[R] in Germanic Dialects—Tradition or Innovation?

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"ain hundts buchstab, wann er zornig die zene blickt und nerret,
so die zung kraus zittert." [1]

0. ABSTRACT The quality of [R] in Germanic dialects is one of the most discussed phonological topics in Historical Linguistics, circling around one main question: Was it front or back? Scholars have proposed a back sound arisen through foreign influence as well as a native uvular trill. In this paper, I offer a comparative survey of the available literature, from the earliest superficial comments to modern in-depth dialect analysis, providing a synthesis of the arguments that have been proposed over time. Though no definite answer can ever be found, I provide what I regard to be a plausible answer as the outcome of the research that underlies this essay.

1. INTRODUCTION

The realisation of /r/ varies a lot among the Germanic (Gmc) languages of today:

Alveolar trill / tap	[r] / ([ɾ])	Afrikaans, Faroese, Frisian, Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish
Uvular trill / fricative	[ʀ] / [ʁ]	Danish, German
Approximants (alveolar / retroflex)	[ɹ] / [ɻ]	British English, American English

TABLE 1: **The various realisations of /r/ in Gmc languages based on Erickson (2002: 183f)** [2]

[1] Valentin Ickelsamer Teutsche Grammatica, 1534? [='the sound of a dog, when it furiously bares its teeth and snarls, thus the curly tongue trembles.'], possibly the earliest attempt of a phonetic description of German /r/ (Runge 1974). Translations are given either in footnotes in single inverted commas, or after a block quote in square brackets and single inverted commas.

[2] Some languages like Dutch, German, Norwegian and Swedish have both coronal and uvular realisations.

The most common realisation among Gmc languages is the alveolar trill or tap, even if it only occurs dialectally in some (e.g. Scots English, Bavarian German). This widespread occurrence may lead us to believe that /r/ must originally have been a coronal trill. In this view, however, the question arises where uvular /r/ came from, and scholars have addressed this question extensively.

This paper is the product of my research in which I addressed a question still prevailing in the study of Gmc dialects in general: What was the original realisation of /r/? This is one of the topics of historical phonology that scholars are most unsure about and a lot of study has been devoted to it.

It is the traditional and most commonly accepted view, held by most grammarians of early Gmc dialects, that /r/ is an alveolar trill, or at least as an apical sound, while non-trill articulations such as the Modern English retroflex approximant or the German velar fricative are considered to be innovatory. This view is largely based on the North/West Germanic Rhotacism, which caused [z] and [r] to fall together. This development also occurs in other Indo-European languages leading to a coronal pronunciation (Howell 1987: 328), and Gmc is thought to have been no exception.

This view has been challenged by a number of scholars, who instead proposed a back pronunciation for early Gmc /r/, based on early linguists' descriptions and on the effect of /r/ on preceding vowels:

> For some writers, retroflex articulation is assumed before consonants (Wright & Wright, 1925, Sweet, 1957); for others, throughout (e.g. Brunner, 1965: 146, who says it was "wahrscheinlich cerebral,"[3] because "Nur so erklärt sich nämlich phonetisch die Brechung vor r"[4]).' (Lass, 1983: 70)

I present here a survey of key theories and claims, and compare the authors' arguments and evidence. Lass (1983: 82) is one of the proponents of back /r/ in Gmc and early Old English, offering a phonological study of the vowels in context of /r/. His claim is that

> alveolar trills, alveolar taps, uvular fricatives and approximants, retroflex fricatives and approximants, and all non-coarticulated varieties of /r/ ought to be considered post-16th-century innovations, and the American pharyngealised velar approximant should be regarded as the most likely candidate for the 'primitive type' of English.

Runge (1974: 85), a main proponent of the 'common effect' theory in support of uvular /r/ (see below), argues that

> the lowering and backing of preceding vowels indicates a retracted pronunciation of [/r, h, l, w/].

[3] 'probably retroflex'

[4] 'Only then can the breaking before r be explained phonetically'

Howell (1987: 342) and Kostakis (2007) both argue for the traditional view in support of coronal /r/, but differ in their explanation as to how uvular /r/ evolved in the Gmc languages. Howell argues for an apical /r/, as it

> squares better with the evidence provided by the North/West Germanic rhotacism, various r metatheses, and the development of epenthetic vowels between r and adjacent consonants,

though he admits that 'it is not really possible to prove in an absolute sense that original PGmc[5] /*r/ was not uvular'. He regards uvular /r/ as an 'internal Germanic development', where weakening and vocalisation of /r/ led to uvular variants, processes which could have started 'at any time'. In Howell's view,

> direct evidence (e.g. rhotacism) must be more highly valued than indirect evidence (e.g. vowel lowering before r) unless it can be demonstrated that a specific r variant is consistently and exclusively responsible for a given effect on a preceding vowel. (1987: 342)

Kostakis (2007: 16) argues for a 'coronal place of articulation', mostly based on the common effect of /r/ with coronal sounds in the ON breaking process and on the 'highly improbable change from [r] to [r]'.

2. THE 'FRENCH INFLUENCE'-THEORY

If /r/ was not originally uvular, one must address the question how [r] has become such a widespread realisation of /r/ in modern Gmc dialects. A major theory, put forward by Moritz Trautmann (1880), is that uvular /r/ spread from Parisian French into German. He and his followers vehemently opposed the uvular pronunciation, regarding it as

> a foreign (in this case French) threat to what they considered to be the only correct, historical, Germanic pronunciation. (Runge, 1974: 7)

Their claim has largely been rejected by recent scholarship (Runge, 1974; Howell, 1987; Erickson, 2002), but has also found some followers (Chambers & Trudgill, 1998: 170ff; Kostakis, 2007). Howell rejects the theory as 'dubious and ultimately untestable', whereas Kostakis (2007: 1) supports it as such a city-to-city shift is a 'common means for a linguistic feature to diffuse geographically'.

Unfortunately, most of the evidence that early scholarship relied on is based on purely impressionistic descriptions made by non-linguists, and is thus open to interpretation and vulnerable to counter-arguments. In this chapter I first look at some literary evidence, before then proceeding to more scholarly evidence.

[5] Proto-Germanic

2.1 The Précieuses

The first major hypothesis about the evolution of uvular /r/ in German (Trautmann, 1880) assumes that French had a dental /r/ until the end of the 17th century. The first instance of a uvular /r/ that Trautmann finds is

> a scene from *Relation d'un voyage de France by Chapelle* (d. 1686), in which is described the 'parler gras' of a group of fashionable ladies later referred to as 'Précieuses' from Montpellier. (Runge, 1974: 11)

Trautmann refers to a dictionary, which defines 'grasseyement' as a rolling guttural sound. This guttural /r/ is supposed to have spread to most major French cities, and, according to his theory, was also adopted at that time by the German upper classes, who imitated the French court. Basilius (1942) extends this argument by claiming that the 25,000 Huguenots were the driving factors in this shift. They came to Berlin and other big cities at the end of the 17th century[6] after the revocation of the edict of Nantes and, being culturally 'far superior to the natives', became teachers, thus exerting strong influence on the pronunciation. This theory, however, has been disproved in Moulton (1952), Penzl (1961) and Runge (1974).

In what follows, I analyse some of their evidence for uvular /r/ occurring in German much earlier than assumed by Trautmann.

2.2 The Schnarrpeter

The first piece of evidence comes from Christian Weise's *Die drei ärgsten Erznarren* (1672), where a certain 'Schnarrpeter' is unlucky with women because he has a rasping, grating pronunciation, and therefore decides to have his tongue loosened. Runge (1974) cites two early dictionaries (Adelung, 1777 & Kempelen, 1791), which define 'Schnarren' as /r/ pronounced with the throat and the soft palate, respectively. Trautmann, who does consider this data, admits the /r/ in question was [r], but assumes it was considered a ridiculous mistake. Runge takes the fact that Schnarrpeter consulted a physician to have his pronunciation corrected as evidence that his /r/ was 'not merely an affectation or a mistake' (p. 14). He does, however, admit that these are very fragile grounds for making a general claim about the pronunciation of /r/ due to the unclear native origin and social position of Schnarrpeter, both of which could have affected his deviating pronunciation.

Unfortunately, both dictionaries cited are written a hundred years after the story and it is likely that rather than describing Schnarrpeter's they describe the contemporary pronunciation of /r/, which at that time was certainly [r]. It is unclear why neither scholar commented on this large time difference. An earlier and more striking example is described in the next section.

2.3 Jacob Böhme

William G. Moulton studied Jacob Böhme, who was a theologian born in 1575

[6] Trautmann's arguments are summarised in Runge (1974: 10f)

in Görlitz. Böhme analysed letters of the Lord's Prayer and inferred mystic meaning from them. Moulton (1952: 86) comments on Böhme's account of <r> as follows:

> 'Das Wort ERDEN stösset vom Hertzen [begins with a vowel], und fasset sich am hintern Theil über der Zungen, im hintern Gaumen [medio- or post-velar closure], und zittert [is trilled]: es braucht sich aber die Zunge [i.e., tongue tip] zu der ersten Sylben ER nicht; sondern sie schmäuzet sich in den untern Gaumen hinein [tongue tip is at bottom of mouth, not participating in the articulation], und verkreucht sich also vor einem Feinde [anticipation of mystic interpretation to follow].' Interpretation: uvular trill.

Moulton plausibly identifies the described sound as a uvular trill, though if we take the statement 'und zittert' (literally 'shivers') as metaphorically as 'und verkreucht sich vor dem Feinde' ('and hides from the enemy'), it could be argued that this describes a vocalised /r/ (see below). Either way, it is good proof for uvular /r/ being used in Bohemia 100 years before the suggested French influence.

2.4 Evidence in poetry

Rhymes can sometimes be used as evidence for the pronunciation of certain graphemes. Even though it could be argued that it is not clear whether a certain rhyme would have counted as a pure rhyme or an impure rhyme at the time of creation, it does allow us to get a good idea about the pronunciation. This is true especially when the rhyme is a consonant, as the consonant inventory of a language is normally more clearly defined than a vowel inventory, which has a lot of phonemes that are only slightly different to each other and can thus make up impure rhymes (e.g. [æ] and [ɛ] in English). In what follows, I will consider some poetic evidence for a uvular /r/ in English and German.

In his life of Becket[7], William Canterbury (1175) quotes Helewisia de Morville, speaking to her Norman husband:

> Huge de Morevile, ware, ware, ware
> Lithulf heth his swerd adrage!

The repetition of ware makes this little quote look like a piece of verse, which is probably meant to rhyme. If this is so, then the <r> in ware must be a velar fricative of some sort in order to rhyme with the [ʏ] in *adrage*. As French still had an apical trill [r] in the 12th century (Haden, 1955: 507f), this could be evidence that a velar /r/ was already existent in English at that time[8].

Penzl (1961) lists a few similar impure rhymes for /r/ in German, though he also cautions that 'if the rimes of a poetic text are obviously not pure, but

[7] *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, I, 128 (Rolls Series); quoted in Baugh & Cable (2002: 121)

[8] But see below for collaborative effects of /w/ and /r/

merely assonances, they can only be interpreted phonetically, not phonemically as indications of a merger.' (p. 489):

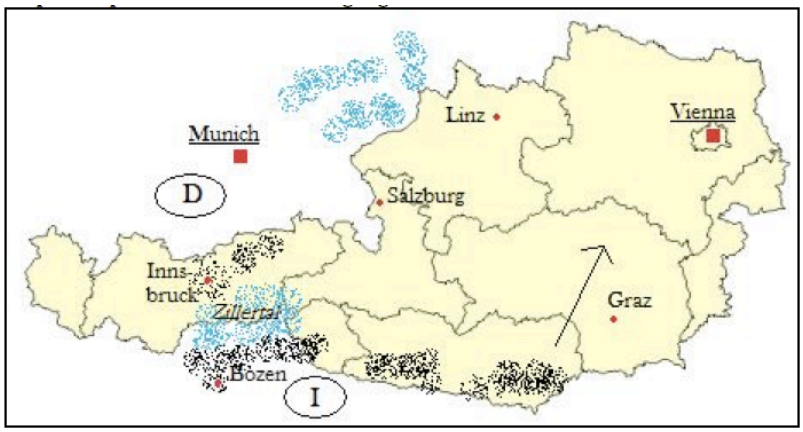
> The orthography cannot provide any evidence for the existence of both lingual and uvular r in early New High German and late Middle High German, but assonances and orthoepic evidence do. Such impure rimes as Oswald von Wolkenstein's (1377-1445) macht : kárt and Jakob Ayrer's (1543-1603) hart : anbracht can only be explained by uvular [r], possibly with some friction. (1961: 493)

Here is good evidence of an existing uvular /r/ long before the 17th century.

2.5 Dialect evidence

While the evidence from poetry above does not provide orthographic clues about the existence of [r], dialectal spelling evidence does. In this section I summarise the work of two dialectologists who studied the dialects in the Alp area in the first half of the 19th and 20th century, respectively. I have put their findings into Map A. The blue dotted areas show the orthographic evidence found by Weinhold (1867), while in the black dotted areas phonetic evidence has been found by Kranzmeyer (1956). The arrow shows the direction of uvular /r/ spreading northward, according to Kranzmeyer's observations. Major cities (>100,000 citizens) are shown by red markings.

MAP 1: **Map of Austria with areas highlighted where evidence of uvular /r/ has been found**



Karl Weinhold (1867) in his account of the Bavarian-Austrian dialect of the Zillertal found <r> spelled <rch> in the 14th century:

(**1**) *darch* 'der' [the][9]
warch 'war' [was]
Earchd 'Erde' [earth]
Wearchd 'Wert' [value]

[9] The dialect token is in italic, the Modern German form in single inverted commas and the translation in square brackets.

Schwearcht 'Schwert' [sword]
hearchn 'hören' [hear]
Wuercht 'Wort' [word]
diarch 'dir' [you]
Thürch 'Tür' [door]
niedarch 'nieder' [down]

For <rn> is found <gn>:

(**2**) *Huagn* 'Horn' [horn]
Zuagn 'Zorn' [fury]
zittagn 'zittern' [tremble]

In other areas such as the Rottal and the Upper Isar, only <ch> is found, which proves Trautmann (1880: 214) wrong when he says that "soweit ich wenigstens sehen kann, von einem wechsel von r mit g k ch h nirgends eine spur zu entdecken ist:"[10]

(**3**) *Eachd* 'Erde'
hâchd 'hart' [hard]
wâchdn 'warten' [wait]
Wiachd 'Wirt' [landlord]
fuchd 'fort' [away]

This data has been variously analysed. Runge (1974: 16f) for instance assumes that <r> was pronounced as a trill, as he says that in above 'the trill was lost entirely, leaving only "das tiefe ch"[11]'. The <g> in Huagn 'Horn' [horn] , Zuagn 'Zorn' [fury], zittagn 'zittern' [tremble] he sees as a 'voiced velar fricative parallel to voiceless ch followed by a voiceless sound'. Howell (1987) considers it evidence for /r/-vocalisation (see below).

Kranzmeyer (1956) documents [r] as occurring in the areas shaded black in Map A. The key point is that those areas are surrounded by areas where [r] is usual and are far removed from larger cities, rendering false the claim that [r] is associated with urban dialects. Crucially, the dialects in question are also considered to be very conservative ones, and thus unlikely to take on an innovation:

> Bei der allgemeinen Entwicklung wird immerhin wichtig, dass gerade die allerkonservativsten Binnenmundarten des Ötz- und Zillertales Zäpfchen-r bevorzugen.
>
> ['Regarding the general development, it is important to note that especially the most conservative interior dialects of the Ötztal and the Zillertal prefer uvular r.']

[10] 'at least as far as I can see, no trace of a confusion of <r> with <g>, <k> <ch> or <h> can be found anywhere'

[11] the low ch', i.e. [x]

Kranzmeyer assumes that [r] may have been the original pronunciation in most of the Bavarian dialects, with [r] being an innovation spread from neighbouring Slavic and Romanic dialects.

In this chapter I laid out evidence against the theory that uvular /r/ did not exist in Gmc dialects until the end of the 17th century, when it is claimed to have spread into German from French. This evidence gives ample proof that uvular /r/ did exist in Gmc dialects at least several centuries before the 17th century.

3. UVULAR /r/ AS AN INNER-GERMANIC SOUND

A more recent hypothesis regarding the origin of uvular /r/ in Gmc languages is that uvular /r/ arose internally rather than diffusing from an external language family. While most scholars now accept that uvular /r/ did already exist in the Middle Ages, discussion still goes on about what the exact realisation was. I will first present Lass's (1983: 80) suggestion that 'virtually all earlier English /r/' was a 'pharyngealised velar approximant'. I will then look at Howell's (1987) evaluation of this suggestion.

3.1 Original velar /r/

Lass (1983: 67) makes four main claims in his paper:

i. It is the same /r/ that is involved in all (or most) of the phonological processes that involve /r/.

ii. Despite the diversity of Modern English /r/-types, we can make a case for a single earlier value.

iii. There is only one kind of /r/ that could be implicated in at least the majority of the above phonological processes.

iv. In the development of /r/, what are traditionally taken to be 'innovations' could turn out to be 'archaisms' and vice versa.

Lass's conclusion is summarised in the table below.

Diphthongisation	by [u]-epenthesis. Either • Articulatory (velar V before velar C) or • Part acoustic (grave V before grave C) and part articulatory (high V before high C)
Retraction	Either • Articulatory (response to backness) • Acoustic (to gravity) Retraction of low vowels due specifically to pharyngeal constriction, as a low back vowel is pharyngeal
Raising	Response to tongue-body configuration

Lowering	Acoustic (response to the height of F_1)
Rounding	/r/ may have been rounded. If not, the low F_2/F_3 of a velar could elicit lip-rounding
Centralisation of /ɪ ɛ ʏ ɷ/	Cannot be entirely accounted for under this interpretation of /r/

TABLE 2: **Lass's accounts of the behaviour of the sounds involved in the selected sound changes (pp 81f)**

In what follows, I will analyse his evidence and look at some major arguments advanced by him and others for an original back value of /r/.

3.2 The 'common effect' hypothesis[12]

One of the main arguments for /r/ being a back sound is the fact that it has the same mutating effect on preceding vowels as sounds such as /x/, /l/ and /w/ and is thus often grouped together with these back sounds. This view was first put forward by Van Haeringen (1922: 253f), who assumed a strong bunching up of the back part of the tongue due to this grouping, though he only suggested a 'sterke velare bij-articulatie […] van oergerm. tijd'.[13]

Lass (1983) also argues for a velar component of /r/ in early English. The two sound changes where the 'common effect' approach plays a role are diphthongisation (also known as breaking) and retraction. /rC lC x/ trigger diphthongisation of preceding front vowels. Lass (1994) gives the following examples (p. 48):

(**4**) /-rC/: *bearn* 'child' (Go, OHG barn), *earm* 'arm' (Go *arms*, OIc *armr*).
/-lC/: *eald* 'old' (Go alþeis, OHG alt); *eall* 'all' (Go *alls*, OIc *allr*).
/-x/: *seah* 'he saw' (OHG sah); *eahta* 'eight' (Go *ahtau*, OHG *ahto*).

/r/ is grouped with back sounds here, which implies it may be velar or uvular.

Retraction is closely related to OE Breaking, appearing as an alternative to the above change:

> In allen Fällen, wo das urengl. æ vor sonst brechenden Konsonanten nicht zum historischen ea wurde, führte die Entwicklung zu a. (Luick, 1964, §144)
>
> ['In all cases where the early OE /æ/ did not change to the historical [ea] before normally breaking consonants, it developed into [ɑ]']

Lass claims this happens 'particularly before /r/', though he does not give any examples as proof. According to Luick, the environment of this sound change

[12] This term is taken from Howell (1987)

[13] 'strong velar co-articulation from early Gmc times'

is generally 'vor w, h, langem r und r+Kons., sowie vor langem l und l+Kons.'[14] A sound change in Anglian, where /æ/ retracts before back vowels and /lC/, is seen by Lass as a parallel change, and he argues that this implies backness of /r/. Though Lass quotes Luick, his thesis is not backed by him. The latter argues that /a/ is promoted by a preceding labial sound and appears especially in preterite forms like warð and warp, and may be due to analogy with forms such as halp (§146f). If this is the case, then /a/ may have originated in preterite forms and then spread to other words by analogy. In this view, the Anglian retraction cannot be seen as paralleling the West Saxon one.

Howell (1987: 320) rejects the 'common effect' argument in several ways. Firstly, he claims that 'the phonetic value of the reflexes of Proto-Germanic */x/ effecting vocalic mutation is very difficult to ascertain', which 'makes judgements about the phonetic value of r (…) uncertain.' His second objection is that uvular /r/ is no more likely to cause the lowerings and diphthongisations in Gmc languages than apical /r/. Howell's general objection to the 'common effect' approach and /r/ is this:

> Since r influence seems to be dependent more on the position of the conditioning r (e.g., in the syllable coda before a consonant) than on the point of articulation of the r, arguments that Gothic braking [sic], Old English breaking and the like indicate the presence of uvular r are not supportable. (1987: 342f)

In this section I described the common effect hypothesis of /r/. It has been shown that arguments both for and against it are plausible and it is thus hard to come to a conclusion whether it can be used as proof for the quality of /r/. In the next section I will look at another way in which /r/ interacts with other sounds to achieve a changing effect.

3.3 'Collaboration' with /w/

The change /wyr/ > /wur/ in some West Saxon texts is regarded by Lass as a 'collaboration' of /w/ and /r/ and thus another argument for a back /r/, as 'neither /r/ nor /w/ alone is enough to produce the change' (p. 73). Luick, however, regards the change as a 'w-influence', with not much importance assigned to /r/. Though the section in question is called 'Velarisierungen' ('velarisations'), Luick does not assume /r/ to have a velar quality, instead, he says that

> Diese Vorgänge setzen wohl voraus, dass r mit Lippenrundung gesprochen wurde, sei es, dass ihm die alte Rundung noch bis zu einem gewissen Grade anhaftete und um diese Zeit sich steigerte (was auch die Rundung des i vor r erklären würde) oder dass sie von dem w übertragen wurde.' (§286, Anm. 4)
>
> ['These developments presume that /r/ was pronounced with lip rounding, either because the older rounding was still present to some extent and

[14] 'before w, h, long r and rC, as well as long l and lC'

> increased around this time (which would also explain the rounding of /i/ before /r/) or because it spread from the /w/.']

In this light, it looks as if the 'collaboration' of /w/ and /r/ is not an argument for a velar /r/, but only for a rounded /r/, which does not exclude a coronal quality. Moreover, it could be argued that the change was merely a spelling change, as misspellings like swyrd, wyrðan and weorm are attested (Luick, §286, Anm. 1).

Lass further refers to evidence in Dobson (1968: §231) that the 17th century monophthongisation /ai/ > /ɛ:/ took place earlier before /r/ than in other environments:

> In the work of Robert Robinson (1619), according to Dobson, the ratio of monophthongal to diphthongal reflexes of /ai/ is 12:14 before /r/, but 1:20 before other consonants. If this is significant, it means that /r/ has an accelerating effect on the diffusion of monophthongisation across the lexicon: i.e. it is a 'preferred' point of entry to a (later generalised) process of /i/-loss. (Lass, 1983: 74)

This again does not allow us to make a judgement about the quality of /r/. It may as well be the retroflex /ɾ/, proposed by Erickson (2002), that leads to the '/i/-loss'. And in fact, Dobson assumes this to be the case, as he considers /r/ to have the 'ModE [r]' pronunciation (§231).

In the sections above I have looked at arguments mainly concerning English. It is hard to reach a definite conclusion regarding Lass's claims. They are plausible, but it is hard to prove or disprove a definite quality of /r/ based on his evidence, and it faces some counterevidence upon closer inspection. I will now leave the discussion of /r/ in English and turn to another Gmc dialect, Old Norse.

3.4 /r/ in Old Norse

In this section I address Runge's (1974) and Kostakis's (2007) hypotheses concerning the quality of /r/ in ON.

Runge (1974: 71f; 88) claims that there were two kinds of /r/ in ON. One was the 'original /r/' and the other the 'newly-formed /ř/ (a "trilled sibilant") from P-Gmc /z/', which entered the language through rhotacism. ON uniquely retains this new /ř/, as Gothic does not undergo rhotacism and 'West Germanic generally lost final /-z/'. Runge concludes that '/ř/ was a fronted sound', though the exact quality is debated among scholars, while the original /r/ was a [r]. A different runic symbol was assigned to each type of /r/, and the sounds later fell together, which

> indicates that they were similar in their phonetic features; however, the regularity in the usage of separate runes for these sounds for a long period of time proves that they did indeed differ phonemically. (1974: 86)

It is Runge's position that [r] and [r] did not necessarily fall together completely, but were regarded as one phoneme merely based on their manner of articulation. In his view, their common vibrancy feature served as the distinguishing characteristic, while the place of articulation became unimportant. He explains the present-day dialect situation in Scandinavia by saying that different dialects selected either the apical or the uvular trill (Runge, 1974: 88f).

Kostakis (2007) argues for a coronal /r/ in ON. As a follower of the 'French-influence' theory, he supports the claim that [r] spread from France into Denmark and northward from there. He claims to have found proof for an original apical /r/ in ON onglides:

> The first source of onglides comes from Germanic /e/, which underwent breaking, e > ea > (ia >) ja. These onglides are thus followed by a nucleic /a/. The second source is the one of direct interest here. These onglides come from the reflexes of Germanic eu. When followed by a non-coronal consonant, eu > iu > ju but when they were followed by a coronal consonant eu > iu > jo (Haugen 1976: 268; Voyles 1992: 103, 11-12). Because /r/ patterns with all the other coronal consonants in this change, we may deduce that /r/ in this context was indeed a coronal sound. (2007: 5)

He effectively uses a common effect approach to argue for a coronal /r/. This conclusion conflicts with Howell (1987), who argues against the relevance of the place of articulation of /r/ as regards its effect on preceding vowels, thereby denying the common effect hypothesis as evidence for a uvular /r/:

> The effect of r on preceding vowels does not […] appear to be so much dependent upon the place of articulation (uvular vs. apical) as it is on the manner of articulation (trilled vs. non-trilled).

Consequently, if we accept Howell's claim, we must also discard Kostakis's argument for a coronal /r/ in ON above.

No definite agreement has been reached in the question of ON /r/, but most scholars now accept that OE /r/ was coronal, in light of the continuous spread of uvular /r/ at the expense of coronal /r/ in modern Scandinavian languages.

If we admit that the original pronunciation of /r/ was coronal, we still have to explain how uvular /r/ came into modern Gmc dialects. A widely accepted theory is outlined in the next section.

3.5 The '/r/-vocalisation'-hypothesis

A number of scholars have admitted an early Gmc back value of /r/, but

suggest a vocalic realisation of /r/. A pharyngeal component is admitted, but rather than being a consonant, the realisation is thought to be closer to a low back vowel.

Howell (1987: 338) agrees with Lass's suggestion that 'the pharyngeal component is a very old property of Germanic /r/' (Lass, 1983: 89), stating that there is 'solid phonetic evidence in modern standard German and AmE (see Delattre, 1971)' for pharyngealisation and it also explains the lowering and retraction. He differs from Lass in saying that this pharyngealisation is 'a characteristic of the vowel /a/ (Delattre, 1971: 129), a common product of r vocalisation in Germanic' (1987: 338)[15].

He thus considers the pharyngeal realisation of /r/ overtly as a vocalic sound, while underlyingly the speaker still perceives it as a consonant. As evidence, he cites some dialect studies, such as Sjöstedt (1936), where uvular [ʀ] is shown to be gradually replacing [r] in order to 'strengthen vocalised variants of apical r which commonly develop before consonants and in word-final position' (Howell, 1987: 339).

Zhirmunskiĭ (1962: 378), who argues for uvular /r/ as a spontaneous development in German 'um das reduzierte und vokalisierte alveolare /r/ durch das akustisch nahstehende [ʀ] zu verdeutlichen'[16], also supports the vocalisation theory. He describes a case where in the Cologne area rural dialects word-finally have a vocalised <-r>, while the urban dialect has [ʀ] in this position, but inter-vocalically all dialects have [r]. According to Howell (1987: 340),

> The crucial fact regarding the distribution of [ʀ] versus [r] in dialects possessing both contextual variants is that the uvular *r* shows a strong tendency to develop in those positions where *r* is commonly vocalised (i.e., before a consonant, word-finally).

This would explain a peculiarity noted by Kranzmeyer (1956):

> In dieser geschlossenen Landschaft findet man zwar im allgemeinen Zungen-*r*, vor Zahnlaut und –*n* aber Zäpfchen-*r* oder daraus entsprungene andere Laute. Erwarten würde man aber genau das Gegenteil.[17]

This is mirrored in Sjöstedt (1936: 107; 129), who shows that apical /r/ in Swedish is most likely to vocalise before dentals. Howell (1987: 340f) summarises this as follows:

> If uvular r is viewed as a strengthened version of vocalised r then the distribution of r variants would seem to be quite normal.

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[15] Lass acknowledges that low-back vowels can be pharyngeal, but does not recognise vocalisation.

[16] In order to clarify the reduced and vocalised alveolar /r/via the acoustically closely related [ʀ]

[17] In this isolated area we generally find apical /r/, but before a dental sound and –n we have a uvular /r/ or sounds derived from that. We would, however, expect exactly the opposite.

Looking back at the poetic evidence in Evidence in poetry (Penzl) and the dialectal evidence in Dialect evidence (Weinhold), we find confirmation for the theory: the uvular variant always occurs in /r/-vocalisation positions, i.e. before dental plosives or –n, or word-finally. If uvular /r/ first developed in these positions, it is likely to then have spread into other positions by generalisation.

In view of the strong acoustic similarity between [r] and [R] on the one hand and vocalised /r/ and [r] (and even [ɹ]) on the other, it makes the hypothesis that uvular /r/ was a 'response to the weakening and vocalisation of *r*' very plausible as regards the question of the genesis of [r] in Gmc dialects.

4. CONCLUSION

In this essay I have surveyed the major lines of argument as regards the nature of /r/ in Gmc dialects. The most commonly accepted view that the original realisation was apical has been attacked by a number of scholars, who suggest a back quality for /r/. It has been seen that there are two main theories about the existence of uvular /r/ in Gmc: (1) that [r] spread into Gmc languages from French, and (2) that uvular /r/ arose from within Gmc dialects either as carried down from Proto-Indo European, or through vocalisation.

It has been shown that the 'French influence' theory faces ample counterevidence and is to be rejected. Uvular /r/ existed in German a long time before the 17th century, and even though the influence of the Parisian uvular /r/ may have played a role in the speed of the spread of uvular /r/ in German, it is not the cause for its genesis.

I then looked at theories proposing that uvular /r/ came from within Gmc. A number of scholars have tried to prove that [r] was the original realisation of /r/ in Gmc. While this is impossible to prove or disprove for certain, it does face some counterevidence which is difficult to overcome, and the preferred view remains that /r/ was coronal in Gmc. The most plausible explanation for the presence of uvular /r/ in Gmc dialects is that it arose through weakening and vocalisation of alveolar /r/. The acoustically similar [r] was then introduced to re-strengthen the reduced consonant position. This happened first before dental consonants and /n/ and in word-final position, and was then generalised in some dialects (e.g. German) to all positions, or is still in allophonic distribution, such as in Scandinavian languages and Austria.

5. REFERENCES

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