

Lecture 2

SOUND CHANGES IN OLD ENGLISH

AN OUTLINE

- I. Mechanisms of linguistic change
- II. OE Vocalism
- III. OE consonant system

II. OE Vocalism

1) Qualitative changes:

- ◉ PG correspondences;
- ◉ Anglo-Frisian Brightening and Restoration of *a*;
- ◉ OE Breaking;
- ◉ Palatalisation;
- ◉ I-umlaut;
- ◉ U-umlaut, velar umlaut

2) Quantitative changes:

- ◉ Contraction
- ◉ Lengthening

III. OE consonant system

- 1) West Germanic germination of consonants
- 2) Palatalisation and assibilation
- 3) Voicing and devoicing of fricatives
- 4) Metathesis
- 5) Loss of consonants in some positions

◎ *All living languages undergo changes.*

◎ *What causes such changes?*

I. MECHANISMS OF LINGUISTIC CHANGE

- ⊙ geographic or climatic
- ⊙ biological or racial
- ⊙ fashion
- ⊙ minimization of effort
- ⊙ the influence of other languages
- ⊙ human inventions
- ⊙ changes in social culture and moral values

ALTERATIONS:

- ◉ *Qualitative // quantitative;*
- ◉ *Dependent // independent*

II. OLD ENGLISH VOCALISM

1) QUALITATIVE CHANGES

PG correspondences

- Gth. *ai* - OE *a*:
e.g. Gth. *stains* - OE *stan* (stone)
- Gth. *ei* - OE *i*:
e.g. Gth. *meins* - OE *min* (mine)
- Gth. *au*- OE *ea*:
- Gth. *eu* - OE *eo*:
- Gth. *iu* - OE *io*:

for greater understanding go to the chart on p. 12 [Иванова И.П., Чахоян Л.П., Беляева Т. М. Практикум по истории английского языка. - Спб., 2005]

ANGLO-FRISIAN BRIGHTENING (OR FIRST FRONTING)

- The Anglo-Frisian languages underwent a sound change in their development from Proto-Germanic by which the vowel **ā** was fronted to **ǣ**, unless followed by a nasal consonant (**n, m**).

Cf. OE mann and OE dæg

RESTORATION OF A OR RETRACTION

- Later in Old English, short /æ/ (and in some dialects long /æ:/ as well), was backed to /ɑ/ when there was a back vowel (**a, o, u**) in the following syllable.

Cf. *Dæg* and *dagas*

RESTORATION OF A OR RETRACTION

⊙ Nominative	dæġ	da <u>g</u> as
⊙ Accusative	dæġ	dæġ
⊙ Genitive	dæġes	daga
⊙ Dative	dæġe	da <u>g</u> um

For further references see pg. 76 //

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347 p.)*

OE BREAKING OR FRACTURE

- ⦿ it is **diphthongization** of short vowels before certain consonant clusters (*before r, l, h + consonant and before h final*).
- ⦿ It is vowels **a** and **e** that underwent fracture.

OE BREAKING OR FRACTURE

⊙ *Gth. kalds – WS ceald*

*For further references see **pg. 78-80** //*

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- It is mostly carried out in the **West Saxon and Kentish dialects** and
- **the Anglian dialects** have unbroken vowels
- *Cf. WS and Kentish ceald “cold” and the Anglian dialects cald*
- **Breaking produced a new set of vowels in OE = the short [ea] and [eo].**

PALATALISATION / PALATAL DIPHTHONGIZATION

- OE vowels also change under the influence of the initial **palatal consonants** ʒ [j], c [kʰ] and cluster sc [scʰ].
- As a result of palatalization the vowel [e] and [æ] are diphthongized. E.g.:

OE scÆmu > OE sceamu 'shame'

For further references see pg. 78-80 // Rastorguyeva T. A. A History of English. - M.: Vysšaja Škola, 2003. - 347 p.)

FRONT MUTATION OR I-UMLAUT

- It was a series of changes to vowels which took place when there was an i, ī or j in the following syllable.
- Subsequently, the i, ī or j disappeared, or changed to e.

tendency to a symmetrical arrangement of diphthongs in the vowel system, which was never fully realised at the phonemic level.

Palatal Mutation

§ 124. The OE tendency to positional vowel change is most apparent in the process termed "mutation". Mutation is the change of one vowel to another through the influence of a vowel in the succeeding syllable.

Table 4

Palatal Mutation

Change illustrated		Examples		
Vowels prior to palatal mutation	Mutated vowels	Gt or OE (without palatal mutation)	OE (palatal mutation)	NE
a o	c	Gt mats	mete	<i>meat</i>
a:		OE sala, Gt saljan	selian	<i>sale, sell</i>
a:	æ:	Gt sandjan	sendan	<i>send</i>
o		OE lār, Gt laisjan	lāran	<i>'teaching', 'teach'</i>
o	e	OE ān	āniȝ	<i>one, any</i>
o:		OE dohtor	dehter	<i>daughter (Nom. and Dat. sg)</i>
u	y	OE bōc	bēc	<i>book, books</i>
u:		OE dōm	dēman	<i>doom</i>
ca	y:	Gt gadōmjan	dēman	<i>deem</i>
eo		OE full	fyllan	<i>fill</i>
ea:	ie	Gt fulljan	fyllan	<i>fill</i>
eo:		OE mūs	mȳs	<i>mouse, mice</i>
eo:	ie:	OE eald	ieldra	<i>old, elder</i>
eo:		OE feor	fierra	<i>far, farther</i>
eo:		OE zelēafa	zelielan	<i>belief, believe</i>
eo:		Gt galaubjan	zelielan	<i>believe</i>
eo:		OE pēod	elpiedig <i>adj</i>	<i>'tribe', 'of a tribe'</i>

- Front mutation made considerable changes in the **pronunciation** of English.
- Examples of i-umlaut in Mod English: *food* and *feed*, *goose* and *geese*, *tooth* and *teeth*, *blood* and *bleed*, *man* and *men*.

i-umlaut led to the appearance of new vowels:

- ◉ [y] and [y:] arose from palatal mutation;
- ◉ Diphthongs [ie] and [ie:]
- ◉ *For further references see pg. 80-82 // Rastorguyeva T. A. *A History of English.* - M.: Vysšaja Škola, 2003. - 347 p.)*

VELAR UMLAUT

- It was the diphthongization caused by an unstressed back vowel (*u, o, a*) in the following syllable, when only a single consonant intervened.

VELAR UMLAUT

- ⊙ i > io hira > hiora (their)
- ⊙ e > eo hefon > heofon
- ⊙ a > ea saru > searu (armour)

⊙ *For further references see pg. 82 //*

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QUANTITATIVE CHANGES

- **Contraction**
- **Lengthening**

CONTRACTION

⊙ e/æ + h + vowel = ea

⊙ eo + h + vowel = eo

⊙ e.g. slæhan > slehan > sleaan
> slean

LENGTHENING

- Vowels were lengthened before the clusters *nd, ld, mb*
- Cf. *bindan* > *bīndan*
- *Cild* > *cīld* but *cildru* = *because the cluster is followed by another consonant*

- ◉ In classical Old English there were **seven long vowels** and **seven corresponding short vowels**.

l(:)

y (:)

u (:)

e(:)

o(:)

Æ(:) a(:)

OE CONSONANT SYSTEM

Perhaps the most obvious difference between Old English and present-day English is the existence in the former of **geminate consonants**.

- 1) **West Germanic germination of consonants**

- In all WG languages at an early stage of their independent history, most consonants were lengthened after a short vowel before [j]. This process is known as **WG germination or doubling of consonants**, the resulting long consonants are indicated by means of double letters:

e.g. fuljan > OE fylan.

- The change didn't affect the sonorant **[r]**,
e.g. OE *werian*;
- nor did it operate if the consonant was preceded by a long vowel
e.g. OE *demjan* - OE *deman*

PALATALISATION AND ASSIBILATION

- The process by which the velar consonant is fronted is called **palatalisation**
- The velar consonants [k, g, x, ɣ] were palatalized before a front vowel (e, i, y).

e.g. OE cild [k] was softened to [k'] as it stood before the front vowel [i].

- In a similar way, the cluster **sc**, as in *scip* (*ship*), became palatalized;
- By the 9th century, however, the new palatal stops had developed into the palato-alveolar affricates. The affricate development is usually called **assibilation**.

e.g. OE cild [k] was softened to [k'] at it stood before the front vowel [i]. in Late OE it may have reached the stage of [tʃ]

3) VOICING AND DEVOICING OF FRICATIVES

- In the meantime the PG set of voiceless fricatives [f, θ, x, s] was subjected to a new process of **voicing and devoicing**.
- In early OE they became or remained voiced **intervocally** (between vowels), sonorants and voiced consonants; they became or remained voiceless in other environments, namely, initially, finally and next to other voiceless consonants:

- e.g. OE *cweðan* [ð] between vowels and OE *cwæð* [θ] at the end of the word;
- OE Nom, Acc case - *wīf*, Gen - *wīfes*
- OE spelling does not distinguish between voiced and voiceless fricatives.

4) METATHESIS

- Metathesis is a phonetic change which consists in two sounds exchanging their places. It most frequently affects the consonant *r* and the vowel in the following words:

e.g. *pridda* > *pirda* (third).

5) LOSS OF CONSONANTS IN SOME POSITIONS

- Nasal consonants were lost before fricative consonants (h, f, s, p): in the process the preceding vowel was probably nasalized and lengthened.

e.g. Gt. fimf, OE fīf

- Palatal **3** is occasionally dropped before **d** and **n**, the preceding vowel is lengthened:

e.g. fri3nan > frīnan (ask)

OE CONSONANT SYSTEM

- ⦿ *For further references see pg. 85-90 //*
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