

## LINGUISTICS

### THE MONOPHTHONGISATION OF DIPHTHONGS BEFORE DORSAL FRICATIVES: A CORPUS STUDY\*

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#### ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the geographical distribution of the monophthongisation of (1) the diphthong [ei] (< [e:ç]) before the palatal fricative [ç] (i.e. [eiç > i:ç]) and (2) the diphthong [ou] (< [o:x]) before the velar fricative [x] (i.e. [oux > u:x] in words like *high* and *bough*). The resulting monophthongs became the input to the diphthongisation rule, a part of the Great Vowel Shift. On the basis of forty-nine Middle English poetic texts from the Chadwyck-Healey online corpus an effort is made here to establish temporal and dialectal conditioning of the change.

#### 1. Preliminaries

The present writer's recent article (Wełna 2004) on a similar topic which discussed the question of long vowel raising in loanwords like OF *frère* > *frīre* (> friar) or in native words like OE (A) *brēr* > *brier* (> MoE *briar*) contained a conclusion that in certain environments, especially before the liquid [r], the process was initiated as early as the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and its effects were visible in the following century, thus a long time before the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, a period generally believed to have generated the basic impulse of the long vowel raising and diphthongisation, labelled as the Great Vowel Shift. Recently a hypothesis has been launched that the two Early Middle English long low vowel raisings, [æ: > ε:], as in OE *sāē* 'sea', and [ɑ: > ɔ:], as in OE *stān* 'stone', can also be considered harbingers of the Great Vowel Shift (Lutz 2004). In what

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\* This is a revised version of the paper delivered at 44<sup>th</sup> International Congress on Medieval Studies. Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, May 7-10, 2009.

follows attention is focussed on a completely different set of changes which increased the number of input forms to the 15<sup>th</sup> century diphthongisation of long vowels.

In Middle English, the raising of the long front close vowel [e:] to [i:] operated in the two main contexts: (a) before <ʒ> representing the palatalised voiced velar fricative which later became the semivowel [j], as in e.g. *dēʒen* ‘die’, *ēʒe* ‘eye’, *flēʒe* ‘fly’, *lēʒe* ‘lie’, *tēʒe* ‘tie’ v., etc. and (b) before <h> representing the palatalised voiceless fricative [ç], as in e.g. *hēh* ‘high’, *nēh* ‘nigh’, *bēh* ‘thigh’, and also *shēh* ‘shy’, *slēh* ‘sly’, *slēhp* ‘sleight’, the last three poorly evidenced in the Middle English texts.

A parallel process affected the long close back vowel [o:] which, when followed by the velar fricative [x], was raised to [u:] in items like *bōʒh* ‘bough’, *clōʒh* ‘clough’, *ynōʒh* ‘enough’, *plōʒh* ‘plough’, *slōʒh* ‘slough’, *tōʒh* ‘tough’. The subsequently narrowed [e:] and [o:] created the input [i:] and [u:] respectively to the diphthongisation rule which ultimately produced the contemporary output diphthongs [ai] and [au]. Since the changes before [j] and the velar fricatives, palatalised or not, went along different paths the present brief contribution examines the temporal and regional circumstances of the raising only in the context before the fricatives [ç] (long [e:]) and [x] (long [o:]) in the two of the above sets of words, with particular attention paid to spelling variation reflecting the changes.

## 2. Traditional grammars on *ē*- and *ō*-diphthongisation/raising before <h>

In his account of the change, Jordan ([1925] 1974: 120) postulates that some time in Middle English “there developed a glide sound /i/ after /e:/, so that /e:i/ > /ei/ originated; *heih*, *heigh* /heiç/ ‘high’, *neigh* ‘nigh’ ... *sleigh* ‘sly’...”. The diphthongal forms, first recorded, according to him, in the *Ancrene Riwe*, were rare in other 13<sup>th</sup> century texts. “This *ei* only later, probably in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> cent., was simplified to *ī*, so that now *hīgh*, *nīgh*, *slīgh* arose.” According to Jordan’s (1974: 132) quasi-sociolinguistic hypothesis, the monophthongised forms “first arose in vulgar language, while *ouh*, *eih* were the conservative more aristocratic pronunciations.” Simultaneously, forms like *heegh* ‘high’ found north of the Humber seem to show that the monophthong [e:] remained unchanged in that region (Brunner 1963: 23). Later on, Brunner hypothesises that in the continuations of words like *heigh* ‘high’ or *theigh* ‘thigh’ “the sound *ī* ... could also have come from inflected forms which had voiced [ʒ] instead of final voiceless [x’] before an ending beginning with a vowel...”. But from Jordan’s (1974: 132) account it follows that the evolution of the vowel in the sequence <ōh> was parallel to that in <ēh>, the former sequence yielding /oux/ which monophthongised as /u:x/ in the 14<sup>th</sup> century in

items like *bough* /boux/ > /bu:x/, *plough* /ploux/ > /plu:x/, *tough* /toux/ > /tu:x/, *inough* > /i'nu:x/, *clough* > /klu:x/, *slough* > /slu:x/, etc. The earliest evidence of monophthongisation are rhymes in *Sir Tristrem* (c1300, Yorkshire; 3110 *ynouȝ. hou*)

- 1) 3110 And knewe it wele *ynouȝ*,  
 3111 Bat fre.  
 3112 Hye seyde, "say me, *hou* ..."

and in Robert Mannyng: *ynowe* (< OE *zenōh*) : *bowe* (< OE *būzan*) (c1330). This development is also found in the area north of the Humber.

As usual, the most detailed description of this and other sound changes is that offered in Luick's *Historische Grammatik*, where the initial stage of the change, i.e. diphthongisation, is dated to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In a general process of the elimination of close quality in short vowels the sequences [eiç] (*heigh*) and [oux] (*inough*) developed to [ɛiç] and [ɔux] with initial open [ɛ] and [ɔ] respectively (Luick 1940: 422-424). Luick's interpretation of the change of the uninflected [e:ç] and [o:x] can be presented as the following sequences:

- 2) (a) [e:] + [ç] > [ei(ç)] <eigh> /> [i:] *heigh* > *high*  
 (b) [o:] + [x] > [ou(x)] <ough> /> [u:] *bough* > *b(o)ugh*

where the spelling <gh> is a reflection of the palatalised or non-palatalised velar.

Simultaneously, the development of the inflected forms creates the following pattern:

- 3) (a) [e:] + [ʒ (+V)] > [ej] <eye> > [ei] > [i:] *hey(e)* 'high'  
 (b) [o:] + [ʒ (+V)] > [ow] <owe> > [ou] > [u:] *bow(e)* 'bough'

As regards changes under (2a, b), Jordan believed in the reality of such developments (diphthongisation followed by monophthongisation to [i:] and [u:] respectively), whereas Luick (1940: 430-431) claimed that the two long vowels in (2a, b) were the result of an analogical transfer from the respective inflected forms under (3a, b) (cf. Welna 1988). According to Luick, the change occurred in words like *eye* and *bowes* (pl. of *bough*), i.e. where the vowels stood originally before the fricative [ɣ], earlier than before the fricative [x], which seems to be proved by the surviving spellings containing the cluster <gh>. Curiously, the rise of the diphthongs [ei] and [ou] in the sets above is termed "breaking" by Jones (1989) who sees analogy with the respective process operating in Old English.

The consequence of Luick's assumption of the lowering of the original short close vowels was his hypothesis that the monophthongisation [eiç > i:ç] and [oux > u:x] never occurred because the first element was lowered and thus the diphthong would have shared its development with that of the diphthong [ei] in nouns like *eight*, *weight*, where the sequence [eiç] yielded [aiç] (> MoE [ei]). The only way out is then to assume that analogy was the primary factor in the monophthongisation. However, the sequences [eiç, oux] need not have contained a lowered variant and thus the subsequent monophthongisation to [i:] and [u:], as in *heigh* > *high* and *plo(u)gh* > *plough* (with [u:]) could be treated as an assimilatory process in which the diphthongs [ei, ou] became transformed into monophthongs.

Because the evidence of the change offered in classic historical grammars is scant, an attempt will be made here to supply a larger body of data. Consequently, the present study is based on a selection of 49 poetic texts from the Chadwyck-Healey on-line corpus of Middle English poetry, with the following distribution: North 15, East Midland 17, West Midland 9, Southwest 7 and Kent 1. Poetry seems to be more useful than prose as it can offer evidence of rhymes which may help identify pronunciations sometimes difficult to recover because of the guise of very often ambiguous spellings. Perhaps the evidence presented in the ensuing sections will make it possible to formulate at least a partial explanation of how, where and when the raising of [e:] and [o:] before palatal/velar fricatives took place.

The list of words whose spellings in Middle English texts are examined is short and includes a selection of items in which original [e:] and [o:] first diphthongised to [ei] and [ou] and later monophthongised to [i:] (4a) and [u:] (4b) respectively. These words are listed below with their contemporary spellings:

- 4) (a) *high, height, nigh, sly, sleight, thigh*  
 (b) *bough, enough, plough (plow), slough, tough*

Special attention will be given to high frequency items, i.e. *high (height)*, *nigh* and *enough*, i.e. words which show a high degree of grammaticalisation. For the sake of simplicity the spelling variants will be represented by the following symbols:

- 5)  
 EH egh, eh, e3, (hegh, heght, negh, neh, sle3t, etc.)  
 EIH eigh, eih, ei3, eygh, eyh, ey3 (heigh, heih, hei3, sle3t, etc.)  
 EY(E) ey(e), ei(e) (hey, heye, ney, neye, etc.)  
 I(E)H igh, ih, ygh, yh, y3 (high, nih, hygh, ny3, etc.)  
 Y(E) y(e), i(e) (hye, hi, nye, nie, etc.)

OH	ogh, oh, o3 (enogh, anoh, etc.)
OUH	ough, ouh, ou3, owgh, ow3 (enough, ynouh, enow3, etc.)
OW(E)	ow(e), ou(e) (enow, plou, ynou, etc.)
UH	ugh, uh, u3 (enugh, ynuh, plu3, etc.)
(NER)	er(e) (ner, nere, nerr)

Examples also include grammatical variants of the above, such as plurals, comparatives and superlatives, as well as segments of nominal compounds, while verbal forms are disregarded. Words in that set will be presented in the context of localised manuscripts. Wherever possible, time references reflect the date of the manuscripts rather than the date of the text composition. Because the Middle English period witnessed the rise of the form *ner(e)* ‘near’, etc., the symbol NER reflects the statistics of such forms, which very frequently coincide in the same texts with forms of the old adjective *nigh*.

Since, regrettably, the editors of Chadwyck-Healey on-line texts employ the grapheme <y> for <3> (yogh), as e.g. in *inoyhe* ‘enough’, for *ino3he* or *boyhess* for *bo3hess* ‘boughs’ (*Ormulum*), such forms are interpreted in the statistics as containing the grapheme yogh.

### 3. North

The time range of the 15 texts from the North is around two hundred years, from c1275 to c1475. Almost all of them come from Yorkshire, the exceptions being the *Cursor Mundi* (Northumberland) and the *Avowing of Arthur* (Cumberland). The distribution of the relevant spellings is shown in Table 1 (in the Appendix).

The above can be exemplified by the following forms:

6)

Surtees Psalter	3hegh, heghte, negh, slegh, sleght, inoghe, slogh
Horn Childe	neie, nere
Castelford’s Chr.	hegh, heght, neghum, ner, sleght, anogh, plogh
Cursor Mundi	hegher, heght, heye, heite, hight, negh, neigh, nei, nigh, nere, slight, bogh, bugh, inogh, inou, plogh, slogh, slught, togh
Richard Rolle	hegh, hyght, negh
Lay-Folks Mass Book	heghly, hight
Gast of Gy	hegh, hyght, nere
Northern Passion	heghest, high, heght, hight, negh, inogh

Sir Ysumbras	heghe, nere, ynoghe, ploghe, plowghe, sloghe
Ywain and Gawain	hegh, high, heght, hight, negh, nere, bogh, ynogh
Sir Eglamour	heghe, hye, ynoghe
Sir Perceval of Gales	heghe, highte, nere, enoghe
Avowing of Arthur	heghehest, heyer, neghe, nere, enughe
Sege of Melayne	heghe, highte, neghe, nere, boughe, ynoghe
Robert of Knaresborough	heghe, heght, enoghe, ploghe, toghe

A closer analysis of the statistical data under (6) reveals characteristic features of Northern texts. If only spelling evidence is considered one cannot fail to observe that the conservative EH forms are found throughout the whole two hundred-year period. Their numerous instances are present in the *Surtees Psalter* and Thomas Castelford's *Chronicle*, having no diphthongal rivals in the time span between Richard Rolle (c1340) and *St. Robert of Knaresborough* (c1475). The only text which contains a significant number of diphthongised EY forms (119) is the *Cursor Mundi*, with 4.5 EY to 1.0 EH ratio. Such forms are practically absent in the other manuscripts of the period. What surprises one is a very small number of the intermediate EIH forms containing a diphthong which coincide with forms containing the palatalised fricative.

As regards the monophthongised I(E)H forms they seem to represent a substantial part of all forms as they are present in several texts, frequently matching in number the non-diphthongised forms. In this respect the North differs from other dialects which, as will be seen, exhibit a substantial number of intermediate, diphthongal spellings. Likewise, the monophthongised forms with <igh> are sometimes matched by the conservative EH spellings in rhymes. Let us consider several instances from the *Surtees Psalter*, Thomas Castelford's *Chronicle* and the *Cursor Mundi*:

- 7) (a) 175 And for þat, torne vpe in *heghte*.  
 176 Lauerd demes folke *righte*.

2995 Þai thought and spake quedenes *vnrighte*;  
 2996 Quedenes spake þai on *heghte* (The *Surtees Psalter*)

Rhyming forms identical with those in 175/176 are also found in the lines 3343/3344 and 4266/4267. However, other rhymes are perfectly matched, thus standing in contrast with those adduced above:

- 7) (b) 3804 And .i. firstgeten sal set him *reghte*,  
 3805 Forbi kinges of erthe on *heghte*  
 5497 Þider sothlike vpstegh on *heght*  
 5498 Kinde, kinde ofe lauerd *right* (The *Surtees Psalter*)

As regards other texts with apparently impure rhymes, Castelford's *Chronicle* contains the rhyme *sleght* (23043) : *fight* (23044), while single instances of such rhymes are found in the *Cursor Mundi* (*heght* 1339 : *sight* 1340) and in *St. Robert of Knaresborough* (*syght* 593 : *heght* 594).

As usual, in such cases three variant interpretations can be considered: (a) rhymes under (7a) are impure, i.e. the pronunciations match spellings literally; (b) IH spellings are realised as EH pronunciations, and (c) EH spellings correspond to IH pronunciations. Of these variants, hypothesis (b) is untenable since one can hardly imagine the pronunciation with long [e:] under the guise of the IH spelling. More realistic is the hypothesis involving impure rhymes which are used together with pure conservative rhymes like those under (7b), but a doubt arises why the scribe did not use EH spellings consistently. The most likely seems the hypothesis that the vowel in the derivative *heght* became narrowed to [i:], which does not mean that the same change affected other EH words, including the adjective *hegh*. If so, we deal with yet another instance of a change following the familiar route of lexical diffusion.

Because all texts, except the *Cursor Mundi* (Northumberland) and the *Avowing of Arthur* (Cumberland) come from Yorkshire, the large number of the diphthongised forms in the *Cursor Mundi* may reflect the specific character of the language of the region.

Due to the scarcity of data, very little can be said about changes of words representing the OH type. The survival of the OH type is evident as there are only four instances of the diphthongised forms. Worth mentioning is that three words with *u*-spellings reflect the process of monophthongisation. These are *bugh* (11721) and *slught* 'slough' (745; with excrescent <t>) in the *Cursor Mundi*, and *enough* in the *Avowing of Arthur*, again, curiously, non-Yorkshire texts.

#### 4. East Midland

The dating of the manuscripts representative of the East Midland ranges from c1175 to c1460, the period covered embracing almost three hundred years. Geographically, there is much variation as these texts come from various areas of the region. Of the 16 texts in total, 5 come from Lincolnshire, 4 from London, 3 from Essex/Middlesex, 2 from Norfolk and 2 from Suffolk. The East Midland shows the distribution of forms as shown in Table 2 (Appendix).

The East Midland texts contain the following forms of the relevant words:

8)	
Ormulum	heh, heyhest, neh, sleh, boʒhess, inoh
Bestiary	heg, inog
Genesis & Exodus	hege, neg, buges, anog, ynug

Havelok the Dane	heye, ney, ner, sley, inow, plow
King Horn	ney, nere
Guy of Warwick	hygh, hye, neye, nere, ynogh, ynowe
Arthour & Merlin	heiye, neiye, sliye, sleiyt, ynouȝ
King of Tars	heye, hiht, neye, ner
Mannyng's Handlyng	hegh, heyyest, hygh, hye, heghþe, nygh, nye, nere, slygh, slye, sleghþe, ynow
Mannyng's Story of England	heg, hey, heighte, neygh, nere, sleye, sleigþe, sleytes, ynogh, ynough, inowe
Chaucer's Romaunt of the Rose	high, height, highte, neigh, nygh, nere, slyghly, slye, bough, y-nogh, y-nough, y- now
Gower's Confessio Amantis	heyher, heyeste, hyhe, heihte, nyh, nerr, slyh, sleihte, bowh, ynowh, ynowe, ynou, plowh, plouh, plowman
Seven Sages of Rome	heghe, hegy, high, hye, neghy, ney, ner, slyeste, ynowgh, inow
Lydgate's Fall of Princes	hih, heihte, nyh, nerre
Hoccleve's Regement	hygh, hyge, heighte, highte, ney, nigh, nere, ynow, plow, tow
Emare	hygh, hye, nere, slye

The most conservative text, *Genesis & Exodus*, completely lacks modified forms, exhibiting the EH and OH forms (but also 2 UH forms). The chronologically earliest manuscript of the *Ormulum* is more innovative as it not only preserves monophthongal EH forms but also develops a substantial number of EIH forms, the ratio being 2 (EH) : 1 (EIH). Other texts from Lincolnshire contain mostly conservative EH monophthongs but, unlike the situation in the North, diphthongised EY forms are in consistent use in the East Midland from around 1300 onwards. The old EH forms are missing not only in *Havelok*, *King Horn*, *Guy of Warwick*, but also in the London poets Chaucer and Gower. Chaucer's *The Romaunt of the Rose* contains practically only monophthongised IH forms and diphthongised OUH/OW forms.

Several East Midland texts also contain what seems to be "impure" rhymes. In fact they are more numerous than those in the Northern manuscripts. They occur in *Havelok*, *Guy of Warwick*, *Arthur and Merlin* and in Robert Mannyng. In *Havelok*, *hey* (1071) rhymes with *fri* (1072), which seems to indicate the monophthongisation [ei > i:]. But rhymes of that kind are particularly revealing in *Guy of Warwick*; cf. the sample below:

- 9)        971     Then he harde horsys *neye*,  
            972     Helmes he sawe bryght on *hye*.



and a set of examples involving the form *heiye* which stands in rhyme with:

- 10) (a) *heiye*: *seyye* 2813, *seye* 5987, *seiye* 6191, 9372, *cuntreie* 8312  
 (b) *heiye*: *aspie* 1151, 6794, *vilainie* 2355, *curteisielie* 5064, *Vnplie* 5064, *compeinie* 7822, 8207, 9321

Evidently, rhyme-words in (10a) indicate the diphthongal pronunciation of *heiye*, while rhymes in (10b) seem to indicate monophthongal pronunciation with long [i:]. Much more complicated is the interpretation of a small set of the two rhyming pairs listed under (11a, b):

- 11) (a) 6845 Ac þer no hadde non scaped *oway*,  
 6846 Nadde chaunce comen fram Crist on *heiye*  
 (b) 7167 For he smot him *forbi*,  
 7168 & Wawain for gret *heiye* (Guy of Warwick)

If rhymes in (11) are impure, the rhyme *oway* : *heiye* seems to conceal the pronunciations [ai] : [ei], while the pair *forbi* : *heiye* contains, as it seems, the pronunciations [i:] and [ei]. But if these are true rhymes we should have [ai] rather than [ei] in (11a) because this would reflect a well-known Middle English development [ei > ai]. On the other hand, the rhyme in (11b) makes the pronunciation of *heiye* with long [i:] plausible as no one would expect that *forbi* contains final [ei], thus matching *heiye*.

Other apparently impure rhymes are found in the poem *Arthur and Merlin* which features the rhymes of *arizt* and *sleizt* (lines 5883-4, 6583-4, 9107-8). These rhymes seem to testify to the process of monophthongisation [ei > i:] before palatal fricatives, cf.:

- 12) 5883 Alle þailaiden doun *riyt*  
 5884 & made þer swiche a *sleit*...  
 6583 þer seyð Merlin anon *riyt*  
 6584 To king Arthour al þe *sleiyt*...  
  
 9107 & made swiche defense & *sleiyt*,  
 9108 þat y no may telle it *ariyt*

Likewise revealing are lines from Robert Mannyng's *The Story of England* which, apart from the regular rhymes, like *fley* : *ney*, also contains several curious rhymes of *ney* with *by* (8447), *party* (!) (8546), *maistri* (12518), *cry* (13058), *softely* (!) (13544), *blody* (13906) and *wery* (15944); cf.:

- 13) 9791      Toward york Colgrym *fley*,  
 9792      Arthur hym pursued faste & *ney*...
- 8447      Sire Eldok was euere hym *by*,  
 8448      & other barons also were *ney*.
- 8545      yyf Eldokes help ne hadde be *ney*  
 8546      Hengist had had þe better *party*...
- 12517      Arthur seide, “Godes help ys *ney*!  
 12518      “He wot ho schal haue þe *maistri*.”
- 13057      Non knew oþer, þey were so *ney*,  
 13058      But by þer speche or by þer *cry*...
- 13543      þe batailes neyghed *ney* & *ney*,  
 13544      Sadly passing, and *softely*.
- 13905      “& þat þou come me so *ney*,  
 13906      Caliborne to make *bloody*!”
- 15943      & when he was þe toun ought *ney*  
 15944      He bad þem reste þat were *wery*...
- (Robert Mannyng, *The Story of England*)

Rhymes of this kind seem to confirm the hypothesis that monophthongisation [ei > i:] must have been quite advanced at the time when the manuscript of *Guy of Warwick* was produced and when Robert Mannyng wrote his *Story of England*. This process must have been well in progress in the East Midland, although its effects are not unambiguously reflected in texts from that area. There is no similar evidence of “impure” spelling rhymes as regards the respective monophthongisation [ou > u:]. But it may be a graphemic rather than phonological problem because the spelling <ou> could represent either the diphthong [ou] (eg. *bowe* n., now [bou]) or [u:] (*bowe* v., now [bau]).

### 5. West Midland

The texts from the West Midland (10 in total) range in time from the early 13<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, a span of around 250 years. They come from 5 counties, i.e. Lancashire (5), Staffordshire (3), Cheshire (1) and Herefordshire (1). The distribution of forms is shown in Table 3 (Appendix).

The above figures refer to the following forms of words examined:

14)	
Harrowing of Hell	heye, heiye, nere, ynoh
Stanzaic Life of Christ	hegh, heye, hye, hie, heght, hight, negh, neye, slegh, sleght, inogh, plogh-
William of Palerne	heiyh, hei3, heye, high, neyh, nei3, ney, nyh, nere, sleiliche, thighs, bowes, inow
Sir Gawain	heye, highe, heyt, neghe, in-noghe, in-nowe
Piers the Plowman A	heichliche, heiy, heiye, neih, nere, i-nouh, i-nowe, plouh, plouy, slouthe
Piers the Plowman B	heigh, heyy, hiegh, neighe, neiye, nyeghe, nere, ynogh, ynowe, plough-, plow, plou-
Destruction of Troy	hegh, heyer, high, hyst, heght, hight, negh, ney, nighe, ner, sleghly, slyghly, slyeste, sleght, theghes, ynogh, ynugh, enow, bogh, bowes, ploghe, togh
Sir Amadace	nere, ynyuhe
Sir Torrent	heygh, hey, high, hyght, i-nough, i-nowe
Sir Degrevant	heghe, heghte, highte, nere, boghe, ynoghe, i-nowe, ploughes

The statistics testifies to the survival of the original forms with long [e:] and, to a limited extent, forms with [o:] in Cheshire (*The Stanzaic Life of Christ*) and OH forms in *Sir Gawain*, while in other texts forms with the diphthong [ei] and [ou] predominate. As compared with the East Midland data, the evidence of the monophthongisation to long [i:] is rather limited, while monophthongisation to long [u:] is confined to UH forms in *Sir Amadace*. Curiously, *The Stanzaic Life of Christ*, the earlier mentioned text from the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, contains a significant number of strongly contrasting monophthongal forms, with long [e:] and long [i:] (37: IH + YE). The most complicated distribution is found in the relatively late manuscript of *The Destruction of Troy* (c1400, Lancashire) where numerous conservative EH and OH forms coincide with the diphthongised EY, OW and monophthongised IH forms.

There is little evidence of line-final rhymes because the most important West Midland poets employed alliteration or, at best, techniques, like the author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In the West Midland, the diphthongal forms were particularly frequent between 1350 and 1400.

## 6. Southwest and Kent

The Southern region is represented by 7 Southwestern poems (Worcestershire 3, Gloucestershire 2, Surrey 1, Devonshire 1) and one text from Kent by William of

Shoreham. The time range is rather narrow as it only embraces the period from around 1200 to 1380, i.e. less than two hundred years (see Table 4, Appendix).

These texts contain the following forms of words subject to analysis in the present study:

15)

Layamon	heh, heihliche, heyes, neh, neih, nih, nere, inoh, inowe
Owl and the Nightingale	heh, heie, neh, ney, inoh
Sir Orfeo	heiye, nere
Castel of Love	heynesse, hyhhe, neih, nyyh, sleih-, inouh
Myroure of Lewed	Men hegh, ynogh
Robert of Gloucester Chr.	heiy, heie, hey, neiy, nei, nye, inowe, plou- heghe, heye, neghy, ney, ner, slegh, sley-, sleythe, ynow
William of Shoreham	heiye, hey, hy, ney, nere, y-now

Only three manuscripts (*Layamon*, *Robert of Gloucester* and *Sir Firumbras*) contain sufficient data to make any generalisation possible. As could be expected, the earliest of them, *Layamon*, exhibits prevalence of the monophthongal EH and OH forms, while *Robert of Gloucester's Chronicle* and *Sir Ferumbras* chiefly contain diphthongised forms. Because the Southwestern texts are relatively early they show very few traces of monophthongisation to [i:]. The only Kentish text, the poems by William of Shoreham, exhibits a similar distributional pattern with preference for diphthongal EY forms.

The only rhyme which might stir up controversy is that found in *Robert of Gloucester's Chronicle*, where *hey* matches *ysay*. This may reflect the incipient stage of the lowering of [e] in [ei] already mentioned in the section on the East Midland; cf.:

- 16) 5745 Ðo þoyte him in is slep þat he an hey tre *ysay*  
 5746 Stonde þere bi syde him & as he bi huld an *hey*  
 (R. Gloucester's *Chronicle*)

Summing up, one can state that data from the South also confirm that the year 1300 separates the texts with the old monophthongs retained from those which contain diphthongs. The monophthongisation of the latter on a larger scale was practically completed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century when the long monophthongs [e:, o:] formerly standing before palatal and velar fricatives became [i:, u:], thus becoming an input to the Great Vowel Shift raising rule. The adverb *enough*, the

adjective *tough* and the noun *slough*, now [slʌf], failed to diphthongise as their long vowel [u:] became shortened before the initial stage of the Shift.

## 7. Conclusions

The evidence of spellings from poetic texts representing all dialects allows one to formulate the following generalisations:

### 1) EY

North of the Humber the diphthongised forms EIH or EY are only found in the *Cursor Mundi* (Northumberland, c1340), being almost absent in poetic texts from Yorkshire. But EIH forms are registered very early in Lincolnshire (*Ormulum*, c1175, East Midland). Only at the turn of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (*Havelok*) and before mid-14<sup>th</sup> century (*Arthur and Merlin*, Robert Mannyng) the EY forms become frequent. After 1350, the EH forms become extremely rare in the West Midland, except in *The Destruction of Troy* (c1400, sLancashire), a poem which shows a large variety of all possible forms, with the prevalence of those containing the old monophthong. In the Southwest, the conservative forms prevail only in the early texts (Layamon, c1200, Worcestershire), but EY forms replace them from c1300 onwards (Robert of Gloucester, *Sir Ferumbras*). The only Kentish text examined, William of Shoreham (c1315) exhibits EY throughout.

### 2) EIH EY > IH

The monophthong in the North is rather rare, although the *Cursor Mundi* contains 13 tokens exhibiting monophthongisation. In the East Midland, the first more numerous instances of the monophthong [i:] are found in Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* (1338, Lincolnshire, 45 IH forms). Curiously, the data in Mannyng's *Story of England* are drastically different (117 instances of EIH EY). Monophthongisation is regular in Chaucer and to a large extent in Gower, Hoccleve and Lydgate.

### 3) OH > OUH

The evidence of the diphthongisation OH > OUH is rather meagre. Forms unambiguously confirming the existence of the diphthong [ou] in the North are lacking. More numerous examples are found in the works of poets from London (East Midland), especially Gower, as well as Chaucer, Hoccleve and Lydgate. In the West Midland their number is high in *Piers the Plowman* (Versions A and B, of 1367 and 1377 respectively). The Southwest exhibits larger numbers of such forms after 1320 (Robert of Gloucester and *Sir Ferumbras*).

## 4) OUH OW &gt; UH

The evidence of this change in dialects is even less than meagre, considering the ambiguous spelling <ou> which could represent a diphthong or a monophthong. Transparent UH spellings are rare in the North and the East Midland. The only text featuring more than mere isolated cases of such spellings is *Sir Amadace* from the West Midland (c1420, Lancashire, 9 tokens). No such forms have been identified in the Southern texts.

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