English Phonetics from History to Present-Day

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Annotation: A phonetic language is a language in which spelling and pronunciation fit in most cases. In these kinds of languages, the "trough" begins from the following syllable.

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The English language is not a phonetic language. The "Trough" starts the previous syllable. For example: mutt-on. In mutton the "o" is not pronounced, that's the reason why the "n" is syllabic.[1]

The word "phonetic" and its derivatives began to be used in English in the 1840s, and although significant insights in the science of speech can be traced across a range of cultural traditions (and back through history into Antiquity) the modern form of the subject is largely a 19th-century European creation The Indo-European consonant system had a large inventory of stops (plosive consonants). Their pronunciation was labial (involving the lips), coronal (involving the tip of the tongue) or dorsal (involving the back part of the tongue). Dorsal stops can be further classified into palatal ('soft', a bit like English /k/ in cube), plain (or simple velar, like /k/ in cut), and labiovelar (with lip rounding, like /kw/ in quote). The letters y and w in this system have no other function apart from marking the palatal or labialised character of the preceding consonant; they are not used to stand for independent speech segments. We mention here the IE palatals (and put them in the table below) because most reconstructions found in the standard handbooks require them in the protolanguage. However, it is not quite clear if they could really contrast with 'plain' velars; we're inclined to think they couldn't, so in our reconstructions elsewhere on this work you will only find k etc. where many other people reconstruct ky.

IE stops could have any of the following three manners of articulation: simple voiceless (like t), simple voiced (like d), or aspirated voiced (like dh, pronounced with a strong puff of breath). The exact pronunciation of these three types of sound is to some extent a matter of speculation, but it is at least certain that all three are needed to account for the observed contrasts in IE languages.

Here is a table of the stop system:

- ➢ Labial
- ➢ Coronal
- ➢ Palatal
- ➢ Plain Velar
- ➢ Labiovelar

There was one sibilant fricative, s, and probably a few more velar or glottal (h-like) sounds, known as the 'laryngeals'. They are very poorly attested in the historical languages (with the notable exception of the Anatolian languages, e.g. Hittite), but the assumption of their existence in

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[1] Abercrombie, D. (1967). Elements of General Phonetics. Edinburgh: Chicago, Aldine Pub. Co.

the protolanguage (the 'laryngeal theory)' is very important for understanding PIE morphology. We shall use the symbols x, xw, and h to refer to the three 'laryngeals' required by most versions of the theory. We consider it likely that x was a velar fricative like Scots 'ch' in loch, xw was its labialised counterpart, and h was a glottal 'aspirate', just like English /h/.

Many mutations appear when we look at the Germanic substrat. They were systematized by Grimm.

The writing system for the earliest English was based on the use of signs called runes, which were devised for carving in wood or stone by the Germanic peoples of Northern Europe. The best surviving examples are to be seen in the Scandinavian countries and in the islands of Shetland and Orkney. The best known is a large 18-foot high cross now in the church at Ruthwell, Dumfreisshire in Scotland.

After the runic system the Roman alphabet began to be used in order to write in Old English. As we know the Roman alphabet is the one we are used to read and write with. It was used to match letters to the nearest equivalent sound in English. But no Roman letter was available for some OE sounds, so other non-Roman letters were adopted.[2]

<ae> - a vowel pronounced [ae] and called ash- derived form Latin. It is today popularly known as "short a", as in MnE cat.

<þ> - a consonant pronounced [θ] or [ð] called thorn from its runic name, now replaced by <th>.

<ð> a consonant also pronounced [θ] or [ð]; called eth derived from Irish writing and now replaced by <th>.

<ρ> - pronounced [w] and called Wynn.

<ˉ>. The Roman letter [g] was the equivalent of Anglo-Saxon yogh. It stood for /g/ and its various allophones —including [g] and the voiced velar fricative [ɣ] — as well as the phoneme /j/ (<y> in modern English spelling). In Middle English, it stood for the phoneme /x/ as in niˉt (night, then still pronounced as spelled: [nixt]). Sometimes, it represented /j/ or /w/, as in the word ˉoˉelinge [jaʊlɪŋge] = yowling.

<7> this sign was used as shorthand for and, like the ampersand (&) today.

Afterwards, we can observe some changes in letter shapes, like:

<ρ> was replaced by <w> or <uu> by c.1300.

<ð> had disappeared by about the same time.

<þ> survived much long, into the 15th century, but often in modified forms, looking like <p> or <y>.[3]

<g> the closed continental or "Carolingian" letter was introduced for the consonant [g].

<ˉ> came to be used for a number of different sounds, [x], [j], [w].

<r> the insular form was replaced by two forms, one like ל and a "continental" form like <r>.

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[2] 5.   Bizzi, E.; Hogan, N.; Mussa-Ivaldi, F.; Giszter, S. (1992). "Does the nervous system use equilibrium-point control to guide single and multiple joint movements?". Behavioral and Brain Sciences.

[3] Abercrombie, D. (1967). Elements of General Phonetics. Edinburgh: Chicago, Aldine Pub. Co.

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<s> the insular form <r> was dropped, but "long s" continued to be used into the 18th century in writing and printing, as well as the surviving "round <s>".

<τ> the familiar present-day from <t> with a vertical stroke above the cross-bar, begins to appear in the 13th century.

A line or "macron", over a letter shows the omission of <m> or <n>.

The omission of <er>, <re> or <ur> is shown by different loops above the line.

Regarding length, OE had both short and long consonants. The pronunciation of continuants- that is, consonants that can be held on, like the fricatives [f], [h], [s] - can obviously be made longer or shorter. But plosive (stop) consonants, like [p] and [t], were also doubled in spelling to indicate a pronunciations similar to that of, for example, the MnE <-pp-> combination in a compound word like hop-pole or <-tt-> in part-time, or the sequence –gg- in the phrase big game. Examples: the words hoppian /hop:in/, cwellan /kw /n/ or sunne /sun/

In most cases, the <h> is now pronounced in RP "spelling-pronunciation" having been adopted – harmony, herb, heredity, hospital and so on, and in England there is divided usage over hotel - [əhəʊtɛl] v. [əʊtɛl].

[γ] To [h] or elision of [γ]

The spelling <h> for /h/ may or may not represent a change from the velar fricative [γ] to the glottal fricative [h]. The fact that the same word is spelt both brouhte and broute presents a problem that we cannot solve without more evidence.

The change of [m] to [n] in unstressed suffixes is part of the general reduction and final loss of most inflections. For example <-am> -à <-an> þam / þan = the

<k> from ON and <ch> from OE

The contrast here comes from the Northern use of words derived from ON, or from Northern pronunciation with [k] of OE words with [tʃ]:

Rike/riche ON rikr/OE rice and OF riche

Like/liche and ilic/I liche ON likr/OE (GE) lice

Suilk/suche Northern form of OE swilc, swelc

<qu-> for <wh->

This <qu-> spelling is not the French convention for the spelling of OE <cw> but a representation of a heavily aspirated fricative consonant, [hw]; (qu-) or (quh-) was in fact retained in Scots spelling through to the 17th century:

Quam/--- (= whom) quat/what

<gh>

In OE, letter yogh <¯> had come to represent three sounds - [g] [j] and [x] With the adoption of the continental letter <g> for [g], <¯> tended to be used for [j]. Two related sounds that occurred after a vowel, [ç] and [x], caused problems of spelling, and among different choices, <gh> became common; [ç] and [x] are fricative consonants:

 Faght/fau¯t right/ri¯t

The sounds [x] and [ç] were eventually elided in many words, e.g. brought, sought, right, bough (though the spelling has been retained). In others it became the fricative consonant [f], as in

cough, tough, enough. The irregularity of the MnE pronunciation of <gh> is the result of a fairly random choice between different dialectal pronunciations:

þof/ þou¯e

Diversity of pronouns

3rd person singular feminine pronoun (MnE she)

The variant forms for she are the evidence for different evolutions in different areas. Both the initial consonant and the vowel varied. In the Southern and West Midlands dialects the inicial [h] of OE heo was retained, but with a variety of vowel modifications and spellings illustrated in the first group of quotations below.

The form scho with initial [ʃ] and vowel [o] developed in the Northern dialect, and probable evolved from the feminine personal pronoun heo, perhaps influenced also by the initial consonant of the feminine demonstrative pronoun seo .

In the East Midlands dialect the origin of the form sche, with inicial [ʃ] and vowel [e], which became the standard she, is not known.

Ambiguity of ME in different dialects

The asimilation of the ON plural pronouns beginning with <th>.

Where there was a large Scandinavian population, in the North, all three forms they, them and their replaced the older OE pronouns beginning with (h). In the South, the OE forms remained for much longer. In the Midlands, they was used, but still with the object and possessive pronouns hem and hire.

Spelling and pronunciation in the South

<¯> used for [x] ber¯e (protect)

<y> is dotted <ẏ> and used for [ɪ] ẏcome and for [j] manẏere

<g> for [g]: god, engliss.

Thorn <þ> still used: þe, þet

<w> used in all cases, never wynn <ρ>: wille, ywent.

Word-initial <z> and <u> for voiced fricatives [z] and [v]: zende (send), uor (for).

Kentish was a conservative dialect - that is, when we compared with others it still retained more features of the OE system of inflections, even though greatly reduced. These features are very similar to those of South-Western texts.This fact is not surprising when we consider the geographical position of Kent, relatively cut off and distant from the Midlands and North of England, but accesible to the rest of the world.[4]

The consonants pronounced [f] and [s] in other dialects were voiced at the beginning of a word or root syllable in Kentish, and pronounced [v] and [z]. The inicial voicing of fricative consonants is still a feature of South-Eastern dialects. It applies equally to the consonant [q], and must have done also in ME, but has never been recorded in spelling, because the letters <þ> or <th> are used for both the voiced and voiceless forms of the consonant.

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