
Lecture 3
**OLD ENGLISH
PHONETIC SYSTEM**

OUTLINE

1. OE accentuation.
2. The system of OE vowels.
3. The system of OE consonants.

OE ACCENTUATION

- The peculiarity of OE accentuation was the same as in other Germanic languages – the principal “dynamic” or “force” stress fell on the root syllable of the word. Word stress was fixed in the sense that it did not shift in form-building: it remained on the same syllable in different forms of the word.
- It should be noted that the suffixes always remained unstressed. The principal stress remained on the root when a prefix was added. With the stress falling on the root syllable, the unstressed vowel underwent the process of weakening and disappearing.

THE SYSTEM OF OE VOWELS

- According to the position of the vocal organs front and back vowels were distinguished in OE. Distinctions were also made as to the nearness of the tongue to the palate, it being higher or lower in the case of various vowels. Three tongue positions were noted: high, middle, low. In OE rounded and unrounded vowels were to be distinguished as well.

- OE vowels made a symmetrical system where short monophthongs were opposed to long ones, and short diphthongs were opposed to long diphthongs:

- **monophthongs**

- **a æ e I o u y**

- **a: æ: e: I: o: u: y:**

- **diphthongs**

- **ea ea eo ia io**

- **a ea: eo: ia: io:**

Length of OE vowels was their phonemic feature, but in few cases it could be developed as a result of positional change of sound:

- 1) **the dropping of nasals:** *m*, *n* were dropped before *h*, *f*, *s*, *θ* which caused lengthening of the preceding vowel by compensation:
 - *Goth uns* – OE *ūs*; *fimf* – *fīf*;
- 2) **contraction:** dropping of /*h*/ in the intervocal position
 - *fohan* → *fōn*, *hohan* → *hōn*.
 - Quite often contraction might produce a long diphthong:
 - *slahan* → *sleahan* → *sēān*; *sehan* → *seohan* → *sēān*; *tihan* → *teohan* → *tēōn*.
- 3) **nasalisation:** narrowing of a vowel before the following nasal, which characteristic of Saxon dialect:
 - *land* → *lond*; *mann* → *monn* (also *lānd*, *mānn* as graphical variants).

I-mutation

- Among the OE combinative sound changes there was one with far reaching effects – **front mutation, or I-mutation.**
- This was a series of changes of vowels which took place when there was **i, ī, j** in the following syllable. **i, ī** disappeared or changed into **e**, but it's original presence can be established by examining the cognate words in other languages.
- It was a kind of assimilation: the effected vowel being moved to the place of articulation nearer to that of the following vowel, either **ī** or **i**, or **j**.
- It is impossible to state the exact time of I-mutation. Still taking into consideration the fact that no traces of I-mutation could be found in Gothic texts (4th c. AD), but its results were reflected in the earliest OE texts (7th c. AD). Thus, we may suppose that I-mutation might have taken place in the period between 4-7 centuries. If we take into consideration that the history of the EL begins in the middle of the 5th century, we could restrict the periodisation of I-mutation.

- **The essence of I-mutation** is the fronting and narrowing of the root vowel under the influence of i/j in the immediately following syllable.
- Since these sounds are very common in suffixes and word endings, I-mutation was a frequent and a systematic change. It effected the whole system of OE vowels. But for the narrowest \bar{i} and \bar{e} , both long and short vowels diphthongs and monophthongs were effected by these changes.
- **Short monophthongs:**
 - $a \rightarrow \text{æ} \rightarrow e$ // *taljan* → *tæljan* → *tellan*
 - $o \rightarrow oe \rightarrow e$ // *ofstian* → *efstan* (спешить)
 - $u \rightarrow y \rightarrow i$ // *fuljan* → *fyllan* (наполнять).
- **Long monophthongs:**
 - $\bar{a} \rightarrow \text{æ}_2$ // *lārian* → *lerian* (учить)
 - $\bar{o} \rightarrow oe: \rightarrow \bar{e} \rightarrow i$ // **fōri* → *foet* → *fēt* (нога)
 - $\bar{u} \rightarrow \ddot{y} \rightarrow i$ // *ontūnjan* → *ontȳnan* (открывать).
- **Short diphthongs:**
 - $ea \rightarrow ia$ // *hleahian* → *hliehhan* (смеяться)
 - $eo \rightarrow ie$ // *heordija* → *hierde* (пастух).
- **Long diphthongs:**
 - $ea: \rightarrow ie:$ // *belēāfian* → *beliefan* (верить)
 - $io \rightarrow ie:$ // *retreowe* → *retriewe* (правдивый).

- As it can be seen from certain examples, under certain conditions I-mutation effected not only the root vowel, but the following consonant too.
- If the root vowel was short, the following consonant was doubled:
- *cnusian* → *cnussan* (*толкать*)
- *framian* → *fremmman*.

Short diphthongs and their phonemic status

- There were 3 essential sources of short diphthongs in OE:
- **1. OE breaking**
- *e* → *eo* or *æ* → *ea* if
- 1) followed by **r, l, h + consonant** or 2) **h** in the final position:
- *ærm* – *earm* (*рука*); *æhta* → *eahta* (*восемь*); *æld* → *eald* (*старый*).
- **2. Palatal diphthongization**
- The diphthongization is caused by the preceding consonant after */k/, /sk/, /ʒ/*.
- *e* → *ie* *zefan* → *ziefan* (*давать*)
- *æ* → *ea* *zæf* → *zeaf* (*дал*)
- *a* → *ea* *scacan* → *sceaco* (*to shake*)
- *o* → *eo*
- *æ:* → *ea:*
- NB. The consonants */k'/* and influenced only the front vowels, while the cluster */sk'/* effected also back vowels */o/, /a/*.

- **3. Back mutation=Velar mutation.**
- The essence of back mutation: the articulation of the back vowel is anticipated in the preceding front vowel which accordingly develops into a diphthong .
- Influence of back /**a**/, /**o**/, /**u**/
- front vowels break into a diphthong:
 - **i** → **io**
 - **e** → **eo**
 - **a** → **ea**

OLD ENGLISH CONSONANTS

- **The system of OE consonants.**
- In the history of the EL consonants turned out to be far more stable than vowels and some of them remained unchanged through the whole period of their existence:
 - **hand, call, foam**
- OE consonants can be described on the following grounds:
 - 1) place of articulation:
 - -labial /p, b, m, f, v/;
 - -dental /t, d, þ, ð, n, s, r, l/;
 - -media-lingual /k', g', x'/;
 - -back-lingual (velar) /k, g, x, /;
 - -pharyngal /h/.
 - 2) the manner of articulation:
 - -stops /p, b, t, d, k, g, k'/;
 - -fricatives /f, v, θ, ð, s, z, x, x'/.

- 3) voice:
 - -voiced /b, d, g, ð, v, z/;
 - -voiceless /p, t, k, θ, f, s/.
- 4) length:
 - -short (single) consonants /s, t, f, g/;
 - -long consonants (geminate) /ss, ff, tt, gg/
 - **System of geminate is a peculiar feature of OE consonants.** Doubled cons-ts were opposed in the length to the single cons-ts.
 - Being opposed to single consonants geminate participated in meaning distinguishing which proves their phonemic status in OE:
 - *scota* – шотландец, *scotta* – человек
 - The main source of geminate in OE was I-mutation. Under certain conditions I-mutation effected not only the root vowel, but the following consonant too. If the root vowel was short, the following consonant was doubled:
 - *cnusian* → *cnyssan* (to push)
 - *framian* → *fremman* (to frame)

- However geminates turned out to be rather unstable. Having appeared at the beginning of the OE period, they disintegrated at the end of it. In ModE doubling of consonants doesn't indicate length of a sound. It's rather a graphical device used to denote shortness of the preceding vowel (potter, kiss).
- In OE there also was an opposition of **palatal consonants to non-palatal ones**: /k/ - /k'/; /g/ - /g'/; /x/ - /x'/; /s/ - /s'/ which disintegrated during the MidE period.

Values of consonant letters in OE

- In the majority of cases each of OE consonant letters represented a single phoneme, but a few of them had two or even more readings.
- Letter **c** stood for /k'/ before front vowels (*cild, cæt*); and for /k/ in all other positions (*cnāwan*).
- In general consonant changes of the OE period didn't result in the development of new phonemes. They simply show a marked tendency for the sounds of one and the same word to assimilate and merge into closer units.