

**Radboud University**



The influence of Latin and French on the use and phonological development of the digraphs <ie>, <ea> and <ou> in English between 900 and 1800 CE

BA Thesis

Veerle Kruitbosch

Prof. Dr Van Kemenade  
15 June 2018

## Abstract

This thesis explores influence of Latin and French on the use and phonological development of the digraphs <ie>, <ea> and <ou> in English between 900 and 1800 CE. Various sources have been carefully examined and the information provided by these sources has been combined to form a coherent argument with regard to the influence of Latin and French on the use of the digraphs <ie>, <ea> and <ou>. The various possible pronunciations for these digraphs will be discussed, as well as the influence from Latin and French and the phonological developments which led to these pronunciations. The findings of this work are in accordance with the hypothesis that French and Latin have had a considerable influence on the use and pronunciation of the digraphs <ie>, <ea> and <ou>. Other phonological developments have influenced the possible pronunciations of the digraphs as well. These findings may contribute to the field of existing stances on the influence from Latin and French on English orthography and phonology.

*Keywords: Language change; English; French; Latin; orthography; phonology; <ie>; <ea>; <ou>*

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## Introduction

The story of the Tower of Babel in The Bible is probably one of the earliest written accounts of an explanation of the multiplicity of the spoken languages in the world. The Bible tells that God saw how powerful humanity was when all people could communicate and decided to make groups of people speak different languages so they would be divided and it would be impossible for them to finish building the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9, New International Version). Different languages have certainly existed for thousands of years, and according to Thomason (2001), “[they] have been in contact certainly for thousands of years, and probably since the beginning of humankind – or at least very close to the beginning, as soon as humans spoke more than one language” (Thomason, p. 6). It seems that there is not one language in the world which has developed without contact with at least one other language. Language contact is everywhere and has been ever since the development of spoken language. Obviously, there are differences to the intensity of contact between languages at different times and in different places. Intense language contact can lead to far-reaching political, social and linguistic changes. Language contact often begins with one group moving into an area dominated by a group with a different language. Language contact does not necessarily involve bilingualism, just some form of communication between speakers of different languages. Contact-induced language change is common in intensive language contact situations. All existing linguistic features can be borrowed, even though some features seem to be borrowed more easily than others (Thomason, 2001). Lexical borrowing is the most common form of language change as a result of contact, but other features, such as phonology, morphology, orthography and syntax can be borrowed too (Hoad, 2012).

The intensity of the contact between French and English, and Latin and English, especially after the Norman Conquest, led to many changes in the English language. Not only did over 10 000 French words enter the English language during the Middle English period, the English phonological inventory was expanded and orthographic features were borrowed as well (Upward & Davidson, 2011). According to Lass (1992), Old English had no voice contrast in fricatives, which means that [v], [z] and [ð] were allophones of [f], [s] and [θ] respectively. The graphemes <f>, <s> and <þ> or <ð> were used in writing. The introduction of French <z> and the use of <u> or <v> for [v] in loans as well as in native words made contrastive pairs a possibility. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century <g> was borrowed from French and/or Latin for [g] and for [dʒ], which had been represented by <ȝ>. The sound [dʒ] in Old English occurred only postvocally. The borrowing of French words like ‘joy’ and ‘jewel’ in the Middle English

period established its use in initial position as well, commonly spelled <j> or <i>. The introduction of French <w> at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century freed [w] from the use of <u>, <uu> and <p>. The use of <w> for [w] became standard by the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The French diphthongs [oi] and [ui] were adopted into English language. In the Middle English period they were commonly spelled <oi> or <oy>. The addition of these diphthongs is one of the rare cases where a foreign language feature with no direct parallel in English was borrowed and was not assimilated to an existing native category but has retained its original form. Often when new elements are introduced into the English language a similar feature already exists, as is the case with the digraphs <ie> and <ea>. These digraphs did exist in Old English, but they were reintroduced into the English language by French scribes for [e:] and [ɛ:] respectively. The digraph <ou> was borrowed from French for the vowel sound [u:], which also did exist in Old English (Lass, 1992). This leads to the question: how did Latin and French influence English orthography and phonology? This work explores the influence of Latin and French on the development of the use and pronunciation of the digraphs <ie>, <ea> and <ou> in English between 900 and 1800 CE.

Because of the enormous influence of Latin and French on the English vocabulary it is reasonable to assume that at least some orthographic and phonological elements have been borrowed from, or influenced by, Latin and French as well. Because French was an actual living, spoken language on the British Isles it would seem logical to assume that this language would have had more influence than Latin on English orthography and phonology. The influence from French and Latin on the digraphs <ie>, <ea> and <ou> could have come from French and Latin writings as well as from first and second language speakers of French. The digraphs <ie>, <ea> and <ou> can be found to represent a number of different sounds in Present Day English (PDE). The pronunciation of the digraphs may have been influenced by many factors, such as native English phonology, French phonology, and other developments such as the Great Vowel Shift and Pre-Cluster Lengthening or Shortening. However, the expectation is that French, and to a lesser degree Latin, have had a considerable influence on the development of the use and the multiplicity of pronunciations of the digraphs <ie>, <ea> and <ou> in English.

Research has been conducted on the influence of Latin and French on English, in particular on the development and pronunciation of the English digraphs <ie>, <ea> and <ou> between 900 and 1800 CE, through the careful examination of various sources. Information from these sources has been gathered, compared, evaluated and organised to form a coherent and comprehensive representation of the developments of these digraphs in English. The first chapter will provide relevant background information about the English language and on the

historical and social circumstances and relevant events that occurred on the British Isles between circa 900 and 1800 CE. The second chapter will elaborate on the methodology and the sources that have been used. The third chapter will discuss the development of the digraph <ie> and its pronunciations, the fourth chapter will do the same for the digraph <ea>. The fifth chapter will discuss the development and pronunciations of the digraph <ou>. The findings will then be summarised and discussed in the conclusion. In the Discussion, the sources that have been used and the research that has been conducted will be evaluated.

## Chapter 1: Historical Background

This chapter will elaborate on the history of England and the English language, which is important as the following chapters will provide in-depth information on the influence of Latin and French on the use of the digraphs <ie>, <ea> and <ou> in English, and the sound changes and other factors that play a role in the developments of their various possible pronunciations.

The English language belongs to the Proto-Indo-European language family. The Proto-Indo-European languages are spoken mostly in Europe and Scandinavia, as well as in some parts of Asia. Proto-Indo-European is the ancestor language of several subgroups, one of which is Proto-Germanic. In circa 200 BCE the Germanic languages were presumably as similar as dialects of English were at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The various dialects of the Germanic language branch became increasingly more distinct as groups of speakers became increasingly more isolated from one another (Hoad, 2012). What is now the English language has been brought to England by Germanic-speaking tribes from territories along the European North Sea Coast, notably the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes, commonly referred to as the Anglo-Saxons. The Anglo-Saxons crossed over to the British Isles for about a hundred years from 450 CE onward (Townend, 2012; Upward & Davidson, 2011). When the Anglo-Saxons moved to the British Isles their Germanic dialects began to become increasingly more distinct from the dialects spoken by their previously neighbouring tribes on the Continent. In addition to the increased isolation from their sister languages, in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries the Germanic dialects which would develop into the Old English dialects also became exposed to influence from Latin and the Celtic languages which were already present on the British Isles (Hoad, 2012). In the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, English came in contact with Old Norse through Viking invasions and settlements. The Anglo-Saxon dialects spoken between the coming of the Anglo-Saxons to the British Isles and around 1150 are commonly referred to as Old English. In this time period the language changed significantly in terms of spelling and pronunciation. There was no official standard of spelling and there were great differences between dialects (Upward & Davidson, 2011). Very few people were literate, and those who were, were often trained according to the standards of a particular monastic scriptorium (Scragg, 1974). Virtually all words that were borrowed during the Old English period came from Latin; many of them had to do with religion (Minkova, 2013; Upward & Davidson, 2011).

In the 8<sup>th</sup> century the dominant dialect on the British Isles was the Northumbrian dialect, from the 10<sup>th</sup> century the dominant dialect was the West Saxon one. In the late Old English period the West Saxon dialect formed somewhat of an unofficial standard. This widespread use

of one stable spelling system for a longer period of time resulted in greater accuracy of phonemic representation, but this was disturbed in the 11<sup>th</sup> century by the Norman Conquest (Scragg, 1974). However, the influence of French on the English language was present before the Norman Conquest as the Anglo-Saxon society had close ties to France before the Norman Conquest (Tabari, 2003).

The Norman invasion in 1066 marked the start of an enormous influence from French, and indirectly from Latin, on English. Contact with the Celtic languages, Old Norse, Latin and French has influenced and changed the English language, just as contact with many other languages has done ever since (Thomason, 2001). Townend (2012) argues that it is therefore impossible to look at the English language in isolation, as it has been shaped by other languages just as much as by internal factors. Loanwords may even make up as much as 75 per cent of the vocabulary of Present Day English (PDE). Most of these loanwords have come into the language from Latin and French (Thomason, 2001). However, not just words have been borrowed from Latin and French, other linguistic features have been borrowed as well. Among these features are orthographic and phonological elements (Hoad, 2013; Minkova, 2013; Upward & Davidson, 2011).

William, Duke of Normandy, invaded England and, not long after the Norman victory at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, Norman nobility and senior clergy replaced the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy and clergy (Tabari, 2003; Upward & Davidson, 2011). Some Normans from lower classes came to England too and, according to Tabari (2003), the number of Normans in England at the time was sufficient for the Norman dialect of French to be used for circa 200 years after the Norman Conquest. The variety of French spoken in England from the time of the Norman Conquest up to around the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century is called Anglo-Norman (Minkova, 2013). However, according to Upward & Davidson (2011) it should by no means be assumed that the Norman Conquest led to great floods of Normans coming to the British Isles. A reason for the continued use of Anglo-Norman could be that the kings of England were also Dukes of Normandy and thus kept close contact with their lands in Normandy. Furthermore, the nobility in general often still had possessions on the Continent and the king, accompanied by household and military forces, clergy, merchants and nobility spent as much time in England as he did in France (Tabari, 2003). The number of monolingual speakers of French in England was small nevertheless, estimated at between 2 and 10 per cent of the population (Minkova, 2013). Although there were not enough French-speaking people in England to make the entire population switch languages, for the upper classes and the areas of the law, the court, the church and in education, French and Latin were the primary languages. The English peasantry made

up about 80 to 90 per cent of the population and there was never a time when English was not the language of the majority of England's population. French was spoken by the people in charge of the state and the church and became a language of prestige (Upward & Davidson, 2011). Lass (cited in Upward & Davidson, 2011) argues that it is not necessarily so that there was widespread active bilingualism in England, and that even though it is very probable that all educated Englishmen in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century could read French, it is likely that they could only speak it to some extent. Being able to understand and speak French was a marker of prestige, but since English was the language of the majority of England's population many inhabitants whose first language was French were at least to some extent familiar with English. By the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century it was not uncommon for people who spoke French as a first language to have knowledge of English or to have shifted to some variety of it (Minkova, 2013; Tabari, 2003). Lass (cited in Upward & Davidson, 2011) states that it is therefore probable that words from French were borrowed into English through passive knowledge, thus from written texts.

In 1204, the strong connection with the Continent was broken when king John lost Normandy to the French as a result of the war between England and France. The English nobility still had close ties to Normandy, but in the following decades people who had had lands in both England and France gave up either their English or their French possessions (Upward & Davidson, 2011). According to Tabari (2003) the loss of this connection caused the upper classes to become fully bilingual, and as is common in a situation where the conquerors become bilingual, their language was gradually replaced by the language of the conquered people, in this case English. The decrease of French as the dominant language of the ruling classes was accelerated by a new French influence which began at the time of king John. During the reign of his son, Henry III, a vast number of Frenchmen was invited to migrate to England. Henry III appointed many of these newly migrated Frenchmen to be officers in his court to replace the already established Normans or Englishmen. This replacement of the established nobility by newly arrived French nobles aroused feelings of nationalism in the inhabitants of England, even in those who were of French origin but had been living in England for generations. As a result, the French language gradually lost its influence on English during the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The loss of Normandy and its consequences were a great factor in the re-establishment of English, which was aided by the fact that Anglo-Norman was considered a dialect and not proper French. The Hundred Years' War turned England and France into bitter enemies and caused a further rise in nationalist sentiments. The war resulted in a surge of negative feelings towards the usage of French in areas of officiality. Another important factor

in the re-establishment of English was the fact that the upper classes, which had been vital in keeping the French language alive in England, became relatively less important as the importance of the middle and lower classes increased in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century. A middle class consisting of merchants and craftsman became rich and powerful. This middle class became increasingly important in towns. The importance of the lower classes was strengthened when the Black Death caused the death of about 40 per cent of the population after it came to England in 1348. This resulted in a significant decrease in the number of labourers in the country, and subsequently in an increase in the value of their work. The increase in the importance of the middle and lower classes meant that the language they spoke, English, became more important as well (Tabari, 2003; Upward & Davidson, 2011). A critical year for the re-establishment of the English language was 1362. This year marks the start of the use of English as the official language of the law courts and the first official opening of parliament in English (Tabari, 2003). The re-establishment of English as the primary language in official situations did not mean that French was no longer an important second language in England in the Middle Ages. It held its position as a learned tongue like Latin, and continued to be a language of prestige for at least several centuries after the re-establishment of English (Minkova, 2013). However, it was no longer the case that many members of the nobility could speak French and the favoured language in the areas of law, administration and literature gradually shifted from French to English from the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Minkova, 2013).

According to Tabari (2003), the influence of French on the English language was so immense that the English language from the Anglo-Saxons differed greatly from the English language after it was re-established in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Minkova (2013) agrees that the linguistic consequences of the Norman Conquest were far-reaching. In Old English new words were commonly formed by adding affixes or by combining native elements to form compounds. This changed in the Middle English period, and consequently words were often borrowed from French even if it would have been possible to form a new word with existing native elements. Moreover, French words were borrowed where an equivalent already did exist in English. Prestige was a huge factor in this. After the Norman Conquest a great amount of French words entered the English language, most of them having to do with religion, military, art, government and administration. Very few French loans entered the English language before 1100. Presumably, not more than 900 words of French origin entered English before 1250. Most of the French loans, about half of all the total number of loanwords borrowed from French into English, entered the English language between 1250 and 1400. In this period the originally French-speaking upper classes switched to English but often still spoke the language

imperfectly. This caused them to supplement their knowledge of English with French words and expressions. As a result, it became possible for these words and expressions to enter the English language. Thousands of French words, most of which are related to government, law, administration, religion, military, food and many other areas have been borrowed in this manner. Many English words were replaced by French ones, or French loans came to be used side by side with their English equivalents. From around 1250 onward the prestigious dialect was no longer Anglo-Norman but rather Parisian French, the variety of French spoken on the Continent, and as a result many French words that were borrowed from about the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century onward came from this Parisian variety. Consequently, sometimes when words were borrowed from both Anglo-Norman and Parisian French the two would exist side by side, often only differing slightly in meaning and/or spelling. An example of such a pair is Present Day English 'warranty', borrowed from Norman French, compared to Present Day English 'guarantee', which was borrowed from Parisian French (Tabari, 2003). It is estimated that within three hundred years after the Norman Conquest loans from French comprised about 25 per cent of the English language (Minkova, 2013). Sometimes loans from French are hard to distinguish from their Latin origin, which could be a source of difficulty in tracing the source of loanwords (Minkova, 2013). The introduction of thousands of French words into the English language did not only cause the vocabulary of English to change and expand but also caused some changes in the sound system and orthography of English (Tabari, 2003).

Loans from French often incorporated features that were unfamiliar to the structure of the English language at the time of borrowing. These features had to be learned by the English-speaking population and eventually could become a part of the basic language structure. The introduction of loanwords may lead to new phonemes in new places, such as initial [dʒ], and new sounds such as [oi] and [ui], and [z], [v] and [ð] which had been allophones of [s], [f] and [θ] respectively in Old English (Lass, 1992; Minkova, 2013). When speakers of French in England eventually shifted to English in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, they imposed features of French phonology on the English language. This imposition may have been the result of imperfect acquisition of English phonology and the need for these speakers to supplement their knowledge of English with French vocabulary. As a result, speakers of French who shifted to English brought some features of their French pronunciation with them into English. Other linguistic features could be borrowed as well, such as graphemes (Thomason, 2001). The graphemes <w>, <ou> and <oi>, for example, were introduced by French scribes.

From circa the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the re-establishment of English as the primary language of England led to more systematic scribal practices, especially in official

documents, in which a unified standard was preferred. The development of a standard was accelerated by the printing press, which was brought to England by William Caxton in 1476. The development of a standard spelling system in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century does not necessarily reflect the contemporary phonological changes that occurred. In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century spelling and pronunciation increasingly diverged. Furthermore, the five vowel letters in the Roman alphabet are not sufficient to represent the sounds of English, which has had at least fifteen contrastive vowel sounds during the transition period between late Middle English and Early Modern English. In English, one grapheme can have multiple pronunciations and one vowel sound may be represented by more than one different grapheme. Often, the Roman vowel graphemes and the combinations used in English reflect historical sources and morphological relations rather than Present Day English sounds. In the Middle English period Anglo-Norman and Parisian French were important factors for the development of orthographic and phonological innovations in the English language, thus causing the vowel inventory to expand (Minkova, 2013). French has had considerable influence on the use, development, and pronunciation of the English digraphs <ie>, <ea> and <ou> (Minkova, 2013; Scragg, 1974; Upward & Davidson, 2011).

The Great Vowel Shift, which took place between circa 1400 and 1750, caused the inconsistencies between spelling and pronunciation to become even greater. During the Great Vowel Shift the English long vowels were raised, with exception of the high vowels which could not be raised and were diphthongised. Inconsistencies between spelling and pronunciation came into being because, among other factors, not all words were affected by the shift. Words borrowed from French before the Great Vowel Shift usually underwent the same changes as native words, while words borrowed after the shift was completed in certain areas or for certain sounds did not undergo these changes. Some words appear to have simply been left out. Regional sub-shifts and variants cause even more irregularities (Minkova, 2013).

According to Minkova (2013), the majority of Latin borrowings entered the English language in the Middle English period. Latin was important in bureaucracy and law in Anglo-Norman England. However, the Latin used in official documents at the time was often borrowed from Anglo-Norman and therefore may be different from classical Latin. The classical Latin studied in universities had greater impact on the development of English. With the re-establishment of English not only thousands of French words were adopted into English in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, so were many Latin words. As many French words descend from Latin, it may not always be clear from which language the loanword was originally borrowed. These words are sometimes referred to as Franco-Latin borrowings (Upward & Davidson, 2011). Even

with the re-establishment of English, Latin remained an important language in the areas of religion and education (Minkova, 2013).

As so many French words entered the language, French phonology and orthography have been brought into the English language with these loanwords. Some orthographic or phonological features may have been borrowed out of need for new sounds or a new way to represent a sound. Many factors, including the Great Vowel Shift and vowel shortening as well as lengthening, have contributed to the severe complexity of the English language, and the variation between orthography and phonology. The use of the digraphs <ie>, <ea> and <ou> as well as their numerous possible pronunciations in Present Day English have been influenced by these various changes and developments.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

Literature research has been conducted to gather information for this work. Various sources about language change in general and the history of the English language have been carefully read, compared and evaluated, and information has been gathered and put together to form a coherent argument. Some of these sources provided information about and examples of specific orthographic and phonological developments in the English language.

The information presented in the Introduction has been provided by Hoad (2012), Lass (1992), Thomason (2001) and Upward & Davidson (2011). The general information in this chapter has been found mainly in Hoad, Thomason and Upward & Davidson. According to Unseth (2003), Thomason provides an excellent overview of the linguistic workings of language contact. Lass has provided examples of phonological and orthographic features and changes influenced by or borrowed from French.

The Historical Background is based on information provided by Hoad (2012), Lass (1992), Minkova (2013), Scragg (1974), Tabari (2003), Thomason (2001), Townend (2012) and Upward & Davidson (2011). Hoad and Townend both occur in *The Oxford History of English* (2012), which, according to Minkova (2009), approaches linguistic issues, in particular in social and cultural context. Minkova (2009) argues that this approach often leads to new ways of accounting for language change. General information about languages, language change and language contact has mainly been provided by Hoad, Minkova (2013), Tabari, Thomason and Townend. Information about the influence of French on the English language has primarily been found in Scragg, Tabari and Upward & Davidson. These sources complement each other in providing the necessary background information for this work.

More specific information necessary for the chapters on the individual digraphs <ie>, <ea> and <ou> has been found in Hogg (1992), Lass (1992; 2000), Minkova (2013), Mossé (1968), Scragg (1974), Tabari (2003) and Upward & Davidson (2011). Virtually all examples that have been given in these chapters have been found in Upward & Davidson, which, according to Kopaczyk (2014), gives a detailed account of the impact of French and Latin on the English phonological and orthographic systems as well as many lexical examples. Lass (1992), Upward & Davidson, Scragg and Minkova have provided these chapters with a lot of information about the development of the digraphs <ie>, <ea> and <ou> and explanations of several specific changes that occurred. Salmon (1976) admires Scragg for succeeding in clarifying certain phonological developments as well as in providing essential information on orthographic changes that occurred. According to Howell (2014), Minkova provides a coherent,

well-informed and up-to-date view on the history of English phonology. Hogg is mainly concerned with Old English grammar but has been able to go into detail about the use of <ie> in Old English. Mossé has complemented the information about <ea> and <ou> given by other sources. Tabari and Lass (2000) do not elaborate on the influence of French and Latin on the development and pronunciation of <ie> and <ea>, but does provide some information about the use of <ou> in English.

The insights provided by these sources combined together build up to one coherent argument with regards to language change and the development of the English language in general. They have been able to supply sufficient background information on the influence of Latin and French on English society, history and on the English language. Furthermore, they have provided the information needed to paint a clear picture of the influence of Latin and French on the development and use of the digraphs <ie>, <ea> and <ou> in English as well as the development of the various possible pronunciations of these digraphs. Numerous of useful examples have been found in these sources as well.

### Chapter 3: The development of the English grapheme <ie>

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the influence of Latin and French on the English digraph <ie> and the developments that caused its various possible pronunciations in Present Day English. The digraph spelling <ie> did exist in Old English (Scragg, 1974; Minkova, 2013; Hogg, 1992). This digraph was used in its Old English form until circa the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The manner in which to interpret <ie> in Old English is uncertain (Minkova, 2013; Hogg, 1992). Minkova (2013) argues that the digraph never represented a stable, fully phonemic sound in Old English. Scribes at the time were very inconsistent in their use of <ie>, and therefore none of the sources that have been used in this work elaborate on its use in the Old English period.

After the 13<sup>th</sup> century, <ie> was one of the digraphs which were adopted to represent new sounds or sounds that were not yet satisfyingly represented at the time. Anglo-Norman scribes used the grapheme <ie> as a way to represent the sound [e:], and consequently in Present Day English <ie> is most commonly found in French loanwords which were pronounced with [e:] at the time of borrowing, as in (1). In many of these words the grapheme <i> was not included until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. <ie> was extended to words native to English, as in (2), but this did not happen until much later and is not very common (Minkova, 2013; Upward & Davidson, 2011; Scragg, 1974).

- (1) Old French *bref* --> Middle English *bref*, later *brief* → PDE 'brief', pronounced [bri:f]  
 Old French *sege* --> Middle English *sege*, later *siege* → PDE 'chief', pronounced [si:dʒ]  
 Old French *acheve* --> Middle English *acheve*, later *achieve* → PDE 'achieve', pronounced [ə'tʃi:v]
- (2) Old English *feond*, PDE 'fiend', pronounced [fi:nd]

When <ie> is found in words native to English, the digraph is usually found in words which were spelled with the Old English grapheme <eo>. In Old English, <eo> commonly represented a vowel sound which had become [e:] in Middle English. Anglo-Norman scribes used <ie> to represent [e:], and consequently some words with <eo> for [e:] were respelled with <ie> instead (Upward & Davidson, 2011). According to Scragg (1974), the spread of the

digraph <ie> to native English words with [e:] which were originally written with <eo> occurred mainly in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This would indicate that the spread of <ie> to English words which were originally spelled with <eo> happened around the start of the Great Vowel Shift, or at least before the Great Vowel Shift for the vowel sound [e:] was completed. These words now occur with various pronunciations (3) (Upward & Davidson, 2011).

- (3) Old English *zeleofan* → PDE ‘believe’, pronounced [biˈli:v]; Old English *peof* → PDE ‘thief’, pronounced [θi:f]  
 Old English *freond* → PDE ‘friend’, pronounced [frend]  
 Old English *leoƷan* → PDE ‘to lie’, pronounced [laɪ]

Some words which have come into the English language via French and/or Latin came in pairs. The different forms exist side by side in Present Day English because they came into the language at different times and/or via different ways. Often, they differ slightly in meaning. An example of this can be found in (4) (Upward & Davidson, 2011).

- (4) Old French *chief*, meaning ‘head’ or ‘leader’ (Chief, n.d.) → PDE ‘chief’, pronounced [tʃi:f]  
 Old French *chief* → French *chef* → PDE ‘chef’, pronounced [ʃef]

In some cases, Old English words with the short vowel sound [e] led to Present Day English <ie>, as in (5). This could be due to vowel lengthening in the Old and Middle English period. One such vowel lengthening development is Pre-Cluster Lengthening, which happened around the 9<sup>th</sup> century and entails that short vowels were lengthened before a cluster of a sonorant and an obstruent consonant (6). This lengthening was especially common before [ld], [mb], [nd], and [rd]. Words with Old English [e] which were lengthened to [e:] and written <ie> are now commonly pronounced with [i:], as is most common for <ie> in Present Day English (Lass, 1992; Upward & Davidson, 2011).

- (5) Old English *zeldan* → PDE ‘to yield’, pronounced [ji:ld]  
 (6) Old English *feld* → PDE ‘field’, pronounced [fi:ld]

A sound change that has had great influence on the English long vowel system is the Great Vowel Shift. During the Great Vowel Shift, the sound [e:] developed into [i:] in most words, which is why, in Present Day English, words spelled with <ie> are usually pronounced with [i:]. According to Upward & Davidson (2011), this change from [e:] to [i:] had generally been completed around 1500. This explains why words with <ie> which were borrowed after circa the 16<sup>th</sup> century may have different pronunciations. These words were not included in the sound change, and consequently they may have kept the pronunciations which they had in the language from which they were borrowed (7) (Foie-gras, n.d.).

(7) French *foie gras* → PDE ‘foie gras’, pronounced [fwa: ‘gra:]

One – less common – development which occurred in English was that some Latin- and/or French-derived words which were written with the grapheme <i> came to be written with the digraph <ie> in Early Modern English. In these words <ie> often developed into the split digraph <i-e> in Present Day English, as in (8) (Upward & Davidson, 2011).

(8) Early Modern English *aspier* → PDE ‘aspire’; Early Modern English *desier* → PDE ‘desire’

The spelling rule ‘<i> before <e> except after <c>’ explains the use of the digraph <ei> instead of the digraph <ie> for [i:] in some words. This is an explanation for the difference in spelling between words like in (9) (Upward & Davidson, 2011).

(9) PDE ‘relieve’, pronounced [rɪ’li:v] and PDE ‘receive’, pronounced [rɪ’si:v]

Various pronunciations can be found for <ie> in Present Day English (10). The pronunciation of <ie> may depend on various or multiple factors. Factors that may play a role are whether a word is native to English or has been borrowed from Latin or French, and, if the word has been borrowed, on when it entered the English language. Another factor may be the phonetic environment in which <ie> occurs. An adjacent sound, an adjacent grapheme or a preceding or following cluster of consonants may be a factor in the pronunciation as well. An example where the phonetic environment resulted in a different sound than [i:] for <ie> is when <ie> is followed by an <r>. A postvocalic [r] could lead to the insertion of a vowel sound [ə]

and the deletion of the [r] (11). This is a common phenomenon in British English (Lass, 1992; Minkova, 2013; Upward & Davidson, 2011).

- (10) PDE 'relief', pronounced [rɪ'li:f]
- PDE 'friend', pronounced ['frend]
- PDE 'sieve', pronounced [sɪv]
- PDE 'to die', pronounced [daɪ]
- PDE 'fiery', pronounced ['faɪəri]
- PDE 'fierce', pronounced [fɪəs]
- PDE 'alien', pronounced ['eɪliən]
- PDE 'movie', pronounced ['mu:vi]
- (11) PDE 'carrier', pronounced ['kæriə]
- PDE 'pliers', pronounced ['plaiəz]

Linguists seem to agree that the English grapheme <ie>, while inherited from Old English, has been reintroduced by Anglo-Norman scribes. Its use in Present Day English has therefore been influenced by French; many of the words containing <ie> in Present Day English have been borrowed from French. At the time of borrowing these words were pronounced with [e:]. The digraph <ie> later spread to some words native to English which were pronounced with [e:]. Some of these words were originally spelled with <eo> and were respelled with <ie> due to influence from French scribes. <ie> was thus originally pronounced [e:], and has commonly changed to [i:] during the Great Vowel Shift. In some Old English words the short vowel [e] was lengthened to [e:] as a result of Pre-Cluster Lengthening and consequently these words are commonly spelled with <ie>. As this sound change occurred before the Great Vowel Shift, these words are now usually pronounced [i:]. When <ie> is followed by [r], this can lead to the insertion of [ə] and the deletion of [r], resulting in pronunciations differing from [i:] as well. As a result of, among others, these various factors pronunciations that can be found for <ie> in words in Present Day English are [i:], [e], [ɪ], [aɪ] and [aɪə], which are especially common word-finally, [ɪə] and [iə], especially before [r], and, word-finally, [i].

#### Chapter 4: The development of the English grapheme <ea>

In this chapter, the influence of Latin and French on the use and development of the English digraph <ea> will be discussed, as well as the developments which resulted in its various pronunciations in Present Day English. The digraph <ea>, like the digraph <ie>, was inherited from Old English and was used in its original Old English form until the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The use of the grapheme <ea> in Present Day English, however, cannot be traced back directly to the Old English grapheme (Minkova, 2013).

In the early Old English period the grapheme <ea> represented a diphthong; [æə]. Monophthongisation took place at the end of the Old English period, and the resulting long monophthong [æ:] was already represented by the grapheme <æ> (Scragg, 1974; Minkova, 2013). In early Middle English [æ:] was represented by both <æ> and <ea> spellings, as in (1) and (2) respectively (Upward & Davidson, 2011). Middle English <æ> disappeared gradually because French scribes in the Middle English period often confused the graphemes <æ>, <ea>, <e> and <a> (Mossé, 1968). The [æ:] vowel was raised to [ɛ:] in most dialects, which was in line with the general tendency of Middle English non-high monophthongs to shift upwards. In the Anglian dialect the sound was raised further to [e:] (Minkova, 2013; Upward & Davidson, 2011).

- (1) Old English *clæne* → PDE ‘clean’, pronounced [kli:n]
- Old English *hælan* → PDE ‘to heal’, pronounced [hi:l]
- Old English *lædan* → PDE ‘to lead’, pronounced [li:d]
- (2) Old English *beacen* → PDE ‘beacon’, pronounced [bi:kən]
- Old English *beatan* → PDE ‘to beat’, pronounced [bi:t]
- Old English *stream* → PDE ‘stream’, pronounced [stri:m]
- Old English *bread* → PDE ‘bread’, pronounced [bred]
- Old English *deap* → PDE ‘death’, pronounced [deθ]
- Old English *earnian* → PDE ‘to earn’, pronounced [ɜ:n] (Earn, 2008)

The source of both the English vowel sounds [ɛ:] and [e:] is West Germanic [a:], which was raised to [æ:] in pre-Old English times. In the Anglian dialect of Old English, [æ:] was raised further to [ɛ:]. This caused the difference between West Saxon [æ:], spelled <ǣ>, and Anglian [e:], spelled <ē>. As a result, when in Middle English the vowel sounds [e:] and [ɛ:] began to be differentiated in spelling, identical etymological entities came to be represented by

either <ee> or <ea> depending on whether the spelling was based on the Anglian or on the West Saxon form. The etymological sound-spelling correspondence with <ea> for [ɛ:] and <ee> for [e:] is much less reliable when the vowel is followed by [r] (Minkova, 2013).

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Anglo-Norman scribes borrowed the English grapheme <ea> to represent the vowel sound [ɛ:], although the spelling with <ea> in English for words with [ɛ:] often first appeared in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (3) (Scragg, 1974; Upward & Davidson, 2011). The use of <ea> for [ɛ:] was reintroduced into English in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and was initially more common in words borrowed from French into English in the centuries before. Later, the use of <ea> spread to native English words which were pronounced with [ɛ:] in Middle English. (Minkova, 2013; Scragg, 1974). Consequently, when in the 15<sup>th</sup> century period the – at the time contrastive – vowel sounds [ɛ:] and [e:] began to be spelled in different ways, <ea> came to represent the sound [ɛ:], as in (3) (Upward & Davidson, 2011).

- (3) Old French *fesan* → Middle English *fesaunt* → PDE ‘pheasant’, pronounced [ˈfeznt]  
 Old French *plesir* → Middle English *plesir* → PDE ‘pleasure’, pronounced [ˈplezə]  
 Old French *feste* → Middle English *feste* → PDE ‘feast’, pronounced [fi:st]

Old English [ɛ] was lengthened to [ɛ:] in some words in the Middle English period and consequently also came to be spelled with the grapheme <ea>, as in (4) (Upward & Davidson, 2011). One reason for this lengthening could be the development of Open Syllable Lengthening, which occurred around 1200. This change entails that short vowels which occurred in stressed first open syllables of words that are disyllabic were lengthened (Lass, 1992). Words that have changed from the short vowel sound [ɛ] to the long vowel sound [ɛ:] have developed over time and therefore do not necessarily have the vowel sound [ɛ:] in Present Day English (Minkova, 2013; Upward & Davidson, 2011).

- (4) Old English *beran* → PDE ‘to bear’, pronounced [beə]  
 Old English *tredan* → PDE ‘to tread’, pronounced [tred]  
 Old English *bicpeðan* → PDE ‘to bequeathe’, pronounced [brˈkwi:ð]  
 Old English *etan* → PDE ‘to eat’, pronounced [i:t]  
 Old English *mete* → PDE ‘meat’, pronounced [mi:t]

The Old English digraph <eo> in some cases came to be respelled with <ea> (Lass, 1992). According to Lass (1992), this was a result of the confusion caused by mergers and phonetic changes around the beginning of the Middle English period and the lack of a stable spelling system. An example of words which was spelled with <eo> in Old English and have retained the digraph <ea> in Present Day English as a result of this confusion can be found in (5). Some words which were spelled with <eo> in Old English and were respelled with <ea> in Middle English eventually came to be spelled with <e> in Present Day English (6) (Lass, 1992).

(5) Old English *eorl* → PDE ‘earl’, pronounced [ɜ:l]

Old English *deore* → PDE ‘dear’, pronounced [dɪə]

Old English *heorte* → PDE ‘heart’, pronounced [hɑ:t]

(6) Old English *heold* → Middle English *heald* → PDE ‘held’

In some cases words derived from French or Latin with <e> led to English <ea>, pronounced [ɛ] (or PDE [e]). This pronunciation is a result of vowel length variation of the digraph <ea> in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The <ea> spelling indicated that these words were pronounced with the long vowel [ɛ:] before the pronunciation eventually settled on the short vowel. Words like (7) and (8) are a result of this vowel shortening (Upward & Davidson, 2011).

(7) Latin *mensura* → Old French or Anglo-Norman *mesure* → PDE ‘measure’, pronounced [ˈmeɜə]

(8) PDE ‘treachery’, pronounced [ˈtreɪʃəri]; ‘deaf’, pronounced [def]; ‘zealous’, pronounced [ˈzeləs]

The realisation of the Present Day English vowel sound for the digraph <ea> can also be dependent on the phonetic environment in which it occurs. Pre-Cluster Shortening around the 11<sup>th</sup> century caused the long vowel [ɛ:] to be shortened before clusters of two consonants (9). The loss of postvocalic [r] in some varieties of British English caused the insertion of a sound [ə] after the vowel sound of the grapheme <ea>. This led to pronunciations such as in (10). Words in which the [r] sound was lost after the 17<sup>th</sup> century vowel lengthening before [r] followed by a consonant or a pause consequently have a long vowel sound, as in (11). In words which lost the [r] sound before this 17<sup>th</sup> century lengthening development a short vowel sound is common. (Lass, 1992; Minkova, 2013).

(9) Old English *breost* → Middle English *breast* → PDE ; breast', pronounced [brest]

(10) PDE 'to tear', pronounced [teə]

(11) PDE 'to search', pronounced [sɜ:tʃ]

At the end of the Middle English period the vowel sounds [ɛ:] and [e:] were still contrastive, but [ɛ:] was raised to [e:] and merged with historical [e:] during the Middle English period. When exactly this merge happened is difficult to say, as it differs between certain dialects and words. However, rhymes provide evidence for the merge in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, although it seems that the merge was not completed before the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Minkova, 2013; Scragg, 1974). The merge of [ɛ:] and [e:] may seem undesirable but an explanation, provided by Minkova (2013), is that the resulting three-vowel height system would be more stable and salient than a four-vowel height system.

The Great Vowel Shift, which affected long vowels during the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, caused most words spelled with <ee> and <ea> to be pronounced with the same vowel sound. The grapheme <ee>, which used to be pronounced [ɛ:], changed to [i:]. Middle English <ea> [ɛ:] changed into [e:] and is now commonly pronounced [i:] as well (12). The pronunciation of [i:] for <ea> was first considered to be less polite (Upward & Davidson, 2011). According to Minkova (2013) (table 1), the pronunciation of [i:] for <ea> was first used mainly by the lower classes. Eventually, [i:] came to replace [e:] between the 16<sup>th</sup> and mid-18<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, not all words spelled with <ea> have followed this development and various pronunciations for <ea> exist in Present Day English. Possible pronunciations for <ea> in Present Day English can be found in (13) (Upward & Davidson, 2011).

	<b>Aristocracy</b>	<b>Bourgeoisie</b>	<b>Lower classes</b>
<b>OE <i>mētan</i> with [e:]</b> <b>in OE, 'to meet'</b>	[mi:t]	[mi:t]	[mi:t]
<b>OE <i>mete</i> with [ɛ:]</b> <b>in OE, 'meat'</b>	[mɛ:t], [me:t]	[me:t]	[mi:t]
<b>ME <i>mate</i> from AN</b> <b><i>mater</i> with [æ:],</b> <b>'defeat'</b>	[mæ:t], [mɛ:t]	[me:t]	[me:t]

Table 1: Social dimensions of the Great Vowel Shift, c. 1600.

(12) PDE ‘meat’, pronounced [mi:t]; ‘meet’, pronounced [mi:t]

(13) PDE ‘leave’, pronounced [li:v]

PDE ‘thread’, pronounced [θred]

PDE ‘year’, pronounced [ˈjiə]

PDE ‘ear’, pronounced [ɪə]

PDE ‘wear’, pronounced [weə]

PDE ‘earth’, pronounced [ɜ:θ]

PDE ‘hearth’, pronounced [hɑ:θ]

To conclude, the digraph <ea> did exist in Old English, but the grapheme disappeared in its Old English form around the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Its use in Present Day English is due to influence from French; the digraph <ea> was borrowed from Old English by French scribes and reintroduced into the English language for the vowel sound [ɛ:]. The digraph initially occurred in words borrowed from French and only later spread to words native to English with the vowel sound [ɛ:]. The use of <ea> can also be a result of the respelling of the Old English digraph <eo> or the French or Latin grapheme <e>. In Present Day English the digraph <ea> can represent various vowel sounds. The most common pronunciation of <ea> is [i:], as a result of the Great Vowel Shift. In some words <ea> is pronounced with the short vowel [e] as a result of Pre-Cluster Shortening in the 11<sup>th</sup> century or vowel length variation in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Other possible pronunciations are [iə] and [ɪə], [eə], [ɜ:], and [ɑ:], often as a result of postvocalic loss of [r] or other phonetic conditions. Thus, pronunciation of <ea> can be dependent on a variety of factors, such as if, and when, a word with <ea> was borrowed into the language, as well as the Great Vowel Shift, various vowel lengthening or shortening processes and the phonetic environment in which <ea> occurs.

## Chapter 5: The development of the English grapheme <ou>

This chapter will discuss the influence of Latin and French on the use of the digraph <ou> in English, as well as discuss developments that caused the various possible pronunciations of <ou> in Present Day English. Linguists do not seem to agree completely on exactly how and when the grapheme <ou> was introduced into the English language. According to Minkova (2013) and Mossé (1968), the digraph was introduced by Anglo-Norman scribes in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Scragg (1974) argues that it was borrowed from Parisian French in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and Upward & Davidson (2011) find that the grapheme was introduced into English around the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and simply state that it was borrowed from Old French. Since Anglo-Norman was the variety of French which was spoken in England after the Norman Conquest and Parisian French became increasingly prestigious from about 1250 onward (Tabari, 2003), both Anglo-Norman and Parisian French seem plausible origins for <ou>. Nevertheless, linguists seem to agree that the English digraph <ou> was borrowed from French and that this borrowing happened during the Middle English period.

In Old French the digraph <ou> was used to represent a diphthong; [oʊ]. This diphthong had developed from Latin <o> and <u>, as in (1). By the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century this diphthong had changed to [u:] in French (Upward & Davidson, 2011). The vowel sound [u:] did already exist in Old English and was represented by <u>, but <u> was a heavily used symbol in Old English. It could represent the vowel sounds [u], [u:], [ʊ], and, in some areas, [y]. No distinction was made between <u> and <v> in English until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and the doubling of <u> was sometimes used to represent <w>. Consequently, <u> could not only represent multiple vowel sounds but the doubling of the grapheme could also represent either <uv>, <vu> and <w> (Minkova, 2013; Scragg, 1974; Upward & Davidson, 2011). To avoid ambiguity, French scribes introduced the digraph <ou> to represent the vowel sound [u:]. Therefore, the borrowing of the digraph <ou> from French into English happened out of necessity. French words spelled with the digraph <ou> which were borrowed into Middle English were pronounced with [u:], as in (2), and Middle English words with the vowel sound [u:] were commonly respelled with <ou>, as in (3) (Upward & Davidson, 2011).

(1) Latin *Florem* → Old French *flour*, ‘flower’

(2) Old French *doute* → PDE ‘doubt’

(3) Old English *hus* → PDE ‘house’

In certain phonetic environments the digraph <ou> came to be spelled <ow>. The digraph <ou> is common in medial position such as in (4), while <ow> is often used in final position, as in (5). Evidently, there are exceptions to this rule, especially in modern loans from or via French such as (6). The grapheme <ow> is also generally used between vowels, such as in (7), before <n> in loans from French, as in (8), but exceptions again do exist, as in (9). The digraph <ow> is also commonly used before consonants that start the following syllable (10). The digraph <ou> is commonly found next to a <w> – where the [u:] pronunciation is often preserved – such as in (11). Generally, <ou> is used before <n> when another consonant follows, as in (12). In some cases there is overlap between the use of the <ou> and <ow>, as in (13), and cognates exist (14) (Minkova, 2013; Upward & Davidson, 2011).

(4) PDE ‘loud’, pronounced [laʊd]

(5) PDE ‘endow’, pronounced [ɪnˈdaʊ]

(6) PDE ‘chou’, pronounced [ʃu:]

(7) PDE ‘coward’, pronounced [ˈkaʊəd]

(8) PDE ‘crown’, pronounced [kraʊn]

(9) PDE ‘noun’, pronounced [naʊn]

(10) PDE ‘powder’, pronounced [ˈpaʊdə]

(11) PDE ‘wound’, pronounced [wu:nd]

(12) PDE ‘round’, pronounced [raʊnd]

(13) Latin *florem* → Old French *flour*, *flor*, *flur*, → PDE ‘flour’ and ‘flour’,  
pronounced [ˈflaʊə]

(14) PDE ‘noun’, pronounced [naʊn] and ‘renown’, pronounced [rɪˈnaʊn]

There are various possible pronunciations for the grapheme <ou> in Present Day English. In Early Modern English confusion about the pronunciation of <ou> did exist and, consequently, various spellings and pronunciations emerged. During the Great Vowel Shift the vowel sound [u:] developed gradually into a diphthong [aʊ] via the intermediate vowel sounds [ou] and [ɔu]. The diphthong [au] is now the most common pronunciation for <ou> in English (15) (Lass, 2000; Minkova, 2013; Upward & Davidson, 2011). However, words which were borrowed from French after the change from [u:] to [au] after the Great Vowel Shift was more or less completed, which, according to Scragg (1974), was from about the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward, often retained the vowel sound [u:], as in (16). Exceptions are more recent loans from French which have been Anglicised, such as (17) (Scragg, 1974; Upward & Davidson, 2011).

- (15) PDE ‘house’, pronounced [haʊz]; ‘loud’, pronounced [laʊd]; ‘shout’, pronounced [ʃaʊt]; ‘doubt’, pronounced [daʊt]  
 (16) PDE ‘group’, pronounced [gru:p]  
 (17) PDE ‘blouse’, pronounced [blaʊz]

Phonetic environments may also play a role in the pronunciation, or the development of the pronunciation, of words. In some words the grapheme <ou> was pronounced with short vowel [u] in Middle English, which has developed into [ʌ] in Present Day English (18). This is especially common before <n>. Generally, these words were spelled with either <o> or <u> in Middle English and only acquired the <ou> spelling somewhat later (Scragg, 1974; Upward & Davidson, 2011). Another development which led to the vowel sound [ʌ] for <ou> occurred in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Long vowels in antepenultimate syllables were shortened before a single consonant, which led to realisations such as in (19) (Lass, 1992). Before [l], the grapheme <ou> may sometimes be pronounced [əʊ] (20) (Upward & Davidson, 2011). In codas, [l] sometimes tends to be deleted which led to pronunciations such as (21). The loss of [r] in non-rhotic varieties of English resulted in a number of different pronunciations for <ou>. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, short vowels were lengthened before [r] followed by another consonant or a pause. Most words which lost the [r] sound in non-rhotic varieties of English lost the [r] sound after the vowel lengthening. As a result, these words are pronounced with a long vowel in Present Day English (22). The loss of [r] also commonly led to the insertion of [ə] (23) (Lass, 1992).

- (18) PDE ‘cousin’, pronounced [ˈkʌzn]; ‘courage’, pronounced [ˈkʌrɪdʒ]; ‘country’ pronounced [ˈkʌntri]  
 (19) Old English *superne* → PDE ‘southern’, pronounced [ˈsʌðən]  
 (20) PDE ‘mould’, pronounced [məʊld]; ‘poultry’, pronounced [ˈpəʊltri]  
 (21) PDE ‘should’, pronounced [ʃʊd]  
 (22) PDE ‘course’, pronounced [kɔ:s]; ‘born’, pronounced [bɔ:n]  
       PDE ‘journal’, pronounced [ˈdʒɜ:nl]; ‘bourbon’, pronounced [ˈbɜ:bən]  
 (23) PDE ‘bourgeoisie’, pronounced [ˌbʊəʒwɑ:ˈzi:]; ‘tour’, pronounced [tʊə]  
       PDE ‘hour’, pronounced [ˈaʊə]  
       PDE ‘favour’, pronounced [ˈfeɪvə]

The digraph <ou> is also found in English word-finally as <ous>. This ending was derived from the Latin adjectival ending <osus> and came into English via the Old French derivatives <os> and/or <us>, as in (24). In Middle English the spelling could vary between <ous>, <ouse>, <ows>, <os> and <us>. When in word-final position, <ous> is commonly pronounced [əs] (Upward & Davidson, 2011).

(24) Latin *famosus* --> Old French *famosos* or *famosus* --> PDE 'famous', pronounced  
[ˈfeɪməs]

There appears to be no doubt among linguists about the significant influence of French on the English digraph <ou>. Originally, <ou> was borrowed from French to represent the vowel sound [u:] in French loans and to replace the excessively used symbol <u> for [u:] in words native to English. In Present Day English a multitude of pronunciations are possible. The most common pronunciation of <ou> is [au], which is a result of the Great Vowel Shift. Words with <ou> which were borrowed from French after the Great Vowel shift have commonly retained the vowel sound [u:]. <ou> may be pronounced [ʌ] as a result of vowel shortening or because the sound developed from [u]. A following [l] can result in the sound [əʊ] for <ou>, and when [l] is deleted <ou> may be pronounced [ʊ]. Pre-Cluster Lengthening and the loss of [r] in non-rhotic varieties of English may lead to the vowel sounds [ɔ:], [ɜ:], [aʊə], [ʊə] and [ə] for <ou>. Word-finally, <ous> is pronounced [əs].

## Conclusion

The French language seems to have had a significant influence on especially the use of the digraphs <ie>, <ea> and <ou>. The digraphs <ie> and <ea> did exist in Old English, but were reintroduced through French to represent the vowel sounds [e:] and [ɛ:] respectively. <ou> was originally a French digraph and was introduced by French scribes for the vowel sound [u:], which had been represented in by <u> in English. <u> was used for many different sounds and letters and was therefore not always easy to interpret in a text. The Great Vowel Shift caused changes in the most common vowel sounds for the digraphs. Both [e:], represented by <ie>, and [ɛ:], represented by <ea>, changed to [i:] in most words. The vowel sound [u:], represented by <ou>, commonly changed to [au]. However, not all words with the digraphs were included in these changes and various other factors, such as the phonetic environment in which the digraph occurs, the time at which a word with one of the digraphs entered the language and less common sound changes, such as lengthening or shortening of a vowel sound, have influenced the possible pronunciations of the digraphs. In Present Day English, the digraph <ie> can be found to represent the vowel sounds are [i:], [e], [ɪ], [aɪ] and [aɪə], [ɪə] and [iə], and [i]. <ea> may represent the vowel sounds [i:], [e], [iə] and [ɪə], [eə], [ɜ:], and [ɑ:] in Present Day English. <ou> in Present Day English may represent the sounds [aʊ], [u:], [ʌ], [əʊ], [ɔ:], [ɜ:], [aʊə], [ʊə], and [ə]. Hence, all three digraphs can now represent a variety of vowel sounds.

The English language consist of many words borrowed from Latin and especially from French, or from either Latin or French, as the exact source of a loanword may not always be clear because many French words are derived from Latin. These loanwords also may have influenced the various possible pronunciations of the digraphs <ie>, <ea> and <ou>. Words which came into the English language before or during the Great Vowel Shift, for example, often underwent the same changes the native English words with the same vowel sounds did. Words that were borrowed more recently often retained their original pronunciation, which may differ from the ones usually represented by the digraph. However, exceptions such as the Present Day English word ‘blouse’, which has been Anglicised even though it has been borrowed relatively recently, may exist. The original spelling of the loanwords in Latin and French may have influenced their pronunciation in Present Day English.

Thus, although developments in the English language, such as, among others, the Great Vowel shift, Pre-Cluster Shortening and Pre-Cluster Lengthening, and the loss of postvocalic [r], have influenced the use and pronunciation of the digraphs <ie>, <ea> and <ou> in Present Day English, Latin, and especially French, have had a great influence on the use and various

possible pronunciations of the digraphs in various ways. The digraphs <ie> and <ea> were borrowed from Old English by French scribes and were reintroduced into the English language in the Middle English period. The digraph <ou> was borrowed from French by French scribes to represent the sound [u:] in English. Loanwords which came into the English language from French after the Great Vowel Shift usually retained their French pronunciation for these digraphs. Pronunciations in Present Day English may therefore be influenced by the phonology of the language from which a word was borrowed. French has had a great influence on English language and society in general following the Norman Conquest, and thus French influence on not only the lexicon but on English phonology and orthography is not really a surprise.

English has been influenced by many languages ever since the Old English period, among which French, Latin and Old Norse have had especially great consequences for the English language. It is therefore not possible to look at developments in the English language from its beginning until today without looking at languages with which English has been in contact. This research has compiled evidence given by various sources about the influence of Latin and French on the use and pronunciation of the digraphs <ie>, <ea> and <ou> in English. This evidence could lead to further research about the influence of Latin and French on the English language and contact-induced language change in general.

## Discussion

The sources that have been used for this research seem to agree on virtually all topics that have been discussed. The only point on which some sources appear to disagree that has been found in the course of comparing the information provided by the sources was on whether the digraph <ou> was borrowed from Old French in the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Upward & Davidson, 2011), from Norman French by Anglo-Norman scribes in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Minkova, 2013) or from Parisian French in the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Scragg, 1974). However, for the main conclusion, that the digraph <ou> was indeed borrowed from French in the Middle English period, the exact when and how are not as relevant. Many sources cite one another, which may also point towards a general agreement between the sources. The fact that one source supplements the information given by another is further proof for the general agreement between the sources.

The various sources provide an abundance of background information on language change in general as well as the development of the English language and the influence of Latin and French thereon. The fact that several sources refer to one another is in line with the general agreement between the sources. Information about specific sound changes in relation to the digraphs is limited, but it has been possible to draw conclusions from this limited information as well as from the many examples and more explicitly explained developments and changes regarding <ie>, <ea> and <ou> in English.

This research has been conducted by reading, comparing, evaluating and compiling information given by various sources. Because time and resources have been limited, only a selection of sources has been used for this work. For further research more sources could be included. Furthermore, a broader research into English orthography and its relation to phonology may be conducted to paint a more general picture of the influence of Latin and French on English.

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