

1: Old English phonology - WikiVisually

Old English phonology is necessarily somewhat speculative since Old English is preserved only as a written language. Nevertheless, there is a very large corpus of the language, and the orthography apparently indicates phonological alternations quite faithfully, so it is not difficult to draw certain conclusions about the nature of Old English phonology.

Phonological history of English diphthongs Save English diphthongs have undergone many changes since the Old and Middle English periods. The sound changes discussed here involved at least one phoneme which historically was a diphthong. Old English Old English diphthongs could be short or long. Both kinds arose from sound changes occurring in Old English itself, although the long forms sometimes also developed from Proto-Germanic diphthongs. They were mostly of the height-harmonic type both elements at the same height with the second element further back than the first. The set of diphthongs that occurred depended on dialect and their exact pronunciation is in any case uncertain. Typical diphthongs are considered to have been as follows: In the transition from Old to Middle English , all of these diphthongs generally merged with monophthongs. Middle English Development of new diphthongs Although the Old English diphthongs merged into monophthongs, Middle English began to develop a new set of diphthongs , in which the second element was a high or. Many of these came about through vocalization of the palatal approximant or the labio-velar approximant which was sometimes from an earlier voiced velar fricative , an allophone of , when they followed a vowel. For a table showing the development of the Middle English diphthongs, see Middle English phonology diphthong equivalents. Veinâ€™vain merger Early Middle English had two separate diphthongs and. The vowel was typically represented orthographically with "ei" or "ey" and the vowel was typically represented orthographically with "ai" or "ay". These came to be merged , perhaps by the fourteenth century. Similarly, vein and vain borrowings from French were pronounced differently as and. After the merger, vein and vain were homophones , and way and day had the same vowel. The merged vowel was a diphthong, transcribed or. Later around the 17th century this diphthong would merge in most dialects with the monophthong of words like pane in the paneâ€™pain merger. Late Middle English The English of southeastern England around had seven diphthongs,[2] of which three ended in a front vowel: The spelling ew is ambiguous between and , and the spellings oi and oy are ambiguous between and. The most common words with ew pronounced were dew, few, hew, lewd, mew, newt, pewter, sew, shew show , shrew, shrewd and strew. Words in which was commonly used included boil, coin, destroy, join, moist, point, poison, soil, spoil, Troy, turmoil and voice, although there was significant variation. These diphthongs were as in tide, and as in house. By the end of the sixteenth century, the inventory of diphthongs was reduced as a result of several developments, all of which took place in the mid-to-late sixteenth century: For more on this, see paneâ€™pain merger , below. This would later rise to , merging with the vowel of toe; see toeâ€™tow merger , below. This left , , , and as the diphthongs of south-eastern England. This change did not occur in all dialects, however; see Yod-dropping. The diphthongs and of tide and house widened to and respectively. The diphthong merged into. The present-day pronunciations with in these oi words result from regional variants which had always had rather than , perhaps influenced by the spelling. Later developments In the 18th century or later, the monophthongs the products of the paneâ€™pain and toeâ€™tow mergers became diphthongal in standard English. This produced the vowels and. In modern-day RP, the starting point of the latter diphthong has become more centralized, and the vowel is commonly written. These occur in words like near, square and cure. Present-day RP, then, is normally analyzed as having eight diphthongs: General American does not have the centering diphthongs at least, not as independent phonemes. For more information see English phonology vowels. Variation in present-day English Long mid mergers The earliest stage of Early Modern English had a contrast between the long mid monophthongs as in pane and toe respectively and the diphthongs as in pain and tow respectively. In the vast majority of Modern English accents these have been merged, so that the pairs paneâ€™pain and toeâ€™tow are homophones. These mergers are grouped together by Wells[6] as the long mid mergers. Paneâ€™pain merger The paneâ€™pain merger is a merger of the long mid monophthong and the diphthong that occurs in most dialects of English. In the vast majority of Modern English accents the vowels

have been merged; whether the outcome is monophthongal or diphthongal depends on the accent. A distinction, with the pane words pronounced with and the pain words pronounced with , survived in Norfolk English into the 20th century. Trudgill describes the disappearance of this distinction in Norfolk, saying that "This disappearance was being effected by the gradual and variable transfer of lexical items from the set of to the set of as part of dedialectalisation process, the end-point of which will soon be a few speakers even today maintain a vestigial and variable distinction the complete merger of the two lexical sets under " the completion of a slow process of lexical diffusion. In accents that preserve the distinction, the phoneme is usually represented by the spellings ai, ay, ei and ey as in day, play, rain, pain, maid, rein, they etc.

2: Old-English Phonology

The phonological system of the Old English language underwent many changes during the period of its existence. These included a number of vowel shifts, and the palatalization of velar consonants in many positions. For historical developments prior to the Old English period, see Proto-Germanic language.

This took place in two types of contexts: This loss affected the plural of root nouns, e. All such nouns had long-syllable stems, and so all were without ending in the plural, with the plural marked only by i-mutation. Note that two-syllable nouns consisting of two short syllables were treated as if they had a single long syllable – a type of equivalence found elsewhere in the early Germanic languages, e. Hence, final high vowels are dropped. However, in a two-syllable noun consisting of a long first syllable, the length of the second syllable determines whether the high vowel is dropped. Examples all are neuter nouns: As a result, high-vowel loss must have occurred after i-mutation but before the loss of internal -i-j-, which occurred shortly after i-mutation. Word-medial Paradigm split also occurred medially as a result of high-vowel loss, e. However, syncope passes its usual limits in certain West Saxon verbal and adjectival forms, e. When both medial and final high-vowel loss can operate in a single word, medial but not final loss occurs: The former was affected by high-vowel loss, surfacing as -e when not deleted i. It is possible that loss of medial -j- occurred slightly earlier than loss of -ij-, and in particular before high-vowel loss. Gothic sibun heol o stor "hiding place, cover" cf. Gothic miluks liofast, leofast "you sg. A number of restrictions governed whether back mutation took place: Generally it only took place when a single consonant followed the vowel being broken. In the standard West Saxon dialect, back mutation only took place before labials f, b, w and liquids l, r. In the Anglian dialect, it took place before all consonants except c, g Anglian meodu "mead", eosol "donkey" vs. West Saxon medu, esol. In the Kentish dialect, it took place before all consonants Kentish breogo "price" vs. West Saxon, Anglian bregu, brego. Back mutation of a normally took place only in the Mercian subdialect of the Anglian dialect. Standard ealu "ale" is a borrowing from Mercian. Similar borrowings are poetic beadu "battle" and eafora "son, heir", cf. Gothic afar many poetic words were borrowed from Mercian. On the other hand, standard bealu "evil" arch. Anglian smoothing In the Anglian i. Mercian and Northumbrian dialects of Old English, a process called smoothing undid many of the effects of breaking.

3: Old English – History of the English Language

1 *Old English: Phonetics & Phonology History of the English Language* H. Littlefield, Ph.D. *Old English Phonology and Orthography* The Futhorc H h N n W w.

The syllable nucleus was always a vowel. Coda Sound changes Like Frisian , Old English underwent palatalization of the velar consonants and fronting of the open vowel to in certain cases. It also underwent vowel shifts that were not shared with Frisian: Diphthong height harmonization and breaking resulted in the unique Old English diphthongs io, ie, eo, ea. Palatalization yielded some Modern English word-pairs in which one word has a velar and the other has a palatal or postalveolar. Some of these were inherited from Old English drink and drench, day and dawn , while others have an unpalatalized form loaned from Old Norse skirt and shirt. Dialects Old English had four major dialect groups: Kentish , West Saxon , Mercian , and Northumbrian. Kentish and West Saxon were the dialects spoken south of a line approximately following the course of the River Thames: Kentish in the easternmost portion of that area and West Saxon everywhere else. Mercian was spoken in the middle part of the country, separated from the southern dialects by the Thames and from Northumbrian by the River Humber. Mercian and Northumbrian are often grouped together as "Anglian". The biggest differences occurred between West Saxon and the other groups. The differences occurred mostly in the front vowels, and particularly the diphthongs. However, Northumbrian was distinguished from the rest by much less palatalization. Forms in Modern English with hard and where a palatalized sound would be expected from Old English are due either to Northumbrian influence or to direct borrowing from Scandinavian. Note that, in fact, the lack of palatalization in Northumbrian was probably due to heavy Scandinavian influence. The further discussion concerns the differences between Anglian and West Saxon, with the understanding that Kentish, other than where noted, can be derived from Anglian by front-vowel merger. The primary differences were: Instead, i-umlaut of ea and rare eo is spelled e, and i-umlaut of io remains as io. Merger of eo and io long and short occurred early in West Saxon, but much later in Anglian. Many instances of diphthongs in Anglian, including the majority of cases caused by breaking, were turned back into monophthongs again by the process of "Anglian smoothing", which occurred before c, h, g, alone or preceded by r or l. This accounts for some of the most noticeable differences between standard i. For example, bury has its spelling derived from West Saxon and its pronunciation from Kentish see below.

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See Old English dialects. Origin of diphthongs Further information: These are examples of diphthongs inherited from Proto-Germanic: Back mutation changed i, e, and sometimes a to io, eo, and ea before a back vowel in the next syllable. Lowland British Celtic had velarization like Old and Modern Irish , which gives preceding vowels a back offglide, and this feature was loaned by language contact into Old English, resulting in backing diphthongs. It also underwent vowel shifts that were not shared with Frisian: Diphthong height harmonization and breaking resulted in the unique Old English diphthongs io, ie, eo, ea. Palatalization yielded some Modern English word-pairs in which one word has a velar and the other has a palatal or postalveolar. Some of these were inherited from Old English drink and drench, day and dawn , while others have an unpalatalized form loaned from Old Norse skirt and shirt. Dialects See also Phonological history of Old English dialects. Old English had four major dialect groups: West Saxon , Mercian , Northumbrian , and Kentish. West Saxon and Kentish occurred in the south, approximately to the south of the Thames river. Mercian constituted the middle section of the country, divided from the southern dialects by the Thames and from Northumbrian by the Humber river. In the south, the easternmost portion was Kentish and everywhere else was West Saxon. Mercian and Northumbrian are often grouped together as "Anglian". The biggest differences occurred between West Saxon and the other groups. The differences occurred mostly in the front vowels, and particularly the diphthongs. However, Northumbrian was distinguished from the rest by much less palatalization. Note that, in fact, the lack of palatalization in Northumbrian was probably due to heavy Scandinavian influence. The further discussion concerns the differences between Anglian and West Saxon, with the understanding that Kentish, other than where noted, can be derived from Anglian by front-vowel merger. The primary differences were: Instead, i-umlaut of ea and rare eo is spelled e, and i-umlaut of io remains as io. Merger of eo and io long and short occurred early in West Saxon, but much later in Anglian. Many instances of diphthongs in Anglian, including the majority of cases caused by breaking, were turned back into monophthongs again by the process of "Anglian smoothing", which occurred before c, h, g, alone or preceded by r or l. This accounts for some of the most noticeable differences between standard i. For example, bury has its spelling derived from West Saxon and its pronunciation from Kentish see below.

5: OLD ENGLISH MORPHOLOGY

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Think in terms of what this would mean for the Hearer. How might the English phonological system deal with such a change? One way the pronunciation of a language can change over time involves changes in how particular phonemes are pronounced but not in the number of phonemes. As with other language change, it is usually not clear how the change begins, but the prototypical phone for some phoneme starts to move. In the simplest case, this is all that happens. More often a change in one phoneme affects others. This is because the change may either make that phoneme more similar to another or open up a region in the phonetic space where there is no phone. In the former case, the changing phoneme may "push" another phoneme away as it comes close to it. In the latter case, the changing phoneme may "pull" another phoneme into the region where it used to be. Both kinds of changes favor the Hearer because they keep the phonemes as far apart as possible. These processes are best known from the history of vowel systems. The vowels of English have undergone several such changes and in some English dialects are undergoing them now. Sometimes a whole set of vowels will shift in the history of a language. Probably the most famous example of such a set of changes is the Great Vowel Shift of Middle English. For example, the vowel in words such as fine had been pronounced [i]; eventually it became the [ay] of Modern English. A quite striking set of changes is happening in some cities of the Northeast and the Midwest in the US for example, Rochester, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, and Milwaukee. You can read more about the Northern Cities Vowel Shift in this paper. The figure below diagrams the changes. The diagram shows what is happening in vowel space front vowels on the left. Each arrow indicates the direction of change for one phoneme. The phoneme label and example word appear in the position where the vowel started, that is, its position in General American. The end of each arrow shows where the vowel ends up in the cases where the shift has progressed the furthest. For example, the word cot following the shift is pronounced something like the word cat in General American. The order of the changes is indicated by the numbers. Different speakers, and to some extent different cities, can be seen as being currently at different points within the set of changes. For examples, for some speakers, only changes 1 and 2 might have taken place, whereas for others all of the changes might have taken place. There is also considerable variation, so we should not expect everybody in the Northern Cities to follow exactly this pattern. Incidentally a similar change has happened in other accents of the US Northeast, but it is normally confined to only some contexts, for example, in glad but not back. As the vowel moved higher, it also tended to become a front-to-central diphthong. The diagram shows the most extreme change; more moderate changes occurred within the speech of many speakers. Again this is an example of a change that seems to be occurring more generally in North America, though apparently only in some contexts, for example, in the word level. This is an example of a pushing relationship. This is also a change that seems to be happening more generally in North America, though again apparently only in some contexts, for example, in the word liver. Change in some contexts Allophones often emerge in the history of a language. Another possibility is that a phoneme will come to be pronounced differently in some contexts but not others. In other words, the realization rules for that phoneme change. Often the changes are examples of assimilation. Here are some examples from the history of English. Final unstressed vowels At several times in the history of English, final unstressed vowels have been dropped. Phoneme loss A further possibility is that two phonemes will merge as a result of change in one or the other or both. Obviously this can only happen when the difference between the two phonemes is not so significant in the language, that is, when the phonemes do not distinguish many words. Phoneme creation We saw in the last section how phonemes could be lost. Given what you know about allophones, how might the opposite process take place? That is, how might allophones of the same phoneme for example, [t] and [th] in English turn into separate phonemes? Phonemes are both lost and created, apparently with roughly the same frequency. If

phonemes can be lost, it stands to reason that they can also be created. Otherwise languages would tend to have fewer and fewer phonemes, making them more and more difficult for the Hearer. There are at least two ways that new phonemes can emerge in the history of a language. One way in which an allophone can turn into a phoneme results from the borrowing of words from another language in which that phone is a separate phoneme already. But following the Norman conquest of England in the 11th century, English borrowed many Norman French words. Once [v] was appearing in positions where [f] could appear, that is, once the distributions of [v] and [f] overlapped, it was a separate phoneme in English. Phonemes may also emerge out of allophones when other changes combine to make the contexts for different allophones overlap. The table shows what happened over a period of several hundred years.

6: Old English phonology - Wikipedia

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Palatalization was undone before consonants in OE: Phonological processes See also: Phonological history of the English language A number of phonological processes affected Old English in the period before the earliest documentation. These processes especially affected vowels, and are the reason why many Old English words look significantly different from related words in languages such as Old High German, which is much closer to the common West Germanic ancestor of both languages. The processes took place chronologically in the order described below with uncertainty in ordering as noted. Forms in *italic* denote either Old English words as they appear in spelling, or reconstructed forms of various sorts. Sounds are indicated using standard IPA notation. Long vowels appear as *e*. Nasal vowels appear as *e*. Overlong vowels appear as *e*. Nasal overlong vowels appear as *e*. This is part of a process known in the literature as Anglo-Frisian brightening. It can be assumed, therefore, that a nasal consonant *n*, *m* caused a preceding long vowel to nasalize. Examples are numerous, *e*. See a-restoration below for examples. Importantly, a-fronting was blocked by *n*, *m* only in stressed syllables, not unstressed syllables. This provides evidence that the fronting occurred before the loss of final *-aN*, which occurred before the earliest written records of any West Germanic language. Diphthong height harmonization Diphthongs in most languages are of the "closing" type, where the second segment is higher if possible than the first, *e*. Old English, however, had unusual "harmonic" diphthongs, where both segments were of the same height: Note that all of these diphthongs could occur both short monomoraic, *i*. Note also that the spelling of the diphthongs differs somewhat from their assumed pronunciation. The process that produced harmonic diphthongs from earlier closing diphthongs is called diphthong height harmonization. Specifically, the second segment of a diphthong was changed to be the same height as the first segment. Proto-Germanic diphthongs were affected as follows: Late in the development of the standard West Saxon dialect, *io* both long and short became *eo*, merging with existing *eo*. This is in fact one of the most noticeable differences between early Old English *c*. The exact conditions for breaking vary somewhat depending on the sound being broken: Both breaking and retraction are fundamentally phenomena of assimilation to a following velar consonant. Breaking and retraction occurred several hundred years before recorded Old English. This did not affect the standard West Saxon dialect of Old English.

7: Old English Phonology - Roger Lass, Lass, John M. Anderson, John Malcolm Anderson - Google Books

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For literature on phonology consult the relevant section of the Reference Guide Old English phonology The sound system of Old English was quite different from that of present-day English. It contained sounds which are no longer found and combinations which do not occur anymore. It also has a system of word stress which only applies to part of modern English vocabulary. This was a morphological process in the West and North Germanic languages and remnants are found in these languages today, with a very few in English such as man: Length contrasts Old English had long and short vowels and consonants. The length distinction among consonants was lost in Middle English. This type of distinction can still be found in other European languages such as Italian. Thus a word like wif [wi: This alternation still exists today for word pairs like wife: Phonotactics This is a sub-area of phonology concerned with the combinations of sounds. The set of permissible combinations has varied over the history of English, either by elements being lost, cf. Middle English phonology A number of changes took place during the Middle English period which altered the sound structure inherited from Old English. Apart from the losses of sounds and changes in clusters just discussed, there were other shifts, especially among vowels which link the Old English to the Early Modern English sound system. Open Syllable Lengthening By this is meant that a short vowel in an open syllable was lengthening and often lowered , e. The open vowel was later raising as part of the Great Vowel Shift see below. Similar lengthening occurred with front vowels, e. Trisyllabic Vowel Shortening In words of more than two syllables the stressed long word was often shortened. This applies in particular to French loans which had more than two syllables in a suffixed form, e. Because the Great Vowel Shift see below only affected long vowels the pronunciation of the shorter word form with the long form was later altered but not than of the trisyllabic word, i. While these were predictable in Old English this was no longer the case in Middle English, e. Voiced fricatives also appeared in final position due to the loss of endings, e. This led to a contrast between noun and verb arising, cf. The rise of new stress patterns French loans were often carried stress on the end of a word, or were perceived to do so by the English borrowing such words. In some cases the Germanic initial stress pattern, which English had inherited from earlier stages of the language, was applied with very early, Anglo-Norman loanwords, compare hostel with initial stress an early loan with hotel with final stress a later loan. A stress contrast also arose in English between initial stress for Romance loans French or Latin via French when they were nouns but non-initial stress when they were verbs. More information on Middle English phonology can be found in the module on Middle English. The following chart gives an idea of the main movements over several centuries. Some sections of the shift advanced more quickly than others. In some varieties of English the Great Vowel Shift did not go to completion, e. In other varieties, the Great Vowel Shift has gone beyond the stage which it reached in Received Pronunciation, e. The vowel in words like sail coalesced with that in words like face while the vowel in words like law merged with that in words like thought so that these two groups of words show the same vowel in present-day English.

8: Later phonological developments

A detailed study of Old English, taking as its point of departure the 'standard theory' of generative phonology as developed by Chomsky and Halle.

Pronouncing Old English Old English is a "dead" language. No one, not even the children of the most fanatical Anglo-Saxonists though some of us are working on it grows up speaking Anglo-Saxon as a cradle tongue. But it is nevertheless worth learning to pronounce the language, and not only so you can impress people at cocktail parties. Reading Old English words and paradigms aloud can help some students to memorize important information more easily. Also, Old English poetry evolved as an oral medium: Finally, Old English poetry is particularly beautiful when read aloud, as this passage from the beginning of Beowulf perhaps demonstrates. Vowels There are many relatively complicated charts that explain the pronunciation of Old English vowels. You can find them in any basic Old English grammar book. But the power of new information technology has suggested to us a better way to learn how to pronounce Old English words: Most editors use macrons a horizontal bar over the top of a vowel to indicate vowel length. A "short" vowel is one without a macron. A long vowel is indicated by a macron. Macrons do not appear in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. Modern English diphthongs include such combinations as the "ea" in "beast," the "ie" in "convenient," and the "ei" in "weight. Consonants Most Old English consonants are pronounced the same way as their Modern English equivalents. We give the exceptions below. Some editors indicate the sibilant pronunciation of "c" by putting a dot above the consonant. Before certain vowels it is pronounced like the Modern English "y" in the word "yes": When "g" is used before other vowels it is pronounced the same as Modern English "g" in "golden": Some editors indicate this voiced pronunciation of "g" by putting a dot above the consonant. It is pronounced with a bit of a throat-clearing sound, like the "ch" at the end of Scottish "loch" or German "Bach":

9: Old English phonology | Revolv

Old English phonology The sound system of Old English was quite different from that of present-day English. It contained sounds which are no longer found and combinations which do not occur anymore.

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