

OLD ENGLISH

The OE consonant system:

PLOSIVES	Short voiceless	p t k	Palatalized: k' sk' k': g':
	Short voiced	b d g	
	Long voiceless	p: t: k:	
	Long voiced	b: d: g:	
FRICATIVES	Short	f – v, θ – ð, s – z, x – x', γ – γ'	palatalized x':
	Long	f: θ: s: x:	
SONORANTS	Short	r l m n w j	
	Long	l: m: n:	

HARDENING: fricative > plosive

PC	OE	Gt.	OE	NE
ð	d	Gt blōb	blōd	blood
v	b	Gt brobar	b rōbor	brother
γ	g	Gt guma	ʒuma	'man

VOICING / DEVOICING

PG	OE	Gt.	OE	NE
v	v f	sibun (v] hlaifs	seofon hlāfas	seven loaves
f	v f	wulfos wulfs	wulfas wulf	wolves wolf
θ	ð θ	siuþan sauþ	seoþan sēað	seethe seethed
γ	γ x	dagos baurgs	dazas buruh	days borough
s	z s	kiusan kaus	cēosan cēas	chosen chose

RHOTACISM [z] > [ʒ] > [r]

PG (Gt)	OE	NE
z	r	
maiza	māra	more
auso	eare	ear

GEMINATION:

Doubling or lengthening of consonants after a short vowel before [j]

Gt.	OE	NE
satjan	settan	set
skapjan	scyppan	shapen
saljan	sellan	sell

PALATALISATION AND SPLITTING OF VELAR CONSONANTS IN OE

Phonetic condition	Change	Examples	NE
Before and after front vowels	$k > k'$ $g > g'$ $g: > g':$ $x > x'$ $\gamma > j$	cinn, birce sengan ec3, bryc3 neaht, niht dæ3, 3eard	chin, birch sing edge, bridge night day, yard
In other positions	k g x, h γ	can 3ān, 3rētan hors, hlaf da3as	can go, greet horse, loaf days

MIDDLE AND NEW ENGLISH

DEVELOPMENT OF SIBILANTS AND AFFRICATES

OE	ME	OE	ME	NE
CHANGE		EXAMPLES		
k'	tʃ	cild	child	child
g':	dʒ	brycʒe	bridge	bridge
sk'	ʃ	fisc	fish	fish

ME	NE	ME	NE
CHANGE		EXAMPLES	
sj	ʃ	condi'cioun	con'dition
zj	ʒ	ple'sure	'pleasure
tj	tʃ	na'ture	'nature
dj	dʒ	sol'dier	'soldier

Modern English

sj	ʃ	issue ['isju: > 'iʃu:]
dj	dʒ	educate ['edjukeit > 'edʒəkeɪt]

VOICING OF SIBILANTS, FRICATIVES AND AFFRICATES IN NE

They were voiced if preceded by an unstressed vowel (and followed by a stressed vowel). Consonants were also voiced in form-words.

ME	NE	ME	NE
s	z	foxes ['fokses]	foxes
f	v	of [of]	of
θ	ð	there ['θɛ:re]	there
ks	gz	anxietie [ænkɛsɪ'e'tiə]	anxiety
tʃ	dʒ	knowleche ['knouletʃ]	knowledge

LOSS OF CONSONANTS IN OE, ME, NE

Phonetic condition	Consonants lost	EXAMPLES			
		Gt	OE	ME	NE
<i>In OE:</i>					
Before fricatives	nasal sonorants	fimf uns	fif ūs		five us
Between vowels	fricatives x, γ	saihwan	sēon		see
Unstressed final	semi-consonants w, j	fulljan triwa sæwə	fyllan treo (nom) sæ		fill tree sea

<i>In ME:</i>		OE	ME	NE
Followed by a sonorant	h	hlystan	listen	listen
<i>In NE:</i>		ME		NE
Before a vowel	h	hit ho'nour [ho'nu:r]	it honour	
In unstressed syllables	h	shepherd Chatham	['ʃepəd] [ˈtʃætəm]	
In clusters stn, stl, stm, ftn	t	listen whistle Christmas often	[lisn] [wisl] [krisməs] [ɔfn]	
skl	k	muscle	[mʌsl]	
dnz, nds, ndm, ndk, and others	d	Wednesday handsome grandmother handkerchief	[nz] [ns] [nm] [nk]	
Before k, m, f, v	l	talk palm calf calves	[tɔ:k] [pɑ:m] [kɑ:f] [kɑ:vz]	
Unstressed syllable after a consonant	w	answer Greenwich	['ɑ:nsə] ['gri:nɪdʒ]	
Initially before r before n	w k, g	wrong write known gnat	[rɔŋ] [rait] [knəʊ] [næ̃t]	
Finally after m after m, l	b n	lamb autumn miln	[læ̃m] [ˈɔ:təm] mill [mil]	