

Identifying Old High German dialects

One of the most challenging things in chapter 4 is learning to identify the regional characteristics of OHG texts. The book gives an overview of how to do this on pp. 138-139 and elsewhere. The simplest approach is to use the consonants and look for the other features discussed there, like *he* for *er*, umlaut in blocking environments, etc.

First, to the consonants. The key here is to have the **points of reference** clear:

- For the **Second Sound Shift**, we're dealing with the earlier **voiceless stops** and unshifted forms look basically like English. No shift means Old Saxon for our purposes. Some shift indicates central and East Franconian is like modern German except that C+p forms show pf, like *helpfan*, *dorpf*. More shift than the standard language here means Bavarian or Alemannic, illustrated by a few forms here:

English	German	Upper German	
path	Pfad	Pfad	Central dialects show no shift, so <i>pad</i> .
tell	zählen	zählen	
can	können	chönnen	
work	Werk	Werch	The environment is consonant + k .
thorp	Dorf	Dorf	Central dialects show partial shift, <i>dorpf</i> .

That is, English and German provide points of reference for two degrees of shift. If you have any shift beyond what English has, like *Herz* instead of *heart*, the text is at least central. If you have more shift than standard German, like a *ch/x* that corresponds to a German *k*, it's southern.

- For the **Medienverschiebung**, we're dealing with the earlier **voiced stops** and unshifted forms look like English. German today shows shift of *d > t* (*trinken* vs. English *drink* and parallel forms in Dutch and Low German), but not of *b > p* or *g > k*. If you see a *k* or *p* that corresponds to German *g* or *b*, like *gib* written as *kip*, you have a southern text.
- Finally, for **θ > d**, the key point is less regional than chronological. Early texts from the south can show fricative spellings and the change in spelling (with some presumed connection to the sound change) works its way northward by 1000 or so. If you see 'th' or similar spellings and southern characteristics, this suggests an early text.

Use the consonants to make a hypothesis about what region (and period) we have. Then look to the longer list of features to support that and maybe make the identification more precise.