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SOUND REPRESENTATION OF THE GRAPH ȝ IN OLD ENGLISH

The article tackles one of the vexed questions in Germanic studies, dealing with the sound realization of the letter ȝ in Old English. The purpose of the research is systematizing all data available on the allophones of the phoneme represented by ȝ into a more logical pattern facilitating reading Anglo-Saxon texts. The materials of the study were phonological works of linguists, as well as the text of Beowulf. As a result, the article critically reviews the accounts recommending that the allophones of the Old English phoneme reflected by ȝ should be identified with [j] and [g]. The phonological analysis of our paper specifies the hypothetical pronunciation of the sound represented by ȝ and limits it to the phoneme [ɣ] and its allophone [ɣ'] finding no conclusive proof in favour of the allophone [g] in initial position before back vowels and after the nasal sound [n]. Using different methods of reconstruction such as synchronic, diachronic, comparative, graphic and analytical, the study determined the fact that the graph under consideration could have reflected the phoneme [ɣ] and its allophone [ɣ'] before front vowels. Generally, the paper challenges traditional views and provides an alternative analysis of some facts of Old English phonology. Thus, the author of the article compares the pronunciations of the Old English grapheme ȝ and the Middle English ȝ; on the basis of the relation of the Proto-Germanic *[ɣ] to the Indo-European *[gh], it is assumed that there was no hardened [g] in the Old English period; the phoneme [ɣ] adopts the status of an archiphoneme, and its palatalized variation [ɣ'] the status of an allophone if distributed before front vowels; on the basis of the conclusions of foreign phoneticians, the pronunciation of the Old English velar fricative [ɣ] and its allophone is detailed; with the help of graphic reconstruction, the hypothesis of the existence of an independent phoneme [j], the allophonization of which is motivated by its articulatory similarity to the sound [ɣ'], is expressed; by means of phonological analysis of the alliterative verse of the poem Beowulf, the conclusion is reached about the structural heterogeneity between the phonemes [ɣ] and [j] that makes them hardly alliterable; finally, the diachronic development of the Indo-European phoneme *[gh] from the Anglo-Saxon up to the Middle English period is outlined.

Key words: the graph ȝ, the phoneme [ɣ], the allophone [ɣ'], historical phonology, Old English, Beowulf.

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ЗВУКОВЕ ВІДТВОРЕННЯ ЗНАКУ ȝ У ДАВНЬОАНГЛІЙСЬКІЙ МОВІ

У статті робиться спроба філологічно обґрунтувати відповідність знаку ȝ фонемі [ɣ] та її алофону [ɣ'] перед голосними переднього ряду в англосаксонський період розвитку англійської мови (VII-XI ст.). У більшості навчально-наукових праць аналізований знак рекомендують передавати звуком [g] та її алофонами [ɣ] та [j] в залежності від дистрибуції. На основі синхронічно-діахронічного аналізу давньоанглійської фонології наше дослідження ставить під сумнів усталений погляд і пропонує реалізацію знаку ȝ не через проривний [g], а через фрикативний [ɣ] та його алофон [ɣ'], а не [j], як це традиційно прийнято сучасними вітчизняними та зарубіжними лінгвістами. Доказовою базою для переосмислення фонематичного відтворення знаку ȝ у давньоанглійських текстах послужили як методи порівняльної (індо-європейський та протогерманський періоди) та графічної реконструкції, так і фонологічний аналіз алітерації на матеріалі метрики першого рукописного видання поеми «Беовульф» (X-XI ст.). Звернення до реконструйованого протогерманського матеріалу підтвердило також наші припущення ймовірної відсутності фонемі [g] на той період та вірогідного існування незалежної фонемі [j], яка в цьому випадку повинна була б передаватися окремим знаком з огляду на максимальну фонетичність правопису у період, що розглядається. Отже, автором статті: проведено порівняння між вимовами давньоанглійської графеми ȝ та середньоанглійської ȝ; на основі походження прагерманського *[ɣ] від індоєвропейського *[gh] зроблено припущення про відсутність затверділого [g] у давньоанглійський період; фонемі [ɣ] приписано статус архіфонемі, а її палаталізованому варіанту [ɣ'] – статус алофону у дистрибуції перед голосними переднього ряду; на підставі висновків зарубіжних фонетистів деталізовано характер вимови давньоанглійського веллярного фрикативу [ɣ] та його алофону; за допомогою графічної реконструкції висловлено гіпотезу про існування самостійної фонемі [j], алофонізація якої більшістю дослідників змотивована її артикуляційною подібністю до звуку [ɣ']; засобами фонологічного аналізу алітераційного вірша поеми «Беовульф» досягнуто висновку про значно глибоку структурну гетерогенність між фонемами [ɣ] та [j] для їх алітерації; нарешті, накреслено діахронічний розвиток індоєвропейської фонемі *[gh] на англосаксонському ґрунті до середньоанглійського періоду.

Ключові слова: літера ȝ, фонема [ɣ], алофон [ɣ'], історична фонологія, давньоанглійська мова, «Беовульф».

Introduction. Divergences in recommendations for reading the insular sign ȝ or the continental *g*, found in most English language history handbooks stimulated us to undertake an in-depth research into the conventional view on the problem (see Diagram 1).

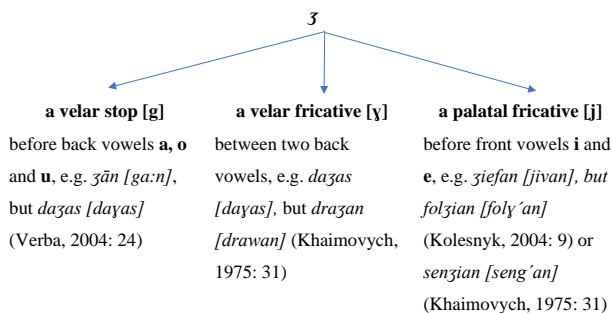


Diagram 1. Commonly accepted pronunciations of the graph ȝ

Though the scholars specify these inconsistencies through distributions or etymology, we decided to track the solution down in a specific pronunciation of the phoneme represented by ȝ and provide a historically more justified and motivated reflection.

Most historical linguists argue that Old English phonology can only be reconstructed speculatively and is still disputed over as for some distinctive features: “Our knowledge of the pronunciation of Old English can be only approximate” (Algeo, 2010). That is why there is no way to be certain how exactly some Old English phonemes sounded and we can only provide a rough description based on specific methods presented below, as well as phonemic laws natural to all human languages, i.e. the genetic hypothesis (Hockett, 1965: 185).

Literature review. The problem in question has never come under scrutiny of domestic scholars. All reference books on the History of the English language (Verba, 2004; Yevchenko, 2016) unanimously use the outdated treatment of the sound representation of ȝ, which sometimes causes mixed reactions and does not always stand criticism from a philological point of view. Hence we addressed the works of foreign historical linguists (Daunt, 1940; Hockett, 1965; Lukas, 1991; Minkova, 2003; Rouse, 1968; Schulz, 1978) and found some hypotheses that challenged the traditional postulates. The alternative ideas of foreign scholars provided us with further facts (reconstructions, prosody, cross-language analyses) we used to handle the problem from different aspects.

Aim. The objective of our research is to resolve the problem of misrepresentation of ȝ in Old English, presumably caused by overlap between two different

historical stages. To achieve the goal we plan to analyze diachronic and synchronic developments of the phoneme, its prosodic context, and define its approximate basic and allophonized pronunciations as genetically close as possible to the period under consideration.

Methods. The most common techniques used by historical linguists include: the method of comparative reconstruction, the method of internal reconstruction, the method of graphic reconstruction, the analytical method, the inductive method. Besides, in our paper we used a metrical analysis of *Beowulf* written in a Germanic alliterative verse where the first phonemes of chosen stressed words alliterate.

Results and Discussion. The use of the symbol ȝ, that was modified into ȝ (called yogh) later in the Middle English period, came from the Old Irish spelling system. We suppose that this graphic evolution caused a confusion of the phonemes represented by the signs, i.e. some modern linguists suggest a Middle English reading of an Old English sound. Below, we are illustrating our vision of the pronunciation difference between the Old English ȝ and the Middle English ȝ (see Grid 1).

Grid 1

The pronunciation of the Old English ȝ and the Middle English ȝ

Old English	ȝōs [yo:s]	ȝeldan [ɣ'eldan]	draȝan [drayan]
Middle English	ȝoos [go:s]	ȝelden [jelden]	draȝen [drawen]

Let us explain our hypothesis. It is assumed that the dorsal fricative [ɣ] (or [g]) came to Old English from Indo-European *gh through a Proto-Germanic development (Grimm’s Law) and did not undergo any essential changes (Algeo, 2010: 89): Old English *āzan*, Gothic *aigan*, Old Icelandic *eiga*, Old Swedish *ēgha*, the dorsal stop [g] having supposedly not existed either in Proto-Germanic or Old-English. The Indo-European *g is supposed to have become *k in Proto-Germanic, e.g. Latin *ager* – Old English *æcer*. The allophonization of the fricative [ɣ] into the stop [g] after *n* (e.g. Enȝlisc, cynȝ, brinȝan, etc.) in the Old English period is still not underpinned by enough evidence, all the speculations being based on later etymological evidence. Some scholars do not even list the velar stop / plosive [g] among Old English consonant phonemes (Lucas, 1991: 37). Thus, we disagree with the historical linguists who differentiate the initial and the medial [ɣ], claiming that initial [ɣ] had already hardened to [g] prehistorically (Lass, 1975: 135), and partially agree with the ones who

insist on nonpalatalized [ɣ] not being hardened to [g] until during the tenth century (Minkova, 2003: 116).

To demonstrate the sound character of [ɣ] we would like to give the floor to Gimson A. C.: «It should be (...) noted that in rapid, familiar speech, where easy intelligibility rather than articulatory precision is the aim, the closure of plosives is often so weak that the corresponding fricative sound, without a preceding stop, is produced, especially in weakly accented positions» (Gimson, 1962: 154). «Il suffit donc de prononcer des mots tels que *dagger*, *he staggered*, *a laggard*... en articulant faiblement le [g] intervocalique, pour réaliser le [ɣ] du vieil-anglais de façon tout à fait satisfaisante...» («It is therefore sufficient to pronounce words such as *dagger*, *he staggered*, *a laggard*... by articulating the intervocalic [g] weakly, to realize the Old English [ɣ] in a completely satisfactory way...») (Rousse, 1968: 8).

Consequently, we hypothesize that before front vowels *e* and *i*, the phoneme [ɣ] is likely to have been palatalized by Old English into [ɣ'] whose pronunciation reminds of the sound [j], creating phonetic similarity (Minkova, 2003: 116). The latter “coincidence” tempted most authors of Old English textbooks allophonize [ɣ] and recommend reading *ȝ* before *e* and *i* as [j], e.g. *ȝeoc* [jeoc], justifying this pronunciation by supplying a parallel version of this word as *ioc* in some Old English manuscripts (Barber, 2009: 119). We can put these spelling vacillations down to a similar articulation of these two sounds, which actually led to the phoneme [j] getting the better of its “opponent” in the Middle English period. It is also worth noting that [j] existed as a separate phoneme in Proto-Germanic, e.g. **fullian* (Gothic *fulljan*) that disappeared and caused palatal mutation in Old English (*fyllan*) (Yevchenko, 2016: 37). This transformation might signal a process of ongoing “deiotization”. If we accepted the allophonic change of [ɣ'] into [j] before front vowels (as in *ȝēar*), it would indicate a diphthongization that some critics question, referring to *ie* as an orthographic means to signal the palatal quality of the preceding consonant, to wit *ȝ* (Daunt, 1940; Sherer, 1995).

Now let us invoke the notion of allophony. As is known, it is a positionally determined sound change of a phoneme (Fasold et al., 2013: 38–41). An allophone does not change the structural organization of its phoneme and, what is more, it does not give rise to a contrastive difference, i.e. it does not create homographs – words that have the same spelling but a different meaning. So, if the phonemic opposition [ɣ] and [ɣ'] does not work but in the same distribution without creating homographs, these are allophones. There are no different lexemes

*[ɣieldan] and [ɣ'ieldan] represented by the form *ȝieldan*. However, the Anglo-Saxon dictionary provides *ȝieldan* (> Modern English *yield*) and *ieldan* (> Modern English *eld-*) (Clark Hall, 2011), which might testify against [j] being an allophone of [ɣ] and to the probable existence of two distinctive phonemes in Old English. After all, the question remains if these two words were simply homophones.

Furthermore, we appealed to the interface between phonology and meter in order to make our hypothesis more material. This investigation involves analysis of meter to support philological reconstructions and vice versa. It is common knowledge that the most standard practice in Old Germanic poetry was alliteration. «Алітераційний вірш складається з рядків, кожен з яких містить два напіввірші. У кожному напіввірші налічується по два наголошених склади [...]. Наголошені склади починаються з того самого звука. Це і є алітерація (початкова рима)» («Alliterative verse consists of lines containing two distiches. Each distich has two stressed syllables [...]. The stressed syllables begin with the same sound. This is alliteration (initial rhyme)») (Lewickij, 2008: 133). The moot point is whether a phoneme could alliterate with its allophone. Let us start with the following quotes from *Beowulf*:

Hwæt! Wē **Gār**-Dena in **gēar**-dagum ... (1) –

(*Gār* alliterates with *gēar*).

gūd-gewādo; **Gode** þancedon ... (227) –

(*gū*d alliterates with *Gode*).

gōd ond **geatolīc**, **gīg**anta **geweorc**... (1562) –

(*gō*d and *geatolīc* alliterate with *gīg*anta and *geweorc*).

gold-āht ongite, **gearo** scēawige ... (2748) –

(*gold* alliterates with *gearo*).

The most thorough research on the Old English alliteration was done by D. Minkova, American scholar from the University of California (Minkova, 2003). Minkova's treatment of palatalized dorsals is scrupulously based on metrical analysis. Accounting for the ability of different phonemes, e.g. [j] and [ɣ], to alliterate, the phonologist simply argues that, before c. AD 950, Anglo-Saxon scop (minstrel) allowed alliteration between consonants differing with respect to place features, voice and manner features being “perceptually more salient” (Minkova, 2003: 129), which sounds too abstract and unconvincing to us. Here is her transcription of a line from *Beowulf* (13) (Minkova, 2003: 113) (see Screenshot 1).

This interpretation dovetails nicely with some of our radical proposals, i.e. replacing [g] with [ɣ], introducing the allophone [ɣ'], but still we advance our theory of a more simplified allophonic version of [ɣ], referring to the allophone [j] as a structurally different phoneme.

	geong in gearдум, þone God sende		
<i>Gmc</i>	*/j/	*/ɣ/	*/ɣ/
<i>Early OE</i>	[j]	[j]	[ɣ]

where [j] = [ɣ] in our paper.

Screenshot 1. Minkova’s correspondence of Germanic and Early Old English dorsals

As a consequence, we draw the inference that making a “joker” out of ȝ when it comes to the Old English period and pronouncing it one of three ways depending on its distribution in a word might be an attempt of phonetic domestication as it is the case of classical languages (cf. the allophone of the letter “c” in Latin before the sounds [e] and [i] that did not exist in the Ciceronian period). So, splitting the Old English [ɣ] up into three allophones is a speculative convention and should only be recommended for adaptive and academic reasons.

Bearing all that in mind, the final “family tree” of the phoneme represented by ȝ in the Anglo-Saxon period might look as follows (see Diagram 2).

As we know, it was in the Middle English period that the weakening of vowels and consonants “kicked in” and resulted in their “deformation” or loss. Then it would be sensible to read Old English words such as *zieldan*, *zear*, *wez*, *mihtiz* using the following phonetic script respectively: [ɣ’i:ldan], [ɣ’ear], [weɣ’], [mihtiy’], where [ɣ’] is an allophone of [ɣ].

Conclusions. Thus, the author of the article 1) compares the pronunciations of the Old English grapheme ȝ and the Middle English ȝ; 2) on the basis of the relation of the Proto-Germanic *[ɣ] to the Indo-European *[gh], he assumes that there was no hardened [g] in the Old English period; 3) he qualifies the phoneme [ɣ] as an archiphoneme and its palatalized variation [ɣ’] as an allophone if distributed before front vowels; 4) on the basis of the conclusions of foreign

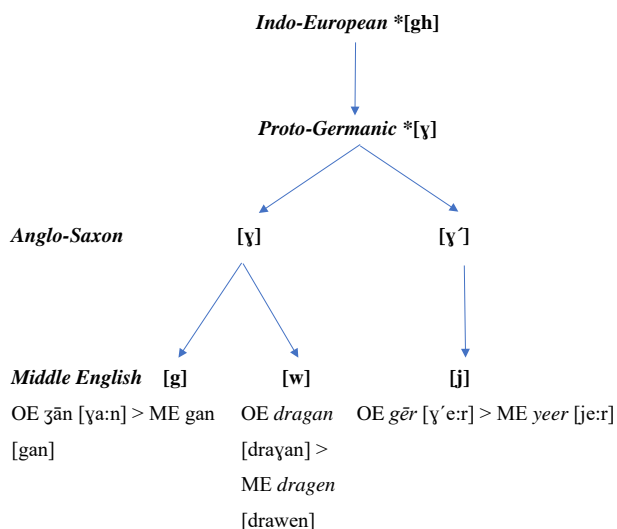


Diagram 2. Evolution of the phoneme *[gh]

phoneticians, he details the pronunciation of the Old English velar fricative [ɣ] and its allophone; 5) with the help of graphic reconstruction, he advances the hypothesis of the existence of an independent phoneme [j], the allophonization of which is motivated by its articulatory similarity to the sound [ɣ’]; 6) by means of phonological analysis of the alliterative verse of the poem Beowulf, he reaches a conclusion about the structural heterogeneity between the phonemes [ɣ] and [j] that makes them hardly alliterable; 7) finally, he outlines the diachronic development of the Indo-European phoneme *[gh] in the Anglo-Saxon context up to the Middle English period.

The prospect of further research is in a detailed study of allophonic character of *f*, *s*, and *þ* (*ð*) which is based on suggestive symmetry in the system of consonants.

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