

Umlaut is not phonological in Swiss German (and neither is lowering)

1. Introduction

- (1) Question of theoretical status of umlaut is old, but not resolved yet (cp. e.g. Hermans & van Oostendorp 2008, Trommer 2009, Wiese 1996)
- (2) Umlaut as an argument pro rule ordering: (Kiparsky 1968: 178f): rule ordering in two dialects of north-eastern Switzerland

R1: umlaut	
R2: lowering of <i>o</i> to <i>ɔ</i> before coronals	
- (3) Adapted from Kiparsky (1986: 179)

Schaffhausen:	Plural		Singular (no umlaut)	
underlying rep.	<i>pokə</i>	<i>potə</i>	<i>pokə</i>	<i>potə</i>
R1 – umlaut	<i>pökə</i>	<i>pötə</i>	----	----
R2 – lowering	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	<i>pɔtə</i>
surface form	<i>pökə</i>	<i>pötə</i>	<i>pokə</i>	<i>pɔtə</i>

Kesswil:	Plural		Singular (no umlaut)	
underlying rep.	<i>pokə</i>	<i>potə</i>	<i>pokə</i>	<i>potə</i>
R2 – lowering	n.a.	<i>pɔtə</i>	n.a.	<i>pɔtə</i>
R1 – umlaut	<i>pökə</i>	<i>pötə</i>	----	----
surface form	<i>pökə</i>	<i>pötə</i>	<i>pokə</i>	<i>pɔtə</i>
- (4) Koutsoudas et al. (1974: 21ff): no rule-ordering necessary. Constraints on possible surface vowels solves the problem.
- (5) Missed point:
Neither lowering nor umlaut is phonological.

2. What is phonological?

- (6) Edges of any theory must be defined.
- (7) Phonological Process:
 - a) *Minimality Condition*: “Processes apply whenever the conditions that trigger them are satisfied.” (Kaye 1995: 290).
→ No exceptions
 - b) *Non-arbitrariness Principle*: “There is a direct relation between a phonological process and the context in which it occurs.” (Kaye et al. 1990:194)
→ local trigger
 - c) All phonological processes (but only those) are expressible in the theory.

3. Data

(8) Umlaut: nominal plural -Ø, -ɔ, -ə

a) <i>špa:s: ~ špe:s:</i>	'jest sg ~ pl'	
<i>so:n ~ sö:n</i>	'son sg ~ pl'	
<i>šɔ:f: ~ šö:f:</i>	'sheep sg ~ pl'	
<i>hunt ~ hünt</i>	'dog sg ~ pl'	
b) <i>plat: ~ plet:ɔ</i>	'leaf sg ~ pl'	
<i>holts ~ höltsɔ</i>	'wood (material) sg ~ pl'	
<i>xɔrn ~ xörnɔ</i>	'grain sg ~ pl'	
<i>štru:x ~ štrü:xɔ</i>	'shrub sg ~ pl'	
c) <i>fat:ɔ(r) ~ fet:ɔrə</i>	'father sg ~ pl'	
<i>t:ɔxtɔ(r) ~ t:öxtɔrə</i>	'daughter sg ~ pl'	
<i>muət:ɔ(r) ~ müət:ɔrə</i>	'mother sg ~ pl'	
d) <i>lep:t:ɔp: ~ lep:t:öp:/lep:t:ɔp:s</i>	'laptop sg ~ pl'	
e) <i>štunt ~ štunt</i>	'hour sg ~ pl'	dim.: <i>štüntli</i>
<i>ko:f ~ kö:fə</i>	'kid sg ~ pl'	dim.: <i>kö:fli</i>
<i>štrɔ:s: ~ štrö:s:ə</i>	'street sg ~ pl'	dim.: <i>štrö:s:li</i>
<i>xunt ~ xuntə</i>	'patron sg ~ pl'	dim.: <i>xüntli</i>
<i>sau ~ sauə</i>	'pig sg ~ pl'	dim.: <i>söili</i>

(9) Lowering:

a) before coronal			
<i>oraŋš</i>	'orange (adj)'	<i>ɔrtə</i>	'order'
<i>plos</i>	'only, just'	<i>hɔsə</i>	'trousers'
<i>oštə</i>	'east'	<i>p:ɔštə</i>	'to shop'
b) before non-coronal			
<i>rɔk:ə</i>	'rye'		
<i>t:rɔf:ə</i>	'hit-PastPart.'		
<i>nɔp:ə</i>	'knop'		
<i>ɔxs</i>	'ox'		

4. Discussion

- (10) Phonological processes are exceptionless (cf. (7a)) – umlaut and lowering are not (cf. (8a, c vs. e), (9a)).
- (11) Phonological processes are not arbitrary, but have a local trigger (cf. (7b)) – where is the trigger in (8a), what is the trigger in (8c, d), (9b)?
- (12) Phonological processes are expressible in the theory (cf. (7c)) – the change *au ~ ɔi* and lowering are not.

5. Conclusion

- (13) The examples are neither exceptionless, nor do we find a connection between the context and the process.
- (14) Umlaut is present in the language, and speakers are aware of it. It is, however, not phonological.
- (15) Lowering is not a process, but lexical items contain either *o* or *ɔ*.

6. References

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