval 'water spring'	
/V$_{[+front]}$_	Plaut: brɛᵊjəns 'brains' Pruss: kriːjən 'to get'	Plaut: plɪdʑe 'peg' Pruss: miɟ	Plaut: ditɕ 'fat' Pruss: pritʲe 'navigation tool'	Plaut: hiɲst 'stallion' Pruss: jiɲc 'went'
/C$_{[+liquid]}$_	Plaut: gaᵘljə 'gallows'		Plaut: foltɕ 'folk'	

Table 6: Phonological Environments of Prussian Low German

3.4 Summary

Regressive palatalization of velars before front vowels is common in the region, but it is also very common x-liguistically. Typological oddities include:

- Palatalization seems to "skip" segments.
- Palatalizaton was triggered by /l/ and /r/.
- Posen is the only region with secondary palatalization which always appears before low vowels which came from /ɛ/ and /œ/; this is not triggered by /ʏ/.
- Chang g>j is very common, even in otherwise non palatalizing regions.

4 Inheritance Scenario

The ancestor of ELG, Old Saxon (OS), had palatalization. According to the inheritance scenario, ELG palatalization is only a relfex of the OS palatalization patterns. ELG varieteis with palatalization would be more conservative than their western counterparts without palatalization as palatalization would have been lost in a sound change around the 13th century. OS patterns are tricky because we only know about k>c before front vowels and g>j before front vowels based on orthography. It could be however that there were other phonological patterns not encoded in the orthography.

4.1 Old English and Old Frisian: The Outer Limits

This does not account for all of the enviroments of palatalization in ELG. Some of the ELG environments either didn't trigger palatalization, or blocked palatalization in Anglo-Frisian.

	Old English		Old Frisian		Proto-Germanic	
	j, dʒ	tʃ	j, dz	ts	*g, *gg	*k
/_V$_{[front]}$	gield	ceorl	ield	tzerl	*gelda	*kerloz
/V(C)_V$_{[high,front]}$	regn	bryce	rein	bretze	*regna	*bruki
/V(C)_j	slecg	ræcean	slydzje	rētsa	*slagj-	*reik(i)jan
/V$_{[front]}$_	dæg	dic	dei	dik	*daga->*Wgm dæg	dik

Table 7: Phonological environments of Anglo-Frisian Palatalization

	Old English		Old Frisian		Proto-Germanic	
/_rV$_{[high,front]}$	grimm	cræft	grim	kreft	*grem-	*kraft
/_lV$_{[high,front]}$	glisian	clēofan	glisa	klibje	*glis-	*kleuban
/l_	gealga, galga	folc	galga	folk	*galgōn	*fulka-
/r_	sorg	forca	soarch	foarke	*surgō	<Lat furka

Table 8: Phonological environments of Anglo-Frisian without Palatalization

4.2 Old Saxon

Palatalization was restricted to g>j and k>c immediately before front vowels Most of the k either assibilated (e.g, Schleswig-Holstein *zind* 'child', Eastphalian *server* 'beetle' Lasch 1914) or underwent a change back to the velar place of articulation around. Orthographic evidence places the change of palatal segments to velar segments around 1250 ad .
The diminuitive suffix found in OS **beetkin* is a flash point for palatalization. Assibilated reflexes have a wide geographical reach past the palatlizating regions of ELG.

- Change could have been from a phonetically uniform change of k>t^{j}/_i (Van der Hoek 2010)
- Change could have been tk>t^{j} Lasch

Plautdietsch is problematic for the phonetic uniformity hypothesis as recent loan words show cluster simplification as proposed by Lasch (c.f, Plaut *Pe(t)klatje* 'washer (hardware)'<Polish *podkładka*).
More western Pomeranian varieties may also be problematic as they show assibilated reflexes of /t/, but not of the velar (c.f, Pomm *bitzke*)

4.3 Summary

- Inheritance can explain why the typologically rare g>j is wide spread over a wide geographic area
- Inheritance cannot explain "jumping palatalization", Posen secondary palatalization, or geographical restriction of common outcomes of palatalization.

- Diminuitive suffix might be an important clue, but it is difficult to say what its contribution in any argument for or against inheritance of palatalization should be.

5 Contact Scenario

According to this scenario, palatalization would have been the result of contact with Slavic speakers. Western varieties of Low German would be more conservative than ELG as both would have lost palatal segments and ELG would have introduced it later via sound change. Common x-linguistic sound change triggered by contact has been noted before by Thomason in the Yimas-Alamblack-Enga Sprachbund of Paupa New Guinea (2001).
ELG speakers would have been in contact with Kashubian and Polish, both of which have contrastive palatalization and morphophonemic palatalization.

Social Evidence

- Kashubian speakers (in northern Poland) started gradually shifting to Low German in 1772 (First Partition of Poland)-1945 (Toby 2000). Even led to use of non-finite verbs in subordinate clauses. (Corbett 2002:785)
- Polish-Low German bilinguals in East and West Prussia in 1800-1900s (Stade 1908)
- In the early 20th century, there are anticdotes of "mistaken identity" in which Polish speakers identify Low German speakers as Kashubians (Koerth 1913). [1]

Phonetic and Phonological Gateways

- Robust Palatal Inventories
- Automatic Palatalization: Palatalization that will not skip segments, but rather bleed through to word boundaries (c.f, Polish *zły* 'bad' *źle* 'badly')
- Morphophonemic palatalization
- Polish e>o and ě>a before hard dentals (Stieber 1973:37)
- Some South Slavic languages which only have velarized l in native words will replace alveolar l from loan words with the sequence lj (Greenberg: 2000)

Models of Language Change
Labove (2007), Haugen (1950), Thomason (2001)

- Labove 2007: Complex patterns can be learned and applied improperly by new populations
- Haugen 1950: Bilinguals and improper learning are key in contact enduced language change, especially when improper learning starts to be taken as the norm.
- Thomason 2001: Proposes a 4 stage contact scale. High structural borrowing, like that of Kashubian building syntactic constructions off of a German model, must be at least stage 3 if not higher. Phonetic and phonological changes are lower on the scale.

[1] Die Pole nennt die Plautdietsch redene Bewohner unserer Provinz Kaschuben! (Koerth 1913: 275)

5.1 Conclusion

There is strong evidence of language contact between speakers of Slavic languages and speakers of Germanic languages in the ELG region that support a contact scenario. Possible gateways for this change could have been either phonetic or phonological in nature, but then one must pinpoint why it is that these changes only effected the velar set of consonants and not others. Some changes, such as ø>jɔ and a>ja might be easily explained away by contact, but others such as the segments l and r triggering palatalization might be more difficult to ground.

6 Conclusion

Palatalization is a complex process and can involve multiple triggers and targets. Whenever assessing the origin of a type of change like this, one must take into consideration typological, geographical, and social evidence in addition to Occam's Razor.
In the context of ELG, palatalization is due to inheritance, contact, and possibly endogenous change.