THE ENGLISH VOWEL SYSTEM IN THE PERIOD OF THE OLDEST WRITTEN RECORDS (VIII – X cc.)

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In Old English writings the stressed vocalic phonemes were usually expressed with the symbols *a, e, i, o, u, æ, ae, y, oe, ea, eo, io, ie*. The letters *a, e, i, o, u* are ascribed the phonetic values which they are supposed to have had in Latin. The ligature *æ*, or *ash*, and the letter cluster *ae* were variant spellings. Both of them represented the low front unrounded vowel [æ] as in *dæg, daeg* 'day', etc. Already this shows that though OE orthography was phonetic, the inventory of OE phonemes did not completely coincide with the inventory of graphic signs. The letter *y* represented the high front rounded vowel [y]; the letter cluster *oe* represented the mid front rounded vowel [ö]. The digraphs *ea, eo, io, ie* must have represented diphthongs, though some linguists question the diphthongal significance even of these letter clusters. Sometimes, especially in the earlier writings, double letters are met with: *aa, ee, ii*, etc. Only the digraphs and the letters *y, æ* were not doubled. In the later manuscripts in analogical cases vowel letters with a diacritic are to be found: *á* 'always', *mín* 'my', etc. Both doubling and the diacritic indicated vowel length.

The graphic and the phonetic data, together with the facts of prehistory and later development of sounds, enable us to determine the inventory and the distinctive features of Old English phonemes with greater accuracy than that with which the vowel system of Primitive Old English is reconstructed. Phonological analysis of these data reveals the contrasts between a) short and long vowels; b) high, mid and low vowels; c) front and back vowels; d) rounded and unrounded vowels; e) monophthongs and diphthongs. Alternatively it might be said that the following vocalic features were distinctive in the language of the oldest written records: a) quantity; b) tongue-raising; c) tongue-retraction; d) lip-rounding, or labialization; e) gliding.

The contrast long *versus* short may be illustrated by the following pairs[1]:

witan	'blame'	— *witan*	'know'
bȳre	'event'	— *byre*	'child'

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[1] A. Reszkiewicz must have been the first to illustrate the phonemic significance of length in distinguishing minimal pairs, see A. Reszkiewicz, The Phonemic Interpretation of OE Digraphs. — Biuletyn Polskiego Towarzystwa Językoznawczego, 12 (1953), p. 181. R. P. Stockwell, W. C. Barritt and some other American linguists analyse long vowels as biphonemic combinations; see below, p. 22–23.

mētan	'meet'	—	*metan*	'measure'
fǣr	'danger'	—	*fær*	'journey'
fūl	'foul'	—	*full*	'full'
gōd	'good'	—	*god*	'god'
hāls	'health'	—	*hals*	(Angl.) 'neck'
hīera	'higher'	—	*hiera*	'their'
cēolas	'ships'	—	*ceolas*	'cold winds'
gēar	'year'	—	*geare, -a, -o*	'utterly'

The gradual opposition of vowels of different tongue-height (high /i(:) y(:) u(:) [*versus* mid [e(:) ö(:) o(:) /*versus* low [æ(:) a(:)/]) may be illustrated by the following pairs:

sittan	'sit'	—	*settan*	'set'
wīn	'wine'	—	*wēn*	'hope'
ber	'bear' imp.	—	*bær*	'bore' pret.
ūs	'us'	—	*ōs*	'god'
oll	'contempt'	—	*all*	(Angl.) 'all'
ōr	'beginning'	—	*ār*	'oar'
beorn	'warrior'	—	*bearn*	'child'
bēod	'offer' imp.	—	*bēad*	'offered'

The contrast between back and front vowels, i.e. [u(:) o(:) a(:)] *versus* [i(:) y(:) e(:) ö(:) æ(:)] may be illustrated by the following pairs:

ār	'oar'	—	*ǣr*	'before'
fare	'travel'	—	*fære*	'journey' gen., dat. sg.
gōs	'goose'	—	*gōes, gēs*	'geese'
hlūd	'loud'	—	*hlȳd*	'sound', *hlīd* 'close' imp.
numon	'took'	—	*niman*	'take'
burg	'town'	—	*byrg,*	dat. sg. of burg.

Though at the present time the opposition /a/—/æ/ is almost universally accepted, quite recently it was disputed by some linguists. Thus A. Reszkiewicz analysed /æ/ and /a/ as variants of the same phoneme, considering them to be purely in complementary distribution[2]. But A. S. C. Ross[3] and S. Chatman[4] have pointed out cases of their contrastive distribution (cp. *macian* 'make', *fare* 'travel', etc. in which [a] is found before a front vowel in the next syllable). An especially clear-cut contrast

[2] A. Reszkiewicz, op. cit., p. 182.

[3] A. S. C. Ross, Old English æ—a, — English Studies, 32 (1951), p. 49—56.

[4] S. Chatman, The a/æ opposition in Old English, — Word, 14 (1958), p. 224—236.

between /a/ and /æ/ is found between nouns of a-stem, on the one hand, and nouns of ō-stem, or verbs of class 6, on the other[5]:

stæle 'place' dat. sg. — *stale* 'theft' gen., dat. sg.
fære 'journey' dat. sg. — *fare* 'I travel', etc.

The originally complementary distribution of /a/ and /æ/ was destroyed partly by the process of analogy (cp. the extension of /a/ from *stalu* 'theft' to *stale* gen., dat. sg.), partly by late Latin loan-words (cp. *catt* < Lat. *cattus* 'cat', *caric* < Lat. *carica* 'dry fig'), and also by separate sound-changes, the earliest of which must have been i-umlaut (cp. *macian* < **macejan* < **macojan* 'make').

Though Ross und Chatman had proved in this way the presence of the phonological opposition /a/−/æ/, it was not still clear how the opposition in question was established. i-umlaut cannot account for this. As is well known, only phonemes can be redistributed by analogy, while allophones cannot, because they are always dependent upon definite positions. Redistribution of /a/ and /æ/, as we may deduce from forms such as *færest* (< **farist*) 'you travel', *færeð* (< **farið*) 'he travels', was possible already before i-umlaut[6]. In other words, /a/ and /æ/ were no longer positional variants when i-umlaut operated. Most probably we have here a case of indirect, paradigmatic phonemization: as there was already the opposition of the long /a:/−/æ:/, the opposition of the short /a/−/æ/ was also established[7].

The contrast between rounded and unrounded vowels, i.e. /y(:) ö(:)/ *versus* /i(:) e(:)/, may be illustrated by the following pairs:

wynn 'joy'   — *winn*   'strife'
hlȳd 'sound'   — *hlīd*   'close' imp.
(ge)mōede 'agreement' — *mēd(e)* 'reward'

In the Kentish dialect lip-rounding had lost its relevance already in the late IX − early X centuries. In the majority of the other dialects lip-rounding as a distinctive feature was preserved only in the phoneme /y(:)/, while /ö(:)/ had merged with /e(:)/. Therefore forms such as *gōes* 'geese', *oexen* 'oxen' may be found only in the earliest writings; later on *gēs, exen*, etc. are found instead.

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[5] A. S. C. Ross, op. cit., p. 49.

[6] K. Luick, Historische Grammatik der englischen Sprache, Vol. I, Part II, Harvard University Press, 1964, § 188.

[7] Я. Б. Крупаткин, К истории древнеанглийской системы гласных, —Вопросы языкознания, 1962, 6, стр. 56.

The low front /æ(:)/ had never had a rounded correlate.

The contrast between diphthongs and monophthongs may be illustrated by the following pairs:

rēad	'red'	—	*rǣd*	'advice', *rād* 'riding'
earn	'eagle'	—	*ærn*	'house', *arn* 'ran'
rēod	'redden' imp.	—	*rēd* (Angl.)	'consult' imp.,
			rōd	'rood'
heolfor	'blood'	—	*delfan*	'dig'
eorl	'nobleman'	—	*orl*	'garment'
tīeran	'run with tears'	—	*tīr*	'glory', *tūr* 'tower'
fiell	'fall'	—	*fyll*	'fulness', *full* 'full'

The phonological interpretation of diphthongs is most problematic. Already in 1938 M. Daunt[8] tried to prove that from the phonological point of view the short diphthongs /ea/ and /eo/ were "contextual variants" of the monophthongs /æ/ and /e/. Later on this question provoked a whole controversy, mainly between Stockwell and Barritt, on one side, Kuhn and Quirk, on the other[9].

Stockwell and Barritt distinguish only eight simple vowels in Old English which, together with their spellings, are as follows: /i/i, ie, io; /e/e, eo; /æ/æ, ea; /ü/y; /ö/oe; /u/u; /o/o; /ɔ/a[10]. The spellings ie, io, eo, ea as found in *hierde*, *hiorde*, 'shepherd', *eorðe* 'earth', *eaht* 'eight', etc. are analysed as representing the central allophones of the vowels /i e æ/. The long vowels, the long diphthongs among them, are analysed as biphonemic syllabic nuclei[11]:

/iy/ as in *bītan* 'bite'
/üy/ as in *cўta* 'kite'
/iw/ as in *frīo* 'free', *cīese* 'cheese'
/ew/ as in *brēost* 'breast'
/æw/ as in *bēam* 'beam'
/uw/ as in *hū* 'how'
/ɔw/ as in *strawu* 'straw'
/eh/ as in *grēne* 'green'
/æh/ as in *slǣpan* 'sleep'

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[8] M. Daunt, Old English Sound-Changes Reconsidered in Relation to Sribal Practice, — Transactions of the Philological Society, 1939, p. 108—137.

[9] For bibliography one may refer to: S. M. Kuhn, The Stressed Syllabics of Old English, — Language, 37(1961), p. 522.

[10] See R. P. Stockwell, The Phonology of Old English, — Studies in Linguistics, 13(1958), p. 13.

[11] R. P. Stockwell, op. cit., p. 15.

/oh/ as in *gōd* 'good'
/ɔh/ as in *bān* 'bone'.

The first elements of those complex syllabic nuclei are considered to be phonologically identical with the simple nuclei /i e æ ü ŏ u o ɔ/. The second elements are called off-glides and classified as the semivowels /y w h/.

A slightly different approach has been! attempted by C. F. Hockett. He does not deny the phonemic status of the vowels spelt *io, eo, ea* in *liornian* 'learn', *meolcan* 'milk', *healt* 'halt', etc. He himself argues for it by analysing the distribution of the spellings *i, e, æ, a* and the spellings *io, eo, ea* in the Vespasian Psalter which prove to be contrastive[12]. But he interprets the short diphthongs as the back unrounded monophthongs /i ə a/, structurally on a par with the vowels /i/i, /e/e, /æ/æ, /ø/oe, /y/y, /u/u, /o/o, /a/a[13]. The long vowels are analysed as clusters of these phonemes with the phoneme of length /·/ : /i·/ī, /·/īo, /e·/ē, etc[14].

Kuhn and Quirk are amongst those linguists who assert the phonemic status and the diphthongal character of the short [ie], [io], [eo], [ea].

The phonemic status of the short diphthongs is quite unambiguously testified by their regular graphic representation. It is true that the distribution of the short diphthongs and the corresponding front unrounded vowels had remained mainly complementary. Nevertheless, instances of contrastive distributions are not lacking[15].

The phonetic and phonemic homogeneity of the short and long diphthongs may be inferred first of all from their identical graphic representation. The diphthongs moreover, were not spelt quite identically in all the dialects and during the whole Old English period. But the spelling of the short and the long diphthongs always remained identical. The analogical phonetic and phonemic interpretations of the short and the long diphthongs is more in accordance with diachronic evidence. The diphthongal character of both the short /io eo ea/ and the long /io: eo: ea:/ is unmistakably evidenced by cases of transference of stress from the first element to the second element of diphthongs, such as North. *sodða* < *sioðdan* 'since', *solf* < *seolf* 'self', etc[16]. A number of such forms have been found in place-name material[17].

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[12] C. F. Hockett, The Stressed Syllabics of Old English. — Language, 35 (1959), p. 575—597.

[13] C. F. Hockett, A Course in Modern Linguistics, N.Y. 1967, p. 375.

[14] ibid.

[15] Numerous forms in which short diphthongs and front unrounded vowels are found in identical positions as a result of analogy, i-umlaut, reduction and syncopation of vowels have been pointed out by Kuhn and Quirk, also by Hockett. Kuhn and Quirk have also picked up a number of minimal pairs, such ans *ærn* 'house' — *earn* 'eagle', *bærn* 'burn' imp. — *bearn* 'child', etc., see S. M. Kuhn and R. Quirk, Some Recent Interpretations of Old English digraph spellings, — Language, 29(1953), p. 154—155.

[16] K. Luick, op. cit., § 265—266.

[17] Cp. H. Bohman, Studies in the Middle English Dialects of Devon and London. Göteborg, 1944; H. Hallgvist, Studies in Old English fractured *ea*, Lund, 1948.

The phonemic similarity of the short and the long diphthongs is very clearly attested by almost complete parallelism in their phonological development. So the merger of the short /io/ and /eo/ is paralleled by the merger of the long /io:/ and /eo:/; the results of the monophthongization of the short and the long diphthongs were also similar. It is significant that, as far as we can trace it, the short and the long diphthongs underwent the same phonetic evolution. Judging by the orthography, the diphthongs were phonetically rather changeable. In Primitive Old English the diphthongs must have been phonetically as follows: [iu], [eu], [æo]. The articulation of the first and the second elements differed as front and back, and the tongue-raising for both elements was approximately the same[18].

In the course of the Old English period the diphthongs underwent a number of phonetic changes. As a result of these changes the phonetic realisation of diphthongs in later Old English differed from dialect to dialect. So after the merger of the diphthongs /io(:)/ and /eo(:)/ at least two phonetic types of the low diphthong /ea(:)/ may be distinguished: the type [æa], found in the majority of the dialects, and the Kentish type [ea], with a narrower first element. The new hight dipthong in which the old diphthongs /io(:)/ and /eo(:)/ had merged showed an even greater variation. In the majority of the dialects it was /öo/, usually expressed with eo. In Kentish it was something like /ɪʌ/, i.e. with a narrowed first element and no rounding in the second element. The Kentish diphthong was spelt io. That the short and the long diphthongs had the same phonetic realisation despite these changes attests directly to their phonemic similarity.

The phonetic evolution and variation of diphthongs, moreover, may be interpreted as evidence of their monophonematic character and phonemic isolation. If we interpret the Old English diphthongs as monophonematic gliding sounds this changeability is quite understandable. The diphthongs, two or three in number, were opposed to each other only by tongue-raising. The only feature which distinguished the diphthongs from the other vowel phonemes was gliding. Hence the wide possibilities for variation. The difference in tongue-raising could be observed during the whole gliding. But it also could be observed only at the beginning or end of it. The phonetic realisation of gliding could be even more varying. As long as gliding was present and tongue-raising distinctions between diphthongs were observed it was of no phonemic importance whether the first or the second element of a diphthong was a rounded or an unrounded sound. Both elements of diphthongs could be front vowels even, only of different tongue-raising, i.e. something like [ie] io and [eæ] ea. This was characteristic at one time of the Kentish diphthongs.

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[18] Cp. K. Malone, Diphthong and Glide, — Mélanges de linguistique et de philologie Fernand Mossé in memoriam, Paris, 1959, p. 261.

From the point of view of the distinctive features enumerated above the overall pattern of the Old English vowels may be presented as follows:

(1)

Short Vowels				Long Vowels			
Monophthongs			*Diphthongs*	*Monophthongs*			*Diphthongs*
/i/	/y/	/u/	/io/	/i:/	/y:/	/u:/	/io:/
/e/	/ö/	/o/	/eo/	/e:/	/ö:/	/o:/	/eo:/
/æ/	/a/	/ea/	/ea/	/æ:/		/a:/	/ea:/

The paterns of separate dialects at separate stages of their development may slightly differ from this overall pattern. Differences usually lie in the inventory of phonemes, though sometimes they concern even distinctive features.

The West Saxon pattern of the VIII-early IX centuries[19] may have been as follows:

(2)

Short Vowels				Long Vowels			
Monophthongs			*Diphthongs*	*Monophthongs*			*Diphthongs*
/i/	/y/	/u/	/ie/	/i:/	/y:/	/u:/	/ie:/
/e/	/ö/	/o/	/eo/	/e:/	/ö:/	/o:/	/eo:/
/æ/	/a/		/ea/	/æ:/		/a:/	/ea:/

The most striking peculiarity of the West Saxon system is the presence of the diphthong /ie(:)/. The phonological interpretation of this diphthong and its reflexes is very problematic. Scheme (2) shows it as a diphthong which had taken the place of /io(:)/ after the latter merged with /eo(:)/. Phonetically it must have been something like [ɪe], or if we take into consideration its monophthongization to /y(:)/, something like [ɪö].

The Kentish pattern of the VIII–IX centuries must have been as follows:

(3)

Short Vowels				Long Vowels			
Monophthongs			*Diphthongs*	*Monophthongs*			*Diphthongs*
/i/	/y/	/u/		/i:/	/y:/	/u:/	
/e/	/ö/	/o/	/io/	/e:/	/ö:/	/o:/	/io:/
		/a/	/ea/			/a:/	/ea:/

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[19] The earliest West Saxon written records that may be of some greater literary and linguistic interest belong only to the late ninth and the early tenth centuries. So the eigth and the early ninth centuries are actually a pre-literary period in the history of West Saxon.

The following changes had contributed to the formation of Kentish pattern (3): a) the raising of the Pr OE /æ¹:/ (< Pr Gmc /e¹:/) in all the non-West Saxon dialects; b) the raising of the Pr OE /æ²:/ (< Pr Gmc ai + i, j) exclusive to the Kentish dialect; c) the raising of /æ/; d) the merger of the diphthongs /io(:)/ and /eo(:)/. The raising of /æ¹:/ took place in the period before i-umlaut [20]. It meant the loss of the phonemic oppositions /æ:/ — /e:/, /æ:/ — /a:/ in the vocalic system of the time. These oppositions were restored only as a result of i-umlaut. But very soon, not later than in the VIII century, not only the oppositons of the long /æ:/ — /e:/, /æ:/ — /a:/, but also the corresponding oppositions of the short were lost in Kentish. Approximately at the same time the opposition of the diphthongs /io(:)/ and /eo(:)/ was also lost[21].

The Mercian pattern of the VIII—IX(X) centuries may have been as follows[22]:

(4)

Short Vowels		Long Vowels	
Monophthongs	Diphthongs	Monophthongs	Diphthongs
/i/ /y/ /u/		/i:/ /y:/ /u:/	
/e/ /ö/ /o/	/eo/	/e:/ /ö:/ /o:/	/eo:/
/ɛ/ /ɔ/		/a:/ /a:/	/ea:/
/æ/ /a/	/ea/		

The most striking peculiarity of the West Mercian system, as we interpret it, is the presence of the pair of the short vowels /ɛ/ — /ɔ/. The phoneme /ɔ/ goes back to the nasal /aⁿ/[23] and was spelt in the Vespasian Psalter o; the phoneme /ɛ/ goes back to the earlier Old English /æ/ and was spelt e. The presence of both phonemes is postulated on structural grounds. According to our interpretations, the West Mercian phoneme /æ/ had originally two main allophones: the low /æ/ and the mid-low [ɛ]. The first was found in positions before *ll*, *l* + cons. as in *fællan* 'fell', *ældra*

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[20] K. Luick, op. cit., § 135.

[21] The vowel system of the Kentish dialect is treated at greater length in: А Степонавичюс. Сужение /ǣ/ в кентском диалекте древнеанглийского языка, — Ученые Записки высших учебных заведений Литовской ССР, Языкознание, 13 (1965), стр. 193—210; and by the same author: Судьба древнеанглийских дифтонгов /ĕa/, /ĕo/, /ĭo/ в кентском. Ученые записки высших учебных заведений Литовской ССР, Языкознание, 13 (1965), стр. 211—234.

[22] We take our evidence for the Mercian dialect of the VIII—IX centuries mainly from glosses, the most important of which are the Vespasian Psalter and Hymns. Though exact localisation of Mercian texts is difficult, the Vespasian Psalter represents in all probability the western part of the Mercian dialect. So pattern (4) is actually the West Mercian pattern of the VIII—IX centuries.

[23] On the Pr OE nasalized vowels see Y. B. Krupatkin, A Synchronic Problem Diachronically Solved, — Philologica Pragensia, 8 (1965), p. 251—255.

'older', etc. In all the other positions the allophone [ɛ] was found. Schematically all this may be shown as follows:

$$/i/ \quad /y/ \quad /u/$$
$$/e/ \quad /ö/ \quad /o/$$
$$\left.\begin{array}{c} /ɛ/ \\ /æ/ \end{array}\right\} \quad /æ/ \qquad /a/$$

The status of /æ/ and /ɛ/ was changed from an allophonic one to a phonemic one by the palatalization of /a/. In the process of the palatalization in positions other than before *ll*, *l*+cons. /a/ coalesced with /æ/, or, to be more exact, with its allophone [æ], found, as it has already been mentioned, before *ll*, *l*+cons. In other words, a redistribution of the phonemes /æ/ and /a/ took place here: the phoneme /a/ was replaced by the phoneme /æ/ in such words as *dagas* (>*dægas*) 'days', and preserved only in such words as *fallan* 'fall', *ald* 'old'. The change was important in that it disturbed the complementary distribution of the sounds [æ] and [ɛ]. Now [æ] was found not only before *ll*, *l*+cons., but also in other positions. The distribution of [æ] and [ɛ] became contrastive. In other words, with the redistribution of the phonemes /æ/ and /a/ the splitting of the phoneme /æ/ into the contrastive pair /æ/ − /ɛ/ occurred. The phoneme /æ/ was opposed to the phoneme /ɛ/ as short front low to short front mid-low:

$$/i/ \quad /y/ \quad /u/$$
$$/e/ \quad /ö/ \quad /o/$$
$$/ɛ/$$
$$/æ/ \qquad /a/$$

Further restructuring of the West Mercian vowel system was connected with the development of the short nasal /aⁿ/. Going back to the Pr Gmc /a/ before nasals, the phoneme /aⁿ/ was found in such words as *land* 'land', *mann* 'man', etc. When the long /aⁿː/ had merged with /oː/, its short counterpart /aⁿ/ as a completely isolated phoneme could also not serve for a long time. The process of denasalization is attested by the interchange of the spellings *a* and *o* for [aⁿ]. This interchange is widely observed in the early writings (mainly from the IX c.) of the Anglian, West Saxon and Kentish dialects. The interchange most probably reflects here the phonemic instability of /aⁿ/ and its confusion now with /a/, now with /o/. As /aⁿ/ was the only nasal vowel, tongue-raising or any other phonetic feature was phonemically irrelevant for it. But this does not mean that /aⁿ/ when nasality began to lose its relevance for it had equal possibilities of merging with any one of oral vowels. The outcome of denasalization had to be determined first of all by the phonetic similarity of the nasal /aⁿ/ to the oral phonemes. By the X century [aⁿ] had merged in almost all the dialect with [a]. This proves that phonetically /aⁿ/ must have stood more close to /a/ than to /o/. Only in West Mercian /aⁿ/ did not merge with [a], because

it could fill in the empty place between /a/ and /o/ and so preserve its phonemic status.

In West Mercian, just as in Kentish, the merger of the diphthongs /io(:)/ and /eo(:)/ had already taken place, but only in a diphthong with a wider first element and probably at a later date than in Kentish.

The Northumbrian pattern of the VIII – IX centuries may have still correspond-ed to the overall pattern:

(5)

Short Vowels		Long Vowels	
Monophthongs	Diphthongs	Monophthongs	Diphthongs
/i/ /y/ /u/	/io/	/i:/ /y:/ /u:/	/io:/
/e/ /ö/ /o/	/eo/	/e:/ /ö:/ /o:/	/eo:/
/æ/ /a/	/ea/	/æ:/ /a:/	/ea:/

The most problematic question concerning the Northumbrian pattern is the pre-sence of the opposition /eo:/ – /ea:/. In spelling the distinction between /eo:/ and /ea:/ is very often neglected: In North Northumbrian manuscripts not only /ea:/, but also /eo:/ are spelt ea; in South Northumbrian, on the other hand, not only /eo:/, but also /ea:/ are spelt eo. Such usage of ea and eo may be significant merely from the point of view of the phonetic character of the Northumbrian diphthongs. In North Northumbrian /eo:/ and /ea:/ may have been diphthongs with unrounded second elements, i.e. something like [ea] and [æ a], while in South Northumbrian, diphthongs with rounded second elements, i.e. something like [eo] and [æ o][24]. But it may be also interpreted as indicating the merger of the diphthongs /eo:/ and /ea:/. Some linguists, moreover, try to prove the merger of the long /eo:/ and /ea:/ by the evidence of the modern dialects. So in the dialect of Lorton, Cumberland[25], the reflex of /ea:/, /eo:/ and /æ:/ is [eï], while /e:/ is reflected as [i]. This led J. W. Watson to suggest the coalescence of /eo:/ with /ea:/[26]. Nevertheless, this evidence is not conclusive. The identical reflexes of /ea:/, /eo:/ and /æ:/ need not necessarily be the result of the mer-ger /eo:/ > /ea:/ and subsequent monophthongization to /æ:/. It was equally possib-le for both /ea:/ and /eo:/ to monophthongize to /æ:/ without any preceding merger. This may have been the case in those parts of Northumbrian in which the diphthong /eo:/ could be phonetically realized as [ea], i.e. with an unrounded and evidently low second element.

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[24] Such was the view of Karl Luick (K. Luick, op. cit., § 127 – 128, 133).

[25] Described by B. Brilioth (B. Brilioth, A Grammar of the Dialect of Lorton, Oxford, 1913).

[26] J. W. Watson, Northumbrian Old English ēo and ēa, – Language, 22 (1946), p. 19 – 26.

The fusion of the diphthongs /eo:/ and /ea:/ has also been suggested by S. Kuhn[27], as resulting in /eo:/[28]. This suggestion is based upon such rhymes of the Cursor Mundi (XIV c.) as *leme* (< OE *lēoma*) : *bem* (< OE *bēam*], etc. Though such rhymes may suggest the identity of the reflexes of /eo:/ and /ea:/, they cannot prove definitively the merger of the diphthongs.

The West Saxon pattern of the late IX – X centuries must have been as follows:

(6)

Short Vowels			Long Vowels			
Monophthongs		*Diphthongs*	*Monophthongs*			*Diphthongs*
/i/ /y/ /i/			/i:/ /y:/	/u:/		
/e/	/u/	/eo/	/e:/		/o:/	/eo:/
/æ/	/o/	/ea/	/æ:/		/a:/	/ea:/

In scheme (6) we find the diphthong /ie(:)/ already monophthongized to /i(:)/ or /y(:)/, and the mid front round vowel /ö(:)/ unrounded to /e(:)/.

The monophthongization of [ie(:)] is evidenced by the interchange of the spelling *ie* with the spellings *i* and *y* in the West Saxon manuscripts of the late IX century, as in *hierde, hirde* 'shepherd', *wiersa, wyrsa* 'worse', etc. Revers spellings, such as *briengan* for *bringan* 'bring', *tīema* for *tīma* 'time', etc. are also met with. So in the West Saxon of the late IX century the diphthong [ie(:)] could be found only as a facultative variant of the monophthongs /i(:)/ or /y(:)/.

In the X century the Mercian and Northumbrian vowel patterns were, as a rule, identical with pattern (6). In Kentish the vowel pattern of the X century was as follows:

(7)

Short Vowels			Long Vowels		
Monophthongs		*Diphthongs*	*Monophthongs*		*Diphthongs*
/i/	/u/	/io/	/i:/	/u:/	/io:/
/e/	/o/	/ea/	/e:/	/o:/	/ea:/
	/a/			/a:/	

Kentish pattern (7) reflects the unrounding of both /ö(:)/ and /y(:)/. The unrounding here of both /ö(:)/ and /y(:)/ to /e(:)/ may be explained by structural peculiarities of the Kentish vowel system. In the Kentish system after the merger of /æ(:)/

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[27] S. M. Kuhn, op. cit., p. 535.

[28] It has been suggested that /eo:/ and /ea:/ merged in /ea:/ (North Northumbrian) and [eo:] (South Northumbrian). See В. Ф. Руцкая, Развитие системы гласных в нортумбрийском диалекте древнеанглийского языка (Автореферат), Минск, 1969, стр. 7. Of course, the exact phonetic interpretation is not important from the phonemic point of view.

with /e(:)/ the opposition /e(:)/ − /a(:)/ was based on tongue-raising. Tongue-retraction was phonemically irrelevant for /a(:)/. Nevertheless, phonetically /a(:)/ must have been more closely related to back vowels than to front vowels. So tongue-retraction also inevitably emphasized the opposition /e(:)/ − /a(:)/. As a result, the tongue-raising distinction between /e(:)/ and /a(:)/ could be less marked. In other words, /e(:)/ could be articulated in Kentish more open than in other dialects. The other front vowels, namely /i(:)/, /y(:)/ and /ö(:)/, could also be phonetically lower. As is known rounding is difficult to maintain in lower vowels. This explains why in Kentish not only /ö(:)/, but also /y(:)/ were unrounded to /e(:)/ and, besides, at an earlier date than in the other dialects.

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Seniausių anglų kalbos rašto paminklų balsių sistema

A. Steponavičius

R e z i u m ė

Seniausių rašto paminklų laikotarpiu (VIII−X amž.) anglų kalbos balsių sistemoje skiriamąją funkciją atliko balsių kiekybė, liežuvio pakilimas, liežuvio padėtis, labializacija ir diftongiškumas. Šių skiriamųjų požymių požiūriu balsių sistemą schematiškai galima pavaizduoti šitaip:

Trumpi balsiai				Ilgi balsiai			
Monoftongai			*Diftongai*	*Monoftongai*			*Diftongai*
/i/	/y/	/u/	/io/	/i:/	/y:/	/u:/	/io:/
/e/	/ö/	/o/	/eo/	/e:/	/ö:/	/o:/	/eo:/
/æ/		/a/	/ea/	/æ:/		/a:/	/ea:/

Tai savotiška bendra sistema. Atskirų dialektų sistemas galima pavaizduoti šios bendros sistemos pagrindu.