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# OLD ENGLISH PHONOLOGY

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*in memoriam*

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# List of abbreviations

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- acc. accusative
- Aelf. Aelfric
- AFB Anglo-Frisian Brightening
- ant anterior
- Arm. Armenian
- artic articulation
- Av. Avestan
- C consonant
- CLOS closure
- cons consonantal
- cont continuant
- cor coronal
- dat. dative
- DHH Diphthong Height Harmony
- Du. Durham
- e- early
- Finn. Finnish
- Fr. French
- G. German
- gen. genitive
- Gmc Germanic
- Go. Gothic
- Gr. Greek
- Hung. Hungarian
- IE Indo-European
- INF infinitive
- IPA International Phonetic Association
- Ka. Kannada
- L. Latin
- lat lateral
- ME Middle English
- MHG Middle High German

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- MnSpan. Modern Spanish  
 MSC morpheme structure condition  
 MS(S) manuscript(s)  
 n. nominative/(foot)note  
 N nasal consonant  
 nas nasal  
 Nb. Northumberland  
 NE New (= Modern) English  
 NHG New (= Modern) High German  
 Nth. Northumbrian  
 O obstruent  
 obs obstruent (feature)  
 OE Old English  
*OED Oxford English Dictionary*  
 OFris. Old Frisian  
 OHG Old High German  
 OIcel. Old Icelandic  
 OIr. Old Irish  
 OJ Old Japanese  
 ON Old Norse  
 OS Old Saxon  
 OSpan. Old Spanish  
 PART past (passive) participle of the OE strong verb  
 PD Proto-Dravidian  
 pers. person  
 PGmc Proto-Germanic  
 phon phonation  
 PIE Proto-Indo-European  
 pl. plural  
 PP past participle and preterite forms of the OE strong verb  
 PR Puerto-Rican  
 PRES present forms of the OE strong verb  
 PRET<sub>1</sub> preterite indicative 1 and 3 person singular of the OE strong verb  
 PRET<sub>2</sub> preterite forms of the OE strong verb other than PRET<sub>1</sub>  
 P-rule phonological rule  
 PU Proto-Uralic  
 R resonant (nonobstruent) consonant  
 REL release  
 RP Received Pronunciation  
 S segment  
 SC structural change  
 SD Structural description

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sg./sing. singular

Skr. Sanskrit

Span. Spanish

*SPE* *The Sound Pattern of English* (= Chomsky & Halle 1968)

strid strident

SV strong verb

SW south-west(ern)

syll syllabic

V vowel

voc vocalic

WGG West Germanic Geminat

WGmc West Germanic

WS West Saxon

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## Preface

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This book is the result of four years of wrestling with some major problems of Old English phonology. The length of time it has been in the works, as it were, is significant when one comes to look at its overall structure. Between the appearance of our preliminary mimeographed version (1970) and the present publication, there have been many new developments in phonological theory, which have – for better or worse – left their mark. In particular, the theory as a whole seems much less stable and unified than it did in the first two years or so after the appearance of *The sound pattern of English* (1968), which more or less established the shape of the ‘classical’ generative paradigm.

The main questions that have arisen seem to cluster around the basic problem of what we might call the ‘determinacy’ of phonological descriptions. To what extent, for instance, does the requirement that all non-suppletive allomorphy be referred to unique morphophonemic representations operated on by ‘independently motivated’ and ‘phonetically natural’ rules still hold? (And, for that matter, how can you tell, in cases less obvious than *go:went* or *good:better*, whether you really have suppletion?) This issue seems to be at the bottom of the whole ‘abstractness’ controversy (Kiparsky 1968a, Hyman 1970, etc.); and the controversy has by no means been effectively settled (cf. Harms 1973, Hyman 1973, Vago 1973).

This problem has left a structural impress on our work: the bulk of this book (with some polemical exceptions) is what might be called a ‘classical’ or ‘standard’ generative phonology of OE; but at the end (ch. vi) we have added a rather elaborate quasi-palinode. We say ‘quasi-’, because it is not so much a ‘retraction’ as a reconsideration of some of our conclusions and procedures in the light of theoretical issues that seem more important now than they did earlier, but are not yet settled enough to make us change our basic analysis. On these matters we leave the decision to the reader, and let our own uncertainty stand.

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Basically this book is an attempt to discover which of those processes that the handbooks call ‘sound-changes’ dating to pre-OE times, and reflected in intraparadigmatic variation of various kinds, can be recovered as synchronic rules of OE. In general, then, the prime issue is the ‘depth’ of OE morphophonemics; how many of the variations in morpheme-shape are synchronically motivated (i.e. are alternations) and how many are relics of historical processes with no synchronic relevance (i.e. suppletions). Our general conclusion is that nearly all of them – including even the ‘ablaut’ alternations in the strong verbs – can be shown to play a significant part in the synchronic phonology, if this is constructed pretty much according to the requirements of standard theory. In this sense, of course, there is in this book, as in any other study of its type, a certain epistemological indeterminacy: is it an account of ‘the structure of OE’, or of ‘the structure of standard theory’, as shown by its confrontation with the facts of OE? We cannot tell at this point whether the two are ‘complementary’ (in the sense of ‘complementarity’ in physical theory) or not. But the problem of whether scientific descriptions are ontological at all, or solely epistemological, cannot be solved here: though we do think it worth mentioning.

Any generative treatment of the facts established by the older ‘philological’ investigations is bound to be somewhat controversial in its interpretations, vis-à-vis the older ones; this is only to be expected. And the extent to which our challenges to the older views are well founded is a matter for the reader to judge. But what is not so obvious is that almost any large-scale investigation conducted in the framework of ‘standard’ theory is bound – by virtue of the language-specific facts it deals with – to be controversial vis-à-vis that theory as well. So that even though our basic orientation is that of Chomsky and Halle, there are a number of points where we depart from the paradigm, and make rather different proposals. This is clearest in issues like the degree of specification required for lexical entries (the admission of ‘archi-segments’: cf. chs. I, V, VI), and the choice of a feature inventory (cf. Preliminaries). Both types of controversial claims will be apparent throughout; but the main impulse here is exploratory rather than polemical.

It is clear that anyone working in historical linguistics and approaching the subject from a contemporary point of view will find himself in the midst of a complex network of indebtedness: to the scholars of the

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‘old tradition’ and to those of the new, including those of his colleagues who have taken the time to exact a personal (rather than simply bibliographical) debt. Our bibliography will give some idea of our impersonal indebtedness; but a number of personal acknowledgements are in order. First and foremost, to the two men (now deceased) who were largely responsible for getting us interested in historical linguistics in the first place, and presided over our early training: Helge Kökeritz, late Professor of English at Yale University, and Dr O. K. Schram, late Reader in English Language at the University of Edinburgh. To their memory, with great affection and gratitude, we dedicate this work.

More directly, we would like to acknowledge the help (both constructive and destructive) of those of our colleagues who have read parts of this book in various versions, or have generously given of their time to discuss our ideas with us. Most especially the following: David J. Tittensor, Charles Jones, Gillian Brown, Geoff Pullum, James R. Hurford, Bengt Sigurd, Robert P. Stockwell, Mary Taylor, Charles Bird, and Fred Householder.

And finally, we must mention the heroic efforts of Jane Lind in deciphering and typing our first draft; the patience of our wives, Jaime and Margaret, during our long periods of utter abstraction; and the fortitude and perceptive commentary of our students in Indiana and Edinburgh, who sat through our early expositions of much of this material.

R.L., J.M.A.

*Edinburgh*  
*November 1973*