

Week 6. Historical change (i)

Developments over the last few centuries: **innovations found in Received Pronunciation and General American**, but not everywhere in the British Isles:

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|---|--|---|
| 1 Loss of final [g] after [ŋ] (c1600) | $g \rightarrow \emptyset / \eta _ \#$ | <i>singer</i> vs. <i>finger</i> resisted in NW England |
| 2 Loss of /x/ (16-17c) | $x \rightarrow f \text{ or } \emptyset$ | <i>Loughborough</i> <i>cough, rough, laugh</i> <i>high, bough, daughter</i> Scots <i>bricht</i> = <i>bright</i> <i>Keighley, Tough</i> <i>Buchan, Loughor</i> <i>MacLachlan; Munich</i> |
| | <i>/x/</i> retained in Scotland in some words only (<i>loch</i>); finally lost in N England only in 19-20c; still in some non-English proper names | |
| 3 Long mid mergers (17c) | e: - ei merge o: - ou merge | <i>pane-pain; late-eight</i> <i>toe-tow, nose-knows</i> resisted in E Anglia etc |
| | ...and diphthonging (by 1800) e: → ei o: → ou (→ əu) | <i>face, day</i> <i>goat, blow</i> resisted in N, W, Sc., etc |
| 4 FOOT-STRUT split (by 17c) | ME u splits into /ʊ/ vs. /ʌ/ Consequence: northern accents have five short strong vowels, others have six. | <i>put-cut, full-dull</i> resisted in N England |
| 5 NURSE merger (17c) | $\text{ɛr, ʊr} (\rightarrow \text{ʌr}) \rightarrow \text{ɜ:} (\rightarrow \text{ɜ:})$ | <i>serve-curve</i> resisted in Scotland and Ireland |

All these changes had taken effect by about 1750 in the common ancestor of RP and General American. But they were not carried through everywhere in the British Isles.

See *Accents of English* chapter 3.1, pages 184-212.