



# Phonological changes in English

Gjertrud Flermoen Stenbrenden

The present paper reports work on the chapter entitled “Phonological Change” (Stenbrenden, forthcoming) for the New Cambridge History of the English Language (ed. Raymond Hickey), which will supplement the original series and is due out in 2022.

Phonology is concerned with the system of distinctive sounds (phonemes) in a language (Cruttenden, 2008), and how these phonemes may be combined in syllables (phonotactics). Phonemes may be established through minimal pairs, i.e. pairs of words that are identical apart from one sound, e.g. ten /ten/, den /den/. Thus, phonological changes may be defined as innovations that bring about a change in phonotactics and/or phoneme inventories, and may be divided into splits, mergers and losses, shifts, cluster changes and phonotactic changes.

This paper will present some long-term sound-changes in English, with a view (a) to seeing how they have affected the present-day phonology of English, and (b) to shedding light on the notion of ‘drift’, i.e., the apparently goal-directed nature of certain sound-changes. Historical material is taken from LAEME (and LALME), and the framework is that of articulatory phonology (Browman & Goldstein, 1992). The findings of modern experimental phonetics will also be applied on both modern and historical material, in search of commonalities and explanations.