

# REVOLUTIONARY CHANGES IN THE PHONETICS OF OLD ENGLISH FOR LINGUISTS

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## Abstract:

This article focuses on the profound transformations that occurred in Old English phonetics over the periods. It explores key shifts, including great vowel shifts and grammatical endings, highlighting how these changes affected the perception of words. Furthermore, this paper will involve the introduction of new sounds on pronunciation. By comprehending these phonetic revolutions, linguists can achieve a more authentic and engaging point of Old English in their academic research papers as well as teaching. Old English is a crucial stage in the development of English language. Knowledge of Old English phonetics allows linguists to compare various language families together, particularly Roman-German languages. Over and above that, understanding the principal alterations can pave the way to read Old English texts and books authentically and for teaching the language accurately. This article will further enhance appreciation and bonds of literary works like “Beowulf” which is an Old English epic poem consisting of Germanic heroic legends. Finally, this article will end by illustrating some exact examples for the phonetic changes in the alphabet of English, based on professional research works by English linguists.

**Key words:** the introduction of new sounds on pronunciation, great vowel shifts, grammatical transformation, the perception of words.

## Introduction

Old English is the earliest form of the English language. Albert Baugh dates Old English from 450 to 1150 AD [1]. It was a source for the creation of Modern English that we used to speak and write. In one word, Old English is the ancestor of Middle English and Modern English. It had several unique features. For instance, it included four different dialects: Mercian, Kentish, West Saxon, Northumbrian. However, these features have changed many times over many decades. Some sources written in Old English have survived until this day. In fact, one of the most significant and most translated works of Old English is “Beowulf”. Its alliterative lines offer a lot of evidence for the phonetic changes among linguists.

## Literature review

The journey of English language from Old English to Modern English is marked by significant changes in phonetics and phonology. Mr. Henry Sweet who was lecturer in Phonetics at Oxford University mentioned two different methods to study the development of a language in his further illustration of the article on Early English Pronunciation by Mr. Alexander J. Ellis. He preferred the comparative method to the historical method. This is mainly because the comparative method is based more on facts rather than theoretical deductions or assumptions

like the historical approach [2]. What I am saying by this is that it is often doubtful which one is older when we compare two forms of the same sound in various co-existing languages. English language has experienced revolutionary changes over the periods. In fact, one of the most widely discussed changes are based on phonetics. Here is a basic change in the phonetics of Old English. Linguist, Stenbrenden mentioned that most elementary grammars of Old English (OE), as well as textbooks on the history of English, state that the digraph <cg> was pronounced as [dʒ] in her further illustration of correspondences in Old and Middle English [3]. In addition to that the loss of the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ (as in "thin" and "this"), a phenomenon noted by Roger Lass in his book "Phonology and Morphology" published in 1987. He observes that these sounds were often replaced by /t/ and /d/, respectively, leading to notable shifts in pronunciation and spelling [4]. Additionally, in the book named "Accents of English" which is the work of Jonathan Wells (1982), he highlighted the voicing and devoicing of consonants in various dialects of Old English, suggesting that these changes were influenced by both internal language evolution and external linguistic contact [5]. The period of Chaucer and Shakespeare paved the way for a significant alteration in pronunciation. Goldsmith claims that before the Great Vowel Shift, English speakers used to pronounce the vowels which they shared with speakers of other European languages including French and other Germanic languages [6]. More precisely, the Great Vowel Shift was a major phonetic change in the English language. According to this shift, English words were pronounced differently compared to their spelling. Furthermore, during Old English period, linguists can observe morphological changes along with phonetic shifts. In fact, English syntax was characterized by a high degree of inflectional morphology. Anderson described English language as a rich system of noun declension beside distinct cases which are nominative, accusative, genitive, and dative. One of the ancient texts, "Beowulf" was given as an example to clarify some unique features in inflection endings and a syntactic framework [7].

### **Methodology**

It is now clear that this article are based on professional research works by linguists. The article involves phonetic features of Old English which is a descendant of Modern English. This research paper helps individuals to comprehend Old English period by comparing various works of linguists. For instance, according to Sweet, the comparative method is considered more valuable approach to identify specific phonetic shifts and their impacts on pronunciation and word perception. In addition to that "Beowulf" is used precisely to illustrate the main changes in the phonetics of Old English as it represents early English words. All the things which is done by linguists like Sweet, Ellis focusing on how these shifts enhance the appreciation of Old English works. Another research that shows the primary changes in phonetics belongs to Anderson. He demonstrates four different cases of nouns in English.

### **Findings and discussion**

The findings of the article mainly reveal the important alterations of English language over the periods. The analysis of phonetic shifts and the introduction of new sounds give us the highlights of Old English. One of the significant identification is realizing how great vowel shifts occurred and how these changes impact on the way we pronounce the words. It should be referenced that the comparative method has proven the importance of the correlation between Old, Middle and Modern English. Furthermore, an essential discussion point from the findings is the vital role of phonetics in both academic researches for linguist and language teaching for teachers. In one word, better understanding of these transformations evokes the

strong bond with the language as well as it encourages awareness about the appreciation of Old English period.

## Conclusion

All things considered, knowing initial changes of Modern English makes surveys and teaching easier. However, this important because by comprehending these phonetic changes, linguists, educators and students as well can easily approach Old English with more authentic way and clear perspective. General knowledge about the language reminds us to save literary heritage in order to give these sources to future generation. Learning a certain language not only consists of repeating grammatical or phonetic rules, the process of studying language also contains being sure about its history and culture.

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