

## Vowel reduction in Old and Middle English

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**Abstract:** The aim of this dissertation is to achieve a better understanding of the nature of vowel reduction in English. It is well-known that vowel reduction has been treated as a unique, but frequent phonological phenomenon in the field of linguistics. For instance, pairs such as ‘*photo*graphic, *photo*graphy’ and ‘*diplo*matic, *diplo*macy’ which show a full vowel in the stressed syllable and a reduced vowel in the unstressed syllable are examined within a synchronic derivational approaches. Similarly, a vowel reduction has also been investigated in terms of diachronic perspective. For example, the development of Old English words *naman* to Middle English *name* could be a possible one to explore in a diachronic analysis. More specifically, the OE noun *naman* ‘name’ probably pronounced as [naman]. On the other hand, in ME, the *naman* in OE changed its segmental shape to *name* in ME. The crucial thing to find out here is that the vowel on the second syllable, which does not contain any stress, converted its phonological property, for instance, a change such as [naman] to [namə] (There are, of course, other phonological changes in this example, for example, processes such as final coda deletion. However, I do not consider such phonological processes in that these are not directly relevant to my research and beyond its scope.). In this work, I will deal with vowel reduction in the history of English, but unlike previous works, I pursue some specific goals in it. There are several questions in this work: How should weakening processes for vowels be analysed and how does it contribute to the understanding of Old English Phonology?; what can be a good definition for vowel reduction?; what are the features that vowel reduction must have?; what are the factors that can condition vowel reduction?; finally, how should the definition of vowel reduction be linked to those factors? The organisation of this paper is as follows. Section 1 provides a general definition of vowel reduction, showing what previous studies have said about it. Next, in section 2, I supply some fundamental data which I will deal with in my dissertation, and give a reason why these data should be crucial for my research. I also give a brief description of schwa, which represent the reduced property of vowels. Section 3 discusses various factors for vowel reduction such as phonological (prosodic and segmental), phonetic (perceptual), and phonemic (systemic) factors. I show previous studies in detail in this section. In the following section, I propose my own definition of vowel reduction, comparing to other analyses. Section 5 investigates some research questions of vowel reduction and some related changes, showing diachronic and synchronic aspects of Old and Middle English phonology.