

I-mutation (or i-umlaut) Exercises

An important sound change that took place even before Old English emerged as a separate language is called i-mutation (sometimes just mutation or umlaut). The change was produced when a vowel sound was altered by a following [i], [ɪ] or [j], all of which are articulated high and in front of the mouth. Vowels lower or farther back were drawn up and forward in the articulation. There are at least five contexts where it applies in English, but this exercise singles out the following three:

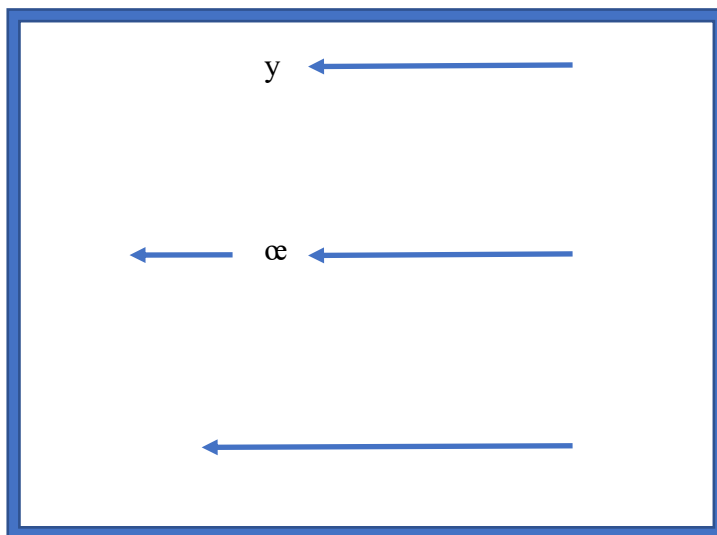
causative verb suffixes	*do:m + jan → dæ:man → de:man	<i>to deem</i>
certain abstract nouns	*hɑ:l + iθu → hæ:lθu	<i>health</i>
certain plurals	*mu:s + ɪz → my:s	<i>mice</i>

Remember the symbol : indicates vowel length; i.e., the preceding vowel is long. And * indicates a word form is reconstructed; it does not survive in written form.

After reviewing the discussion from lecture and in our textbook, study the chart below and complete the right hand column. Note that the [o] vowel goes through an intermediate stage.

early or pre-OE	Old English	modern form	Change of vowels
*langiθu	lengthu	length	an <i>to</i> en
*gɑ:tiz	gæ:t	goats	ɑ: <i>to</i>
*sættȳan	settan	to set	æ <i>to</i>
eald	ieldra	elder	ea <i>to</i> ie
ladin	læden	Latin	ɑ <i>to</i>
*fo:tiz	fe:t	feet	o: <i>to</i> œ: <i>to</i>
*fullȳan	fyllan	to fill	u <i>to</i> y
*fu:rɪz	fy:r	fire	u: <i>to</i>

The movement of i-mutation. Some of the vowels are filled in for you. Fill in the remaining five (no diphthongs; and no distinction for long/short). The final change to Modern English is not required, such as OE *mys* to MnE *mice*, but it's helpful to keep in mind!



Complete the chart below, filling in the appropriate vowel after i-mutation in the middle column. Note that the [o] vowel goes through an intermediate stage. The right hand column gives the Modern English word where it is not obvious.

reconstructed pre-OE	Old English	Modern English
mo:tjan	m__tan	meet
bro:θri	br__θer → br__θer	brother (cf. <i>brethren</i>)
strangiθu	str__ngθu	
go:siz	g__s → g__s	
bo:kiz	b__č → b__č	books
fo:djan	f__dan → f__dan	
ha:ljan	h__lan	
lu:siz	l__s	
so:kjan	s__can → s__can	
da:ljan	d__lan	
kuning	c__ning	
fu:ljan	f__lan	(de)file (cf. foul)