

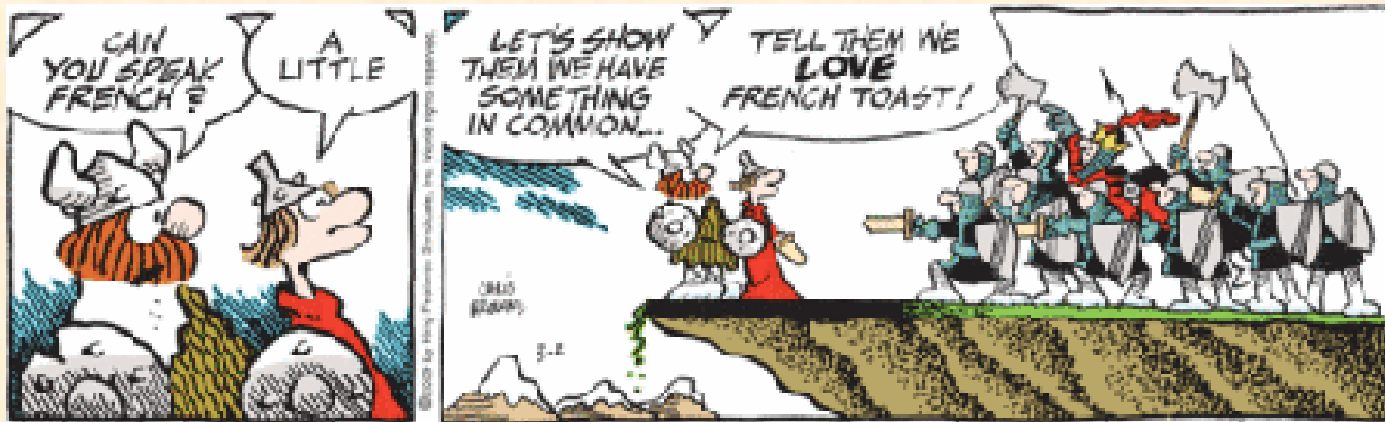


## Chapter 5, Part 2:

Fun with Old English: How Sound Changes and Inflections Started to Shape Modern English

# The Old English Language Situation

- Between 449-1100, many periods of war & colonialization
- Constant influx of new vocabulary
- Changes in who was in power meant many changes in which language(s) or dialect(s) had higher status
- Probably ongoing evolution of sound changes and grammatical changes—not all at one time



# Stress (OE's, not yours) (p. 90)

- Stress goes on first syllable of OE root
- Prefixes are **not** stressed (ignore the be-, ge-, un-, etc.)
- If it's a compound word (and OE loves these), the heaviest stress is on the root syllable of the first part of the compound and a secondary stress is on the root syllable of the second word in the compound:  
/   \
- \*hlāf-ford>hlāford (loaf-farer, loaf-giver = lord)
- The position of OE primary stress is going to make it easier for the unstressed syllables to change and simplify; this is where we will start losing inflectional endings & relying more on word order.

# Pronunciation (Algeo 86-89)

- Vowels generally are believed to have been pronounced as they are in modern Continental languages
- *j, q, v* used for writing Latin but not OE
- *y* is always a vowel
- Double consonants: **both** are pronounced
- **No silent letters**
- *C, g, h,* and *z* can be tricky—look at phonemic environment

# Vowel length is phonemic in OE

- Conventionally we mark long vowels with a macron and leave short vowel unmarked: gōd (good) is pronounced differently from god (God).
- When you **transcribe**, mark long vowels with a colon after them-- /go:d/ for 'gōd'
- Length was indicated by how long you held the sound.
- Often words with double vowels in modern English descend from OE long vowels: *good, seek, book*.

# Special Orthographic Characters

- Old English used four runes from the **futhorc** alphabet (remember ch. 3? Page 40? All those years ago?) in its writing system
- þ ('thorn') spells the sound 'th' (it can represent either the sound /θ/ or the sound /ð/)
- ð ('eth') spells the sound 'th' (almost always represents /ð/)
- ȝ ('yogh') spells the sound 'y' or as the "gh" in 'laugh'—it's not the numeral 3!
- ƿ ('wynn') spells the sound 'w'; because it's easily confused with þ, it disappeared from spelling fairly early.
- Pp. 89-90



# 1. Major **early phonological changes** in OE (p. 88)

- **Gemination**: a single consonant (except *r*) that in Gmc was preceded by a lax (short) vowel and followed by /j/ was doubled.
  - \*cunnja > cynn, \*hafjan > habban, \*saljan > sellan
- **Nasalization**: Before a nasal, the /a/ sound becomes the /ɔ/ sound (spellings go from PIE *a* to OE *o*). This means spellings will eventually go from a- to o-.
  - ond, lomb, monig > and, lamb, manig; \*sanft > sonft > sōft
- **Raising**: Gmc /a/ goes to OE /æ/ unless there is a **back** vowel in the following syllable; will often show up with *-as* suffixes (*dæg, dagas*): so \*sad > sæd but \*dagas > dagas

These changes often explain the differences between the English and German/Dutch cognates of a word.

## 2. Breaking

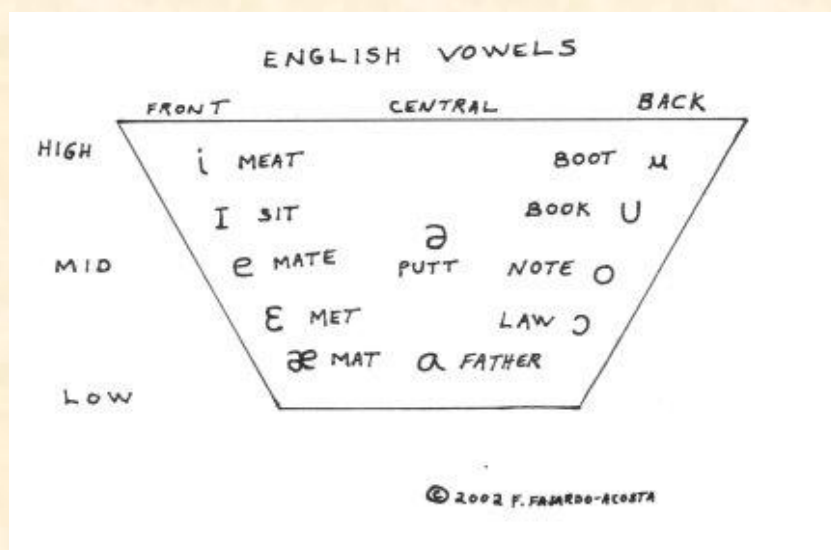
- This change explains the phonetic presence of many diphthongs and “long vowels” in modern English
- Lax (short) high vowels “break” into diphthongs before *-r* + consonant, *-l* + consonant (if the following consonant is /k/ or /h/), or *-h*: \**hærd* > *heard*; \**fællan* > *feallan*; \**herte* > *heorte*; \**melcan* > *meolcan* but \**helpan* > *helpan*; \**fehtan* > *feohtan*
- Tense (high) vowels break before *-h*: \**liht* > *liōht* > *lēoht* ‘light’





# 3. *i*-umlaut or *i*-mutation

- Happens chronologically *AFTER* breaking
- **Most common** OE sound change
- A stressed root vowel is palatalized (moved toward high-front position) by the presence of *ī*, *i*, or *j* in the following syllable



\*ū to ī, as in \*tūnjan to tīnan  
\*u to I, as in \*trumman to trimman  
\*ō to ē, as in \*dōmjan to dēman  
\*o to e, as in \*morgin to mergen  
nasal \*a or \*o to ɛ, as in \*framman to fremman  
\*ā to ā̄, as in \*lārjan to lārjan  
\*a to æ, as in \*ladin to lædin  
\*æ to ɛ, as in \*ægi to ege  
diphthongs \*ēa, \*ēo, \*īo, \*ea, \*eo, \*io  
to ī or i, as in \*hiordi to hirde or \*gēlēafjan to gelīfan

## 4. Diphthongization (p. 88)

- Mid- and low-front single vowels turn into diphthongs after **initial palatal** sounds (/g/, /c/, /š/) in a *stressed* syllable: æ > ea,  $\bar{a}\bar{e}$  >  $\bar{e}a$ , and e > ie
- \*castra > ceaster, “chester”, \*g $\bar{a}\bar{e}$ fon > g $\bar{e}a$ fon, “give”, \*sceran > scieran, “shear”
- Again, this explains the development of some of modern English’s diphthong spellings

If you want to know more about this, go get Richard Hogg’s *Old English Grammar: Phonology*.



# Declensions of Nouns (p. 93 ff.)

- The vowel of the PIE root determines the **class** of noun in OE: remember *ablaut*?
- Most important class in OE is the *a*- stems—more than half of OE nouns, which comes from PIE \*o-stems (p. 94)
  - ModE noun declensions come from the *a*- stems
- Minor but important: *r*-stems (*child-childer*), *n*-stems (*ox-oxen*), and *root-consonant* stems (*foot-feet*)
- Most irregular plurals in Modern English words that descend from Old English come from one of these variant stem classes.

# Weak vs. strong noun inflections (p. 97)

- Names given by 19<sup>th</sup> c. German linguists like Grimm
  - “Strong” nouns don’t have a demonstrative pronoun in the noun phrase
  - “Weak” nouns have a demonstrative (‘the’ or ‘that’) in the noun phrase
- OE has different inflectional endings depending on whether noun is strong or weak—leads to many allomorphs and considerable confusion—see the slides from the last lecture
- Remember that the adjective form will match in case, number, and gender—but it **MAY NOT MATCH** in SPELLING.
- No other way to learn these but memorizing them.

# Noun Tricks

Some endings repeat, so learn these patterns:

- Neuter and masculine genitive singular forms are the same within each major declension
- All dative singular forms are the same within each major declension
- All genitive plural forms end in *-a*
- All dative plural forms end in *-um*

# Adjectives (p. 97)

- Also must be inflected **for** weak or strong, depending on whether demonstrative is present (note: adjective ending is not always spelled like the noun ending!)
- Comparative forms (*-ra*) come down to us as *-er* spellings
- Superlatives (*-est*, *-mest*) come down to us as *-est* or sometimes *-most* spellings (utmost, foremost)
- A few exceptions have internal vowel changes instead: survivors *long/length*, *old/elder* (both *ablaut* and *i-umlaut*)
- And a few have comparative/superlative forms from other roots (*good/better/best*, *much/more/most*, etc.)



# Strong Noun-Adjective Agreeent

## The Strong Noun Declension , a- and o-stems (concord with strong adjectives)

Case	Masculine		Neuter		Feminine	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Nominative	--	-as	--	-u / --	-u / --	-a
Accusative	--	-as	--	-u / --	-e	-a / -e
Genitive	-es	-a	-es	-a	-e	-a
Dative/Instr.	-e	-um	-e	-um	-e	-um

## Strong Adjective Endings, a- and o-stems (concord with strong adjectives) (no determiners!)

Case	Masculine				Neuter				Feminine			
	Singular		Plural		Singular		Plural		Singular		Plural	
Nom	til	gōd	tile	gōde	til	gōd	tilu	gōd	tilu	gōd	tila	gōde
Acc.	tilne	gōdne	tile	gōde	til	gōd	tilu	gōd	tile	gōde	tila	gōda, -e
Gen.	tiles	gōdes	tilra	gōdra	tiles	gōdes	tilra	gōdra	tilra	gōdre	tilra	gōdra
Dat.	tile	gōdum	tilum	gōdum	tilum	gōdum	tilum	gōdum	tilre	gōdre	tilum	gōdum

# Weak Noun-Adjective Agreement

## The Weak Noun Declension (concord with determiner & weak adjectives)

Case	Masculine		Neuter		Feminine	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Nominative	-a	-an	-e	-an	-e	-an
Accusative	-an	-a	-e	-a	-an	-a
Genitive	-an	-ena	-an	-ena	-an	-ena
Dative/Instr.	-an	-um	-an	-um	-an	-um

## Weak Adjective Endings

Case	Masculine		Neuter		Feminine	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Nominative	gōda	gōdan	gōde	gōdan	gōde	gōdan
Accusative	gōdan	gōdan	gōdan	gōdan	gōdan	gōdan
Genitive	gōdan	gōdena, gōdenra	gōdan	gōdena, gōdenra	gōdan	gōdena, gōdenra
Dative/Instr.	gōdan	gōdum	gōdan	gōdum	gōdan	gōdum

## Adverbs (p. 98)

- Simple in OE: just add *-e* to the adjective (the *-ly* spelling is a later development)
- A few OE genitives adjective endings could function as adverbs: see Algeo p. 98-99
  - *Once, twice, thrice*, etc. are OE genitives (*-es*) spelled with a *-ce* and used adverbially.
  - *He walked backwards & forwards* (the 's' in both adverbs is a survivor of an OE genitive)

# Pronouns (p. 99)

- More than in modern English, and inflected for all **five cases, numbers, and genders**—some forms very similar and therefore probably confusing
- Pressure came early to adopt some of the Scandinavian forms to lessen the confusion—probably happened on a rolling basis
- Had a category of “**dual**” (‘you two’) that’s been lost (give thanks!)
- Western Michigan University has a great web page on these if you need more help beyond Algeo:

<http://www.wmich.edu/medieval/resources/IOE/inflpron.html>



# Some pronoun tricks..

As you study the pronouns, nouns and adjectives, you will find that forms repeat themselves in the same pattern:

- neuter nominative and accusative singular forms are the same
- neuter and masculine genitive singular forms are the same
- neuter and masculine dative singular forms are the same
- feminine genitive and dative singular forms are the same
- plural nominative and accusative forms are the same