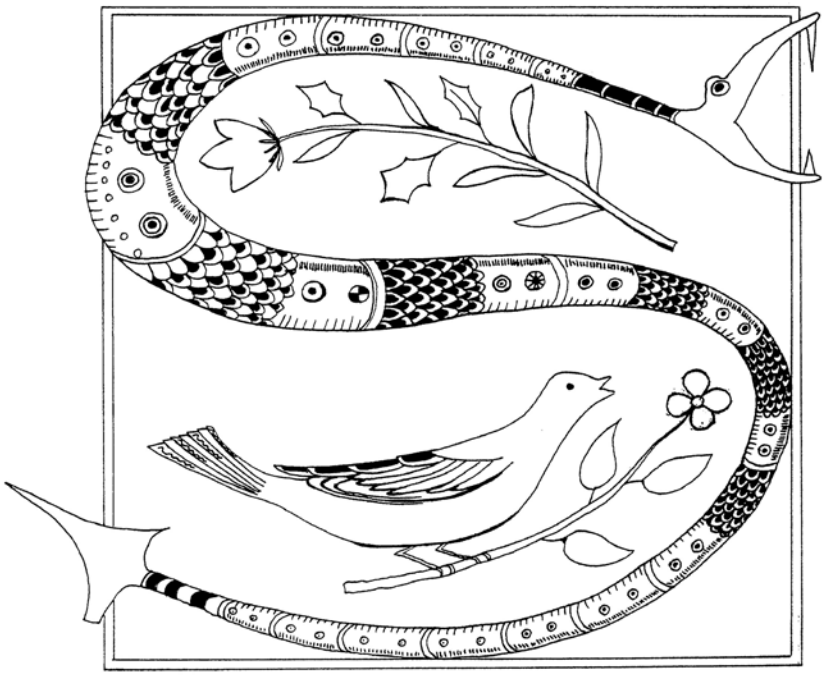
SELIM

Journal of the Spanish Society for Mediaeval English Language and Literature
Revista de la Sociedad Española de Lengua y Literatura Inglesa Medieval



Edited by - Dirigida por
Trinidad Guzmán & S. G. Fernández-Corugedo

Nº 14
Oviedo, 2007

Universidad de Oviedo &
Sociedad Española de Lengua y Literatura Inglesa Medieval
Oviedo – Murcia 2008

ON THE EXCRESCENT MIDDLE ENGLISH *P*

Abstract

After a historical discussion of consonantal epenthesis and the accounts of the insertion of *p* in early English, a dialectal corpus analysis of ME texts is performed to study the sporadic and the permanent insertion of epenthetic *p* in the Northern, East and West Midlands, Southwest, and Southeast varieties. Throughout Middle English the forms with the extra plosive are clearly outnumbered by those without the stop with the exception of the West Midlands. The process seems to have been irregular with no apparent correlations to time or place. It seems to have been a device facilitating the interpretation of minims by scribes, and permanent cases are scarce. **Keywords**: Consonantal epenthesis, *p* insertion, Middle English, dialectology, scribal practices.

Resumen

Tras una discusión histórica de la epéntesis consonántica y de las explicaciones de la inserción de *p* en inglés temprano, se analiza un corpus dialectal de inglés medio para estudiar la inserción esporádica y permanente de *p* en las variedades del norte, Midlands orientales y occidentales, sudoeste y sudeste. A lo largo del inglés medio las formas que presentan la oclusiva extra son claramente menos abundantes que las que no, con la excepción de la zona de las Midlands occidentales. El proceso parece haber sido irregular, al no mostrar correlatos temporales o espaciales. Parece haber sido un procedimiento para facilitar la interpretación de los trazos por parte de los escribas, ya que los casos de epéntesis permanente son raros. **Palabras clave**: Epéntesis consonántica, inserción de *p*, inglés medio, dialectología, prácticas de escribas.

1 Consonantal epenthesis: general remarks

Consonantal epenthesis is a process which affects the number and arrangement of segments[1] in a sequence by inserting a consonant between two other consonants (Trask 1996: 66, 67). Unlike *anaptyxis* (vowel epenthesis), which may serve as a tool for breaking up articulatorily complex consonant clusters, consonant insertion is not infrequently a consequence of "mistiming" (McMahon 1994 [1999]: 15, 16). The "wrong timing"

[1] By doing so, epenthesis falls into the category of what Trask (1996: 66) calls "whole-segment processes", i.e. sound changes which interfere not only with the nature of segments, but also with their number and ordering in strings.

(Hock 1986 [1991]: 118) leads to an overlap of the gestures involved in the primary articulation of each of the members of a cluster (Ohala 2003 [2005]: 681), whereby an unetymological consonant results between the adjacent segments. In the PDE *fence* /fens/, for example, the two neighbouring homorganic obstruents differ in the type of closure, voicing and orality. If, by any chance, the velic closure is accomplished before the contact between the tip/blade of the tongue and the alveolar ridge becomes less intense (leading, in consequence, to the change in the type of closure), an extra alveolar plosive may appear on the way from the nasal to the ensuing oral.[2] In other words, *fence* might come to be realised as [fen^{t}s], following the general model of excrescence as found in Hock (1986 [1991]: 117): Ø > Y / X _____ Z, the voicing of the epenthetic segment probably adjusting to that of the following consonant through assimilation (Hock 1986 [1991]: 117).

As regards the driving force and the outcome of the process, Campbell (1998 [2006]: §2.7.2.3) observes that what excrescence typically yields are sequences that are phonetically easier to handle than the input. This, in turn, is in keeping with Lindblom's (1983) account of the economy of speech gestures. Lindblom (1983: 235) points to the similarity between speech production and General Motor Behaviour in their pursuit of minimum "energy expenditure". Apparently, during normal speech, the possibilities of speech organs are never fully exploited. The management of energy expenditure is correlated both with the biological constraints on speech production and the requirements of speech perception that need to be satisfied, extremes being best avoided. Epenthesis fits in with this model in that the extra consonant shortens the distance between each two destinations, which, as Lindblom claims, "implies less work per

[2] In Hock's (1986 [1991]: 118) opinion, the timing of the gesture of nasality determines the presence/absence of an epenthetic plosive.

unit time ... [and] lower[s] energy costs" (1983: 217–246; see also Shariatmadri 2006).[3]

2 Previous accounts of the insertion of *p* in early English

Neither impressive in terms of scale nor particularly influential in terms of potential restructuring of the system, the phenomenon of consonant intrusion in early English has not been investigated thoroughly. With the exception of recent contributions by Wełna (2005a, b) on bilabial and dental stop insertion respectively, Jones (1976) on constraints on medial consonant clusters, or papers over a century old by Jespersen (1902) and Logeman (1904) discussing the origin of unhistorical *n* in *nightingale*, there are only passing references to the process in standard reference books (e.g. Jordan 1934 [1974]; Luick 1940–64; Fisiak 1968 [2004]; Wełna 1978). The available accounts of the insertion of *p* in the history of English provide no exception.[4]

Jordan (1934 [1974]: 190) speaks of "a transitional sound between *m* and a dental of the following syllable", as in *empti* (*Ancrene Riwle*, *The Katherine group*), which he considers a characteristic of the AB language, *drempte* 'dreamt' (*Genesis and exodus*), *dempte* 'judged' (*Gen&Ex*, *Cursor Mundi*), *dempster* 'judge' (*CM*), but also *nempnen* 'call, name', *hersumpnesse* 'obedience' (*Trinity Homilies*), *sompnin* 'urge' (*St. Marherete*), or *dampnen* 'condemn' (*Gawain*), where the "dental of the following syllable" is likewise a nasal. Jordan's findings corroborate Luick's (1914–1940 [1964]: 963, 964) with respect to the environment for insertion and the earliest attested instances of

[3] Lindblom's observations pertain to assimilation, but the present author believes excrescence works along the same lines.

[4] In LALME there is a map illustrating the distribution of *empty* (the only item to have undergone permanent insertion), but the variable is the initial vowel, not the word-internal mt.

epenthetic *p*, but the latter goes further in that he actually attempts to account for the reason behind the excrescence which he attributes to the "incorrect" timing of articulatory gestures involved in the production of the segments in question. McLaughlin (1963: 104) sees the excrescent *p* as a product of "a denasalization" of /m/, a stage in the motor activity on the way from the bilabial to a following dental, e.g. *solemne ~ solempne*, *damner ~ dampner*.[5] He claims the word *empti* found in *St. Katherine* (c1225) to be the earliest native instance of an inserted *p* (McLaughlin 1963: 105). Summing up, what one finds out from the authorities as regards the insertion of *p* in early English is that (i) the plosive was inserted between /m/ and a following dental (mostly /n/, /d/ or /t/), (ii) the earliest instances of insertion are found in the Southwest or West Midlands[6] (*Ancrene Riwle*, *The Katherine group*), and East Midlands (*Trinity Homilies*, *Genesis and exodus*), and, finally, (iii) that the process itself was a result of a disturbance in the synchrony or coordination during the transition from one articulatory gesture to another in the sense that the velic closure occurred before the remaining articulators managed to take up the target positions for the oncoming segment. One does not find out, however, for example, whether the phenomenon was equally common in all dialects of English in all historical periods.

What remains to be examined, then, is (1) which items underwent sporadic and which permanent insertion, (2) what the latest

[5] It is interesting that McLaughlin should mention a "denasalisation of /m/" during the transition to the following dental given the following dental is a nasal, too. It seems unlikely that the insertion of /p/ in the examples given by McLaughlin is due to mistiming and overlapping of articulatory gestures because the position of the velum does not change on the way from /m/ to /n/ in the first place.

[6] The *MED* classifies *Ancrene Riwle* and texts from *The Katherine group* as South-western, while the compilers of the *Helsinki Corpus* view them as West Midland (see also Laing 1993).

recorded instances without *p* are of the words affected permanently by epenthesis, (3) whether the rate of insertion was more or less the same for Early and Late Middle English or not, (4) whether the rate of insertion was the same irrespective of the dialect area, and, finally, (5) whether the rate of insertion was affected in any way by the native/foreign origin of the lexeme. In the remainder of this paper, answers to the above questions will be sought, following the analysis of the adduced material.

3 The insertion of *p* in Middle English: The evidence from selected texts, the *Middle English dictionary* and the *Oxford English dictionary* online

The analysis has been carried out on the basis of the material extracted from the on-line versions of the *Middle English dictionary*, the *Oxford English dictionary* and a selection of 37 Early and Late Middle English texts representing the traditional Middle English dialect continua (for the ME dialect boundaries see Moore – Meech – Whitehall 1935). In order to avoid the discomfort of ignoring the data whose provenance is unknown, the statistics of the occurrence of the forms with and without *p* will be based not on the instances found in the *MED* or the *OED* but on the ones found in the texts with a firmly established dialectal background (see Table 1, below):

Table 1. *The corpus of texts used for the quantitative analysis*

Dialect	Early ME (1100–1300)	Late ME (1300–1500)
N		*Benedictine rule* (Lnsd 378 & Vsp A. 25) *Works* by Rolle Mandeville's *Travels* (Egerton 1982) *Pricke of conscience* (Glb E. ix & Hrl) *Wars of Alexander* (Ashmole 44)

EM	*The Peterborough Chronicle 1070–1154* (LdMisc 636) *Trinity Homilies* (Trin-C B.14.52) *Lambeth Homilies* (Lambeth 467) *Vices and virtues* (Stw 34) *Ormulum* (Jun 1)	Merlin (Cmb Ff.3.11) Confessio Amantis (Frf 3) Mandeville's *Travels* (Cotton Titus C. XVI) Towneley Plays (Hnt HM 1) Guy of Warwick (Auchinleck)
WM	*Hali Meidenhad* (Bodley 34) *Poema Morale* (Lamb 487) *St. Juliana* (Bodley 34)	*Cleanness* (Nero A. 10) *Pearl* (Nero A. 10) *Destruction of Troy* (Htrn 388) *Gawain* (Nero A. 10) *Joseph of Arimathie* (Vernon)
SW	Layamon's *Brut* (Caligula A. 9) *Hali Maidenhad* (Titus D. 18) *Owl and nightingale* (Clg A. 9 & Jes-O 29) Winteney version of *Benedictine rule* (Cld D. 3) *St. Juliana* (Royal 17.A.27) A moral ode (Egerton 613)	*St. Editha* (Fst B. 3) *Castle of love* (Vernon) *Cato* (Vernon) *Harley lyrics* (Harley 2253) *Psalter Mariae* (Vernon)
SE	*Kentish sermons* (LdMisc 471)	*Ayenbite of Inwyt* (Arundel 57) Shoreham (Add 17376)

Since, according to authoritative historical grammars such as Luick (1914–40), Jordan (1934 [1974]), or Wełna (1978), the epenthetic *p* surfaced between /m/ and a following dental, all words in which /m/ came to immediately precede *d*, *t*, *s*, *θ* or *n* have been used in the study, e.g.: pret. and p.p. of *dēmen* 'judge, criticise, condemn, believe'; pret. and p.p. of *fordēmen* 'condemn, convict'; *dēmester*(*e*) 'judge'; *sēmester*(*e*) 'seamstress'; pret. and p.p. of *drēmen* 'dream'; pret. and p.p. of *nemnen*, *emptī* 'empty', *empten* 'to empty', *emptīnesse* 'emptiness', *empting* 'voiding'; *ampte* 'ant'; pret. and p.p of *wemmen* 'disfigure, injure'; pret. and p.p. of *rēmen* 'rush in battle'; pret. and p.p. of *quēmen* 'please sb, gratify, serve sb'; pret. and p.p. of *fremmen* 'perform sth'; pret. and p.p. of *flēmen* 'expel, banish, exile';

sŏm-dēl 'partly'; *him-self*; *sŏm-tīme* 'sometimes'; 2, 3 sg pres. ind. of *undernimen* 'entrap, surprise, receive, undertake' and *cŏmen* 'come'; *ihērsumnesse*, *gehērsumnesse*, *hērsumnesse* 'obedience', *unhērsumnesse* 'disobedience', *buxŏmnesse* 'humility', *unbuxŏmnesse* 'inhumility', *sibsumnesse* 'peacefulness'; *nemnen* 'name', *somnŏur* 'summoner'; *samnen* 'to gather together', *samning*(*e*) 'gathering'; *somnen* 'urge', *somninge* 'an assembly, summoning'; inflected forms of *sŏm* 'some'; inflected forms of *tōsāmen* 'together', etc. The words have been divided into two groups on the basis of the orality of the dental following /m/ prior to excrescence. While in the first group, where /m/ precedes a dental plosive/fricative, the insertion is most likely due to a delay in the shift from the bilabial to apico-dental relative to the formation of the velic closure, in the other group, where /m/ is adjacent to another nasal, such motivation is out of the question given that there is no change in the position of the soft palate. Therefore, an alternative explanation needs to be sought.

3.1 Epenthetic p: Sporadic insertion

Of all the analysed words, sporadic insertion affected almost every item, except for *emptī* and its derivatives. The earliest traces of sporadic epenthetic *p* were found in the East-, West Midland and Southwestern manuscripts dating back to c1225:

(*a*)

(1) a1225 *Trin.Hom.Creed* (Trin-C B.14.52) 15: He beð *dempd* to þolie wowe mid deflen on helle. (EM)

(2) a1225(?c1175) *PMor.*(Lamb 487) 270: Þa boð nu mid him in helle fordon and fordemet [vrr. *fordempde*, vordemde]. (WM)

(*b*)

(3) c1225(?c1200) *HMaid.*(Bod 34) 28/458: Hwuch schal beo þe *sompnunge* [Tit: somnunge] bituhen ow i bedde? (WM)

(4) c1225(?c1200) *St.Marg.(1)* (Bod 34) 36/1: Ne nis þear na bote bute fleo þenne, þet nowðer ne beo nohwer ane wið oðer; ne seon ham, ne *sompnin*, ne sitten to-gederes wið-uten wittnesse. (WM)
(5) c1225(?c1200) *St.Kath.(1)* (Einenkel) 1329: Se ha Crist cleopede & his nome *nempnede*. (SW)

3.1.1 Sporadic insertion of *p*: The Northern dialect

Due to the lack of edited Northern Middle English textual material from before 1300, the instances of an excrescent *p* from 1400 and later, by necessity, pass for the earliest ones in this dialect:

(*a*)
(6) a1400(a1325) *Cursor* (Vsp A.3) 18300: To ded you deme he did.. Nu sal þat ded [i.e. death] be *dempt* on him. (N)

(*b*)
(7) ?a1400 Mannyng *Chron.Pt.1* (Petyt 511) 2871: *Nempe* it [Lamb: Priuely þou hast hit boren, Þat we ne scholde mynge for drede]. (N)
(8) c1450(?a1400) *Wars Alex.*(Ashm 44) 1026: Alexander with ane ost of many athill dukis, Samed [Dub: *Sampnez*] a vnsene somme. (N)

Tables 2a and 2b show the distribution of forms with and without the epenthetic *p* in Northern Middle English.

Table 2a. *Sporadic epenthetic* p *(North): ⟨MN⟩ vs.* ⟨mpn⟩

	Forms with excrescent *p*	Forms without excrescent *p*	Total
EME	–	–	–
LME	8 (20.51%)	31 (79.49%)	39 (100%)
Total	8	31	39

Table 2b. *Sporadic epenthetic* p *(North):*
⟨ms, mt, md, mth, mþ⟩ *vs.* ⟨mps, mpt, mpd, mpþ, mpth⟩

	Forms with excrescent *p*	Forms without excrescent *p*	Total
EME	–	–	–
LME	13 (10.07%)	116 (89.93%)	129 (100%)
Total	13	116	129

Interestingly, epenthesis is twice as frequent in the case of two adjacent nasals as it is in the case of the other clusters. Only 10.07% of instances of /m/ covered by an oral dental undergo a split, whereas ⟨mn⟩ yields to insertion two times out of ten (20.51%). Nonetheless, the majority of forms occur without an unhistorical stop.

3.1.2 Sporadic insertion of *p*: East Midlands

In the East Midlands, forms with the epenthetic *p* appear as early as c1225:

(*a*)

(9) a1225 *Trin.Hom.Creed* (Trin-C B.14.52) 15: He beð *dempd* to þolie wowe mid deflen on helle. (EM)

(*b*)

(10) ... for hordom ne haueð non time ne scule. ac is defles *hersumpnesse*. Ne forðe gef man haueð to done mid his rihte spuse on unsele. (*Trin. Hom.*, a1225) (EM)

(11) ... and lernie hwu hie sullen here lif laden on godes *hersumpnesse*. and hem swo gaderen on rihte bileue. (*Trin. Hom.*, a1225) (EM),

the East Midland dialect being one of the earliest to show the presence of the segment under study. Tables 3a and 3b show the ratio of *p*-full to *p*-less forms in early and late East Midland texts.

Table 3a. *Sporadic epenthetic* p *(East Midlands):* ⟨mn⟩ *vs.* ⟨mpn⟩

	Forms with excrescent *p*	Forms without excrescent *p*	Total
EME	2 (0.68%)	288 (99.32%)	290 (100%)
LME	10 (35.71%)	18 (64.29%)	28 (100%)
Total	12	306	318

Table 3b. *Sporadic epenthetic* p *(East Midlands):* ⟨ms, mt, md, mth, mþ⟩ *vs.* ⟨mps, mpt, mpd, mpþ, mpth⟩

	Forms with excrescent *p*	Forms without excrescent *p*	Total
EME	1 (0.99%)	100 (99.01%)	101 (100%)
LME	6 (0.96%)	617 (99.04%)	623 (100%)
Total	7	717	724

In the Early Middle English period insertion is rare, irrespective of the orality of the segment covering /m/. In fact, fewer than 1% of the clusters in question exhibit the presence of an unetymological *p*. In Late Middle English the percentage of ⟨mpn⟩ forms rises considerably from 0.68% to 35.71%, whereas in the case of a nasal – oral combination the operativeness of epenthesis falls from 0.99% to 0.96%.

3.1.3 Sporadic insertion of *p*: West Midlands

All early West Midland instances of *p*-excrescence recorded in the investigated corpus of texts (1× *nempnede*, 5× *inempnet*, 2× *sompnunge*) involve insertion of a segment between two nasals. Likewise, all of them belong to the Bodley 34 MS and come from *Hali Meidenhad* and *St. Juliana*, known to have been written in the AB language:

(12) ... bi Nichomedesse burh o rade towart rome. Sophie wes *inempnet* of heh cun akennet. & nom þis meidenes bodi. & ber hit in to hire schip biwunden swiðe... (*St. Juliana*, a1225) (WM)

(13) Ah! babilones folc þet ich ear *nempnede*, þe deofles here of helle,—þet beoð, flesches lustes, þ feondes eggunge—weorrið & warpeð ... (*Hali Meidenhad*, a1225) (WM)

Variants that show epenthesis outnumber those without the plosive and constitute 66.(66)% of the tokens. In texts dating from after 1300, no instances of an inserted word-medial *p* have been attested (see Tables 4a and 4b, below).

Table 4a. *Sporadic epenthetic* p *(West Midlands):* ⟨mn⟩ *vs.* ⟨mpn⟩

	Forms with excrescent *p*	Forms without excrescent *p*	Total
EME	8 (66.66%)	4 (33.33%)	12 (100%)
LME	–	32 (100%)	32 (100%)
Total	8	36	44

Table 4b. *Sporadic epenthetic* p *(West Midlands):* ⟨ms, mt, md, mth, mþ⟩ *vs.* ⟨mps, mpt, mpd, mpþ, mpth⟩

	Forms with excrescent *p*	Forms without excrescent *p*
EME	–	7
LME	–	83
Total	–	90

3.1.4 Sporadic insertion of *p*: The Southwest

The Southwestern variety belongs among the three dialects in which the excrescent *p* surfaces the earliest. The first traces of the epenthetic plosive are to be found in *St. Katherine* (Einenkel, c1225) and *Ancrene Riwle* (Corp-C 402, c1230):

(14) c1225(?c1200) *St.Kath.(1)* (Einenkel) 1329: Se ha Crist cleopede & his nome *nempnede*. (SW)

(15) c1230(?a1200) *Ancr.*(Corp-C 402) 149/9: Nim anan þe rode steaf, mid *nempnunge* [Nero: nemmunge; Cai: nemnunge] i þi muð, mid te mearke i þin hond, mid þoht i þin heorte. (SW)

The distribution of *p*-full forms between Early and Late Middle English (in the sense of the number of tokens) is considerably even when insertion affects consonants of identical orality. However, the rate of epenthesis increases with time from 2.18% in Early ME to 25% in Late ME:

Table 5a. *Sporadic epenthetic* p *(Southwest):* ⟨mn⟩ *vs.* ⟨mpn⟩

	Forms with excrescent *p*	Forms without excrescent *p*	Total
EME	5 (2.18%)	224 (97.82%)	229 (100%)
LME	5 (25%)	15 (75%)	20 (100%)
Total	10	239	249

Where members of the cluster differ with respect to their orality, the same tendency is to be observed. Excrescence operates more effectively in Late ME with 9.09% of tokens exhibiting unetymological *p*. This means a rise by 5.94% from 3.15% in Early ME:

Table 5b. *Sporadic epenthetic* p *(Southwest):*
⟨ms, mt, md, mth, mþ⟩ *vs.* ⟨mps, mpt, mpd, mpþ, mpth⟩

	Forms with excrescent *p*	Forms without excrescent *p*	Total
EME	3 (3.15%)	92 (96.85%)	95 (100%)
LME	1 (9.09%)	10 (90.01%)	11 (100%)
Total	4	102	106

As regards the rate of insertion relative to the type of environment, in Early ME both contexts seem more or less equally susceptible to the phenomenon. In Late ME, in turn, the epenthetic *p* surfaces far more frequently when /m/ is followed by a dental nasal (25% : 9.09%).

3.1.5 Sporadic insertion of *p*: The Southeast

There are no occurrences of any of the analysed words in the Southeastern material from before 1300. In Late Southeastern there are 67 instances of words that could potentially be affected by epenthesis, but none of them actually is. The only forms found in the *Ayenbite of Inwyt* and William of Shoreham are: *demde* (2×), *demd* (2×), *y-demd* (5×), *yulemde* (1×), *zomdel* (2×), *warmd* (1×), *semde* (1×), *y-quemd* (1×), *yemd* (1×); and (with a cluster of two nasals): *buxomnesse* (10×), *unbuxomnesse* (4×), *nemni* (5×), *nemny* (1×), *nemneþ* (1×), and *y-nemned* (8×), *ssamnesse* (1×), *emne* (2×), *emni* (1×).

3.1.6 Sporadic insertion of *p*: Summary

Sporadic insertion of *p* in Middle English is, indeed, occasional and, as it seems, accidental. Therefore, seeking any potential pattern behind it, a process which is by no means a wholesale change, appears utterly pointless. Even if there are forms with an unetymological *p* in a text from a given dialectal area or their number happens to increase with time it is more likely that either the scribe used pronunciation spellings from his own repertoire or copied verbatim what he saw in the exemplar. Alternatively, an influence of Latin spellings could be postulated.

Tables 6a and 6b show the distribution of forms with and without the epenthetic *p* found in the 37 investigated texts:

Table 6a: *Sporadic insertion of* p *in Middle English:* ⟨mn⟩ *vs.* ⟨mpn⟩

	EME			LME		
	+	–	Total	+	–	Total
N	–	–	–	8 (20.51%)	31 (79.49%)	39
EM	2 (0.68%)	288 (99.32%)	290	10 (35.71%)	18 (64.29%)	28
WM	8 (66.66%)	4 (33.33%)	12	–	32	32
SW	5 (2.18%)	224 (97.88%)	229	5 (25%)	15 (75%)	20
SE	–	–	–	–	33	33
Total	15	516	531	23	129	152

Table 6b: *Sporadic insertion of* p *in Middle English:* ⟨ms, mt, md, mth, mþ⟩ *vs.* ⟨mps, mpt, mpd, mpþ, mpth⟩

	EME			LME		
	+	–	Total	+	–	Total
N	–	–	–	13 (10.07%)	116 (89.03%)	129
EM	1 (0.99%)	100 (99.01%)	101	6 (0.96%)	617 (99.04%)	623
WM	–	7	7	–	83	83
SW	3 (3.15%)	92 (96.75%)	95	1 (9.09%)	10 (90.01%)	11
SE	–	–	–	–	34	34
Total	4	199	203	20	860	880

Throughout Middle English the forms with the extra plosive are clearly outnumbered by those without the stop, with the exception of the West Midlands where before 1300 (*St. Juliane*, *Hali Meidenhad*) a reverse tendency is to be observed. There are 19 (2.58%) instances altogether (Tables 6a, b) of epenthesis in the analysed texts from Early ME, and 43 (4.16%) instances in texts from the second part of the period, which means an increase in the total of the affected items by 1.58%. Interestingly, both before and after 1300 epenthetic *p* is more common in clusters of two nasals than between a nasal and an oral.

As regards the bearing of etymology of a lexeme on its susceptibility to epenthesis, there are 19 items of French or Latin provenance in the investigated texts, namely: *primseinen* 'mark with the sign of the cross', *apostēm* 'morbid swelling', *pilgrim*, *psalm*, *ensaumple* 'example', *ipotam* 'hippopotamus', *septentriōne*, *remenaunt* 'remnant', *circumstaunce* 'circumstance', *circumcisiŏun*, *chimenē* 'chimney', *omnipotent*, *simenel* 'a loaf made of fine flour', *raunsŏun* 'ransom', *painime* 'Heathen lands', *damisēle* 'unmarried woman', *demestere*, and *somnour*, not one of them with an unhistorical segment. In the *MED*, *somnour* appears with an epenthetic *p* 1.6 times out of ten, *septentrione* does so 1.25 times out of ten, while *demestere* shows the extra segment 2.5 times out of ten. *Remenaunt*, *chimene*

and *raunsoun* appear with the excrescent *p* once each. *Dampnen*, *solempne* and their derivatives, not infrequently given as examples of excrescence in Middle English, have been disregarded since there is a possibility insertion affected them already in French.

As for the mechanism and motivation behind the process, in the case of items in which the second element of the cluster is oral, the excrescent *p* is attributable to the overlapping of articulatory gestures, provided the segment in question is really there. What seems an argument to the contrary is the dubious voicing (or, rather, the lack of voicing) of the extra unit. It would be most unusual for a speaker to produce a fortis plosive right in the middle of a voiced environment, as in *dempd* or *fordempde* (Dieter Kastovsky, Jerzy Wełna, personal communication).[7] Another counterargument is the presence of ⟨p⟩ in words such as *hersumpnesse* or *sompnunge*. If, indeed, both members of a cluster are nasals, the mistiming cannot be held responsible for the insertion, since the transition from /m/ to /n/ involves only one articulatory gesture. Why, then, insert a stop at all? On phonological grounds one could imagine the insertion of *p* to be a kind of evasive technique aimed at counteracting potential assimilation and the subsequent loss of /n/ (see *nemmunge*, ex. 15 above) as in PDE *column* or *solemn*. It seems equally plausible, however, that ⟨p⟩ was used as a "phonetically empty" grapheme, the insertion of which was to facilitate the reading and interpretation of the otherwise troublesome sequences of minims, e.g. ſomnunge vs. ſompnunge (Marcin Krygier, Dieter Kastovsky personal communication). Last but not least, there is

[7] Unless the use of ⟨p⟩ is due to scribes feeling somehow uneasy about inserting ⟨b⟩ in the context from which the plosive was more and more frequently removed (Wełna 2005). Jones (1976: 124,125) accounts for the voicelessness of the epenthetic segment in terms of constraints on interludes. He claims that a combination of a nasal and a voiced obstruent right before a left syllable bracket, e.g. *[nemb] [nən], would be ill-formed.

a question of syllable structure. According to the principles of Syllable Boundary Placement (Jones 1976: 122), if there are more syllabic segments per word than one, any medial (intervocalic) sequence is to be interpreted as ambisyllabic. An interlude which fails to involve overlap, e.g. $_{1}[\text{nem}_{1}]_{2}[\text{nən}_{2}]$, is considered highly marked and, therefore, calling for the satisfaction of the "second well-formedness condition" (Jones 1976: 126). The problem is, the insertion of *p* does not result in a desired non-proper bracketing and cannot be, as Jones (1976: 125) himself admits, attributed to an attempt at altering the interlude.

3.2 Epenthetic p: Permanent insertion

Permanent insertion of *p* is to be seen in the ME *emptī* and its derivatives. The earliest and only instance of the process found in Early ME comes from *St. Katherine* (Einenkel, c1225):

(16) c1225(?c1200) *St.Kath.(1)* (Einenkel) 839: Þe glistinde wordes.. (þe beoð wiðuten godleic ant *empti* wiðinnen). (SW)

Next, there is an instance from Oxfordshire, which, depending on the exact location, could be interpreted as either Southwestern or East Midland:

(17) c1300 *SLeg.Cross* (LdMisc 108) 593: He is in a veteles þat *ampti* is. (Oxon)

Then there is Chaucer:

(18) (c1390) Chaucer *CT.Rv.*(Manly–Rickert) A.3894: Til that almoost al *empty* is the tonne. (EM)

and *Northern Homily cycle*: *The devil as physician*:

(19) c1390 *NHom.Devil Phys.*(Vrn) 98: Þis hermyte þonked God almihti þat made þe ffendes craft *Empti*. (WM)

No instances of *empty*, whatever the form, were found in the examined texts from the Northern dialect area.

Table 7 presents the ratio of forms with the epenthetic *p* to those without the segment in question in Early and Late ME.

Table 7: *Permanent insertion of* p *in Middle English:* Empti *and its derivatives*

	EME		LME	
	+	–	+	–
N	–	–	–	–
EM	–	4	2 (66.66%)	1 (33.33%)
WM	–	–	–	–
SW	–	2	–	–
SE	–	–	–	3
Total	–	6	2	4

With the exception of the single instance of epenthetic *p* found in the MED, the insertion of *p* in *empti* does not seem to have caught on until the 14th century. If one were to draw conclusions solely on the basis of the tabulated data, in Late Middle English the excrescent *p* in *empti* would have been still quite a novelty. However, in the MED there are 33 occurrences of *empti* with the plosive against 14 instances without it, which suggests a well advanced change in progress. The last occurrence of a derivative of empti in the form from before the epenthesis is to be found in a text from 1674 (OED):

(20) 1674 BREVINT *Saul at Endor* 230 It is but an *emty* Phantome.

4 Conclusions

The analysis of the material from the *MED* online and a number of selected ME texts allows one to formulate the following observations concerning the insertion of *p* in Middle English:

(1) The sporadic insertion of *p* in Middle English is a highly irregular process with no apparent correlation to either time or place.
(2) Where the plosive is inserted (if at all) it is probably either a reflection of the scribes' own preferences, a transfer from the exemplar, a device facilitating the interpretation of minims, or a tool counteracting potential assimilation.
(3) The only word affected by permanent epenthesis is *empty* (and its derivatives). While forms with the excrescent *p* occur as early as Old English (Campbell 1959 [2003]), in Middle English the earliest instance of insertion is to be found in *St. Katherine* (c1225, SW). Later (1390) the epenthetic *p* surfaces in the Midlands. The last instance of *empty* attested in the analysed corpus without the bilabial oral is found in a text from 1674.
(4) Even though the tabulated data from the investigated material would appear to suggest otherwise, in Late ME the insertion of *p* in *empty* is probably a well advanced change.

Anna Hebda
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

References

Primary sources

Corpus of Middle English prose and verse [2007/09]. http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/mec/.

Secondary sources

Campbell, A. 1959 [2003]: *Old English grammar*. Oxford, At the Clarendon Press.

Campbell, L. 1999: *Historical linguistics: An introduction*. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.

Fisiak, J. 1968 [2004]: *A short grammar of Middle English*. Warszawa, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.

Hock, H. 1986: *Principles of historical linguistics*. Berlin – New York – Amsterdam, Mouton de Gruyter.

Jespersen, O. 1902: The nasal in *Nightingale*. *Englische Studien* 31: 239–242.

Jordan, R. 1934 [1974]: *A handbook of Middle English grammar*: *Phonology*. (Translated and revised by Eugene J. Crook). The Hague, Mouton.

Jones, Ch. 1976. Some constraints on medial consonant clusters. *Language* 52.1: 121–130.

Joseph, B. D. & R. D. Janda eds. 2003: *The handbook of historical linguistics*. Oxford, Blackwell.

Kurath, H., S. Kuhn, R. E. Lewis eds. 1952–2001 [2007/09]: *Middle English dictionary* (*MED*). http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/m/med.

Laing, M. 1993: *Catalogue of sources for a linguistic atlas of early medieval English*. Cambridge, D. S. Brewer.

Lindblom, B. 1983: Economy of speech gestures. in: P. F. MacNeilage ed., 217–246.

Logeman, H. 1904: The *n* in *Nightingale*. *Englische Studien* 33: 249–254.

Luick, K. 1914–40 [1964]: *Historische Grammatik der englischen Sprache*. Stuttgart, Bernard Tauchnitz.

MacNeilage, P. F. 1983: *The production of speech*. New York, Springer.

McIntosh, Angus – Michael L. Samuels – Michael Benskin eds. 1986. *Linguistic atlas of late mediaeval English*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.

McLaughlin, J. C. 1963: *A graphemic-phonemic study of a Middle English manuscript*. The Hague, Mouton & Co.

McMahon, A. 1994 [1999]: *Understanding language change*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Moore, S., S. Meech & H. Whitehall. 1935: Middle English dialect characteristics and dialect boundaries: Preliminary report of an investigation based exclusively on localized texts and documents. *University of Michigan Publications in Language and Literature* 13: 1–60.

Ohala, J. 2003: Phonetics and historical phonology. In: B. D. Joseph & R. Janda eds., 669–686.

Ritt, N. & H. Schendl eds.. 2005. *Rethinking Middle English: Linguistic and literary approaches*. Frankfurt/M. – New York, Peter Lang Verlag.

Shariatmadari, D. 2006: Sounds difficult? Why phonological theory needs 'ease of articulation'. *SOAS Working Papers in Linguistics* 14: 207–226.

Simpson, J. & E. Weiner eds. 1989: *The Oxford English dictionary*. (2nd edition). Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Trask, R. L. 1996: *Historical linguistics*. London, Arnold.

Wełna, J. 1978:. *A diachronic grammar of English. Part one: Phonology*. Warszawa, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.

Wełna, J. 2005: Now you see it, now you don't, or the fates of the ME voiced labial stop in homorganic clusters. In: N. Ritt & H. Schendl eds., 327–336.

Received 03 Feb 2008; *revision received* 11 May 2008; *accepted* 23 May 2008