

ON THE QUALITY OF C IN CERTAIN OLD ENGLISH WORDS

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The paper deals with the controversial issue of the proper vocalic quality assigned to the consonant sound in the Old English words *gelice*, *licest*, *licedest*, *licede*, *licen*, *liceden*, *licende*, *geliced*, *lician*, where the *c* symbol occurs in the intervocalic position. The specific literature is thoroughly analysed, on the grounds of which the scholars' standpoints have been organised into four groups providing four different opinions as to the pronunciation of the Old English *c* in the intervocalic position, which contribute to inconsistencies and unavoidable mistakes in teaching the History of English in universities. To eliminate the discrepancies the author expounds on certain justification for the hypothesis, according to which *c* in *gelice*, *licest*, *licedest*, *licede*, *licen*, *liceden*, *licende*, *geliced*, *lician* possesses the vocalic quality of the velar stop [k], contrary to the majority of opinions which seem to be insufficient and rather misleading. The conclusion is crucial in terms of correct reading of the Old English texts as well as their proper pronunciation while creating different digital recordings and teaching Old English. Some of the words in question are a compulsory structural part of the Old English simile, a popular stylistic devise that quite often becomes the focus of linguistic analysis, which is another reason to stress the necessity of its correct pronunciation.

Keywords: Old English; sound; velar stop; affricate; vocalic quality; *gelice*.

Introduction

Though the phonology of Old English has ceased to be a mystery for linguists and there are quite a few plausible works analysing Old English pronunciation, sometimes helpfully providing a modern reader with different diacritical marks indicating the quality of sounds, there still remain certain controversial issues. One of such disputable questions is the quality of a consonant sound represented by the *c* symbol in the Old English words *gelice*, *licest*, *licedest*, *licede*, *licen*, *liceden*, *licende*, *geliced*, *lician*, that is in the adverb, showing similarity, as well as in all the grammatical forms of a weak verb *lician* where *c* occurs in the intervocalic position. The question demands its proper and serious consideration as the quality of any consonant sound is crucial for the correct pronunciation. Therefore, no arbitrariness can be allowed.

The problem is especially urgent since apart from paper dictionaries and edited manuscripts printing Old English words with or without diacritical marks employment, the online ones are being or can be created with the option of a playback function where the accuracy of pronunciation is by all means compulsory if the resource claims to be a reliable and proficient one.

On the grounds of numerous references consulted we can state that there are serious controversies concerning the quality of the final consonant sound in the Old English word *gelice* which, logically, coincides with the quality of the consonant sound represented by the *c* symbol in all the grammatical forms of the weak verb *lician* where it is found in the intervocalic position. To alleviate the narrative, the pronunciation of the Old English word *gelice* will be analysed throughout the paper while the results should be applied to the whole paradigm of the weak verb *lician* where *c* occurs in the intervocalic position. Therefore, in the course of this paper the author is going to present the overview of the current state of disagreement concerning the aforementioned issue which is found in the specific literature and introduce her own viewpoint proposing to interpret the sound in question as [k].

Methods

To present the diversity of current opinions as to the pronunciation of the sound under analysis, all available literature on the subject was scrutinised. The found dissimilarities were organised into four groups showing different standpoints of the scholars.

To support the hypothesis that the proper vocalic quality, assigned to *c* in the Old English words *gelice*, *licest*, *licedest*, *licede*, *licen*, *liceden*, *licende*, *geliced*, *lician*, should be [k], certain clues were deductively gathered. To prove it the sampling of adjectives and adverbs ending in *-like* and *-liche/-lyche* was carried out from Ormulum as a foolproof source of the then pronunciation.

Results

Quite a few credible sources such as dictionaries, monographs, Old English grammars have been thoroughly studied for the purpose to resolve the matter of the correct pronunciation of this sound and the following results can be based on the data obtained from the analysis: scholars usually provide the rules for the interpretation of the pronunciation of these words in four different ways which are listed below.

1. First of all, most linguists (75% of the ones given in the references) are inclined to believe that before the front vowels or in an intervocalic position Old English *c* is to be palatalised and pronounced like modern *ch* as in *church*. This point of view is supported by Barrack, 1975; Berndt, 1984; Fennel, 2001; Fisher, 2006; Freeborn, 1992; Gelderen, 2006; Hogg, 1992; Horobin, 2013; Lass, 1984; McIntyre, 2009; Minkova, 2014; Nielsen, 1998; Wyld, 1957. To explicate the phenomenon, these scholars employ different diacritical marks: a) dot *ċ*, b) caron *č* or c) cedilla *ç* editing Old English examples; Campbell (1971) even provides *gelīč* as an example where *c* has the vocalic quality of the [tʃ] sound. Thus, according to the majority of scientists the Old English *gelice* should be pronounced like [jeli:tʃe] (p.174).

2. Secondly, there are two scholars who are either more (Baker, 2012) or less (McIntyre, 2009) specific about the vowel environment of *c* in *gelice* which would influence its pronunciation. For instance, Baker (2012) employs a dotted symbol *ċ* to mark a sound similar to modern *ch* in the cases when *c* occurs “before the front vowels *i* and *ie* and the diphthongs *ea* and *eo*” which means that the front vowel *e*, if not a part of a diphthong, is not included in the list and, thus, in his case Old English *gelice* is to be pronounced [jeli:ke], while the infinitive form *lician* – as [li:tʃian] (p.18). McIntyre (2009), on the contrary, generalises the rule and conceives of the [tʃ] pronunciation in case *c* is used “between or after vowels”, thus, meaning all kinds of vowels, not only front ones, which implies that the whole paradigm of the words in question should contain a [tʃ] sound, including *gelicode*, *gelicost*, etc (p. 39).

3. Thirdly, a small group of linguists seem to be more careful about assigning any phonological quality to *c* in *gelice* since they do not employ any diacritical marks and leave the choice of pronunciation to the reader having provided the latter with the necessary rules advising to consider the modern pronunciation (Barber, 2005, p.110), or the history of the word (Pyles & Angelo, 1993, pp.104-105).

4. Finally, there is a category of authors who do not offer a plausible solution towards the phonological representation of the consonant in question. Their viewpoints remain unclear due to the insufficient explanation they provide, for example Smith (2005) says “sometimes *c* is pronounced [tʃ] and *g* is pronounced [j]; this often (but not always) happens when these letters precede *e* or *i*...” (p.49) without specifying any details of “often (but not always)”. This is also the case of Mitchel (1986) who does not use a diacritical dot (1995, p.1062) but does it in the earlier edition (Mitchel, 1986, p. 316).

Discussion

The overall picture presented above testifies about great controversies found in the specific literature. Thus, it is but logical to present our own vision and contribution to the subject. The author is strongly inclined to think that the symbol *c* in the Old English word *gelice* should be interpreted as a velar stop [k] and not an affricate [tʃ]. The following hints contribute to this assumption.

1. First of all, the formation of this word should be taken into account, which might have developed in the early Old English period, since there is an ample use of *-lic(e)* suffix forming adjectives and adverbs in the Old English manuscripts, speaking of which one must say that they also display a copious use of the grammatical forms of *lician*. The transformation of the pronunciation, according to Berndt (1984) involving “one-step shift” or a more gradual process from [k] to [tʃ], presumably finished in the ninth century or even earlier (p.189). The early formation of *gelice* and the establishment of its pronunciation as well as a relevantly high level of spelling consistency of this word in the manuscripts give us the reason to think that its form and pronunciation were rather stable all the period long. Hence, if to follow the standpoint of the aforementioned biggest group of scholars, recommending to pronounce Old English *c* before front vowels like modern *ch*, the word *gelice* will sound like [ˈjeli:tʃe], which will directly imply two facts: a) the interchange of consonants must have been involved while switching grammatical persons, since the paradigm of the weak verb *lician* contained the forms where *c* occurred either before back or before front vowels, which means that in the first case it was pronounced as [k] and in the other case it was pronounced as [tʃ]; b) another unknown to us consonant shift was to have operated during Old or Middle English period which would have changed this [tʃ] sound back into [k] leading to the modern pronunciation of *like*. Neither of these hypotheses seems to be likely, especially the second one, which makes one inclined to believe that there does not exist any justification for the theory.

2. Secondly, the orthographical representation of the word *gelice*, which it acquires in the texts of the later periods, induces us to believe that the Old English pronunciation was nothing but [ˈjeli:k(e)]. This idea is supported by the authors of *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, which says that Middle English *līc/līk* developed from Old English *ġelīč* employing yet another diacritical mark – an acute accent to mark the palatalisation of the sound. The fact that both *līc* and *līk* forms are found in the Middle English manuscripts means that it took time for the scribes to stick to a spelling consistency after the new rules had been introduced by the Normans, who in many cases substituted *c* with *k*.

Moreover, it is a well-known fact that Orm spelled his words exactly as they were pronounced; he is considered to have been particularly concerned about the length of vowels inventing his consonant duplication system, but his attention to vowels means that neglecting consonants would have been out of character. So, if he sometimes replaces *c* either by *k*, or *ck* or *ch* in his manuscripts this fact can be a valuable asset for our purpose as it will decidedly point at the corresponding pronunciation of the word at the time. The Ormulum was written soon after the Norman invasion (around 1200) which means that it displayed both contemporary pronunciation and new spelling norms reflecting it. Though chronologically it is Middle English already, everybody agrees with the fact that the borderline between Old and Middle English, marked with the Norman invasion in 1066, is historically precise but linguistically vague. Since The Ormulum represents the very beginning of the Middle English era, the pronunciation reflected in it might have preserved a lot of Old English features. Anyway, none consonant shift operating on the borderline of Old and Middle English has been heard of. The text was reviewed for our purpose and though the exact studied forms were not spotted, 32 examples of adjectives and adverbs ending in *-like* were sampled (e.g. *heofennlike*, *witerrlike*, *gastlike*, *dafftelike*, *aldelike*, *hazhelike*, *weorelldlike* etc.) and none with the suffix *-liche/-lyche*, notwithstanding the fact that *ch* combination, even when it was followed by a front vowel, was already used by Orm (e.g., *stinnchess*, *laechedom*, etc.). This fact by all means gives us the grounds to assume that *gelike* must have been pronounced with the [k] sound. Therefore, from the orthographical point of view the spelling consistency of the aforementioned adjectives and adverbs in The Ormulum is very significant to prove our assumption.

3. The corresponding words in other Old Germanic languages are another valuable source of information. Both Old Norse *likr/lika*, and Old Frisian *līkia*, and Old Scandinavian *likōn*, and Gothic *leikan* contain a *k* symbol, marking a [k] sound. Thus, since all the genetically related languages display unanimity in the analysed sound representation we can logically assume once again that the *c* symbol in the Old English *gelice* represented nothing but the [k] sound at the time.

4. If to follow the rules of Old English pronunciation, formulated by Pyles and Angelo (1993), the word *gelice* should be pronounced as [ˈjeli:ke], for its etymology roots back to the Proto Germanic word **galika*, in which [k] occurs in the intervocalic position followed by a back vowel (pp.104-105).

5. Finally, if to concede that in Old English there was a strongly pronounced [tʃ] sound, it seems reasonable to expect Old English speakers to have used a corresponding symbol to denote this phonetic value first in runic and later in Latin alphabets, the way they consistently used thorn (þ), wynn (ƿ) and ash (æ). Given the “phonetic” character of Old English alphabets and the absence of a symbol to denote a [tʃ] sound in it, we naturally have yet another reason to conclude that Old English *gelice* should be pronounced as [ˈjeli:ke].

Conclusions

This paper has outlined a rather controversial issue concerning the pronunciation of the final consonant sound in the Old English *gelice*. It turns out that most sources might mislead the reader spelling Old English *gelice* with various diacritical marks to indicate the [tʃ] sound and not providing the reading rules specific enough to pronounce Old English words correctly. Significantly smaller number of scholars (three out of nineteen: Baker, 2012; Barber, 2005; Pyles & Angelo, 1993), whose standpoints prove the author’s assumption, seem to have studied the problem profoundly and worded the reading rules according to which the sound in question should be pronounced as [k]. Regardless the outstanding state of disagreement, found in the specific literature, we have managed to deductively gather certain clues which certainly provide definite evidences as to the pronunciation of this word, which is obviously important while creating reliable and proficient text and audio guides to Old English. The following facts speak in favour of this standpoint: the alphabetical logic, according to which every sound usually had its symbol to represent a certain phonetic value; a comparative reconstruction leading to a Proto-Germanic **galika*-, having a [k] sound in all the corresponding forms of *gelike* in genetically related languages; the absence of any known sound change whatsoever which would have resulted in the change of the [tʃ] sound into [k] in the modern *like*.

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