ON VOICING OF INITIAL FRICATIVES IN MIDDLE ENGLISH*

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In an article in *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 17 (1984) Professor Fisiak discusses the voicing of initial fricatives in Middle English from different points of view. This is the first time the phenomenon concerned has been taken up for full-scale treatment, and Fisiak's thorough and well-balanced discussion forms an admirable summation of a century's research on the subject. The article reveals that the area for initial /v/ and /z/ in Middle English extended considerably further to the north than had earlier been known. McIntosh-Samuels's isophone for /v/ (Fisiak 1984: Map 5) is of undoubted evidential value in this respect. The isophone is supported by a solid body of forms whereas Oakden's and Moore-Meech-Whitehall's more southerly isophones (Fisiak 1984: Maps 2 and 4) rest on tenuous evidence.

Fisiak's article also incorporates material which derives from my excoripation of forms for *A Survey of Middle English Dialects 1290-1350* and which suggests that the isophone for initial /v/ and /z/ was even further to the north in the early 14th century than demonstrated by McIntosh-Samuels for the period 1350-1450. Since 1981, when my material in its state at that time was imparted to Fisiak and published by him, I have completely my excoripation of the material for the West Midlands, and come across forms that I did not know of in 1981. As a sequel to Fisiak's article all the relevant material is therefore presented in the following pages and Map 1.

The material is taken from the Lay Subsidy Rolls of the early 14th century. These documents contain lists of taxpayers and cover the whole area fairly evenly. In their capacity of legal documents they can be expected to reflect

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local usage better than any other Middle English documents (except perhaps Court Rolls which, however, suffer from the drawback of being unevenly distributed). The Lay Subsidy Rolls thus provide first-rate sources for investigations along the lines of linguistic geography.

The material below includes all forms that display ⟨V⟩, ⟨Z⟩ in words with OE or ON initial /f/ or /ʃ/. No such forms are found in Cheshire, Derbyshire or Nottinghamshire. All forms adduced are dotted on Map 1. The large dot on Map 1 indicates 18 forms (in Bristol).

Material

I. /f/≤[v]:

Sa:  atte Vaston (p) 1327 8 (de Vaston (p) 1332 3 (OE fast(e)n, hām); le Vege (p) 1327 4 (2×), ð (OE fæger); Boleyn (p) 1327 2 (Boleyn (p) 1332 2 (last el. OE fæn).

St:  le Valang (p) 1332 106 (OE fælging ‘ploughed land’ or OE feallig ‘clearing’).

He:  Torcven 1332 17 (mod. Edwin Loach PNVo 43) (last el. OE fæm).

Wo:  Fælvede 1327 39 (mod. Fairfield PNVo 27) (last el. OE fæld).

Varno (p) 1327 27 (ON Farmann); Le Videle (p) 1327 30, le Vytethe (p) 1327 5, Vytethe (pr. Wythele) 1332 12 (OE fælere), le Vence (p) 1327 4 (OE Fræncs); le Vynoh (p) 1327 31, 40, 1332 11 (OE fæn); Boleyn (p) 1327 16 (last el. fæn).

Wa:  Atte venne (p) 1332 102 (OE fæn); Atte Fadde (p) 1327 13 (OE fælor); le Vorn (p) 1332 38 (ON forn or OE forn); Vol (pr. Voces) (p) 1332 10 (–Fot (p) 1327 14); Bulyn (p) 1332 15 (last el. OE fæn).

Le:  le Veer (p) 1327 9 (OE gæsfer).


2 No unequivocal example of ⟨V⟩ or ⟨Z⟩ in OE or ON loan-words with initial /f/ or /ʃ/ has been found. The form le Vole in Ox is tentatively taken to be from OE fæd but may simply be a reflex of OE fæd ‘bird’.

3 Each example is followed by date, reference to page or — in the case of unpublished sources — to membrane. References to membranes are in italics.

* The form is found in the Wo roll.
* The form is found in the St roll.
* The form is found in the Gl roll.
* Of Richard Forn 1332 43.
* The forms are found in the Wo rolls.
* The person was assessed in a village whose name was Hemy (or Hemy or Hemy). The place is lost. Probably it is identical with the lost Hemy in the Anglo-Saxon Wills, v. Fellows Jensen 1976: 64.
Staffordshire demonstrates that voicing of initial /θ/ and /ʃ/ had largely the same sphere of operation. Whether /θ/ was also voiced, it is impossible to decide. But in the modern dialects initial /ʃ/, /θ/ and /θ/ cover much the same are, and this leads one to assume that voicing of initial /θ/, /ʃ/ and /θ/ was a unitary process. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that Wakein and Barry (1968: 54) note /θ/ in Thursday (in the SED material) as far north as southern Shropshire and southern Staffordshire.

It is conspicuous that the /ʃ/, /θ/ isophone runs along or – in Staffordshire – slightly north of Watling Street. It is true that there is one example of /ʃ/ in Leicestershire (very close to the Warwickshire boundary), but this may be a case of overlapping. In Staffordshire there are some forms north of Watling Street, but the boundary between the Dinas and the Anglo-Saxon is here largely unknown. Evidence of Danish settlement is slight in Staffordshire; in Shropshire there is none. In Leicestershire, on the other hand, Danish settlement was considerable. We can thus infer that, as far as the West Midlands are concerned, voicing of initial /θ/, /ʃ/ (and /θ/?) took place in the area which was not occupied by the Danes, but did not spread into the Scandinavianized territory.

The boundary between /ʃ/, /θ/ and /θ/ largely coincides with that between heo ‘they’ and they ‘they’ as outlined by Samuel (1963: 83). The dividing-line between /ʃ/, /θ/ and /θ/ also forms the southern boundary of the area where OE *an, the dat. plur. ending, lived in place-names. In the /ʃ/, /θ/ area, on the other hand, OE *an in place-names appeared as ME -am, -en, -m. It is true that mod. Lytham in southern Shropshire is Lytham in the Lyd Subsidy Rolls of 1237 and 1232, but this is probably a case of overlapping in a boundary area. Just north of the said boundary is Ilam (Hillam 1009) in Staffordshire. In Cheshire, Statham (Statham 1285) and Stockham (Stokham 1288) exhibit -am in Middle English, and Nottinghamshire abounds in place-names in ME -am, -en, -m, v. Wrander and Kristoffersen (1981, footnote 16).

The isophone drawn on Map 1 is a tentative one. After all, the evidence is slight. The large majority of forms exhibit /θ/ (and /θ/). But in the territory where (V) and (Z) are found, we must assume that initial /θ/ and /θ/ occurred. It is possible – in my opinion likely – that the /θ/, /θ/ (and /θ/?) area extended somewhat further north than is indicated on Map 1. If so, the line would coincide with the modern boundary between northern ought and southern anything, and would be just south of the modern boundary between beo ‘she’ and her ‘she’ (v. Orton, Sanderson and Widlowski 1978: Maps L44 and M68).

In Kristoffersen (1985) I have dealt with the appearance of OE *o in the West Midlands in the early 14th century. The conclusions of the article were (i) that OE *o had become /o/ in the West Midlands, but (ii) that OE *o, at least partly, lived on as /ø/ in the area where there...
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are traces of /s/ is almost exactly coterrinous with the area where there are traces of initial /v/ and /z/. In both cases we are concerned with recessive isophones, but the coincidence of the isophones can hardly be due to mere chance. The concurrent evidence of Maps 1 and 2 warrants us to look upon the isophones as a rough divide between a northern and a southern part of the West Midland dialect area.

Sources

I. Unpublished Lay Subsidy Rolls (preserved at the Public Record Office): Sa 1327 (166/1), 1332 (166/2); Le 1327 (163/1); Gl 1312 (113/4), 1327 (113/5); OX 1316 (161/8), 1327 (161/9).

II. Published Lay Subsidy Rolls: St 1327, 1332: Collections for a History of Staffordshire edited by the William Salt Archaeological Society, Old Series 7, 10 (1889—90); Wo 1327, 1332: Worcestershire Historical Society I (1893—1902); Wa 1327: Transactions of the Midland Record Society 6 (1902), 1332: Publications of the Dugdale Society 6 (1928); Gl 1312, 1327: Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society 19 (1894—95).

Abbreviations

cf. = compare, 
Ch = Cheshire, 
Db = Derbyshire, 
Der. = derivative, 
Gl = Gloucestershire, 
He = Herefordshire, 
La = Lancashire, 
Le = Leicestershire, 
ME = Middle English, 
Nt = Nottinghamshire, 
OE = Old English, 
OFr = Old French, 
ON = Old Norse, 
Ox = Oxfordshire, 
(p) = personal name, 
pr. = printed, 
St = Staffordshire, 
v. = s.v., 
Wa = Warwickshire, 
Wo = Worcestershire.

REFERENCES


The figures in round brackets refer to the catalogue number at the Public Record Office.


