

**M**ichael Schulte. *Grundfragen der Umlautphonemisierung: Eine strukturelle Analyse des nordgermanischen i/j-Umlauts unter Berücksichtigung der älteren Runeninschriften*. Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde 17. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998. 331 pages.

If Jacob Grimm, who coined the term *Umlaut* and was the first to describe the phenomenon covered by it, had been told that almost two centuries later scholars would still be struggling with the basics of this sound change, he would have been greatly surprised. The classroom examples are easy: cf. Gothic *fulljan*, Old English *fyllan* 'to fill' (*j* is lost, and, by way of compensation, *u* is fronted). And yet the solid facts concerning umlaut are depressingly few. The main difficulties are typical of all great sound changes. We have a neat formula: A is attended by B (in our case, the loss of a certain element in the postradical syllable influences the vowel in the root), but the formula is exploded in two directions. A can happen without B (the fronting element is preserved, but umlaut still occurs), and B does not necessarily cause A (the fronting element is lost, but umlaut does not happen). Also, in each Germanic language umlaut follows a pattern of its own.

Schulte mastered the enormous literature on umlaut, offered an exemplary analysis of his predecessors' solutions, and made every effort to clarify the situation in Old Norse and partly in West Germanic. Even from a technical point of view his work deserves the highest praise: the misprints are few and insignificant, the generalizing chronological tables are most useful, and the word index is a great help. Below I will briefly touch on two questions only, namely the phonologization of the products of umlaut in Scandinavian and the famous exception to the rule of umlaut in Old Icelandic, because it is for the sake of these questions that Schulte undertook his investigation.

Structural linguistics introduced a model known as the phonologization of an allophone. In its dogmatic form it goes back to

Twaddell. Its idea is simple. A form like *fulljan* was pronounced \*[fylljan], with [y] being an allophone of /u/ before /j/, but, when /j/ was lost, [y], no longer dependent on the factor that caused fronting, acquired phonemic status: [y] (an allophone of /u/) became /y/ (a phoneme). This model has a seemingly insurmountable logical flaw. The existence of front allophones is said to be due to the presence of *j* or *i*, but after the disappearance of *i/j* these allophones, for some reason, do not follow the front (semi)vowel, as they should have done by definition. The rise of the phoneme /y/ cannot be explained by the existence of the allophone [y], and, even if there was such an allophone, this is not the reason the phoneme /y/ came into being. Doubts concerning Twaddell's theory were voiced long ago, but they were not heard. In the fifties, positing allophones acquired grotesque dimensions: every time a new vowel or consonant sprang up in the system, enthusiastic scholars would reconstruct the corresponding allophone with the single purpose of letting it one day hatch a phoneme. Historical phonology became as predictable as Freudian literary criticism or modern feminist musicology. I have contributed in a small way to the discrediting of Twaddell's model and can state with satisfaction that it no longer enjoys the prestige it once did. Schulte, for example, has no faith in it.

One of Schulte's main theses is that the products of umlaut arose *before* the endings were lost. In a most painstaking way, he analyzes one runic inscription after another and shows that not the loss of postradical elements but their weakening (reduction) caused the new phonemes to emerge; hence the notorious gradualness of this sound change. It is hard to base any conclusions on the evidence of runic spellings. An instructive case is the much discussed form **-gestumr** from the Stenotoft inscription. It is a crown witness in all attempts to date umlaut in Scandinavian, but the line **niuhagestumr** should probably be read **niu hagestumr** = *niu ha(n)gestumr* < *\*hangistumz*, with **gestumr** having nothing to do with the word for "guest" or umlaut (76–82). Despite countless difficulties Schulte's examination of runic forms is so unbiased and fundamental that his opponents will hardly be able to destroy his

arguments. I believe that this is the most durable part of his book.

Another strong point of Schulte's reconstruction is his consistent differentiation between *i*- and *ī*-umlaut and between both of them and *j*-umlaut. One can perhaps go even further with this typology than Schulte does in his work. By Sievers's Law, we have such Gothic forms as *was-ji-þ* 'he dresses' and *wand-ei-þ* 'he turns' (*ei* designates *ī*), so *was-ji-þ* versus *wand-ī-þ*. The choice of the postradical element depends on the length of the preceding syllable: *ij* after a short (light) syllable, *ī* after a long (heavy) one, *ī* being really *ij*. So after all the transformations the opposition appears as *was-ji-þ* : *wand-ij-þ*. *\*Gastiz* (cf. Gothic *gasteis*) 'guests' (plural) was, by the same token, *\*gast-ij-z*, which means that umlaut in *gestir*, the Scandinavian reflex of *\*gastiz*, was indeed caused by *j*, and this circumstance allows us to juxtapose *j*- and *ī*-umlaut with *i*-umlaut despite the traditional grouping *i(j)*- versus *ī*-umlaut. This conclusion reinforces Schulte's findings. If new *e*, as in *gestir*, at any time differed from old *e* (the graphemes *æ* and *e* point in this direction), the opposition was supported by pairs like *gēstir* 'guests' : *nēstir* 'provider'. If, however, new *e* tended to merge with old *e* at once, the problem of its phonologization did not even arise. The evidence of Old High German is inconclusive, for OHG *gesti*, etc., were spelled with the same letter as *geban*. Other umlauted phonemes had no old vowels with which they could merge, and Schulte's reconstruction explains their development quite well.

In Old Scandinavian, some short-syllabic words resist umlaut. Thus *\*gastiz*, *\*bandilōz*, and *\*dōmiðō* became *gestr*, *bendlar*, and *dōmda*, whereas *\*staðiz*, *\*katilōz*, and *\*taliðō* became *staðr*, *katlar*, and *talða*. Contrariwise, *\*kunja*- displays umlaut: OI *kyn*. The formula is easy to detect: umlaut occurs after long syllables (*gast*-, *band*-, *dōm*-) but does not affect short ones (*stað*-, *kat*-, *tal*-). Schulte convincingly treats *\*kunj*- as a long syllable. He suggests that *\*kunja*- became *\*[kyni]* after the loss of *-a*, for, if at that stage it had been pronounced *\*[kuni]*, it would have shared the fate of *\*staði* and not undergone umlaut. Later *i* was lost in both *\*[kyni]* and *\*staði*, and syncope (apocope) yielded the recorded

forms *kyn* and *stað*. Schulte's relative chronology is acceptable, but it remains unclear how *[y]* in *\*[kyni]* attained phonemic status: *\*[kyni]*, we are repeatedly told, was *\*/kyni/*. Assuming that *j* in *\*kunja* was vocalized after the loss of *a* (this process of vocalization is called *saṃprasāraṇa*) and that *y* in *kyn* is the product of *j*- rather than of *i*-umlaut, we still have *[y]* only before a front vowel (*i*), to the exclusion of *[u]*. Attention to the gradual weakening of postradical vowels allowed Schulte to solve the paradox of Twaddell's model, but whatever happened to *i* in *\*[kyni]* could have no effect on *[y]* if it manifested the phoneme */y/*.

This is what Schulte says about *\*/bæði/*, a form of *\*baðja*- 'bed': "In letzter Konsequenz kann somit postuliert werden, daß der primäre *j*-Umlaut gerade durch den Eintritt von *saṃprasāraṇa* phonemisiert wird, zumal dieser Vorgang den Zusammenfall der Phoneme *\*/i/* und *\*/j/* in Endsilben nach sich zieht (Interimsstufe *\*kyni*, *\*bæði* versus *\*staði*)" (184). I do not quite understand "in letzter Konsequenz" and "zumal." Was the phonologization of *[y]* caused by the merger of *\*/i/* and *\*/j/* (and, if it was, then why?), or did it happen "in the final analysis . . . the more so because . . ."? On p. 185 a more definite formulation is offered: "Es drängt sich die Schlußfolgerung auf, daß der Übergang *\*kunja* > *\*kyni* mit dem Erlöschen des primären Umlautvorganges in direkter Beziehung steht. Auf dieser Zwischenstufe kommt es zur Verschmelzung von etymologischem, d.h. primärem *\*i* mit sekundärem *i* (<*\*j*); damit erlangt der *j*-Umlaut Phonemstatus." However interesting this idea (the phonologization of *[y]* as the result of the merger of *i* and *j*) may be, the mechanism of the phonologization, given the complementary distribution of *[y]* and *[u]*, remains undisclosed.

Schulte goes on to say (186) that *\*staði* and *\*taliðō* were not susceptible to umlaut because by the time of the syncope (apocope) of *a* in *\*kunja* postradical *i* had not yet started its way toward reduction. But later *i* did undergo weakening, yet *\*staði* never became *\*steð*. Why didn't it? The only answer is that when the syncope of *i* set in, *i*-umlaut had stopped being operative. This is more or less what is said on p. 187: "Dagegen führt die erst später eintretende *i*-Schwächung, die völlig

parallel und zeitgleich in *\*kyni* und *\*staði* (nebst *\*taliðð*) stattfindet, nicht mehr zur Phonemisierung. Durch den vorausgehenden Anschluß des *\*/j/* an */i/* hat */i/* seine Geltung als primärer Umlautfaktor verloren; *\*/j/* hat seine Umlautwirkung schon ausgeübt und damit eingebüßt. Im System wird unbetontes */i/* daher nicht mehr als Umlautfaktor anerkannt; der *i*-Umlaut ist auf dieser Stufe im Regelfall nicht mehr operativ." A sound change is not a river that can suddenly run dry, so one wonders why after the merger of */i/* and */j/* the product of this merger lost its ability to function as "a primary factor of umlaut" (= "a factor of primary umlaut") and why *\*staði* did not succumb to secondary umlaut.

Although Schulte realizes the fallacy of phonologized allophones, he believes in the existence of the so-called allophonic stage in the development of umlaut and reconstructs the form *\*[stæði]* for *\*staði*. It will again be better to let him speak for himself: "Nach seiner Vokalisierung und der damit gekoppelten Umlautphonemisierung schließt sich halbvokalisches *\*j* bestehenden kurzvokalischen *i*-Lauten im lautlichen System an. Der Umlautkontrast */æ/* : */a/* in *\*/bæði/* versus *\*/staði/* ist somit phonologisch und wird fortan aufrechterhalten. Die Entwicklung des phonematischen *i*-Umlauts in *\*/staði/* = *\*[stæði]* wird durch das Aufkommen des neuen Typus *\*/bæði/* = *\*[bæði]* regelrecht unterbunden. In der Tat kommt es auf dieser Stufe durch Einfluß der *ja*-Stämme zu einer Reversion der subphonematischen Umlautwerte: *\*/staði/* = *\*[stæði]*  $\Rightarrow$  *[staði]* und *\*/taliðð/* = *\*[tæliðð]*  $\Rightarrow$  *\*[taliðð]*" (184). But if *\*staði* was indeed *\*[stæði]*, the emergence of *\*bæði* should, I think, have had the effect opposite to what Schulte postulates: supported by *\*/bæði/*, *\*[stæði]* should probably have been understood as *\*/stæði/*! Schulte makes *\*[stæði]* revert to *\*[staði]*, to maintain the old contrast. Allophones are nothing more than realizations of a phoneme in a given phonetic context. If *\*[stæði]* had ever existed, it would not have had the power to become *\*[staði]*: only *\*/stæði/* consists of elements that can be changed by analogy, replaced, and so forth.

In his survey, Schulte shows how one scholar after another attempted to explain the difference between *dómda* (with umlaut)

and *talða* (without umlaut) by setting up different syllable boundaries, special junctures, and the like. These efforts, based on ad hoc preconditions, could not bear fruit (for the reasoning has always been circular), but it may be that they were not entirely misdirected. Even the earliest Germanic, as we know it, disallowed notional words of the CV̆ type. It follows that, contrary to what our manuals say, *\*staði* and *\*taliðð* were never syllabified *\*sta-ði*, *\*ta-li-ðð*. Syllables should be pronounceable, and *sta-*, *ta-* were not. (It is curious how little influence this truism first formulated by Kuryłowicz has had on Germanic studies.) The locus of all prosodic changes in Old Germanic was a trimoric complex (let us remember *\*kunj-a!*), and the opposition was between, for example, *\*tali-ðð* and *\*dōm-iðð*. The weakening and eventual loss of *i* in *\*dōm-iðð* did not affect the integrity of the complex *dōm*, while the same process in *\*tali-ðð* ruined its "home" (from the prosodic point of view *\*dōm-iðð* became *dóm-da* whereas *\*tali-ðð* became *talð-a*). It appears that the reduction and loss of *i* was compensated for only in "undamaged" structures. When *i* belonged to the initially indivisible group, it did not cause umlaut, or, to put it differently, umlaut needed an agent external to the prosodic structure in which it occurred. Apparently, *j* and *ī* (= *ij*) did not obey this rule. It remains to explain why this rule existed, which is not easier to do than for a mouse to bell a cat.

Schulte touches on every aspect of umlaut, and each section displays his deep understanding of his material. Of necessity, I had to leave many important questions (secondary umlaut, *R*-umlaut, etc.) undiscussed. The book, taken as a whole, all quibbling apart, is an example of first-rate scholarship. It has significantly advanced our knowledge of what is arguably the most difficult problem of Germanic historical phonetics.

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