Writing Systems in Comparison: German, Dutch, English

Nanna Fuhrhop (Potsdam)
Niklas Reinken (Leipzig)
Reena Poeschel (Potsdam)
Torsten Leuschner (Gent/QMUL)

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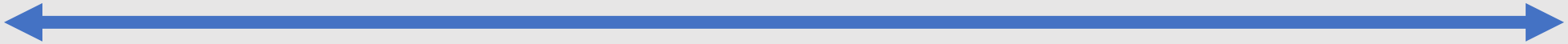
‘Deep’ vs. ‘flat’ writing systems

Dutch	**German**	**English**
‹rende›	‹rannte›	‹rough›
[rɛn.də]	[ran.tə]	[ɹʌf]
‘run.PST’	‘run.PST’	



flat
phonographic

deep

- Traditionally: the flatter, the closer to the ideal of 1:1 phoneme grapheme correspondence; the deeper, the less phonographic correspondence (due to conflicting writing principles and historic developments)
- Is there another definition of deep and flat? Is German ‘flatter’ than English?

e.g. Meisenburg (1998), Frost, Katz & Bentin (1987), Caravolas (2005), Buetler et al. (2014)

Phenomena & writing strategies in comparison

1. How to show vowel quantity:

1.1 lax

1.2 tense

2. How to show syllable boundaries?

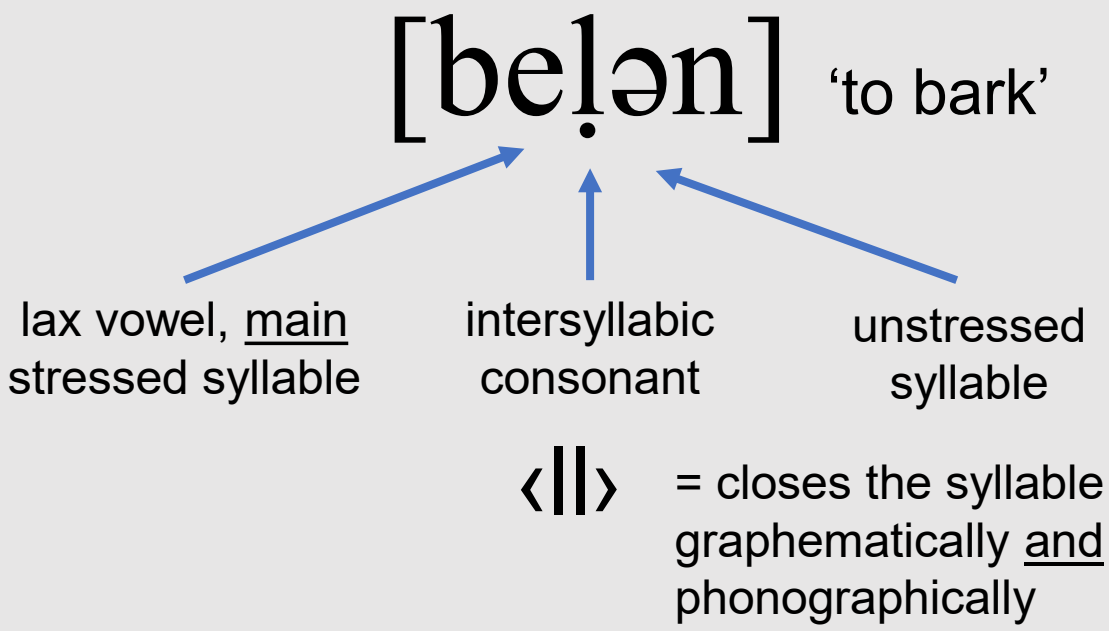
3. Morphological principles – how to show lexical and grammatical information?

1.1 Lax vowel > double consonants

a. **German**: *schrubben, bellen, kämmen, trennen, kippen, knurren, küssen, retten*

b. **Dutch**: *tobben, redden, blaffen, leggen, bakken, hollen, trimmen, rennen, morren, gissen, pletten*

c. **English**: *robbing, kidding, sniffing, begging, calling, humming, banning, stepping, stirring, kissing, chatting, buzzing*



Digraphs and Trigraphs such as ‹sh, sch› are not doubled.

‹tz› in German for *zz, ‹ck› in German and English for *kk

Fuhrhop (2020: 96)

1.1 Double consonants in mono-syllabic words

	one consonantal letter	two consonantal letters	
German		*jobb-t, klaff-t, knall-t, schwimm-t, renn-t, schnapp-t, knurr-t, küss-t*	> stem constancy, morphological principle
Dutch	*kis-t, cros-t, bel-t, blaf-t, bak-t, ren-t, zwem-t*		> 1:1 correspondence, phonographic principle
English	*rob, nod, beg, hum, ban, stir, stop, chat*	*call, sniff, buzz, kiss*	> middle ground

1.1.1 Double consonants after a syllable that does not carry the main stress

German	*Potsdam – der Potsdamer, Rotterdam – der Rotterdamer* *Hindernis – Hindernisse, Kenntnis – Kenntnisse, Zirkus – Zirkusse*
Dutch	*Rotterdam – de Rotterdammer, Amsterdam – de Amsterdammer* *fruniken, grinniken, haviken, kanunniken*
English	*to benefit – benefitted* (BrE) *vs. benefited* (AmE) *to travel – travelled* (BrE) *vs. traveled* (AmE) *to cancel – cancelled* (BrE) *vs. canceled* (AmE)

1.2 Showing tense vowels

Strategy	German	Dutch	English
Graphematic syllable structure: - open syllable > tense vowel - closed syllable > lax vowel **> no extra indication**	! *Los, Huf*		
Doubling of the vowel letter	*Boot, Beet, Aal*	*huren > huurt*	*roof, seek* *! book, good*
Digraphs	‹ie› *tief*	‹oe eu ie› *boek, deur, fiets*	‹ea ou› *seat, wound*
Lengthening ‹h› **(stems ending with ‹l m n r›)**	*Wahl, Lehm,* *Rohr, Bahn*	–	–

1.2.1 Tense vowels and graphematic bisyllabicity

‹Lob›
[loːp]
‚praise'

‹Lobes›
[loː.bəs]
‚of praise'

In this cases, bisyllabicity shows that the first syllable is an open one and thus, it is probably tense.

Syllable openers

‹fat›
[fæt]

‹fate›
[feit]

In English, the silent <e> does something similar (with an additional vowel quality change).

	checked (lax)		vs.	free (tense)	
<a>	/æ/	*'fat'*		/ei/	*'fate'*
<e>	/ɛ/	*'pet'*		/iː/	*'Pete'*
<i>	/ɪ/	*'tin'*		/aɪ/	*'tine'*
<o>	/ɒ/	*'lob'*		/əʊ/	*'lobe'*
<u>	/ʌ/	*'run'*		/uː/	*'rune'*

Cook (2004: 60), Schmidt (2018), Fuhrhop, Leuschner, Poeschel & Reinken (in prep.)

2. Two vowels next to each other

	one syllable	syllable border	explicit marking of second syllable
Dutch	*geit, ruim, baud, boud*	*beantwoorden, gearresteerd …*	**diaresis:** *geïnd, ruïne, geüniformiseerd, coöperatie, officiële, creëert … *geärresteerd*
German	*Preis, Haus, feucht*	*beachten, beerben, beirren, beobachten …*	**syllable initial ‹h›:** *nahe, Ruhe, Mühe, ziehen … *bauhen, *teuher*
English	*gain, pound*	*doable*	**syllable opening ‹a›:** boat, meat, coat, peat

Syllable openers

Graphematic diphthongs with ‹a› as a second part correspond to the syllable opening strategy in English:

met – meat – mete
vial – vile
cot – coat – cote
pet – peat – Pete …

3. Morpheme constancy

	Dutch	English	German
stem constancy	‹leven› – ‹leeft›	‹leaf› – ‹leaves›	‹Lob› – ‹Lobes›
	[levən]– [left]	[li:f] – [li:vz]	[lo:p] – [lo:.bəs]
	flat	**flat**	**deep**

	one consonantal letter	two consonantal letters	
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The ‚depth' of writing systems

	Dutch	German	English
Double consonants in monosyllabic words	flat	deep	middle
Showing tense vowels	flat	deep	middle
Syllable openers	flat	middle	deep
morpheme constancy *double consonants in monosillabic forms* *final devoicing*	flat	deep	middle flat

Writer-orientation vs. reader-orientation

Keeping the morphological structure visible – to the point of abandoning the phonographic principle – facilitates the reading and the identification of lexemes but aggravate the writing.

cf. also Schmalz, Marinus, Coltheart & Castles (2015)

Literature & Sources

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Many thanks for your attention
and for any questions or comments!

Otherwise, just enjoy the coffee break

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