

XIII-ICCS Bonn

**What can rhymes teach us
about Cornish?**

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Overview of talk

- Background
- Rules of versification
- What rhymes tell us about phonemes
- Unstressed rhymes and sound-changes

BACKGROUND

- Sources
- Rhyme-schemes

RHYMING TEXTS IN TRADITIONAL CORNISH

- *CE.* “Charter Endorsement” c. 1350
- *MC.* *Pascon agan Arluth* c. 1400
- *OM.* *Origo Mundi* c. 1450
- *PC.* *Passio Christi* c. 1450
- *RD.* *Resurrectio Domini* c. 1450
- *BK.* *Beunans Ke* (?1464 ?) c. 1500-30
- *BM.* *Beunans Meriasek* 1504 (?1518)
- *CW.* *Creacon of the World* 1611
- *LC.* “Late Cornish” 1660 to 1730

RHYMES IN TRADITIONAL CORNISH

- In Middle Cornish, there are three **set rhyming schemes** (ABABABAB, AABCCB and ABABCDDC), each with variants.
- Most lines were of **seven** or **four** syllables.
- Usually only the **last syllable counts** towards the rhyme.
- **but occasionally two syllables count** (**double rhymes**)
- The rhyming syllable may be **stressed or unstressed**.
- **Internal rhymes** (as in Middle Breton) and *cynghanedd* (as in Middle Welsh) **are practically unknown**.

- In Late Cornish (as in Modern Breton), almost all verse is in **rhyming couplets**.

Rhyme-scheme A8 (ABABABAB) (Bruch's Type I)

Example: Stanza 10 of *Pascon agan Arluth*

I vam pan yn drehevys	A	/ɪz/
hay vos deue3is 3e oys	B	/oʊz/
gull penans ef a pesys	A	/ɪz/
henna ganso nyn io poys	B	/oʊs/
[d]evguans dyth ow penys	A	/ɪz/
y speynas y gyk hay woys	B	/oʊz/
ha woteweth rag densys	A	/ɪz/
eff an geve awell boys	B	/oʊz/

Rhyme-scheme **S6** (AABCCB) (Bruch's Type II)

Example: *Origo Mundi* lines 437-442

Caym hag abel ov mebb yon	A	/ɔn/
eugh sacryfyeugh in scon	A	/ɔn/
yn meneth then tas an nef	B	/ɛv/
hag ol agas gvyr theg e	C	/ɛ/
thotho gvetyeugh offrynne e	C	/ɛ/
hay lesky del yrghys ef	B	/ɛv/

Rhyme-scheme S8 (ABABCDDC) (Bruch's Type III)

Example: Beunans Meriasek lines 874-881

Marso du avan y days	A	/az/	7
me a leuer meryase ek	B	/εg/	7
eff a also der y rays	A	/as/	7
selwel rych ha bohose ek	B	/εg/	7
heb boys marov	C	/arɔv/	4
ath daryvas schame yth yv	D	/IU/	7
pan othem o the vap du	D	/y/	7
boys lethys avel carov	C	/arɔv/	7

Rhyming couplets from Late Cornish

Example: Rhyme by John Boson

Puha vedn Kavas an gwel skians **ol**,
Gwith compas do benegas Egliz **Paul**.
Gazow do gerriow zans gus Arleth **Deu**,
Gen Kolon, Brez, ha Ena guîr es **D'ew**,
Diskeutha Trueth do Deez guadn Pleu **ma**,
Ha senzhia ol guz dethiow Bownans **da**.

RULES OF VERSIFICATION

- Rhymes and contrasts
- Stressed, bound and free rhymes
- Single and double consonants
- Minimal contrasts

PRINCIPLES

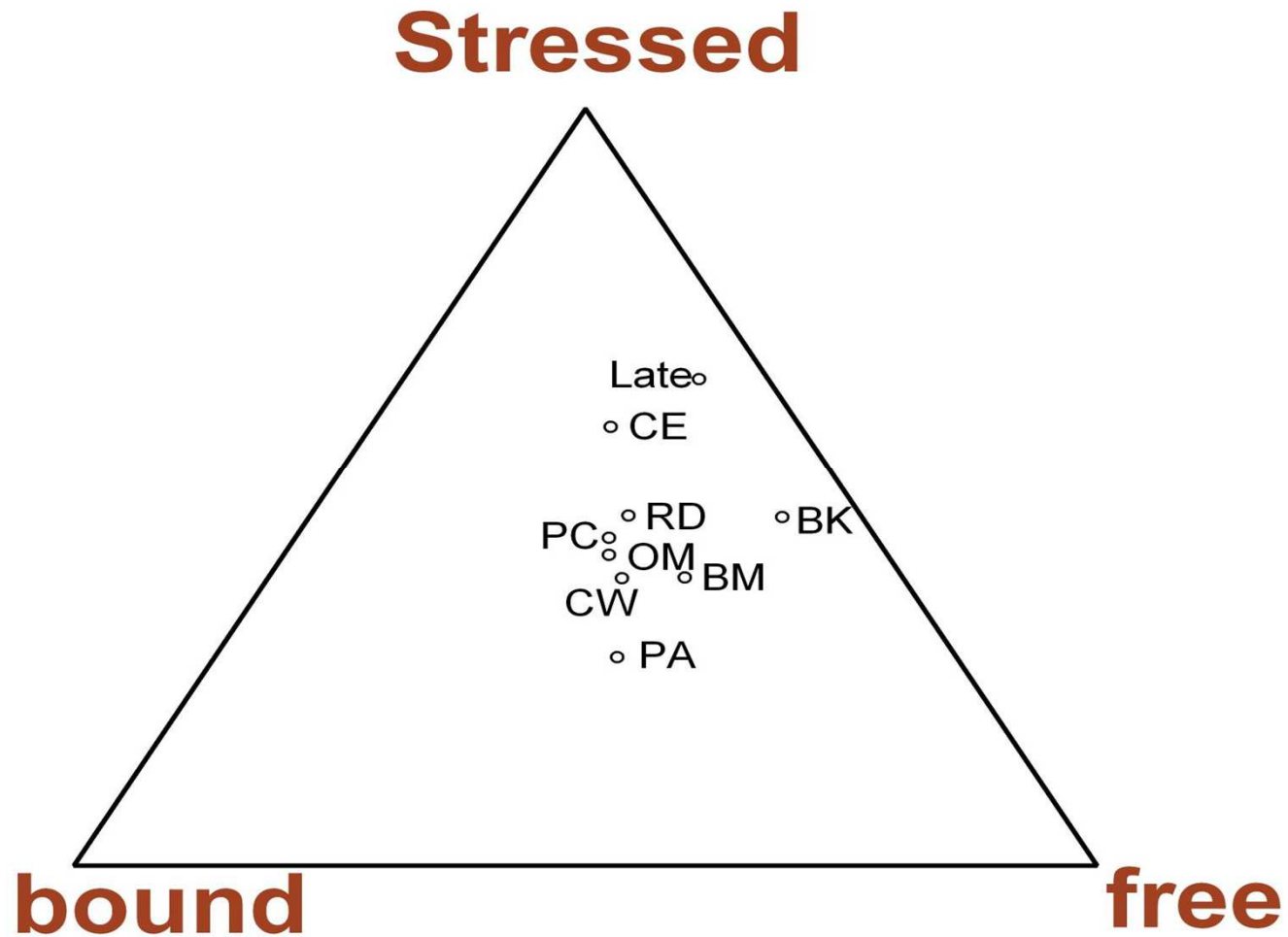
- If two words are rhymed, it usually means that the sounds in their rhyming syllables are similar, but not necessarily identical.
- If two words are contrasted in rhyme, it means that the sounds in their rhyming syllables are not the same.

Types of rhyme

One way of classifying rhymes is:

- 1 Stressed rhyming syllables
- 2 Unstressed rhyming syllables
 - a) Bound, which rhyme with a stressed rhyming syllable in the same stanza;
 - b) Free, which rhyme only with unstressed rhyming syllables in the same stanza

Proportions of types of rhyme



SINGLE AND DOUBLE CONSONANTS

In stressed monosyllables, one had

either **Short vowel + double consonant**

or **Long vowel + single consonant**

It was possible to rhyme these two types:

Out gony mata sa **ban** [**'ann**]

haneth oll an beys gans **tan** [**'a:n**]

Radulphus Ton 1504

Ha piw a lever bos yn ifarn tan ?

Y'm ifarn vy ny gevir travyth mann.

K.J.G. 1978

Statistics of rhyming pairs

Total number of rhyming pairs = 39,786

Stress	Vocoid	Consonant(s)	Number	%age
same	same	same	23,006	58
stressed unstressed	same	same	31,376	79
stressed unstressed	same	voiced unvoiced single geminate	35,956	90
stressed unstressed	adjacent	voiced unvoiced single geminate	38,685	97

MINIMAL CONTRASTS

(1a) **voiced v. unvoiced**

Lines 715 to 720 of Resurrexio Domini

a fystynyn ny yn fen	A	['ɛn]
rag dreheuys yv an men	A	['ɛn]
thyworth an beth	B	['ɛ:ð]
arluth fattel byth han eth	C	[ɛθ]
mar ny wothefaf ple the th	C	['ɛ:θ]
pen vyghterneth	B	[ɛð]

MINIMAL CONTRASTS

(2a) involving 2 syllable rhymes

Charter Endorsement, Lines 1 to 6

Golsoug ty cowe ³	A	[εθ]
by ³ na bor ³ me ³	A	['ε:θ]
dyyskyn ha powes	B	['ɔʊεs]
ha ʒymo dus nes	C	['ε:s]
mar coʒes ʒe les	C	['ε:z]
ha ʒys y rof mowes	B	['ɔʊεs]

plus 1 such stanza in *RD.*, 2 in *BM.*,
but 33 in *Beunans Ke.*

MINIMAL CONTRASTS

(2b) 2 syllables v. 1 syllable

Lines 14.07 to 14.12 of *Beunans Ke*

mar pith rys thym indella	A	['ɛlla]
in hanow dv vHELLA	A	['ɛlla]
genas me a	B	['a:]
Jesus an arluth gwelha	A	['ɛlla]
mab an wyrthyas vwelha	A	['ɛlla]
roy thym gras the wuthyl da	B	['a:]

MINIMAL CONTRASTS

(1b) **voiced** v. **unvoiced**

Lines 19.25 to 19.28 of *Beunans Ke*

Kepar del vyn reno thas	A	[a:z]
me A ganso myghtern Das	B	[a:s]
hag in batal hag in cas	A	[a:z]
me an socker in pub plas	B	[a:s]

PHONEMES

- long /ɪ/
- /ɔ/ and /o/
- /yʊ/
- /n/ and /nn/

The status of long /ɪ/

in stressed – stressed rhyming pairs

Rhymes with	PA	OM	PC	RD	BM	BK	CW	Late
[i]	12	35	10	12	33	5	12	3
/ɪ/	76	209	138	106	117	162	208	8
[ɛ]	28	23	8	3	11	1	18	22

Rhymes in {ɔz} and {oz}

	PA	OM	PC	RD	BK	BM	CW	Late
ɔZ - other	--	--	--	--	--	1	--	2
ɔZ - ɔZ	4	4	6	7	13	17	9	4
ɔZ - OZ	--	--	--	1	--	8	--	2
OZ - OZ	11	4	1	--	13	8	3	5
OZ - other	--	--	--	--	2	--	--	1

Identifying the /yʊ/ phoneme

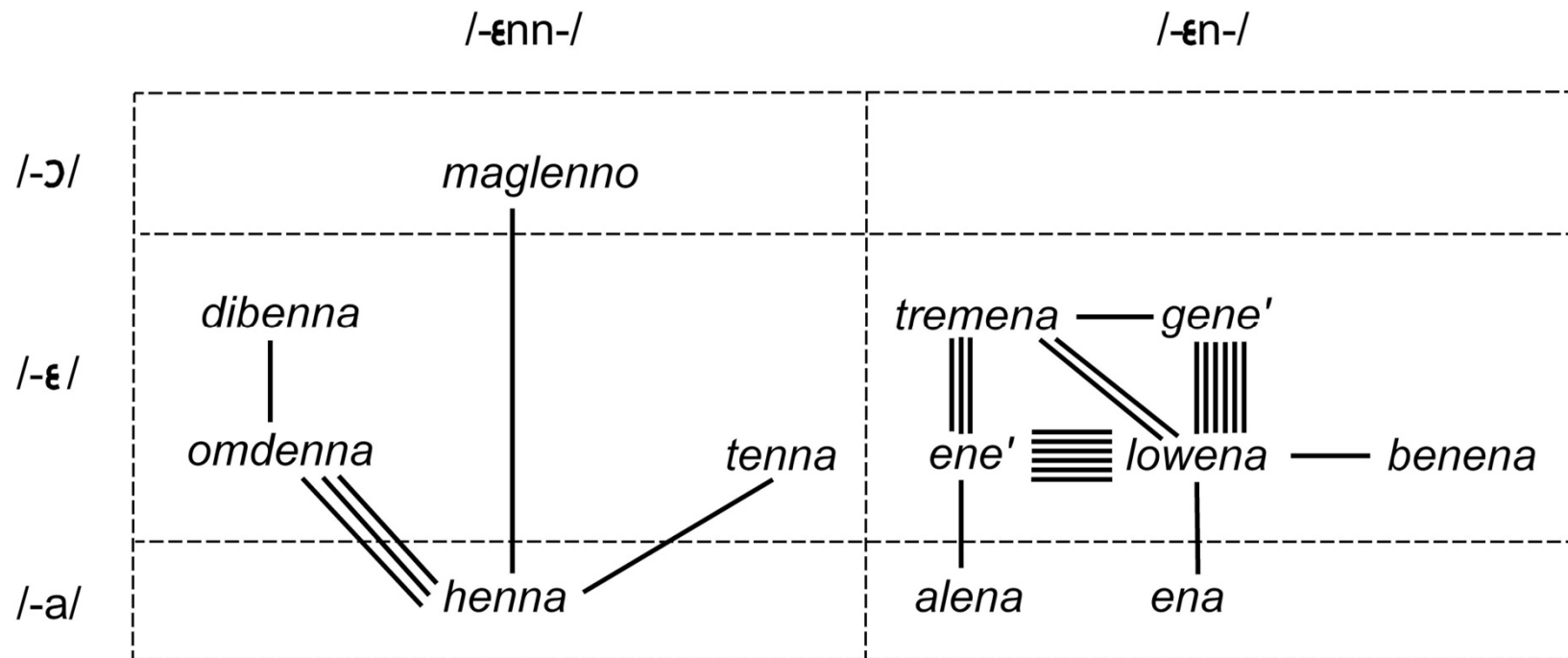
Source	PrimC	Cornish	English
Brit. * <i>dêwos</i>	/duiw/	OldC <i>duy</i>	‘god’
Brit. * <i>glaiwo-</i>	/gloiw/	MidC <i>glev</i>	‘bright’
Brit. * <i>wogaiso-</i>	/woɣoiw/	OldC <i>-wuyu</i>	‘lance’
Lat. <i>plêbem</i>	/pluiβ/	OldC <i>plui</i>	‘parish’
Celt. * <i>reimo-</i>	/ruiɰ/	OldC <i>rui</i>	‘king’
?	? /gwuiw/	MidC <i>gv</i>	‘woe’

Identifying the /yʊ/ phoneme

Lines 2579 to 2586 of *Resurrectio Domini*

ow scons a fue crous a pren	A	
kyns en myghtern den ha dev	B	[-yʊ]
in le basnet war ow fen	A	
curyn a spern lym ha glev	B	[-yʊ]
ol ov ysyly yn ten	A	
hag awel the lyes plu	B	[-yʊ]
in golon dren tenewen	A	
the restye syngys ow gu	B	[-yʊ]

Double rhymes in *Beunans Ke*



UNSTRESSED RHYMES AND SOUND-CHANGES

- [ɛ] > [a] in open syllables
- [ɔ] > [a] in open syllables
- [ɛ] > [a] in closed syllables
- [ɔ] > [a] in closed syllables

Three-way contrast between {az}, {ez} and {iz}

Lines 2253 to 2258 of *Passio Christi*

rum fey pilat re sorras	A	[-as]
me ath pys awos satnas	A	[-as]
doro an laddron yn mes	B	[-'ɛ:s]
me a leuer an guyr thys	C	[-'ɪ:z]
the pe yma ow wagys	C	[-ɪs]
ny fynnaf tryge genes	B	[-ɛz]

Contrast between [e] and [a]

(i) correct spelling

Lines 1165-1171 of *Origo Mundi*

the volungeth yn pup le	A	['ɛ:]
arluth vhel my a wra	B	['a:]
yn mes an gorhel wharre e	A	['ɛ:]
my ham gurek ham flehas a	B	['a:]
yn onour dev thy lawe e	A	[ɛ]
guren vn alter tek ha da	B	['a:]
may hyllyn sacryfy e	A	[ɛ]
thotho war an keth honna	B	[a]

Contrast between [ɛ] and [a]

(ii) both spelled <e>

Lines 1627 to 1632 of *Origo Mundi*

gallas moyses hay bobel	A	[ɛl]
mes am glas hy yv thewel	A	[ɛ:l]
yn pur wyr war ov ene	B	[ɛ]
me a vyn aga sywe	C	[a]
ha warbarth age lathe	C	[a]
kyns me the treyle the tre	B	[ɛ:]

Contrast between [ɛ] and [a]

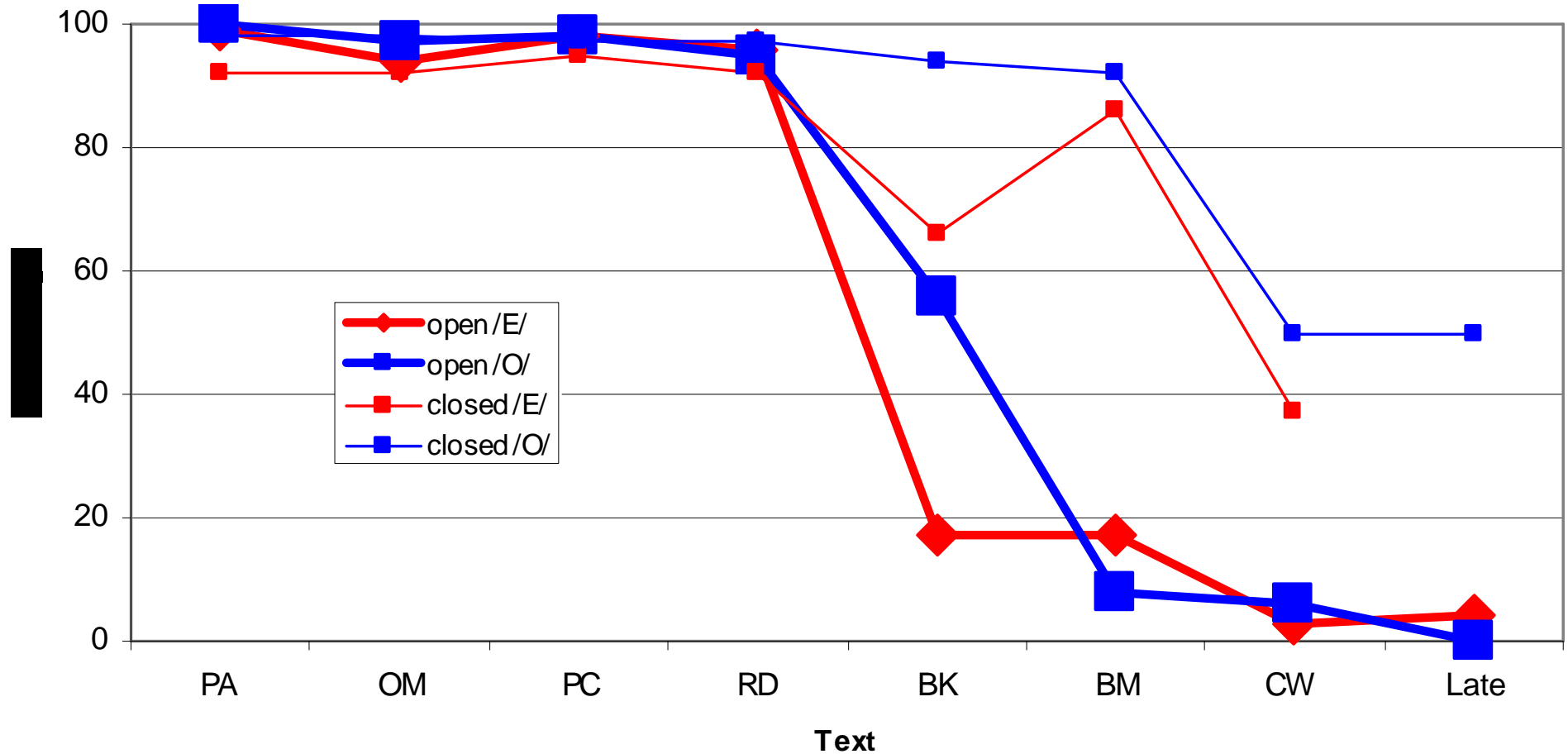
(ii) both spelled <a>

Lines 62 to 65 of *Beunans Meriasek*

Ov map benneth vary	a	A	[a]
dys ham bennath vy neffra		B	[ɛ]
thethe ganov mannafi amma	a	A	[a]
ewne yv 3yn 3eth leuf kara		B	[ɛ]

Sound-changes / ϵ / > [a], / o / > [a]

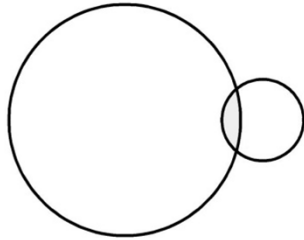
Percentage of unchanged sounds in rhyming words



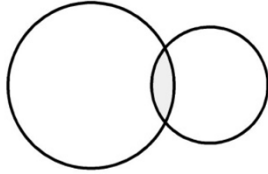
Sound-changes /ε/ > [a], /ɔ/ > [a]

	PA	Ord.	BK	BM	CW	Late		UC
/ε/	[ε]	[ε]	[a]	[a]	[a]	[a]		[a]
/ɔ/	[ɔ]	[ɔ]	→	[a]	[a]	[a]		[ɔ]
/εC/	[ε]	[ε]	[ε]	[ε]	[a]	[a]		[ε]
/ɔC/	[ɔ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]	[a]	[a]		[ɔ]

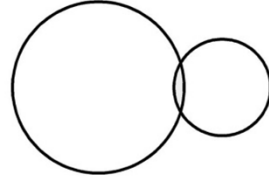
Sound-change $[-\varepsilon] > [-a]$



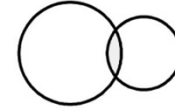
PA



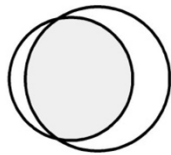
OM



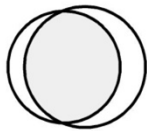
PC



RD



BM1



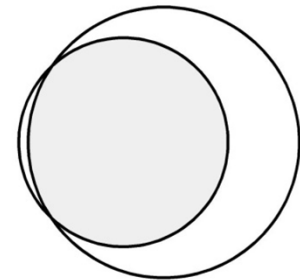
BM2



BK1



BK2



CW

New free unstressed rhymes

[a] = /a/, [a] < /ε/ and [a] < /ɔ/ all rhyme

Lines 700 to 709 of Beunans Meriasek

Ihesu arluth neff han beys	A	['i:z]
yehes dywy re grontya	B	[a] < [ɔ]
ihesu arluth me ath peys	A	['i:z]
lemmen sav an keth tusma	B	[a] = /a/
maria mam luen a rays	A	['a:z]
peys theth vap arluth ragtha	B	[a] < [ε]
maria mam ha guerhays	A	[as] < [εs]
gueres ov pesy gena	B	[a] < [εv]
sevugh inban a tus vays	A	['a:z]
fetel omglowugh omma	B	[a] = /a/

Old bound unstressed rhymes

Lines 2676-81 of Beunans Meriasek

Ov flehys wek eugh why dre	A	['ɛ:]
ov banneth genogh neffre	A	[ɛ]
na letyogh vy am servys	B	[ɪs]
ha guetyogh the du grass ee	A	['ɛ:]
eff re ruk agis sawy e	A	[ɛ]
adar my cresugh pup preys	B	['ɪ:z]

Contrast between {az} and {iz} is still alive in CW. (1611)

Lines 741 to 752 of *Creacon of the World*

des nes gas ve the well ^{as}	A	[az] < [ɛz]
mara sewa avall da	B	['a:]
lavar pe veva ke ^{fys}	C	[Is]
praga adam ow fry ^{as}	A	[az] < [ɛz]
der dowte es thy ^{es} y̆ well ^{as}	A	[az] < [ɛz]
lavar 3ymmo me ath ^{pyes}	C	['i:z]
n̆y̆ bleig thym sight anotha	B	[a] < [ɔ]
dowt pur vras yma thyma	B	[a] < [ɔ]
nagewa vas me a ^{gryes}	C	['i:z]
ty mar pe hemma terr ^{ys}	C	[Iz]
mes an wethan defenn ^{ys}	C	[Iz]
ragtha me a v ^t grev ^{ys}	C	[Iz]

CONTRASTING UNSTRESSED RHYMES

Williams (1995) asserted that:

“all unstressed vowels are schwa from the Middle Cornish period onwards”

Das stimmt nicht!

UNSTRESSED [-ε] > [-a]

- This change took about two centuries to complete.
- In the *Ordinalia*, [-ε] and [-a] were often contrasted in rhyme.
- In later texts, stanzas showing this contrast were much rarer.
- The central date was *c.* 1475.

CONCLUSIONS

- 1 Rhymes confirm the existence of /ɪ/ and /o/.
- 2 The older and newer sounds in sound-changes co-existed for several generations; both were used in the same text, sometimes even in the same stanza.
- 3 Differences between unstressed vowels were maintained into the Late Cornish phase.
- 4 The difference between /ɔ/ and /o/ was maintained into the Late Cornish phase.