

Concepts in English Linguistics

Session 9: Old English

Back mutation In OE, refers to *a*-mutation and *u*-mutation: the breaking of $\text{æ} > \text{ea}$; $\text{e} > \text{eo}$; $\text{i} > \text{io}$ (later eo) in case of a following /a/ or /u/ (in the early stages of OE; /u/ often manifested as <o> in writing): *scædu* > *sceadu*; *eƿor* > *eofor*; *sifon* > *siofon*

Breaking The development of one vowel into two. In OE, this occurs under influence of a back vowel in the next syllable (in which case the process is referred to as back mutation) or certain following consonants/clusters.

Early West Saxon The West Saxon dialect as evidenced in eighth-century sources, such as those produced under the guidance of King Alfred of Wessex; characterized among other things by the diphthong *ie* where one would later find *y*.

Front Mutation In OE, refers to *i*-mutation and *j*-mutation: the fronting of a back vowel, or raising of a front vowel, under influence of an /i/ or /j/ in the next syllable: $\text{u} > \text{y}$; $\text{o} > \text{e}$; $\text{a} > \text{æ}$ (but $\text{e} > \text{e}$ before a nasal); $\text{æ} > \text{e}$; $\text{e} > \text{i}$; $\text{ea}, \text{eo} > \text{ie}$: **cuning* > *cyning*; *fōt* → *fēt*; *mann* → *menn*. The /i/ <i> or /j/ <j> is often subsequently lost.

Futhorc The runic script used for Proto-English and Old English inscriptions, as well as for Proto-Frisian and Old Frisian.

Late West Saxon The West Saxon dialect as evidenced in sources from the later tenth and earlier

eleventh centuries, e.g. the writings of Ælfric of Eynsham; characterized among other things by *y* where earlier West Saxon had *ie*.

Retraction The substitution of a back vowel for a front vowel. In OE, the sequence is $\text{æ} > \text{a}$; $\text{e} > \text{o}$; $\text{i} > \text{u}$ under influence of a back consonant, or a back vowel in the next syllable. Especially common for *e* and in Anglian: *hældan* > *haldan*

Smoothing The simplification of diphthongs before back consonants; characteristic of Anglian