

Triangulating the long front vowels to trace the fate of /ɪ/

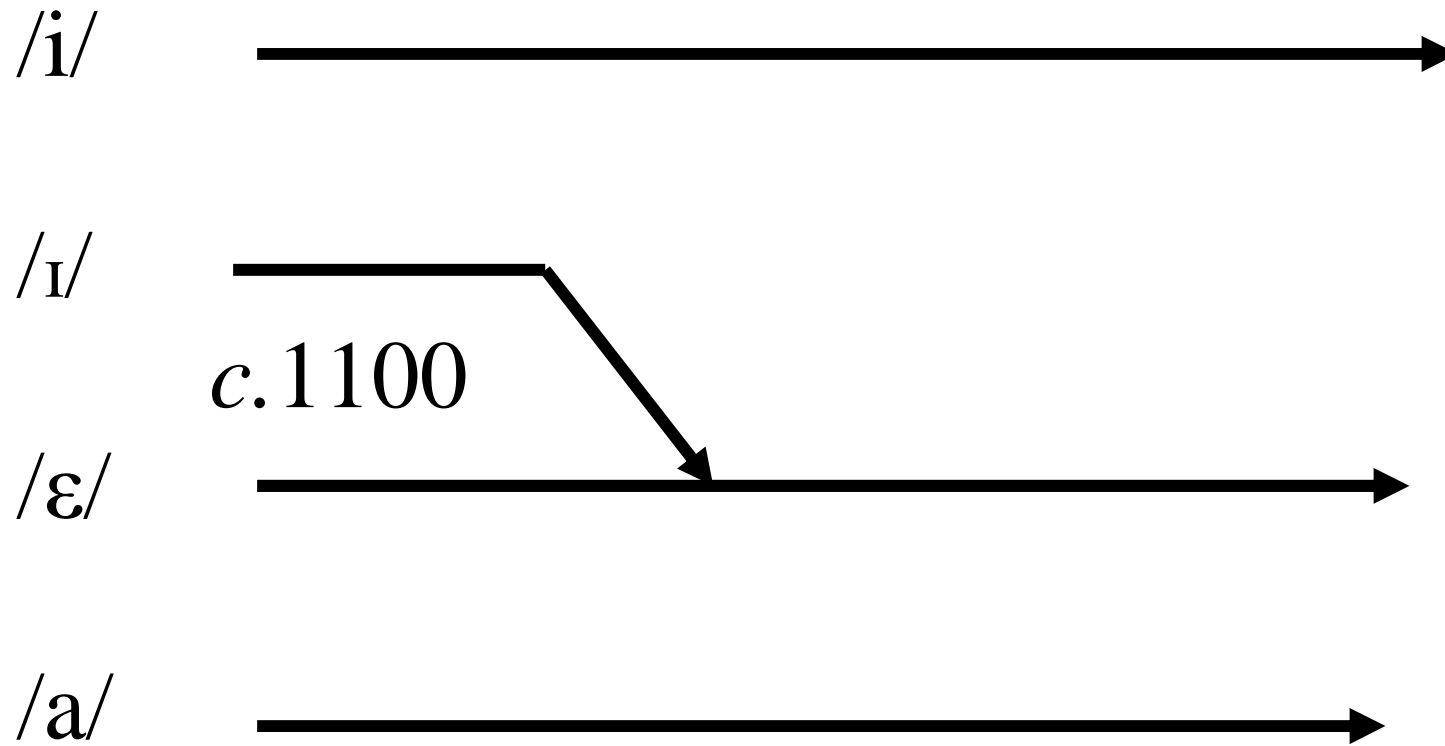
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Kesva an Taves Kernewek

Skians 2015

Long front vowels (1)

Jackson (1953)



Spelling-types

	{y}	{ey}	{e}
MidC	<y, i>	<ey, ei> <yy>	<e>
CW	+ <ye, ye-e>	+ <ey-e>	+ <ea>
Lhuyd	+ <ŷ, î>	+ <êy>	+ <ê>
VLC	+ <ii, ij> + <ee, ee-e> + <y-e, î-e>	+ <eî>	+ <ea-e> + <e-e>

Sources of /ei/, with examples

Source	Words in Cornish (23 in number)
Prim WCB	bleydh ‘wolf’, eyl ‘second’, gweyth ‘work’, gweyth ‘occasion’, heydh ‘barley’, kleys ‘trench’, leys ‘mud’, meydh ‘whey’, meyn ‘stones’, preydh ‘prey’, reyth ‘law’, seyth ‘7’, teyl ‘dung’, teyr ‘3 (f.)’, yeyn ‘cold’
Later source	bleyn ‘tip’, breyn ‘rotten’, dreyn ‘thorns’, eyn ‘lambs’, keyn ‘back’, treys ‘feet’
/i/ > /ei/	dreys ‘briars’, neyth ‘nest’ (also in B, <i>deiz</i> ‘day’, <i>feiz</i> ‘faith’)

Spelling of /ei/

- The later spelling-types used for the 23 words were:

	MC	OM	PC	RD	BM	BK	TH	SA	CW	Lh	VLC
{y}	5	16	10	4	7	2		4	7	3	7
{ey}	16	13	33	10	11		16	1	4	53	5
{e}			1							1	1

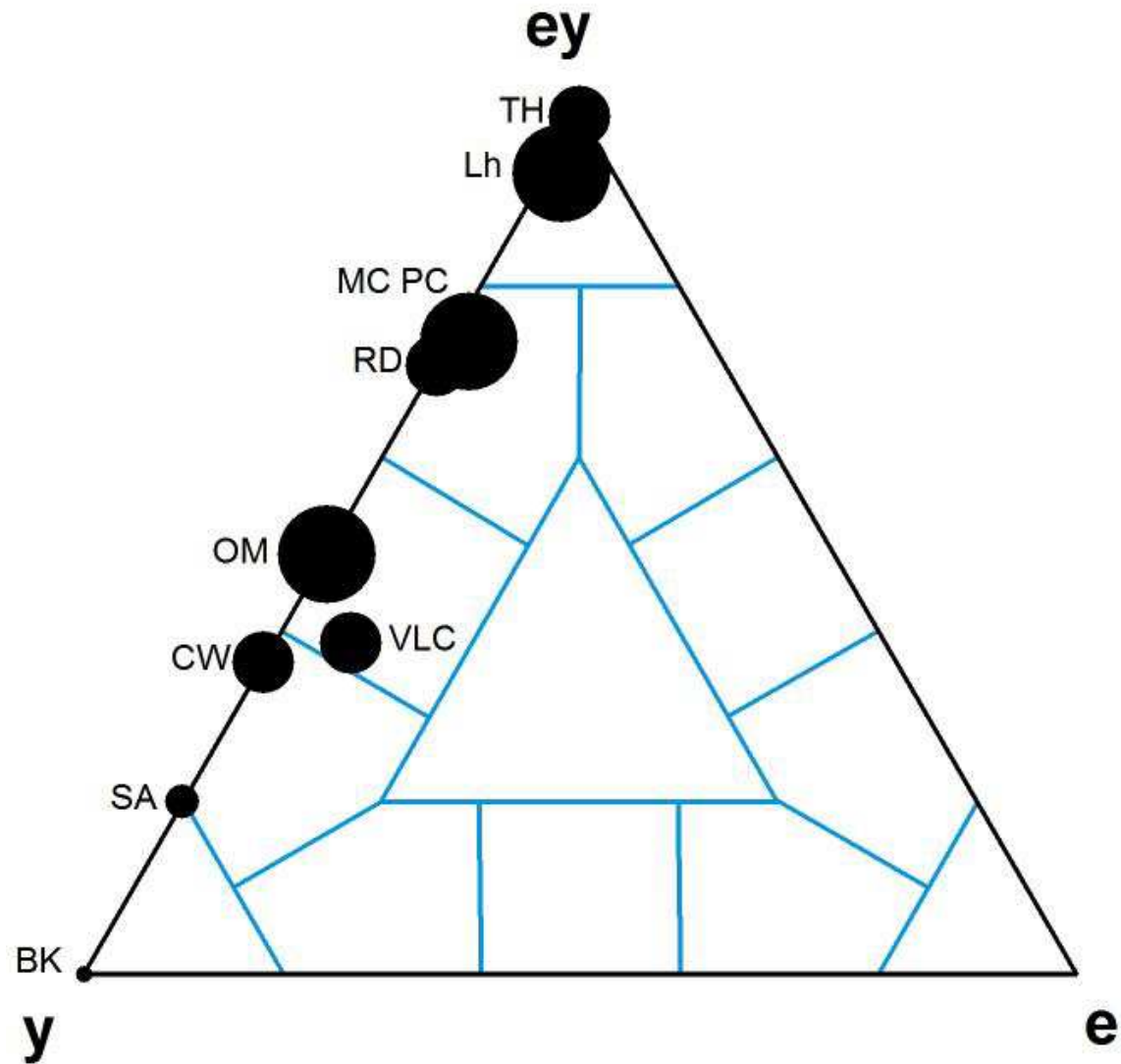
i.e. a combination of {y} and {ey}; {e} was very rare.

- {y} was a valid graph for [ei] because after the English Great Vowel Shift, [i:] had become approximately [ei].
- /ei/ in seven of the 23 words was spelled <ei> in Old Cornish:
bleit ‘wolf’, *drein* ‘thorns’, *dreis* ‘briars’, *gueid* ‘work’, *chein* ‘back’,
neid ‘nest’, *yeyn* ‘cold’

Markers of /ei/

	<yy>			<yi>	
OM.0711	thryys	‘feet’	PV.14316	Myin	‘stones’
OM.0823	tyyr	‘three’	PV.15120	Tyil	‘dung’
OM.1070	lyys	‘mud’	PV.18326	Vyin	‘stones’
OM.1729	tyyr	‘three’	PV.18319	Myin	‘stones’
OM.2281	vyyn	‘stones’			
OM.2656	thyyr	‘three’			
OM.2694	myyn	‘stones’			
OM.2708	lyys	‘mud’			
OM.2756	myyn	‘stones’			
OM.2807	dryys	‘feet’			
BM.3477	nyyl	‘other’			

23 cases of /eI/

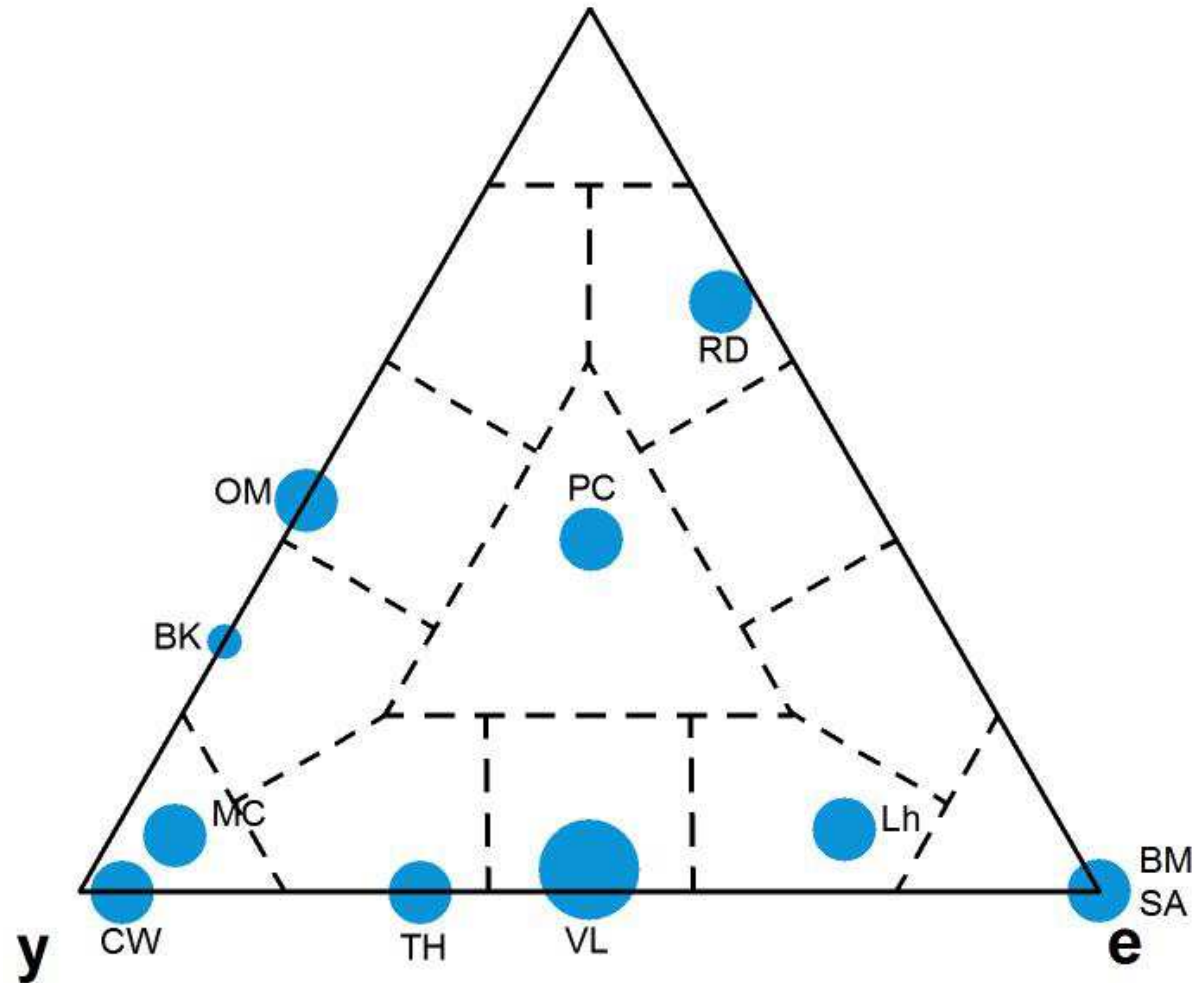


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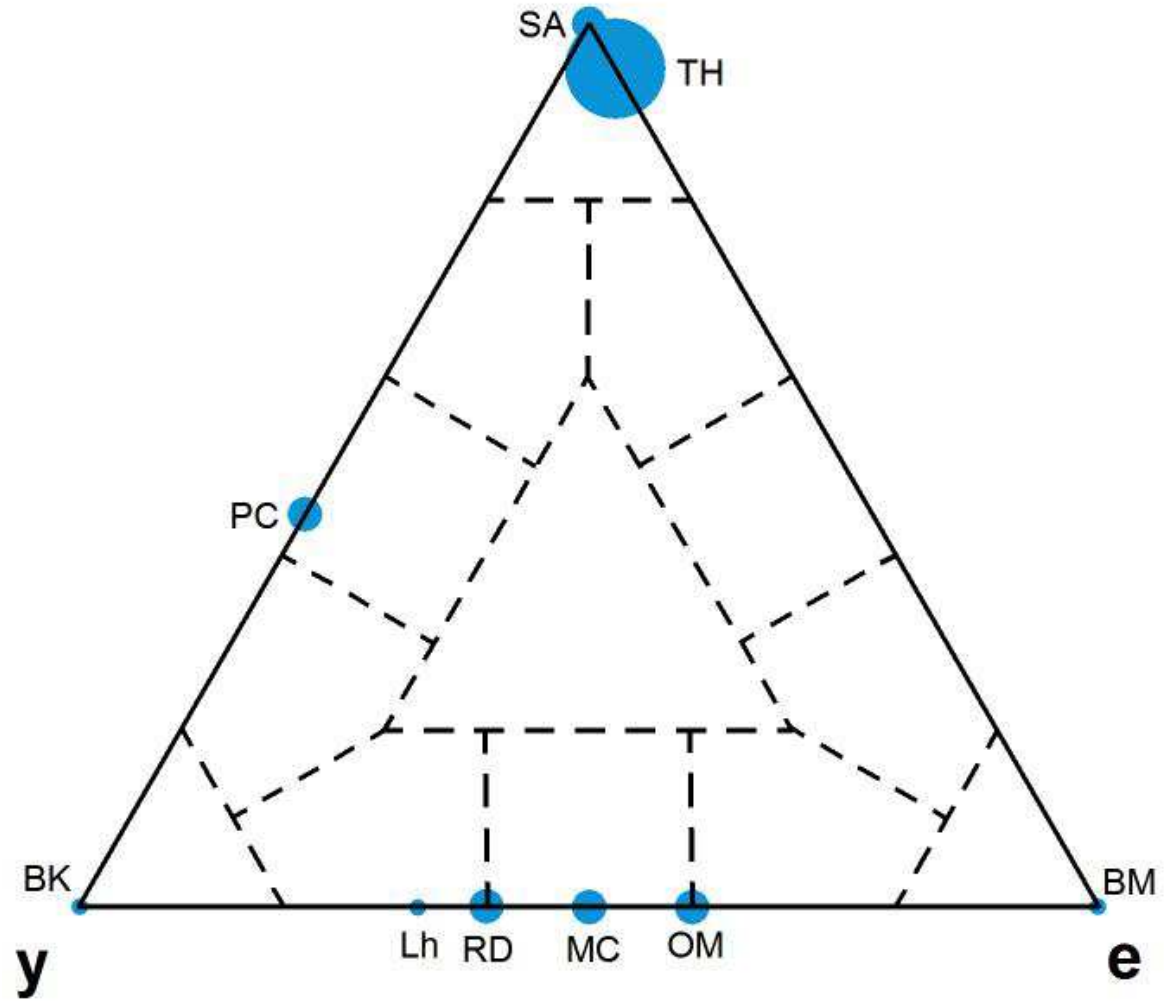
dydh

ey



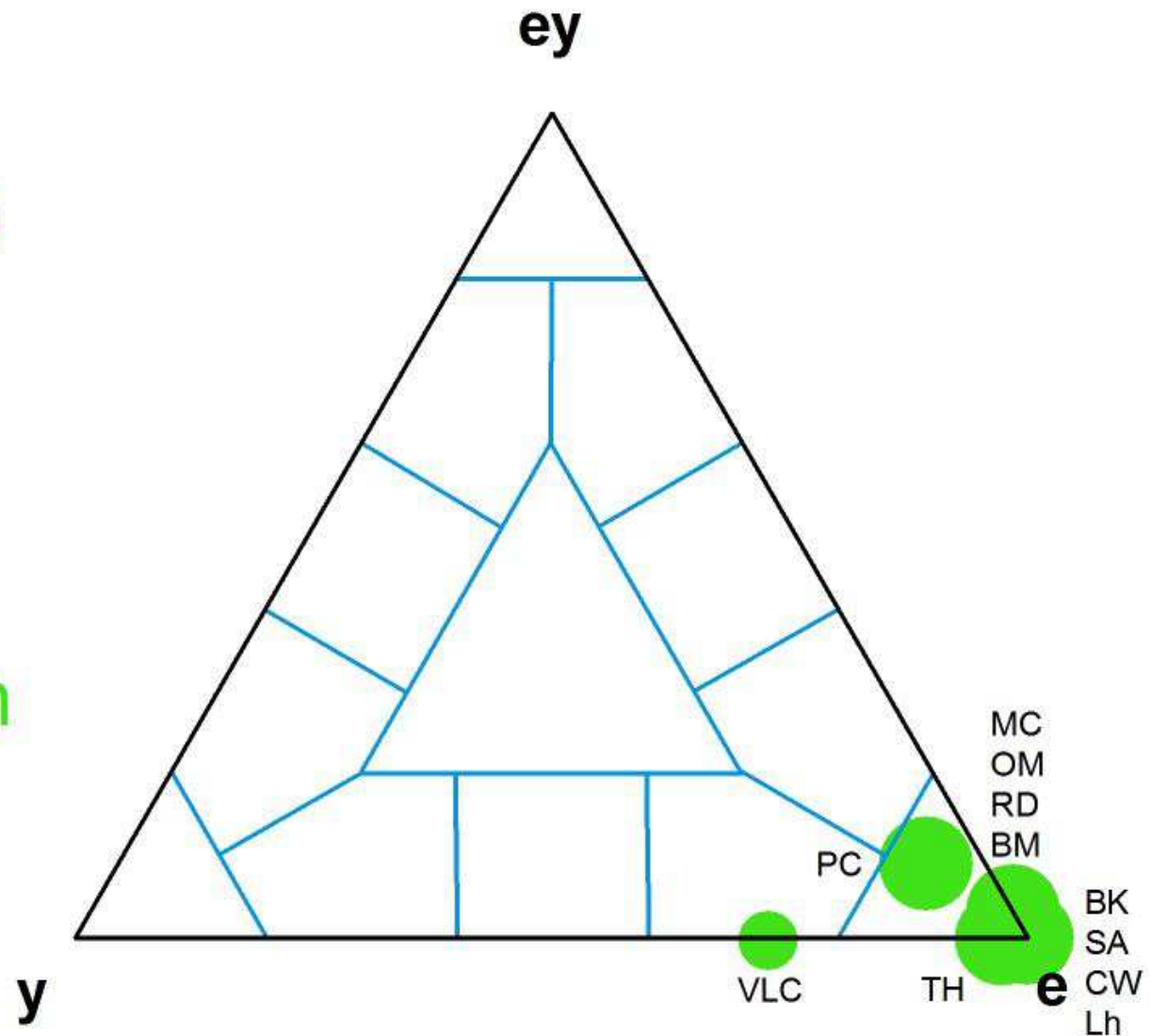
fydh

ey



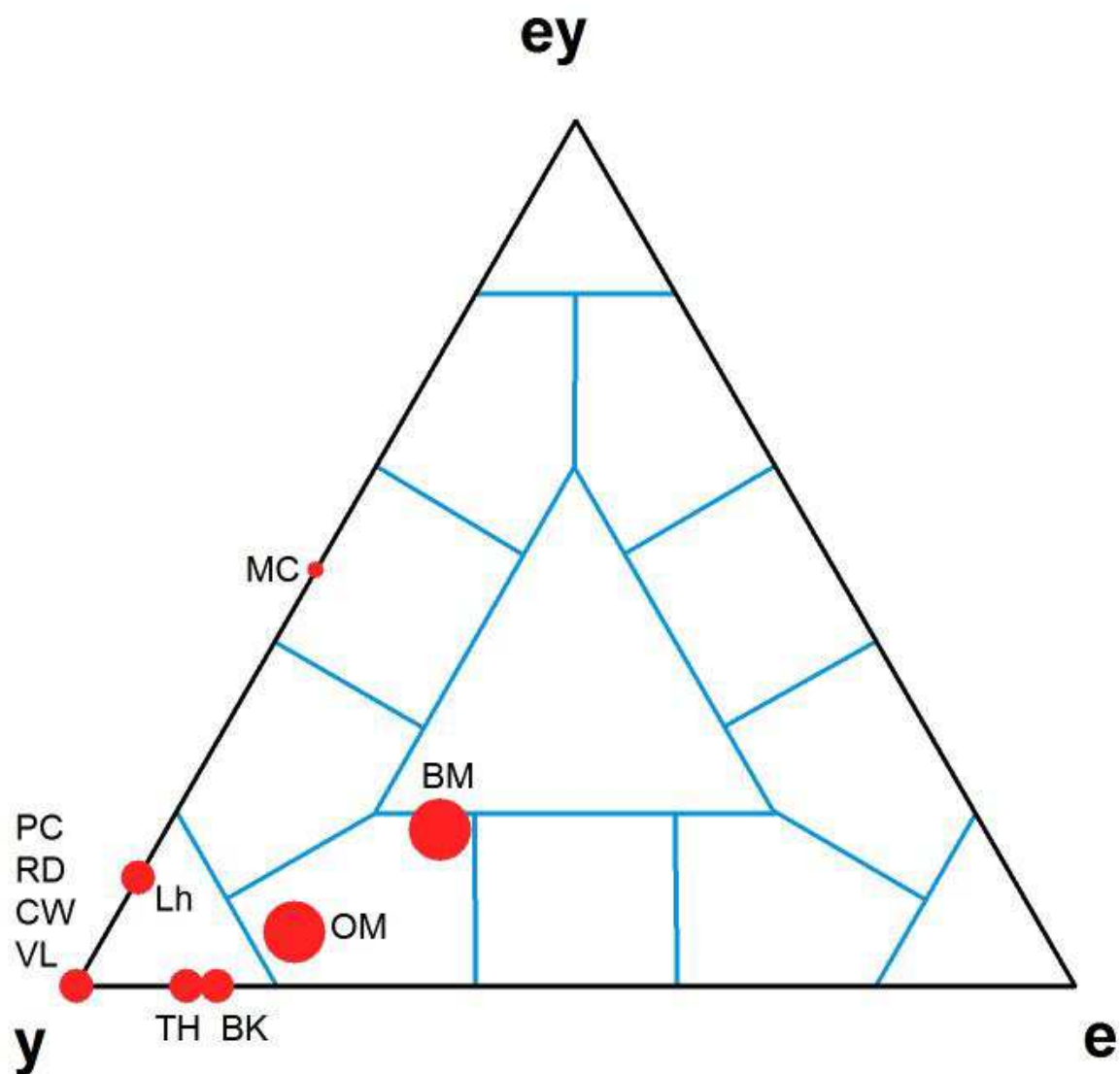
Words with [-E:D]

bedh
gwredh
kledh
medh
nedh
stredh
ynwedh



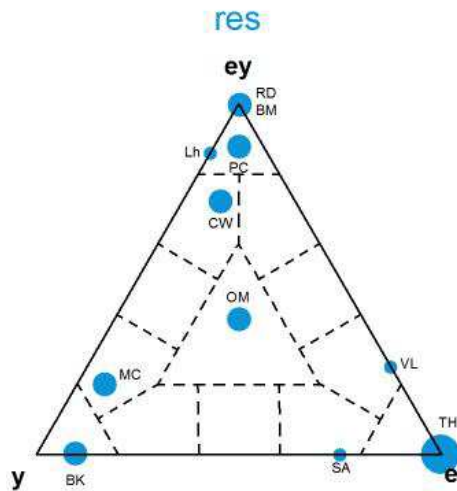
Words with [-i:T]

brith
gwith (n.)
gwith (v.)
lith
pith
skwith



Different results of final *i*-affection

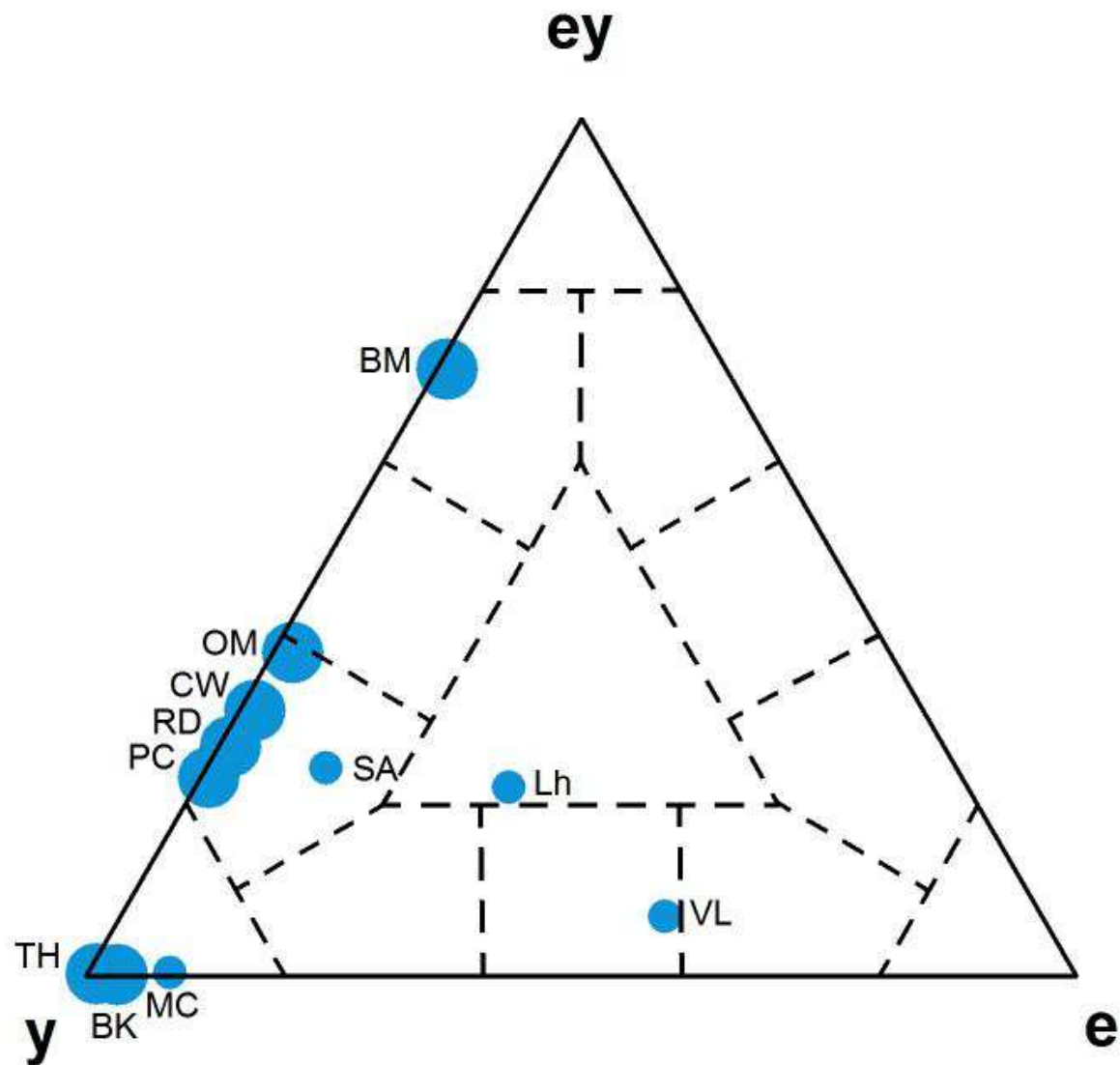
KK	English	Etymology	Breton	Welsh	OldC	MidC	LateC
breg h	arm	Lat <i>bracchium</i>	brec'h	braich	brech	breg h	Brê h
gwreg	wife	Brit. * <i>uraci</i>	gwreg	gwraig	gureg	gwrek	Gwrê g
spys	interval	Lat <i>spatium</i>		ysbaid		spys	
res	necessity	Lat <i>ratio</i>	red	rhaid		rys, reys, res	reis, res



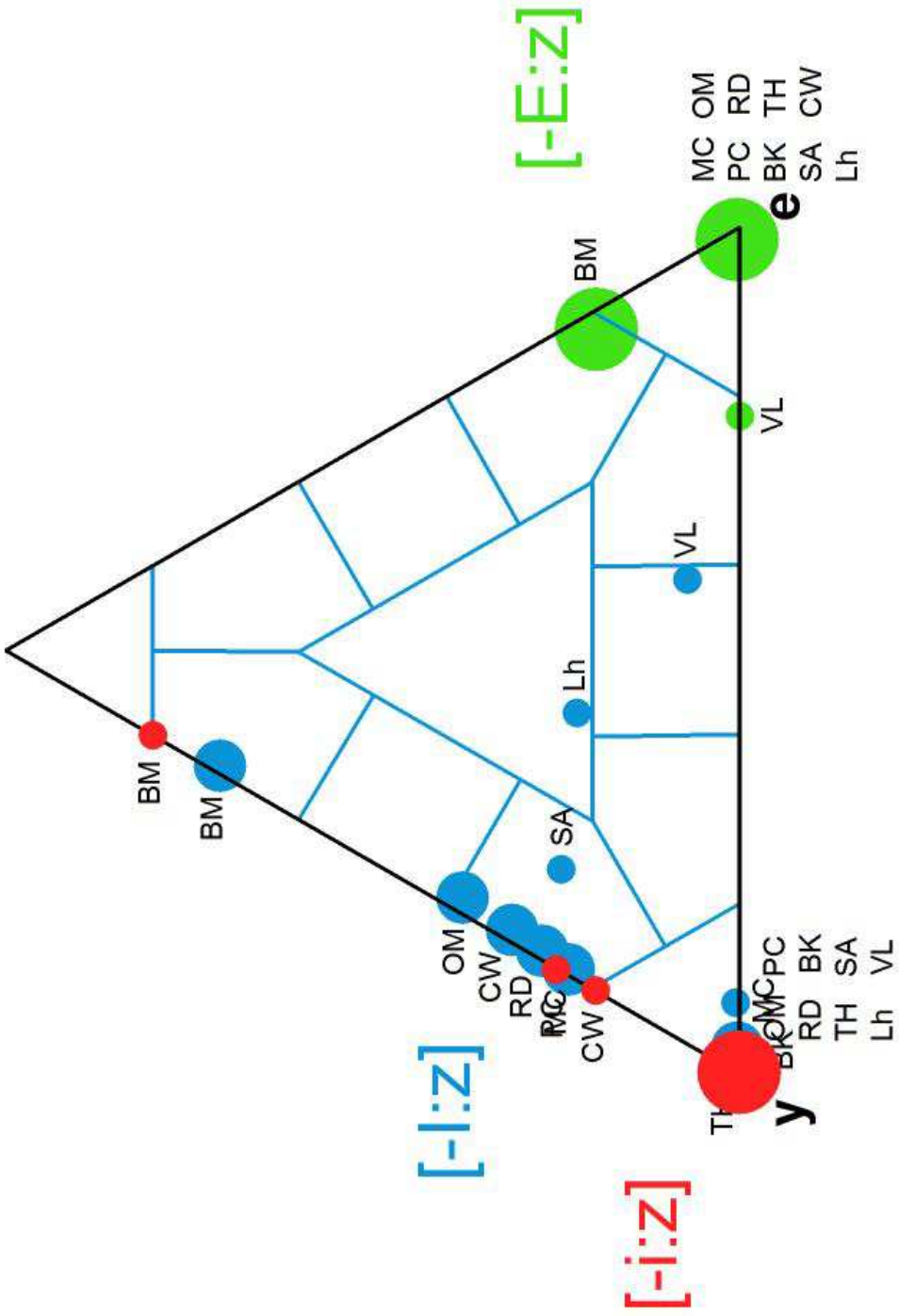
Total numbers of cases

KK	{y}	{ey}	{e}	Other
breg h	0	0	14	0
gwreg	4	0	89	2
spys	16	2	0	0
res	43	89	75	0

Words with [-l:z]



ey



SUMMARY

In the ternary diagram:

/i/ lies at or near the <y>-vertex;

in early texts, for some words /ɪ/ lies $\frac{1}{3}$ of the way from the <y>-vertex to the <ey> vertex;

/ɛ/ lies at or near the <e>-vertex;

/eɪ/ lies along the <y> - <ey> axis

Description of composite diagram

Texts	/i/	/ɪ/	/ɛ/
MC, OM, PC, RD, SA	y-vertex	y ¹ / ₃ ey	e-vertex
BM	y ² / ₃ ey	y ² / ₃ ey	near e
BK, TH	y-vertex	y-vertex	e-vertex
Lhuyd	y-vertex	central	e-vertex
VLC	y-vertex	central	near e

Distinctions in writing

/i/ v. /ɪ/

yes: MC, OM, PC, RD, SA, Lh, VLC

no: BM, BK, TH

/ɪ/ v. /ɛ/

yes: all texts, except possibly VLC

The digraph <ey>

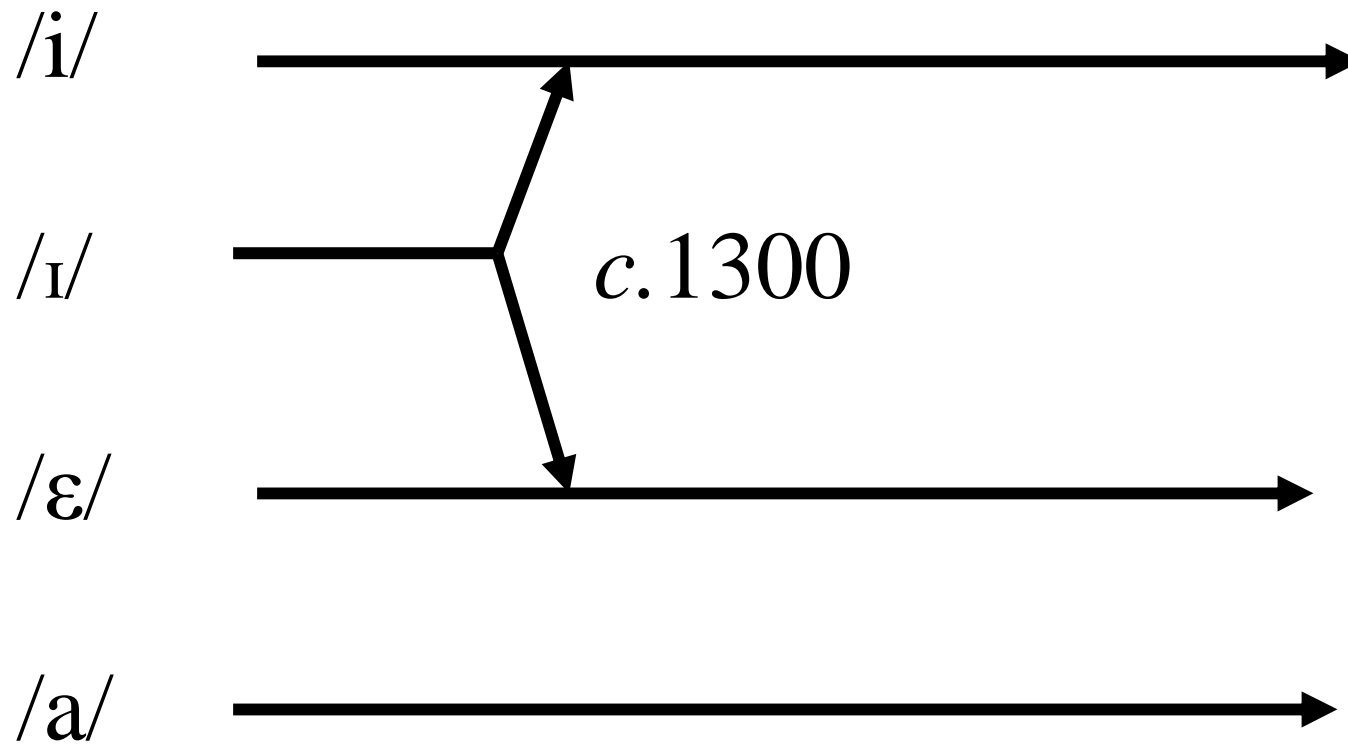
- In words with /ei/, it meant [ei]
- But its primary function was a **marker of length**,
in words with /I/, and to a lesser extent in word with /i/ and /ε/.
- This is shown by:

OM.1395	yma marth thym a vn dra	I wonder at one special thing -
OM.1396	an pyth lemmyn a wela	at what I now see
OM.0473	rum fey mur a wokyneth	I' faith, it is much foolishness
OM.0474	yw mones the lesky peyth	to go to the length of burning something

- <ey> as a marker of length was used in BM more than in any other text.
- We may compare this with the use of <oy> as a length-marker in back vowels.
- In the early MidC texts, <ey> may have served to distinguish /I/ from /i/.

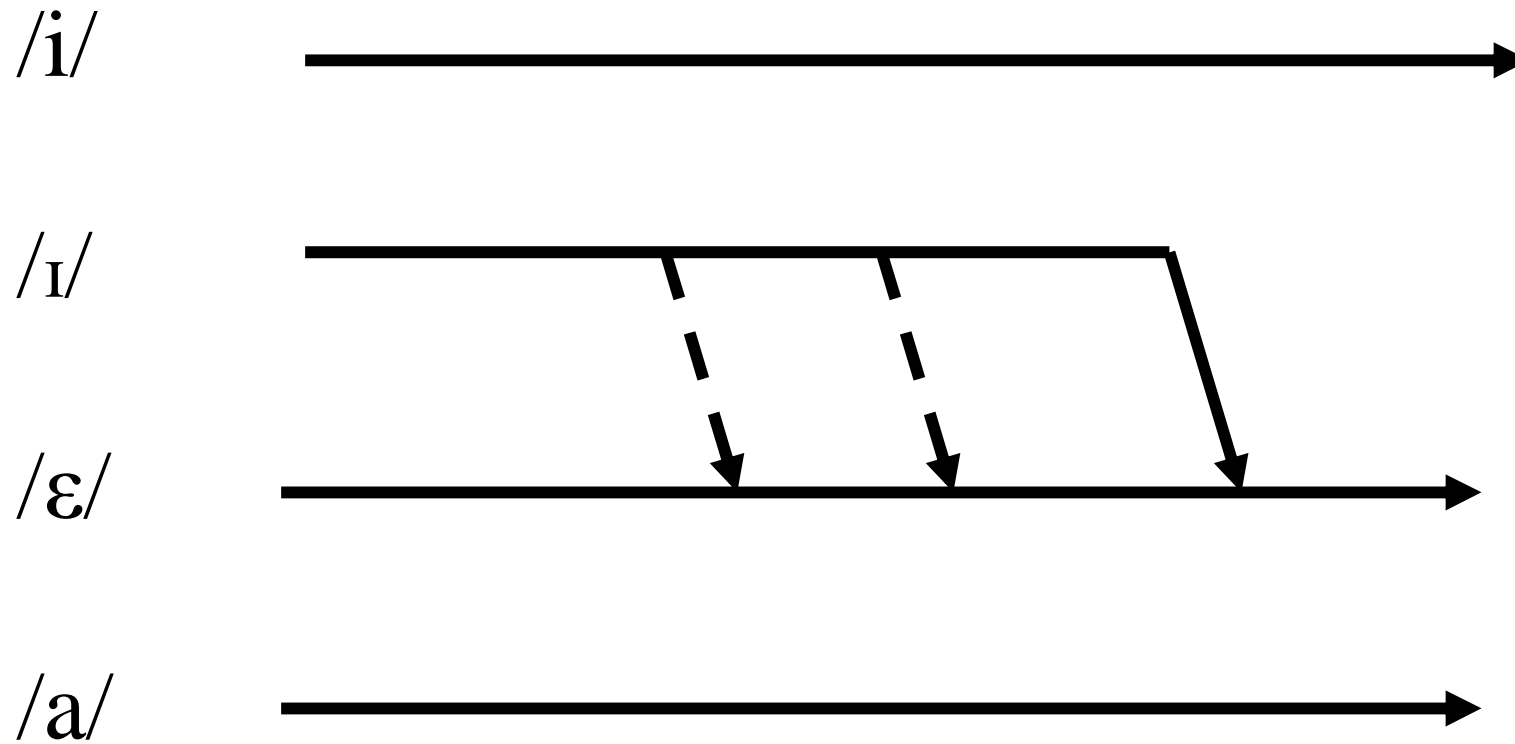
Long front vowels (2)

Williams (1995, 2006)



Long front vowels (3)

George (1984, 1997)



CONCLUSION

The change /ɪ/ to /ɛ/ apparently took place by lexical diffusion, which means that the process needs to be examined on a word-by-word basis. Only well-attested words will give good results.

- **krev** ‘strong’ (OldC *crif*) changed very early.
- **dydh** ‘day’ was *deth* in BM.
- **res** ‘necessity’ was *res* in TH.
- **bys** ‘world’ did not change early.