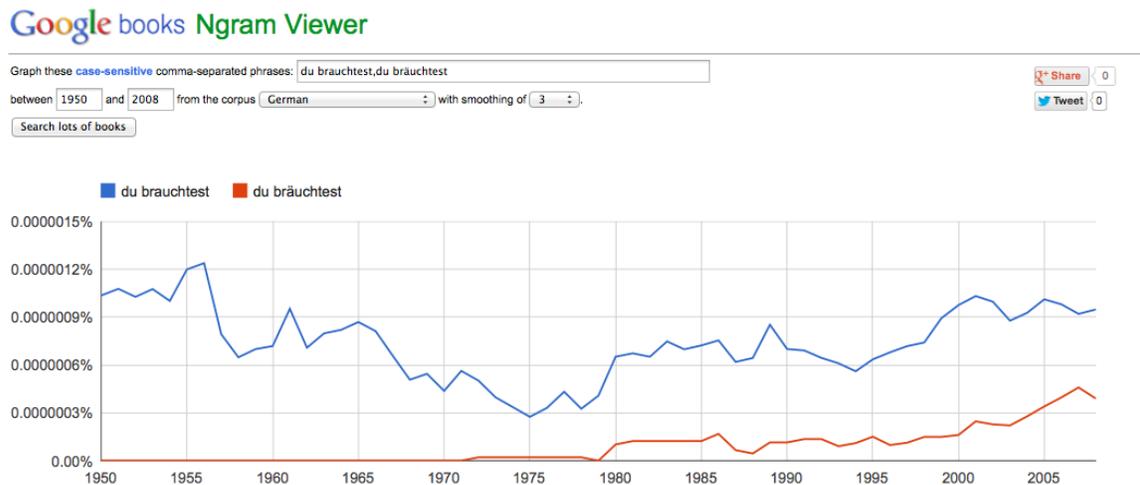


## Change in written German over time: Google Ngram Viewer

This chapter argues that standardization has hardly stopped history in its tracks. In fact, there's a tremendous amount of variation and change in German over recent times. It's now easy to measure such patterns. One of the easiest (and most addictive, I confess) is to track patterns in German-language books using Google Ngram Viewer, <http://books.google.com/ngrams/>. If you go there and set 'corpus' to German, you can compare frequencies of variants.

For example, we've talked about the apparent rise in unmlauted forms of *brauchen* in recent time. The picture below shows a search comparing two competing forms:



This strongly supports the notion that unmlauted forms are increasing over time. Note that I've search only since 1950 and chosen a form of the verb that's likely to be used more colloquially (2SG), but the numbers are skewed naturally because *brauchtest* can be a simple past form. What may be surprising to some is that the unmlauted forms are so common in books — the form is considered normal spoken German by many, but the written language has been slower to change, probably moreso with books than newspapers (let alone Facebook).

In the book, you have lots of instances of possible change in progress or social and regional variation, including not just words but things like these:

### Phonetics/phonology:

- Coronalization: ich / isch [ɪɕ]
- Centralization: nicht / nücht

### Morphology:

- Gender assignment: der / die / das Joghurt

### Syntax

- Word order: Verb final with *weil*

Here's the assignment:

- Choose some pattern of suspected variation and/or change and check the competing forms in Ngram Viewer.
- Formulate some searches so that you get a clean comparison (e.g. by making sure the forms are parallel and avoiding ambiguous forms). Adjust search dates to focus on key time periods as needed.
- Describe the pattern you've found. For instance, in the above example, *bräuchtest* takes off in the late 1970s and rises pretty sharply in the new millennium.
- Describe what role the source of the data (printed books) is likely to play in the change.