

DEVELOPMENT OF THE QUANTITATIVE CONTRAST IN OLD GERMANIC LANGUAGES

The correlation of quantity is a significant property of sounds that takes an important place in the phonological description of the feature specification of phonemes. The phonemic feature *length/shortness* in the Indo-European vocalic system of monophthongs arose after the removal of combinatory factors that lead to the appearance of the phonetically determined long vowels in the late Indo-European period [1: 193-194]. In Latin the quantity of the vowel was a distinctive phonemic feature that could differentiate the lexical units (*līber book* – *līber free*, *sēro I sow* – *sēro late*) and morphological forms (*vēnit he comes* – *vēnit he came*). Later this contrast was lost [2: 17]. In Sanskrit, the quantity of the vowel also could have a phonemic significance: *sā he* – *sā she*, *śāstrá- spell* – *śāstrá-order* [3:19; 4: 130]. The Indo-European symmetrical vowel system of monophthongs was broken in the Proto-Germanic area with the loss of the phonological contrast of quantity between /a/ – /a:/ and /o/ – /o:/. This specific development happened through the loss of the Indo-European vowels /a: / and /o/ in the Germanic area where the Germanic /a/ was the reflex of the Indo-European vowels /a/, /o/ and /ə / and the Germanic /o: / was the reflex of the Indo-European vowels /o:/ and /a:/. The Indo-European */a/, */o/, */ə / merged into */a/ in the Proto-Germanic area. Indo-European */agro/ || Old Indian ájra- *pasture*, Greek ἄγρός *field*, Latin ager (agri) || Gothic akrs, Old Icelandic akr, Old English æcer, Old Frisian ekker, Old Saxon acchar, akkar, Old High German ahhar *field*.

Indo-European */nokt-/ || Tocharian noktim *before the night*, Latin nox (noctis), Ukrainian ніч, Russian ночь, Polish noc, Czech noc, Old Irish *nocht (in-nocht *at night*) || Gothic nahts, Old Icelandic nátt, Old English neaht, niht, Old Frisian nacht, Old Saxon naht, Old High German naht.

Indo-European **/pə tɛ́r/* || Old Indian pitár, Sanskrit pita, Greek πατήρ, Latin pater *father* || Gothic fadar, Old Icelandic faðir, Old English fæder, Old Frisian feder, Old Saxon fadar, fader, Old High German fadar, fater.

The Indo-European **/a:/, */o:/* merged into **/o:/* in the Proto-Germanic area. Indo-European **/mā́tér* || Sanskrit mātár, Greek μάτηρ, μήτηρ, Latin mater, Latvian mate, Ukrainian мати, Russian мать || Old Icelandic móðir, Old English mōdor, Old Saxon mōdar, Old High German muoter.

Indo-European **/plōtú-* || Greek πλωτός *swimming*, Latin plōro(-āre) *to weep aloud* || Gothic flodus, Old Icelandic flóð, fléðr, Old English flōd, Old Frisian flōd, Old Saxon flōd, Old High German flout *flood*.

The Proto-Germanic system of vowels after these changes became asymmetrical and included four short vowels: /i/, /u/, /e/, /a/ and four long vowels: /i:/, /u:/, /e:/, /o:/. The long monophthong /a:/ developed in late Common Germanic as a result of assimilative changes and became contrasted to the short /a/ individually in Old Germanic languages in later periods. In the East Germanic area, this contrast was not phonemic because distribution and the functional load of the long /a:/ was greatly restricted through its origin. In Gothic, the phonemic contrast of quantity could be seen between the vowels /i/ – /i:/: is *he* – eis *they*, wis *the calm of the water* – weis *we*, but this was not enough to keep up the phonemic correlation of quantity as the basic vocalic opposition in the Gothic vocalic system. J. W. Marchand was one of the first scholars who gave convincing arguments to substantiate this approach in his famous paper *The Sounds and Phonemes of Wulfila's Gothic* published in 1973 in The Hague. Today the widely supported theoretical approach to the problem of the phonemic status of the quantity of vowels in Gothic seems to be the exclusion of this opposition from the description of the Gothic vocalic system [5: 34-35]. The correlation of quantity was not characteristic of the Gothic diphthongs, considered biphonemic structures by some scholars, and of the system of consonantal phonemes in which geminates, also treated as biphonemic structures, were peripheral and possible mainly in the subsystem of sonorous phonemes /r/, /l/, /m/, /n/ [5: 23]. Here are few examples with

Gothic sonorous geminates: *osanna* from Hebrew, Common Germanic *spillōn to narrate*, *swammō sponge*, Indo-European *rinnan to run*. Occasionally, the fricative /s/ could have a correlative geminate sibilant: Indo-European *misso reciprocally, one to another*, Common Germanic *knussjan to kneel*. In a few instances, a long voiced explosive [g:], reconstructed etymologically, appeared by Holtzmann's Law: *triggwō true, faithful*, *bliggwan to beat, to strike*. The distribution of other geminates was mainly limited to loans, such as *sakkus sack* from Latin. Generally, the correlation of quantity did not develop to embrace the whole system of phonemes in Gothic.

In Old Icelandic, the assimilative changes of vowels caused the formation of an asymmetric system of short and long vowel phonemes in the "classical" stage of Old Icelandic literary texts [6: 2]. The opposition *length / shortness* unaccompanied by qualitative distinction was, probably, characteristic only of the phonemes: /i/ – /í/; /u/ – /ú/; /y/ – /ý/. [7: 18]. Still, with the rise of the long vowel /á/ the semantically contrasted forms became possible with the phonemes: /a/ – /á/, for example, *varr aware – várr our*. After the thirteenth century, a series of phonetic changes in the Old Icelandic vocalic system resulted in the removal of the quantitative difference between short and long vowels that have become to differ in quality [6: 6]. Phonemic was the difference in quantity in the Old Icelandic consonantal system in which short and long consonants were opposed to each other and could differentiate the lexical units: *várr our – vár spring*, *nótt night – nót net*, *viggr horse – vigr spear* [7: 20]. Still, there exists another view on the nature of these consonants in the Old Icelandic phonological system when they are treated as geminates and biphonemic structures [5: 79]. The Old Icelandic diphthongs were equivalents in length to long vowels in the phonological system [6: 2]. Generally, the correlation of quantity did not develop to embrace the whole system of Old Icelandic phonemes.

Already in the earliest period, there was a well-marked tendency to increase the importance of the correlation of quantity in the Old English vocalic system. A phonologically relevant feature of quantity characterized late Old English vowel phonemes so the vocalic phonemic system appears

to have been balanced and symmetrical: OE *fūl* *foul* – OE *ful* *full*, OE *wēg* *weight* – OE *weg* *way*, OE *gōd* *good* – OE *god* *God*. The subsystem of Old English diphthongs consisted of six phonemes: /ea/, /ea:/, /eo/, /eo:/, /ie/, /ie:/. The contrastive quantitative distribution of these diphthongs was rather limited through their origin. The long diphthongs, mainly Germanic by origin, are mostly the reflex of Common Germanic diphthongs, whereas the short diphthongs are the result of the Old English assimilative sound changes which were in operation either in the time before the first written records of Old English or in the time of their writing. Only some morphological forms can support the contrastive properties of long and short diphthongs: *hīerra* *higher* – *hiera* *their*, *hēore* *mild, gentle* – *heoru* *a sword*, *hēala* *rupture* – *heal* *a corner*. This raises a theoretical problem about a controversial phonemic status of Old English short diphthongs. Still, the correlation *length / shortness*, one of the basic oppositions in the phonological description, was not equally important for Old English vocalic and consonantal sounds. Old English long consonants were peripheral to the system of consonant phonemes through the absence of long correlative phonemes to some consonants, thus making the contrast defective. In addition to that, the distribution of long consonants in Old English was of a restricted nature and it was characteristic of medial and intervocalic positions: *sunna* *the sun* – *sunu* *sons*. This inconsistent nature of contrast in functioning and a restricted number of long consonants in the phonological system can be a sign of the instability of the opposition of quantity. The weakening of the quantitative contrast in vowels took place in Late Old English through a series of quantitative sound changes in the seventh – ninth centuries. Phonetically conditioned allophones that appeared after these syntagmatic changes altered the distribution of long and short vowels and weakened the correlation *length / shortness* in the system of vowel phonemes.

Thus, the phonemic contrast in quantity in Old Germanic languages developed differently in each of the languages and had an individual way of actualization. The phonemic opposition of length in consonants turned out to have been an important part of the divergent

processes between East Germanic, North Germanic and West Germanic lines of the phonological evolution [8].

Less evident the realization of the phonemic contrast of *length* / *shortness* shows itself in Gothic, more consistent the evidence for the phonemic character of the quantitative contrast was in Old English in which it, if not consistently, embraced all phonological system. In Gothic, quantitative contrast was peripheral to the sound system and characterized only several vowels. In Old Icelandic, the opposition of quantity could be more regular in the system of consonantal phonemes. Overall, the East and North Germanic area does not show a regular all-embracing character of the quantitative contrast of vowel phonemes.

Early Old English showed divergence from North and East groups by a more regular nature of the quantitative contrast that was important for the majority of the Old English sounds. In Early Old English, this feature was characteristic of all vowels, monophthongs and diphthongs alike, whereas in consonants it had a restricted character of distribution. With the time, the phonemic feature of quantity became unstable in Late Old English and decayed in later periods of the language evolution.

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