

HEL2- Seminar 8

Some more challenges for you...

1. Why did *warn* and *worn* become homophones?

They became homophones when ModE /a/ was rounded to /ɒ/ in contact with the labial semivowel /w/ (assimilation), then both forms were pronounced /wɔrn/. Later on, they were affected by loss of postvocalic /r/ and compensatory lengthening.

2. In which dialect of BrE are *luck* and *look* homophones?

They are homophones in Northern English, since in this variety /ʊ/ was not unrounded to /ʌ/ in Modern English.

3. Why is *bless you* pronounced /'bleʃə/ in rapid speech?

This shows palatal assimilation across word boundaries: /'bles ju/ > /'bleʃə/. /sj/ > /ʃ/

4. Transcribe PDE *castle* in (i) RP and (ii) Northern English. Why are they pronounced differently?

/ˈka:sl/ and /ˈkæsl/. The RP form shows pre-fricative lengthening (and a backing of the vowel). This change did not affect the North.

5. Why do PDE *fir* and *fur* sound the same?

They became homophones as a result of the so-called 'nurse'-merger. /i/, /u/ and /ɛ/ in contact with /r/ were centralized to /ə/. Then the forms underwent loss of postvocalic /r/ and compensatory lengthening /ɜ:/.

6. Why do the adjective *clean* (OE *clǣne* > ME *clēne*) and the related verb *cleanse* (OE *clǣnsian* > ME *clense*) show different vowels in PDE?

The adjective was subject to the Great Vowel Shift ME *clēne* /ˈkle:nə/ > /kli:n/. The verb was not affected by this change because the long vowel of OE had been shortened in contact with a consonant cluster before the GVS started to operate.

7. Why is <u> pronounced differently in *busy*, *butcher* and *cut*?

Busy /ˈbɪzi/ goes back to OE *bysig*. OE /y/ was unrounded to /ɪ/ in the North and East Midlands (this is the reflex we normally find in Standard English), but it was kept rounded for a while in the West Midlands. There /y/ was represented by the French convention <u>. Later on it was unrounded, as in other parts of the country. This accounts for this funny spelling for /ɪ/.

Butcher /ˈbʊtʃə(r)/ is a French word. Here we find the vowel /ʊ/ because the presence of a preceding labial consonant /b/ prevented the unrounding to /ʌ/ in Modern English.

Cut /kʌt/ shows the unrounding.

8. Which changes caused the homophony of *knot/not*? What happened to *king/kin*?

knot/not became homophones after the simplification of the consonant cluster /kn/ > /n/. We know that this took place later than ME, because it has left a trace in the spelling.

King was pronounced [kɪŋg]: the consonant cluster [ŋg] was simplified and, as a result, velar ŋ, which was an allophone of /n/ in contact with velar sounds, became an independent phoneme. After phonemization, it was possible to distinguish minimal pairs, such as *king/kin* by the contrast between /ŋ/ and /n/.

9. Why does the plural of *leaf* have a different consonant *leaves*?

This is related to the fact that in OE /f/ had two different realizations, voiceless in (initial and) final position (cf. *leaf*) and voiced in medial position (hence *leaves*). In the ME period /f/ and /v/ became distinct phonemes because the voiced element could appear in initial position in French words such as *virgin*. Therefore, the two sounds were no longer in complementary distribution.

10. Which sound change do these three words have in common? *marble, night, balm*.

They have all been affected by loss of a consonant and compensatory lengthening:

Marble: loss of postvocalic /r/

Night: loss of [ç]

Balm: loss of /l/ in contact with a consonant.

And finally, fill in the gaps:

OE *rūh* [ru:x] > ME *rough* [ru:x] > EModE /rʊf/ > PDE *rough* /rʌf/

- <ou> is the French convention for /u:/. It was introduced in the ME period.

In some words, [x] remained for a while and then became /f/.

Long vowels were shortened in monosyllabic words in front of certain consonants.

11. OE **dūfe* [ˈdu:ve] > ME /ˈdu:və/ > EModE /dʊv/ > PDE *dove* /dʌv/

From OE to ME: weakening of the unstressed vowel to schwa. /v/ is now a distinct phoneme (see above). In the 15th century final schwas were lost. The vowel was shortened in a monosyllabic word before the operation of the GVS. Finally /ʊ/ is unrounded.