

Seminar 6.

I take it you already know

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Of tough and bough
and cough and dough?
Others may stumble, but not you,
On hiccough, thorough, lough and through?
Well done! And now you wish, perhaps,
To learn of less familiar traps?
Beware of heard, a dreadful word
That looks like beard and sounds like bird,
And dead: it's said like bed, not bead –
For goodness sake don't call it deed!
Watch out for meat and great and threat
(They rhyme with suite and straight and debt).

A moth is not a moth in mother,
Nor both in bother, broth in brother,
And here is not a match for there
Nor dear and fear for bear and pear,
And then there's dose and rose and lose –
Just look them up - and goose and choose,
And cork and work and card and ward,
And font and front and word and sword,
And do and go and thwart and cart –
Come, come, I've hardly made a start!
A dreadful language? Man alive!
I'd mastered it when I was five!

Quoted by Vivian Cook and Melvin Bragg 2004, by Richard Krogh, in D Bolinger & D A Sears, Aspects of Language, 1981, and in Spelling Progress Bulletin March 1961, *Brush up on your English*. https://www.spellingsociety.org/uploaded_misc/poems-online-misc-1419940069.pdf

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRe-j2EC1j8>

1. Identify the different kinds of lengthening (compensatory lengthening; open syllable lengthening, homorganic lengthening) illustrated in the following examples:

- Gmc **fimfi* > OE *fif* 'five' COMPENSATORY LENGTHENING
- OE *milde* > ME *milde* /'mi:ldə/ HOMORGANIC LENGTHENING
- OE *cnafa* /'knafa/ [ˈknava] > ME *knaue* /'kna:və/ OPEN SYLLABLE LENGTHENING
Note here that in OE /f/ was a phoneme with two allophones: [f] in initial and final position, and medially when geminate; and [v] in medial position.
- EModE *park* /park/ > PDE (BrE) *park* COMPENSATORY LENGTHENING

2. Describe the sound changes affecting the forms below, dating and labelling them whenever possible.

- OE *cēpte* /'ke:pte/ > ME *kepte* /'keptə/ > PDE *kept* /kept/

Quantitative change: shortening of OE /e:/ in contact with a consonant cluster (ME)

Qualitative change: weakening of the unstressed vowel to schwa (transition from OE to ME).

Loss of final schwa (15th century). The infinitive of this verb was OE *cēpan* /'ke:pan/, therefore the conditions for shortening did not apply. The infinitive kept the long vowel /e:/, which later on was raised to /i:/ by the Great Vowel Shift.

- OE *cnyll* > ME *knel* > PDE *knell* /nel/

Quantitative change: the geminate consonant of OE, /ll/ is simplified to /l/. Weakening.

Qualitative change: OE /y/ is lowered and loses its lip-rounding to become ME /e/. The most typical reflex of OE /y/ is ME /i/, but /e/ is common in Kentish

Simplification of the consonant cluster /kn/ > /n/ at a late stage, leaving a trace in spelling <kn>.

- OE *þēof* > ME *þēf* /θe:f/ > PDE *thief* /θi:f/

OE diphthongs were monophthongized in ME. The resulting vowel here ME /e:/ was later on raised to /i:/ as an effect of the Great Vowel Shift.

- OE *āc* /a:k/ > ME *oak* /ɔ:k/

Qualitative change: OE /a:/ is raised and rounded to ME /ɔ:/. This change did not affect the North.

3. Reconstruct the phonological evolution of the following words. Note that vowel length in OE and ME will be marked by a macron when relevant.

- OE *scēap* /ʃæ:ap/ > ME /ʃe:p/ > Mod E *sheep* /ʃi:p/

Monophthongization of OE diphthong; Raising of the long vowel (Great Vowel Shift).

- OE *cniht* /kniht/ / [kniçt] > late ME [kni:t] > EModE [ni:t] > PDE *knight* /nait/

Loss of [ç] (an allophone of /h/ after front vowels) with compensatory lengthening of the preceding vowel; Simplification of the consonant cluster /kn/ > /n/ at a late stage, leaving a trace in spelling <kn>. Diphthongization of the long vowel (Great Vowel Shift).

- OE *cuppe* /'kuppe/ > ME /'kupa/ > PDE *cup* /kʌp/

Quantitative change: OE geminate consonant /pp/ is simplified to ME /p/.

Qualitative change: weakening of unstressed vowel to schwa (transition from OE to ME).

Loss of final schwa (15th century).

Qualitative change: ME /u/ > ModE /ʌ/ lowering and unrounding (not in the North).

- OE **hlystan* /'hlystan/ > ME *listen* /'listən/ > PDE *listen* /lɪsn/.

Simplification of the OE consonant cluster /hl/ in the transition from OE to ME (no trace in spelling).

Qualitative change: weakening of unstressed vowel to schwa (transition from OE to ME).

Simplification of consonant cluster /st/ > /s/

Loss of schwa in medial position (syncope).