# Compensatory Doubling of Consonants in Old English

Hideo Kobayashi (University of Hyogo) and Peter M. Skaer (Hiroshima University)
keywords: Old English, moraic theory, compensatory doubling of consonants

This paper investigates the doubling of consonants in Old English (OE) phonology which favors preserving the mora of a syllable following the shortening of a preceding long vowel or diphthong in the stressed syllable. Though compensatory lengthening in OE is well attested to (cf. Hock 1986; Hayes 1989; Kavitskaya 2001; Kobayashi and Skaer 2022), *Compensatory Doubling of Consonants* (CDC) is lesser known than compensatory lengthening, and as such has not been accounted for satisfactorily in the literature. Compensatory lengthening is defined as a combinatory phonological occurrence in which the loss of one underlying segment leads to the lengthening of another neighboring segment at the surface (Kavitskaya 2001). CDC is exemplified in the available data (1) (Wright and Wright 1925):

> (1) *blǣdre → blæddre* 'bladder'   *hwītra → hwittra* 'whiter'
> *ǣdre → æddre* 'vein'   *gelīcra → geliccra* 'more like'
> *nǣdre → næddre* 'adder'   *dēopra → deoppra* 'deeper'

Let us consider a case of CDC from the view of the moraic theory argued for by Hyman (2003). Diagram (2) shows the preservation of mora count by way of CDC. In (2a), the onset consonants are considered non-moraic by the onset-creation rule (Hyman 2003). The shortening of the long monophthong *ǣ*, as in (2b), induces its last mora to be unoccupied without any melody assigned. The question remains why *ǣ* shortens in the older form, though (cf. April 2000). In order to form a direct link between the mora and the empty slot in the melodic tier, OE phonology permits the initial syllable to copy the melody of the immediately following onset consonant into the empty slot, as in (2c). Accordingly, though the syllable-initial onset for the ultimate syllable remains non-moraic, the new member of the coda consonant becomes weight-bearing, thereby preserving the moraic count of the initial syllable. OE phonology blocks none of the remaining onset consonants *r* or *l* from filling the empty moraic slot in (2b): such phonological processes are local and non-arbitrary (Kaye 1995). Extraneous segmental insertion should be avoided. The approach suggested in this study assumes a syllable boundary in between the double consonants in the examples (1), above.

(2)
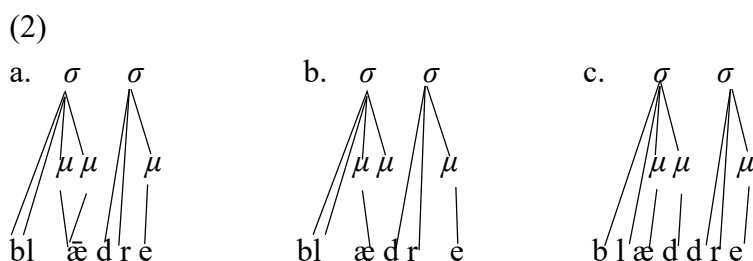
On the other hand, OE phonology does not permit the syllable to preserve the mora compensatorily as a direct result of a synchronic consonantal deletion in the unstressed syllable, as in *cyning → cynig* 'king' and *penning → penig* 'penny' (Wright and Wright 1925); CDC may not arise through a consonantal deletion in the unstressed syllable.

References

April, M. (2000). *Lexical Phonology and the History of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hayes, B. (1989). Compensatory lengthening in moraic phonology. *Linguistic Inquiry 20*, 253-306.

Hock, H. (1986). Compensatory lengthening: In defense of the concept 'mora.' *Folia Linguistica 20*, 431-460.

Hyman, L. M. (2003). *A Theory of Phonological Weight*. Stanford, CA.: CSLI Publications.

Kavitskaya, D. (2001). *Compensatory lengthening: Phonetics, phonology, diachrony*. PhD. dissertation, UC, Berkeley.

Kaye, J. (1995). Derivations and interfaces. In J. Durand and F, Katamba (Eds.). *Frontiers of Phonology: Atoms, Structures, Derivations*. 289-332. Longman: London.

Kobayashi, H. and Peter, M. Skaer. (2022). *On resolving the hiatus in Old English compensatory lengthening*. Paper presented at the 28th Germanic Linguistics Annual Conference, the University of Georgia 31st Mar-2nd Apr.

Wright, J. and Mary, Wright (1925). *Old English Grammar*. 3rd ed. London: Oxford University Press.