Sound change

Types

Assimilation → two sounds occurring close together in speech become more alike. This reduces the effort of pronunciation. Assimilation can be **total** (e.g. Latin *nocte* > Italian *notte*) or **partial** (e.g. *-ed*, /d/ (voiced) becomes /t/ (voiceless) when the preceding sound is voiceless: *kicked* /kɪkt/).

Dissimilation → sounds become less like other sounds in their vicinity. The reasons for dissimilation are not clear. It could be due to the fact that some speakers find it difficult to repeat the same sound. The sounds can be adjacent (contact) or not (distant).

Lenition (weakening) → weakening of sounds. Both vowels and consonants can be weakened. It has to do with ease of production. The opposite development, **fortition** or **strengthening**, is much less frequent.

Metathesis → entails the reversal or reordering of two sounds. Liquids, rhotics and nasals seem to be particularly prone to metathesis.

Loss of sounds → Loss of a segment is very common. It is usually prompted by ease of articulation. Loss of vowels in initial position (aphesis); in medial position (syncope); in final position (apocope). Loss of consonants in connection with another adjacent consonant: simplification of consonant clusters.

Addition of sounds (epenthesis) → a segment is added. Usually prompted by ease of articulation.

Merger → two or more separate phonemes combine to become a single phoneme. Merger can be complete, when it takes place in all environments, or partial. In partial merger phonemes merge only in certain environments and are kept distinct in others.

Split → allophones of a phoneme split off from that phoneme and (i) merge with a different phoneme (the inventory does not change); or (ii) and this split causes the introduction of a new phoneme (the inventory changes).

## Changes affecting vowels

QUALITATIVE CHANGES		
RAISING ⟹	Latin *caelu* > Spanish *cielo* (a>i)	
LOWERING	⟹	Latin *iocu* > Spanish *juego* (u>o)
FRONTING	⟹	Pr OE *fōtiz > *fēt* (o:>e:)
BACKING	⟹	Latin *ebriacu* > Italian *ubriaco* (e > u) 'drunk'
CENTRALIZATION ⟹	OE *finger* > PDE *finger* /er/ > /ə/	
ROUNDING	⟹	Latin *ebriacu* > Italian *ubriaco* (e > u) 'drunk'
UNROUNDING	⟹	OE *cyning* /y/ > PDE *king* /ɪ/

DIPHTHONGIZATION ⟹	Latin *cento* > Spanish *ciento*; ME *house* /uː/ > PDE *house* /aʊ/
MONOPHTHONGIZATION ⟹	Latin *caule* > Spanish *col*; OE *feallan* > ME *fallen* > PDE *fall*

QUANTITATIVE CHANGES

LENGTHENING	⟹	OE *blind* /i/ > ME *blind* /iː/
SHORTENING	⟹	OE *hāt* /haːt/ > PDE *hot* /hɒt/
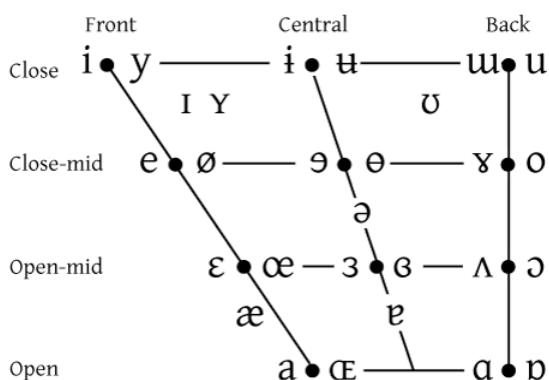
VOWELS

Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a rounded vowel

Chronology

Pre-OE and OE:

- i-mutation (pre-OE)
- palatalization (pre-OE)
- homorganic lengthening (8th century)
- weakening of unstressed vowels to schwa (transition from OE >ME)
- monophthongization of OE diphthongs (transition from OE >ME)
- simplification of some consonant clusters (e.g. /hr-, hn-, hl-/). Other OE consonant clusters were simplified at later stages, leaving a trace in spelling. (transition from OE >ME)

ME:

- OE /aː/ > ME /ɔː/; not in the N
- OE /y(ː)/ > ME /y(ː)/, ME /e(ː)/, ME /i(ː)/ depending on dialectal area
- Open syllable lengthening (13th c)
- creation of new diphthongs (i) by vocalization of [ɣ, w, j]; (ii) when a vowel is followed by [ç, x]
- shortenings of long vowels (in trisyllabic words or in connection with consonant clusters)
- phonemic splits in the set of fricatives
- loss of final nasal
- loss of final schwa
- loss of [ç, x] + compensatory lengthening

ModE:

- /æ/ vs. /aː/ split
- /ʊ/ vs. /ʌ/ split
- GVS
- rounding of /a/ > /ɒ/ following /w/
- /-ir-, -ɛr-, -ʊr-/ > /-ər-/
- shortening of /eː/ and /uː/ to /e/ and /ʊ/ in monosyllabic when followed by /t,d, k, f, v, θ/
- [x] > /f/ in some words in which [x] was not lost in the 15th c.
- loss of postvocalic /r/
- adoption of /ʒ/
- palatal assimilations /sj, tj, dj/ > /ʃ, tʃ, dʒ/
- phonemization of /ŋ/

Estuary English:

- glottalization
- th-fronting
- /tj/> tʃ/

The Great Vowel Shift

Great Vowel Shift

(1300)	1400		1500	1600	1700	1800	present
driven	/iː/	/ɪi/	/ei/	/ɛi/	/ʌi/	/ai/	
house	/uː/	/ʊu/	/ou/	/ɔu/	/ʌu/	/au/	
feet	/eː/		/iː/				
fool	/oː/		/uː/				
beat	/ɛː/				/eː/	/iː/	
foal	/ɔː/				/oː/		/əu/
take	/aː/		/æː/	/ɛː/	/eː/	/ei/	
sail	/ai/		/æi/	/ɛi/	/eː/	/ei/	
law	/au/		/ɒu/	/ɒː/		/ɔː/	

(from https://www.uni-due.de/SHE/SHE_Change_Phonological.htm)