

Sound Changes Old to Middle English

QUALITY: a long vowel changes into a different long vowel, or a short vowel changes into a different short vowel, such as [æ] to [a].

UNROUNDING: a specific quality vowel change that occurred when the high front French vowels [y] and [y:] became unrounded, respectively, to [i] or [i:].

SMOOTHING: an Old English diphthong “smooths” into a single vowel sound, as [e:o] to [e:].

REDUCTION: occurs typically in unstressed Old English syllables, in which a full vowel is “reduced” to a schwa. For example, Old English [hæðɛn] becomes Middle English [hɛ:ðən].

LOSS: disappearance of a consonant, usually at the end of a word in an unstressed syllable. For example, Old English *cyssan* became Middle English *kisse*.

BREAKING: occurs when a single Old English vowel “breaks” into a diphthong in Middle English. For example, Old English [dæj] became Middle English [dɛɪ].

LENGTHENING: In certain environments, short vowels of Old English become long vowels in Middle English. For example, Old English [latɛ] becomes Middle English [la:tə].

SHORTENING: In certain environments, long vowels of Old English become short vowels in Middle English. For example, Old English [ke:ptɛ] becomes Middle English [kɛptə].

ARTICULATIVE INTRUSION: insertion of a new sound, such as [d] added to Middle English *kindred*, but not present in Old English *cynræden*.

PARTIAL ASSIMILATION: a sound change that occurs when one sound is altered to resemble more closely a nearby sound. This is evidenced in the Modern English word *sandwich*, pronounced [sæmlɪʃ] by some speakers.

CONSONANT LOSS: the disappearance of a consonant sound, such as the final -n on the Old English word *cyssan*, which has disappeared in the Middle English word *kisse*.

METATHESIS: letters switch places; for example, Old English *bridde* becomes Middle English *bird*.

JUNCTURE DISPLACEMENT: a shift in the boundary between two words; *a napern* in Old English becomes *an apron*.