

HEL2 Seminar 7

- **CHALLENGE 1:** Why did the words *beat* (OE *bēatan* /'bæ:ətan> ME *beaten* /'bɛ:tən/) and *beet* (OE *bēte* /'be:te/) become homophones?

They became homophones as a result of various changes, among them, the GVS, and the loss of the unstressed syllables in both forms.

OE *bēatan* /'bæ:ətan> ME *beaten* /'bɛ:tən/ > late ME *beat* /'bɛ:t/ > eModE *beat* /be:t/ > PDE /bi:t/

- Monophthongization of the OE diphthong (transition from OE to ME)
- Weakening of the unstressed vowel to schwa (transition from OE to ME)
- Loss of final nasal (late ME)
- Loss of final schwa (late ME)
- Raising of the long vowel due to the GVS (EModE); the resulting vowel /e:/ merges with the reflex of ME /e:/ in /i:/.

OE *bēte* /'be:te/ > late ME *beet* /'be:tə/ > late ME *beet* /'be:t/ > PDE *beet* /bi:t/

- Weakening of the unstressed vowel to schwa (transition from OE to ME)
- Loss of final schwa (late ME)
- Raising of the long vowel due to the GVS (EModE) /e:/ > /i:/

Note that the spelling of PDE gives us a clue to the pronunciation in ME: <ea> was the typical spelling for /ɛ:/, while <ee> was the typical spelling for /e:/.

The merger of these two vowels took place in the 16th century in the lower classes, and by the 18th century it had been adopted by the whole speech community.

- **CHALLENGE 2:** Why are there two different vowels in PDE *wise* /waɪz/ (< OE *wīs* /wi:s/) and its derivative *wisdom* /'wɪzdəm/ (< OE *wīsdōm* /'wi:sdo:m/)?

These words show different vowels because the adjective has been affected by the GVS, while the noun *wisdom* had a shortened vowel in ME, and therefore did not take part in the change.

The long vowel was shortened in contact with a consonant cluster.

OE /s/ had a voiceless [s] allophone in initial and final positions (as in the adjective, whose phonetic transcription would be [wi:s]). In the noun, the /s/ was realized as [z] because it was in final position. According to the OED, the voiced /z/ we have in standard PDE in the adjective is presumably derived from the pronunciation of the oblique cases, in which the sibilant was in medial position, and therefore pronounced voiced.

- **CHALLENGE 3:** Why are there two different vowels in *bleed* /bli:d/ (< OE *blēdan*) and its preterite *bled* /bled/ (< OE *blēdde*)

The infinitive shows the effects of the GVS. In the preterite the long vowel had been shortened, so it was not affected by the GVS.

OE *blēdan* /'ble:dan/ > ME /'ble:dən/ > late ME /'ble:d/ > EModE /bli:d/

- Weakening of the unstressed vowel to schwa (transition from OE to ME)
- Loss of final nasal (late ME)
- Loss of final schwa (late ME)
- Raising of the long vowel due to the GVS (EModE):/e:/> /i:/.

OE *blēdde* /'ble:dde/ > ME /'bledə/ > late ME /'bled/

- Weakening of the unstressed vowel to schwa (transition from OE to ME)
- Shortening of the long vowel in contact with a geminate consonant (OE > ME)
- Simplification of the geminate consonant (OE> ME)
- Loss of final schwa (late ME)

- **CHALLENGE 4:** How would you explain the different pronunciations of *south* /saʊθ/ (OE *sūþ* [su:θ]) and its derivative *southern* /'sʌðən/ (OE *sūþerne* ['su:ðerne])? Note that the spelling <ou> is a French convention that was introduced in ME for /u:/.

Again, in one of the words in the pair (*south*) we can see the effects of the GVS. The long vowel in *southern* was short when the GVS operated, and was not affected. It had been shortened in ME (shortening in trisyllabic words).

OE *sūþ* [su:θ] > ME *south* /su:θ/ (<ou> is a French convention for /u:/) > EModE /saʊθ/ (diphthongization due to the GVS)

OE *sūþerne* ['su:ðerne] > ME /'suðərnə/ > late ME /'suðərn/ > /'suðən/ > /'sʌðən/

- Weakening of unstressed vowels to schwa (OE>ME)
- Shortening of the long vowel in a trisyllabic word (ME)
- Loss of final schwa (late ME)
- Loss of postvocalic /r/ (ModE)
- /ʊ/ > /ʌ/ (ModE)

The allophone of OE /θ/ in OE *sūþ* is the voiceless one [θ], because it occurs in final position. In OE *sūþerne* it is the voiced realization [ð], as the sound occurs in intervocalic position.