LINGUISTICS

THE LOSS OF [ei] : [ai] OPPOSITION IN MIDDLE ENGLISH[*]

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ABSTRACT

On the basis of several electronic and online corpora this paper discusses the temporal and regional conditioning of the elimination of the diphthong [ei] in Middle English, a process which led to a restructuring of the system of English diphthongs. The study exploits the so-called impure rhymes found in poetic texts from various areas of England. Although Luick's hypothesis concerning an early change in the North is not invalidated, the examples adduced here seem to indicate that an early merger of [ei] with [ai] may have also taken place in the northern areas of the West Midland.

1. General statements

Between the end of Old English and Late Middle English the system of diphthongs underwent a long series of transformations (cf. Wełna 1986). To these changes belongs the elimination of [ei] from the inventory of Middle English diphthongs through its merger with [ai], another closing diphthong. The change, a dissimilatory process, was effected through the lowering of the first segment of the diphthong. A small selection of words which contained the relevant diphthong are listed as (1) below. Diphthongs in these words represent Old English sequences such as (a) [eʒ], (b) [āēʒ], (c) [ēʒ]:

1) (a) OE eʒe > ME aie 'awe', OE eʒlan > ME eylen > ail, OE leʒde > ME leide > laid (PT), OE leʒen > ME leien > lain (PP), OE leʒer > ME leier > lair, OE pleʒa > ME pley > play, OE pleʒian > ME pleie > play, OE reʒn > ME rein > rain, OE seʒel > ME seil > sail, OE seʒst >

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ME seist > sayst 'say' (2nd sg. pres.), OE þeȝen > ME theyn > thain 'thane', OE weȝ > ME wei > way, OE weȝan > ME weye/weigh; ON heill > ME heile > hail, ON reisa > ME reise > raise, ON sveinn > ME swein > swain, ON þeir > ME þey > they; OF estrein- > ME straine > strain, OF feire > ME faire > fair, OF feit > ME feiþ > faith, OF preie > ME preie > pray, OF preisie > ME preyse > praise, etc.

(b) OE āēȝ > ME ey > ay 'egg', OE āēȝþer > ME either 'either', OE cāēȝ > ME key > kay 'key', OE clāēȝ > ME clei > clay, OE grāēȝ > ME grey > gray, OE hnāēȝan > ME neyen > nayen 'neigh', OE stāēȝer > ME staier 'stair', etc.

(c) OE hēȝ > ME hei > hay, OE hwēȝ > ME w(h)ey > whay 'whey', OE tweȝen > ME tweine > twain, etc.

As regards the Middle English spelling convention, the medieval scribes frequently continued to use the old spelling <ei/ey>, thus disregarding the change in the diphthong, especially in words listed as (1b). The earlier spelling was as a rule preserved in the case of [ei] followed by the velar fricative [x], the change [eix > aix] being delayed until the 15th century. The diphthong failed to develop in the North. Here belong the following words:

2) ME eighte 'eight', freyght 'freight', heighte 'height', neighebour 'neighbour', sleyght 'sleight', weight, etc.

Only occasional spellings testify to the occurrence of the change before the fricative since the above words retain the traditional orthography.

In terms of phonetic detail, there is a consensus among the authorities that the lowering must have involved three principal stages, the first being the lowering [ei > ɛi], then a further lowering [ɛ > æ] , and the third stage when the initial segment in the diphthong [æi] became lowered to [a] and thus merged with the diphthong [ai] from [æȝ], as in OE dæȝ > day. The last and the most crucial of the changes is variously dated. Thus, Wright and Wright (1928) assume they took place around 1300. Jordan's (1925 [1974]: 118) date of the first stage, i.e. opening of close [e], is the 12th century, and the last stage of the opening, i.e. [æ > a], belongs to the latter half of the 13th century. Luick's (1940: 374-375) dating of the first stage, [e > ɛ], is "vor 1200" in the North and shortly after ("bald nachher") in the southerly areas, while the stage of [ai] was reached, according to the *Historische Grammatik*, at the end of the 13th century, which agrees with Jordan's chronology. Simultaneously Luick (1940: 435) states that texts from the early 13th century, like *Trinity Homilies*, *Kentish Glosses*, *Ancrene Riwle*, *Ormulum* or *Vices and Virtues*, lack any traces of the [ei : ai] merger. Curiously, no dating is suggested in the standard short grammars of Middle English by Brunner (1963) and (Fisiak 1968).

The change also affected Kentish and Mercian forms with [ei] (= WS æi), as

in *dey* > *day*, *mæiden* > *maiden*, etc. The intermediate stage, that of the lowering, is confirmed by spellings with <æ> in Layamon (c1205):

3) Brennes wes awæi ifloȝen   (4764)
   Wæila wæi wæila wæi þæt he is þus i-faren *awæi*   (8031)
   In his herede he makede grið, æ lette *awæi* þat *vniriht   (10281)
   Anan swa heo me þer witen, *awæi* heo wulleð wenden   (15060)

where *awæi* is a reflection of the Old English phrase *on weȝe*.

From the above it follows that [ei] must have merged with [ai] around 1300 at the latest. However, many linguists are not eager to treat *ei*-spellings in Chaucer (late 14th century, but manuscripts from the 15th century!) as representing the diphthong [ai]. To the group of those who believe that the diphthong [ei] in the noun *veyne* was completely replaced by [ai] in the language of the author of *The Canterbury Tales* belong Berndt (1960), Peters (1980) and Fries (1985). Some scholars assume the intermediate pronunciation with initial [æ], i.e. the diphthong [æi] (Moore 1951; Kökeritz 1954; Gimson 1970; Williams 1975 and Algeo 1992), while Weinstock (1968) and Cable (1983) employ the old diphthong [ei] in their samples of Chaucer's texts (cf. Wełna 1988).

The aim of the present brief study is to establish on the basis of various Middle English poetical texts a more precise chronology of the change and thus to identify the reflections of the lowering in particular texts. Attention is especially focused on the "impure" graphic rhymes where words retaining the conservative spelling <ei>, as in *wey*, match items containing original <ai>, as in *day*. Such rhymes are found, claims Luick (1940: 435), in *Havelok* (c. 1300), Robert Mannyng and other non-Northern texts. Thus, the change is believed to have been effected at the end of the 13th century, around 1300, except in the South-west where the merger occurred at a later date. The rhymes of EY and AY offer three logical possibilities of interpretation, as representing respectively:

4) (a) [ei],
   (b) [ai],
   (c) intermediate [æi] and, finally,
   (d) different pronunciations according to spelling, i.e. the absence of a rhyme.

Of these, (a) must be rejected as it is highly improbable that the new spelling <ai> could represent the conservative pronunciation [ei]. On the contrary, the presence of such spellings in rhymes may confirm that the earlier sequence <ei>, pronounced [ai], now matches the new sounds phonetically. Equally improbable is hypothesis (d) postulating lack of rhyme, especially that in the texts examined *ai-*

spellings prevail statistically over *ei*-spellings, which compels us to treat the latter as mere graphic residue. Consequently only the solutions (b), postulating a full lowering to [a], and (c), suggesting lowering of [e] to [æ], are possible to accept.

Unlike the modest evidence from Jordan and Luick, mainly based on prose samples, the data used in the present paper come from poetic texts representing Scotland, North, East Midland, West Midland, South and Kent, in which the lowering is usually documented by the modified spelling <ai> for earlier <ei>. Attention is focused especially on the instances of graphically impure spellings in the rhymes of [ei/ey] and [ai/ay]. Such spellings testify to the process of merger going on or being totally effected in the language of the scribe who copied a relevant manuscript. Practically all the data for the investigation come from the Lyon – Chadwick comprehensive collection of Middle English poetic texts. But other sources, like the *Middle English dictionary* (1954-2001) and the *Oxford English dictionary*, were also consulted.

As a method of examination I decided to consider spellings of words with the original [ei] diphthongs taking the new spelling <ai/ay> for earlier <ei/ey>. As a test word I chose the high frequency noun *way* (< OE weȝ) and examined the distribution of its various spellings ranging from traditional *wei(e)/wey(e)* to the modified spelling <*wai/way*> in around fifty localised Middle English texts representing different dialects.

2. Scotland and the North

A general consensus localises the first stage of the change in the northerly areas, i.e. Scotland and Northern England. Unfortunately, the shortage or rather lack of early texts from that region cannot support in full such claims, although, as our evidence shows, they appear to be justified. Thus, Scottish English texts from the 14th century contain words with spellings reflecting the change, as exemplified by the typical rhyme of the nouns *day* : *way* (< *wei*) in Barbour's *Bruce* (c. 1375):

5) & syne gaiff him gud day
   & bad him pas furth on his *way*   (*Bruce*: 131-132)
   Yen to ye hycht yai held yar way
   And huntyt lang quhill off ye day   (*Bruce*: 477-478)

An "impure" spelling rhyme can be found in the *Legend of St. John* (Johannes) from the Scottish *Legends of the Saints*, a 14th century collection, where final <ey> stands for the diphthong [ai]; cf.:

6) had askit hym sum money,
   as In depose þat with hym *lay*   (409-410)

Such rhymes are, however, rare and Scotland can be considered an area where the change was implemented more consistently in the 15th century.

Much richer spelling variation is found in the texts from the North, especially those representing Yorkshire, a county localised in the Southern area of the Northern region. The table below shows the distribution of forms with <ei/ey> and <ai/ay> and the incidence of the forms of the noun *wey/way* in particular texts from the North of England. The pair EI : AY symbolises impure graphic rhymes. The symbol EI stands for *ei(e)/ey(e)* and AY for *ai(e)/ay(e)*. Analogously, WEY represents *wei(e)/wey(e)*, while WAY stands for *wai(e)/way(e)*.

7)

	Date	EI : AY	WEY	WAY
Northumberland				
Cursor Mundi	1340	+	+	+
Yorkshire				
The Surtees Psalter	1250-1300	–	–	+
Sir Tristrem	c. 1320	+	–	+
The Northern Passion	1300-1333	–	–	+
Castelford's *Chronicle*	1327	–	–	+
The pricke of conscience	c. 1340	–	–	+
Lawrence Minot	1320-1350	–	–	+
Richard Rolle of Hampole	1320-1350	–	–	+
William of Nassington	c. 1350	+	+	+
The Gast of Gy	c. 1350	–	–	+
The lay-folks mass-book	1375-1400	–	–	+
Sir Ysumbras	a 1400	–	–	+
Octovian	c. 1400	–	–	+
Ywain and Gawain	c. 1400	+	–	+
Sir Eglamour d'Artoi	e. 15c.	+	+	+
St. Robert of Knareborough	l. 15c.	–	–	+

As regards the *Cursor Mundi*, the text most representative of the Northern region, it contains numerous impure graphic rhymes of (a) foreign words, e.g. *traueil* : *auail* (89-90), *glaiue* : *receiue* (7745-6), *perceiue* : *consaiue* (10785-6), (b) foreign and native items, cf. *dozein* : *again* (11407-8), *magdalein* : *slain* (29216-17) and (c) purely native pairs, e.g. *awai* : *ei* (13546-7), etc. This etymological diversification proves that the origin of words affected by the change was not a factor triggering the lowering. The double treatment of the continuation of the Middle English noun *wei* is reflected in the consecutive lines of the example below:

8) If þou redes þat it sua be
    We wil þe *wai* ga be þe se,
    For þar es tuns in for to rest,
    þat *we[i]* to ga me thinc it best."   (11735-8)

The texts from Yorkshire offer more material for comparison. The fifteen texts cover the period from the latter half of the 13th century until the 15th century. Most of them (10) do not contain impure graphic rhymes, the five texts having such rhymes are *Sir Tristrem* (c. 1320), William of Nassington (c. 1350), *Octovian* (c. 1400), *Ywain and Gawain* (c. 1400) and *Sir Eglamour* (e. 15th c.), but the forms with <ey> of WAY survive in only two texts, by William of Nassington and *Sir Eglamour*. All the fifteen texts contain the forms of WAY with the diphthong [ai], which may validate claims that in the northern regions of England [ai] had to a large extent ousted *ei*-forms. The retention of an isolated form *awey* (788) preserving the old diphthong in the late text *Sir Eglamour d'Artoi* from the early 15th century is difficult to account for.

3. East Midland

The data from the East Midland are split into two groups, Lincolnshire, in the northerly area of the Midlands, and the Central/Southern region embracing counties such as Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Essex/Middlesex and London.

9)

	Date	EY : AY	WEY	WAY
Lincolnshire				
The Ormulum	c. 1175	(unrhymed)	+	–
Amis and Amiloun	c. 1330	–	–	+
Robert Mannying of Brunne	c. 1330-1338	+	+	+
The Romance of Emaré	c. 1460	+	–	+
East Anglia/Cambridge/				
London/Essex/Middlsx				
Genesis and Exodus (Norfolk)	c. 1250	+	+	+
Havelok the Dane (Norfolk)	c. 1300	+	+	–
Guy of Warwick (Suffolk)	c. 1314	+	+	+
Dame Sirith (Cambridge)	c. 1282	–	+	+
The King of Tars (London)	c. 1330	+	–	+
Chaucer: *Romaunt*/*CT*				
(London)	c. 1380	+	+	+
Gower: *Works* (London)	c. 1390	–	+	–

King Horn (Ess/Midsx)	c. 1300	+	+	+
Arthour and Merlin				
(Ess./Midsx)	c. 1330	+	+	+

Although copied in Lincolnshire, a northerly area, the *Ormulum*, a text produced before 1200, lacks forms showing the merger, the only form of WAY being *weyyess* 'ways' (96, 108, 636, etc.), which agrees with the statements found in the grammars whose authors postulate that the merger belongs to a later period. However, other texts written at approximately the same period, the anonymous poem *Amis and Amiloun* and Robert of Brunne's two major works, *Handlyng Synne* and *The story of England*, reveal significant differences since Mannying preserves impure graphic rhymes and the forms of WAY with the first element unchanged in spelling; cf.:

10) Yyf þou herdyst a fals þyng or *layþ*
     Þat were spoke ayens þe *feyþ*   (*HS*: 563-564)
     Pers mette, vp-on a day,
     A porë man, by þe *way*..   (*HS*: 5695-5696)
     & wel armed wente þer *weye*
     Þer he knew by o valeye.   (*SE*: 1115-1116)
     "Bot yyf ye do as y yow seye,
     "Of þes ys þer non oþer *weye*."   (6355-6356)

As regards East Anglia, its dialects seem to have been partly affected by the lowering rule since *Genesis and Exodus* (Norfolk c. 1250) still exhibits the prevalence of *ey*-forms over *ay*-forms, although frequent impure graphic rhymes indicate the progress of the change. Characteristically the noun WAY is only rarely represented by the spelling <ai>, while the other standard text from Norfolk, *The lay of Havelok the Dane* (c. 1300), although written half a century later, completely lacks forms of WAY with *ai*-spellings. Such forms are found, more frequently in *The romance of Guy of Warwick* (Suffolk c. 1314), a text which contains numerous impure graphic rhymes; cf,:

11) ... ðe first moned and te sirst *dai*,
     He sag erðe drie & te water *awai*..   (*G&E*: 615-616)
     oc on of hem, ðe flogen *a-wei*
     Told it abram ðat ilke *deai*.   (*G&E*: 861-862)
     Sone so it was lith of *day*,
     Grim it under-tok þe *wey*   (*H*: 663-664)
     And at þe croiz, þat he biforn *lay*,
     Siþen yede sore grotinde *awey*.   (*H*: 1389-1390)

Smerteliche he dede him in þe *ways*,
Ouer þe dounes & þe *valeys*   (*GW*: 3875-3876)

Of the two most famous poets, Chaucer and Gower, it is the author of *The Canterbury Tales* who demonstrates numerous impure graphic rhymes [ei : ai], as said earlier, variously interpreted in the standard grammars, suffice to mention pairs from *The romaunt of the rose*, such as *certeyn* : *fayn* (809-810), *hakeney* : *ay* (1137-1138), *chesteynes* : *fayn is* (1375-1376), *pley* : *ay* (1449-1450), *agayn* : *seyn* (1765-1766), but *pleyn* : *ageyn* (2269-2270), *wey* : *bitray* (2689-2670) or a peculiar rhyme involving the two spellings of WAY:

12) Al the world holdith this *way*;
     Love makith alle to goon *miswey*…   (*RR*: 4765-4766)

Curiously, Gower not only lacks *ai*-forms of WAY, using only the form *weie/wey*, but his works do not contain any graphically impure rhymes, which testifies to the poet's avoidance of any ambiguity. Does it mean that Gower ignored the lowered pronunciation in the first segment? Or rather that he used an intermediate pronunciation [æi] preserving the traditional spellings?

The two romances representing the dialect of Essex/Middlesex at the turn of the 14th century, *King Horn* (c. 1300) and especially *Arthour and Merlin* (c. 1330), contain plenty of impure graphic rhymes. It seems that a high number of such rhymes testifies to the early period of the operation of the *e*-lowering rule.

13) & þe sonde *seide*
     Þat sik lai þat *maide*…   (*KH*: 271-272)
     Horn tok his *preie*
     & dude him in þe *weie*.   (*KH*: 1235-1236)
     Þe kniyt him aslepe *lay*
     Al biside þe *way*.   (*KH*: 1303-1304)
     & kepe we þe strait *wais*
     Ouer alle in þe *cuntrays*   (*A&M*: 4321-4322)
     Þis Ider loked wele þe *wayes*
     Wiþ his folk in þat *cuntreys*   (*A&M*: 4367-4368)
     Gveheres & eke *Wawain*,
     Gaheriet & *Agreuein*.   (*A&M*: 4567-4568)

Summing up, the East Midland shows a much more advanced stage of the change in the northerly counties, the conservative *ei*-forms undergoing at the same time the initial stage of the merger in the southern areas of the Midlands.

4. West Midland

The best literary works from the West Midland region cannot be as useful as they deserve to be because the authors of several poems use the technique of alliteration without line-final rhymes. Here belong, first of all, *William of Palerne*, Langland's *Piers Plowman* or *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* composed by the Pearl Poet, whose romance contains only short fragments of rhymed lines. There is an evident correlation of the chronologically earlier texts from the South (Staffordshire/Herefordshire) and the later forms from Lancashire occupying the northern area of the Midlands.

14)

	Date	EY : AY	WEY	WAY
Staffordshire/Herefordshire				
Harrowing of Hell (Staff.)	c. 1310	+	+	+
Langland: *Piers Plowman* (Staff.)	c. 1340	(alliter.)	+	–
William of Palerne (Heref.)	c. 1350	(alliter.)	+	+
Lancashire				
The Pearl Poet (Lanc.)	c. 1375	–	–	+
Sir Degrevant (Lanc.)	a 1440	+	–	+
Sir Amadace (Lanc.)	c. 1450	–	–	+

The distribution of the forms of historical EY in the region is far from surprising. All the three texts from southern West Midland continue to use the spelling <wey> with variants. Thus, the *Harrowing of Hell*, *Piers Plowman* (Staffordshire) and *William of Palerne* (Herefordshire) still retain the conservative forms of WEY, while Langland's poem contains no advanced *ai*-forms of the noun.

15) þou sentest me þe riyt *way*
     Into helle, for soþ to say..   (*HH*: 217-218)
     Þou teitest me þene riyte *wey*
     Opone þe mounte of *sinay*   (*HH*: 233-234)
     Bote þer were fewe men so wys þat couþe þe *wei* þider..   (*PP*: 67/3)
     were sche out of þe *weye* þat william wold fonde   (*WP*: 1019)
     & eiþer tok tit is *way* to his owne chaumber   (*WP*: 1054)

The Lancashire texts covering the period from the last half of the 14th to the middle of the 15th century (*Sir Gawain*, *Pearl*, *Sir Degrevant* and *Sir Amadace*) show the total absence of the *ei*-forms of WAY and, with the exception of *Sir*

Degrevant, the lack of impure graphic rhymes. This situation is easily explainable as subject to the influences from the North. The only impure graphic rhyme in *Sir Degrevant* is as follows:

16) 'Þo Duke comes of so gret *arey*
       To iuste and to *tornay* (*SD*: 865-866)

   Other texts from Lancashire only contain standard rhymes, such as *awaye* : *gaye* (*Pearl*: 258-260), *away* : *fay* (*P*.: 488-489), *daye* : *waye* (*Sir Gawain*: 1075-1077), *say* : *way* (*Sir A.*: 61-62), *way* : *lay* (*Sir A.*: 244-245). They testify to the completion of the merger of EI with AY in the West Midland and thus its northern part, can be regarded as the area where this and other phonological innovations may have been born (cf. Wełna 2005a, b).

5. Southwestern

The Southwestern dialect is here represented by texts from three regions: (a) Worcestershire, (b) Gloucestershire and (c) other dialects (Somersetshire, Wiltshire, Surrey, Devonshire and Oxfordshire). The eleven texts representing these dialects, except the document from Oxfordshire, represent roughly the time-span of 100 years, ranging from c. 1275 to c. 1380. The distribution of the rhymes and forms of WAY is shown below:

17)

	Date	EY : AY	WEY	WAY
Worcestershire				
The fox and the wolf	c. 1280	–	+	+
Proverbs of Alfred	c. 1300	+	+	–
Castle of love	c. 1320	+	+	+
Gloucestershire				
Iacob and Iosep	c. 1275	+	+	+
Sir Orfeo	c. 1300	–	–	+
Robert of Gloucester	c. 1300	+	+	–
Somersetshire/Wiltshire/				
Surrey/Devonshire/Oxfordshire				
Layamon's *Brut*				
(Somersetshire)	c. 1200	(alliter.)	+	+
A moral ode (Wiltshire)	c. 1250	–	+	–
The owl and the nightingale				
(Surrey)	c. 1275	+	–	–
Sir Ferumbras (Devonshire)	c. 1380	+	+	+

Short English metrical chron.				
(Oxford)	1400-1450	–	+	+

   Since the South is considered a conservative area it is not surprising that the traditional spelling <ei/ey> survives in as many as 9 documents including the *Chronicle* from as late as the first half of the 15th century:

18) Ac whanne þe kyng *awai* was wen(t)   (*SEMC*: 303)
       & betere hit is þat *wei* deie bo
       Þan al Engelond were so wo   (*SEMC*: 984-985)

   The only two texts which lack *ei*-forms of WAY are *Sir Orfeo* (Gloucestershire, c. 1300), which, in addition, contains no impure graphic rhymes, and the famous poem *The owl and the nightingale* (Surrey, c. 1275) which, however, contains no *ai*-form of WAY either. Likewise, no *ai*-forms are found in Robert of Gloucester (Gloucestershire, c. 1300) nor are they present in the anonymous *Moral Ode* (Wiltshire, c. 1250), which also lacks graphic rhymes. The alliterative poem *Brut* by Layamon, a very early text (Somersetshire, c. 1200) shows the contrasting forms of WAY, cf.:

19) to þan ilke *weie* þe he ful yeare wuste.   (*L*: 264)
       & ferde riht on his *wei* his scipen runden swiðe.   (*L*: 676)
       Do we *awai* þane twenti a tene beoð inohye   (*L*: 1692)
       from Lengres to Auste swa læi his *weie* rihte.   (*L*: 13648)

   Especially rich impure graphic rhyme-related data come from *Sir Ferumbras* (Devonshire, c. 1380). The romance contains numerous rhymes like *playne* : *sleyne* (148-9), *mayne* : *beyne* (660-661), *tweye* : *aye* (1006-7), *asleyn* : *fayn* (1018-19), and many others. The *ey*-forms are, for instance, found in the following lines:

20) þat þou him neuere schalt clowe *a-weye* wile þou þy lyf miyt broke.(*F*: 63)
       Wend *a-wey* þou vauasour & say so Charlis kyng…   (*F*: 562)
       of scheld & haberk *a-wey* a schar al þat he arauyte   (*F*: 702)
       Faste þay passede ouer al þe *weys* þey knew ful wel þe cost (*F*: 1552)

   The two other texts from the Southwest, *Castle of love* (Worcestershire, c. 1320) and *Iacob and Iosep* (Gloucestershire, c. 1275) show mixed spellings typical of the transition period.

6. Kent

As usual, documents from Kentish are in demand since their scarcity is striking. The only text from that region analysed here is a selection of poems by William of Shoreham. The distribution of forms under examination shows the following pattern:

21)

William of Shoreham	Date	EY : AY	WEY	WAY
	c. 1315	+	+	+ (*away*)

Like in the case of the Southwestern dialect, forms in Shoreham demonstrate variation with relatively numerous impure graphic rhymes; cf.:

22)   *a-fayty* : *weyti* (*De septem mortalibus peccatis*: 289-291), *preye* : *traye* (317-319), *assaye* : *aueye* (*De septem sacramentis*: 1297-1299), *seyde* : *mayde* (*The five joys of the Virgin Mary*: 81-84), etc.

In sum, the evidence from Kentish, modest as it is, seems not to differ much from that found in the other regions of the South.

7. Conclusions

On the basis of the adduced data, the following tentative conclusions can be formulated:

1) The change [ei > ai] was not completed around 1300, as Luick and some other scholars claimed, but was still in progress reaching the areas of the South later than the Northern regions.
2) The dialect which triggered the change was, in agreement with standard historical grammars, the Northern dialect, although there is a strong evidence that the lowering was completed almost equally quickly in the northern West Midland.
3) The impure graphic rhymes are most frequently found in the 14th century texts from the East Midland, but their reappearance in the Northern dialect around 1400 is difficult to explain since they were absent in most texts written before 1400.
4) Although the *ey*-forms of WAY were eliminated even in the earliest texts from Yorkshire and the northern West Midland, in the 14th century they survive in the East Midland and the South, including Kent.

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