

## Old English as a templatic language

The notion of templaticness, if understood as a window into which phonological material of a given size must fit, is traditionally taken to be part of some morpho-phonological phenomena of the Semitic languages, such as iterative, passive, diminutive, etc. This notion, as explained by Scheer (2003), still has not found its way into the description of some phonological phenomena of the Indo-European languages because it is simply too exotic. Scheer (2003), however, shows that in Old Czech there existed a three-mora window on infinitives (ending in *-ti*): the vocalic space before it could only be occupied by a long vowel or a sequence of two short vowels. That such a three-mora constraint is a viable construct can also be observed in some nominal classes (e.g. in the so-called *žéna*-type which shows that the long stem-vowel *-é-* undergoes shortening if concatenated with a long-vowel ending, as in *ženách* ‘wife, Loc. pl.’ or an ending having two short vowels, as in *ženami* ‘id., Inst. pl.’), as well as in diminutives. This is a clear sign of templaticness in an Indo-European language.

My aim is to focus on a phonological constraint of Old English (OE) that has never been termed templatic or explained in terms of Semitic ‘glasses’, but can offer some new insight into a number of seemingly unrelated phenomena (Campbell 1959). These processes include high vowel deletion (the deletion of pre-OE short *-\*i* and *-\*u* after a heavy syllable or two light syllables, but NOT after a single light syllable: *word* < *\*wordu* ‘words’, *cȳ* < *\*cȳi* ‘cows’, *firen* < *\*firenu* ‘trespasses’ vs. *scipu* < *\*skipu* ‘ships’), the place of secondary stress (it is only found after a heavy syllable or two light syllables: *drifēnde* ‘driving’, *lufiēnde* ‘loving’ vs. *etende*/*\*etēnde* ‘eating’). This constraint has been tacitly assumed in the explanation of OE poetic tradition (Sievers 1893), best seen at work in *Beowulf*, in which two light syllables are counted in scansion as one heavy syllable. This is traditionally known as resolution (i.e. the equivalence of *one* heavy syllable to *two* light ones). The issue arises, of course, whether this counting of syllables was merely a poetic tradition (as in Latin or Greek) with no phonological repercussions or whether there is any non-poetic and purely phonological argument for the equivalence of two light syllables to a single heavy one. There does seem to be such evidence (e.g. the absence of vowel reduction in non-primary stressed positions). This OE templatic constraint will be tackled in the framework of CV phonology (Scheer 2004), a theory which assumes a strict alternation of CV positions. It will be argued that in OE the minimal word constraint (i.e. having two CV units as a threshold for minimal phonological well-formedness) was promoted into a templatic constraint.

### References

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