

# Concepts in English Linguistics

## Session 9: Old English

**Back mutation** In OE, refers to *a*-mutation and *u*-mutation: the breaking of  $\alpha > ea$ ;  $e > eo$ ;  $i > io$  (later  $eo$ ) in case of a following /a/ or /u/ (in the early stages of OE; /u/ often manifested as <o> in writing): *sceedu* > *sceadu*; *efor* > *eofor*; *sifon* > *siofon*

**Breaking** The development of one vowel into two. In OE, this occurs under influence of a back vowel in the next syllable (in which case the process is referred to as back mutation) or certain following consonants/clusters.

**Early West Saxon** The West Saxon dialect as evidenced in eighth-century sources, such as those produced under the guidance of King Alfred of Wessex; characterized among other things by the diphthong *ie* where one would later find *y*.

**Front Mutation** In OE, refers to *i*-mutation and *j*-mutation: the fronting of a back vowel, or raising of a front vowel, under influence of an /i/ or /j/ in the next syllable:  $u > y$ ;  $o > e$ ;  $a > \alpha$  (but  $> e$  before a nasal);  $\alpha > e$ ;  $e > i$ ;  $ea, eo > ie$ : *\*cuning* > *cyning*; *fōt* → *fēt*; *mann* → *menn*. The /i/ <i> or /j/ <j> is often subsequently lost.

**Futhorc** The runic script used for Proto-English and Old English inscriptions, as well as for Proto-Frisian and Old Frisian.

**Late West Saxon** The West Saxon dialect as evidenced in sources from the later tenth and earlier

eleventh centuries, e.g. the writings of *Ælfric of Eynsham*; characterized among other things by *y* where earlier West Saxon had *ie*.

**Retraction** The substitution of a back vowel for a front vowel. In OE, the sequence is *æ > a; e > o; i > u* under influence of a back consonant, or a back vowel in the next syllable. Especially common for *æ* and in Anglian: *hældan > haldan*

**Smoothing** The simplification of diphthongs before back consonants; characteristic of Anglian