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## Jerzy Wełna's contribution to linguistic studies

Marta Sylwanowicz, Anna Wojtyś

*University of Warsaw*

### 1. Introduction

Jerzy Wełna, a noted authority in the field of English historical studies, has tied his career to the Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw. In 1974, he defended his PhD dissertation entitled *Linguistic Analysis of Borrowings in Old English*, written under the supervision of the late Jacek Fisiak (Adam Mickiewicz University). In 1986, he received the title of Doctor of Letters (habilitation) in English Linguistics based on the book *A Critical Survey of a Historical Phonology of English Vowels (with special reference to K. Luick's Historische Grammatik der englischen Sprache)*. He was granted the title of Professor of Humanities by the President of Poland in 2000.

Jerzy Wełna's earliest work was much influenced by the late Alfred Reszkiewicz (Jagiellonian University, University of Warsaw), who kindled Wełna's love for (historical) linguistics when he was still a student of English philology. Other important figures in Wełna's career were Margaret Schlauch (a former Head of the English Department) and Jacek Fisiak, first a supervisor of his PhD dissertation and then his life-long friend.

Jerzy Wełna has published five books, sixty-eight scientific articles and fifteen book reviews, all devoted to the study of the English language, mostly the changes it has undergone from the period of Old English till present times. His work on the history of English has gained international recognition as shown by the innumerable citations by scholars such as Minkova, Hickey, Dance, Ringe, Anderson, Mańczak, Fisiak, Molencki, Krygier, Pons-Sanz, Steponavičius, Kharlamenko, and many others.

Although his publications give priority to English historical phonology and morphology, many important works deal with other areas including studies on (i) spelling alterations, (ii) language contact, (iii) the rivalry

between lexical items, and (iv) gender change. It is also noteworthy that before Wełna fully committed himself to historical studies, he had been involved in contrastive English-Polish studies to which he devoted his earliest contributions.

Apart from being a diligent researcher, Professor Wełna has also served as a mentor for generations of students and PhD candidates, 17 of whom successfully defended their dissertations. For many years now his monograph *A Brief Outline of the History of English* has served as basic reading material for the students at the Institute of English Studies. He has also reviewed innumerable PhD dissertations and Doctor of Letters theses (habilitations), and has served on promotion committees of various scholars. One can safely conclude that he fathered a new generation of historical linguists in Poland.

The present paper offers an evaluative survey of Jerzy Wełna's contribution to the study of English linguistics. The first part (section 2) is devoted to the area of his primary concern, i.e. historical phonology and morphology, whereas the second (section 3) concentrates on the studies addressing problems from other linguistic areas. These sections have been written, respectively, by Anna Wojtyś (phonology and morphology) and Marta Sylwanowicz (other areas), Professor Wełna's students from their second-year obligatory course in the history of English (BA studies) till the achievement of their doctoral degrees.

## **2. Research in phonology and morphology**

As mentioned above, Jerzy Wełna's work presents him as a truly multifarious historical linguist engaging in the research on phonology, morphology, semantics and lexis with references to sociolinguistics, dialectology, present-day varieties of English and contrastive studies. Yet, undoubtedly the jewel in the crown of his achievements is his work on English historical phonology. This area has inspired him throughout his whole career, resulting in three books and forty-four articles published between 1978 and 2021.

### **2.1 *A Diachronic Grammar of English***

It is indeed astounding that the outpouring of Wełna's publications in historical phonology did not begin with an article but rather with a

monograph, the highly regarded *A Diachronic Grammar of English: Part one: Phonology* (1978). The book is a concise but extremely informative and exhaustive study of sound changes in the history of English. Divided into eight chapters corresponding to the recognized diachronic stages (typically some 200 years in length), it traces changes in vowels and consonants of both native and foreign words. The greatest advantage of this book, which is, after all, one of many such publications on English historical phonology, is its unique structure. The chapters are divided consistently into sections on (1) general characteristics of the phonological changes in the respective period, (2) qualitative changes and (3) quantitative changes affecting vowels, (4) diphthongs, and (5) vowels in unstressed syllables, followed by (6) the developments in consonants, which are discussed according to their manner of articulation. Such a treatment allows for immediate identification of changes affecting a particular phoneme at a given period in time. Additionally, all processes reviewed are illustrated with numerous examples of lexemes exhibiting each change. Possible exceptions are explained in meticulous notes referring to all relevant publications on the topic. Still, from the point of view of the reader the most valuable element is the excellent word index, which lists all items specified (which amount to around three thousand) together with references to the sections where they are mentioned. This enables one to quickly trace each word throughout the history, identifying all relevant phonological rules that have contributed to its present shape. The impressive bibliography contains the names of authors of fundamental works on the history of English, including (in alphabetical order) Brunner, Campbell, Dobson, Fisiak, Jespersen, Jordan(-Cook), Kökeritz, Lass, Luick, Mossé, Reszkiewicz, Vachek, and the Wrights. For the next 44 years, those scholars's publications served as points of reference for Wełna, who much respected and appreciated their painstaking research, and often aimed to complement and verify their hypotheses. Still, the most prominent figure among them, the one that had the greatest overall impact on Wełna's academic career was Karl Luick.

## 2.2 Luick's impact

Karl Luick (1865–1935), a professor at the University of Graz and the Rector of Vienna University, was first fascinated with metrics, but moved onto the area of historical phonology, which resulted in the monograph *Historische Grammatik der englischen Sprache*. This opus, published in nine instalments

(1914–1929), concerned the developments in English vowels. The chapters on consonants, left incomplete by Luick at the time of his death, were finished and published by his students, Wild and Koziol (Luick 1940). The monograph was, in Wełna's (2010: 2491) estimation, "an invaluable source of information on how English pronunciation evolved through centuries both in the standard speech and in dialects". It is the book that became the source of inspiration for Wełna's monograph *A Critical Survey of a Historical Phonology of English Vowels (with special reference to K. Luick's Historische Grammatik der englischen Sprache)* (1987), the achievement that granted him a habilitation degree.

This publication is Wełna's next important contribution to the field of English historical phonology. In the preface, he explains that Luick's grammar was chosen as "the only uniform, detailed and comprehensive study covering the whole history of English" which contains "numerous pioneering theories of English phonological change" (Wełna 1987: 9). As the title suggests, Wełna is far from being uncritical of Luick's ideas. He carefully examines Luick's hypotheses, comparing them objectively to those of other scholars (Dobson, Jordan, Mossé, etc.) and juxtaposing them with historical data. There is open criticism for what he considers overcomplexity in some of Luick's ideas. For instance, regarding the development of /ü/, he finds fault with Luick's account asserting that the sound changed into /üü/ during the Great Vowel Shift and then to /iu/, resulting in the Early Modern English diphthong /iu/ (as in *new*). This explanation is rejected by Wełna as following from a misinterpretation of the data found in 17<sup>th</sup> century dictionaries and including a very unlikely stage of /üü/. Instead, Wełna opts for the hypothesis that fronting of /u:/ or its diphthongization occurred via the insertion of a glide. The analysis of Luick's theories reveals features that are later conspicuous in many of Wełna's studies: a detailed examination and comparison of the previous hypotheses on the subject postulated in linguistic literature, cautiousness towards any explanation that lacks evidence from the historical data, rejection of unnecessarily complicated explanations, and belief that a change should not be examined in separation from other developments. *Historische Grammatik* is also the subject of an article from 2008, which focuses on the last part of the book devoted to consonants. Here Wełna (2008a: 83) attempts to explain the "undeservedly lukewarm perception" the instalment was met with. As previously, he praises some theories and criticizes others.

The impact of Luick's work does not end with the texts about the monograph but remains powerful in most of Wełna's phonological research.

The two above-mentioned publications draw the reader's attention to various phonological processes tackled by Luick but often in an unsatisfactory way. On perusing the list of titles by Wełna, it becomes evident that those were the developments he found intriguing and worthy of examination. Hence, his future articles discussing:

- the process of *e*-raising,
- changes affecting vowels in the following contexts:
  - unstressed syllables,
  - velar fricatives,
  - the liquid *-r*,
  - nonprimary homorganic clusters,
- developments of English diphthongs,
- changes affecting consonants including
  - (de)spirantisation,
  - the loss of the semivowel /w/,
  - the elimination and epenthesis of stops,
  - voicing and devoicing of obstruents, and
- the processes of metathesis and geminate simplification.

### 2.3 Contribution to historical phonology

While Wełna's monographs discuss the inventory of English phonemes and chief phonological rules in all historical periods, his articles are typically focused on minor changes including irregular developments. Such studies are highly valuable since they complement historical grammars, which generally do not devote much space to such peripheral issues. Note also that, apart from a few (typically early) theoretical publications (e.g. 1980b, 1986a, 1990a), the articles are based on data that come from historical dictionaries and/or electronic texts corpora. Among the latter, Wełna's preferred choice has been the *Innsbruck Corpus on Middle English Prose*, which contains texts from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. What makes it his favourite source is the completeness of the texts collected and the fact that they represent all major Middle English dialects. The additional advantage is that prosaic texts are believed to contain a more natural language than poetry and hence those data are a reliable illustration of language changes. This, however, is by no means the only corpus Wełna has drawn data from; he has also based papers on the *Helsinki Corpus* (2002d, 2005b) and, whenever data from

poetry were relevant, completed the picture with material from Chadwyck-Healey *Literature Online Corpus* (2006a, 2008ab). The main advantage of studies based on data is obviously the comfort of drawing conclusions that are well-grounded. Wełna has typically used such historical material for verification of the hypotheses postulated earlier, producing articles that mostly dealt with the identification of temporal and areal conditioning of various linguistic changes.

Thematically the phonological articles by Wełna can be grouped into five major categories collecting texts discussing (a) changes in a single word or groups of words, (b) changes of particular sounds, (c) insertion or a loss of a sound, (d) relation between spelling and pronunciation, and (e) rhymes and stress in poetry.

## 2.4 Changes in a single word or groups of words

The texts in the first category discuss developments in single words, such as those involved in the change from *macode* to *made* (2015), from *ich* to *I* (2014a), and *wyrcan* to *work* (2017a), as well as in groups of words where the sequences *weor/wyr/wor* underwent levelling (2006a) and those in which the vowel /e/ underwent raising in the context of a nasal (2005b). In the first study here (2015), the absence of forms illustrating the change  $k > g > \gamma > w > u$  (i.e. \**magde*, \**mawde* and \**maude*) leads Wełna to the solution suggested by Wright – Wright (1928: 41), who derive the PDE form *made* via OSL (> *mākede*), the loss of intervocalic *k* (> *mā(ə)de*) and the elimination of schwa (> *māde*). An analysis of the distribution of the 1sg pronoun in Middle English (2014a) forces Wełna to conclude that the change from *ich* to *I* was the result of several distinct factors: phonological (the misanalysis of the final affricate as occurring within a sandhi context), orthographic and functional (the awkwardness of the one-letter word spelt with a small *i*) and sociolinguistic (the tendency to capitalize the pronoun to emphasise the status of the author). This is a perfect illustration of Wełna's openness of interpretation – his work is not limited to the arguments from one field but he is always willing to look for the reasons for certain changes both in linguistic and extralinguistic areas. The last of the one-word texts establishes the distribution of the two types of forms of the verb *wyrcan* 'to work' (2017a): the conservative ones with the rounded vowel /y/ and palatalization, and the innovative ones with /o/ and the velar /k/, which, as the data show, were in use mostly after 1520.

The impact of labials on a following vowel is also the subject of the article on levelling of the *weor*, *wyr*, and *wor* sequences (2006a). The examination of Old and Middle English poetic texts allows the author to confirm that it "was not a chronologically uniform process" but "a sequence of individual developments" (Welna 2006a: 425). He also discovers that the first word to be affected was *sweord* followed by items with the sequence <weorþ/ð->. The last publication in this group addresses the problem of the change of /e/ in the context of a nasal (2005b), the development responsible, among others, for the PDE pronunciation of *England*, *ink*, or *finish*. After examining material from dictionaries and corpora, Welna draws the conclusion that the change was active from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He also identifies the Southwestern region as the dialect area where that process was initiated. This, he claims, is one of the arguments in favour of his hypothesis that "peripheral sound changes were initiated in the west of England, spreading to the adjacent areas" (Welna 2005b: 315).

## 2.5 Changes of particular sounds

The analysis of developments of the front vowel /e/ is one of the leading themes of the studies belonging to the second group, i.e. those addressing changes of particular sounds. Among 15 articles on vocalics and consonants, four focus on the modifications of /e/. The context that seems to be of particular interest to Welna is that of the liquid *r*. He devotes three papers (1999b, 2002bd) to the problem of lowering of /e/ to /a/ (as in *bern* > *barn*), the change which, he argues, is evidenced already in Old English and continues in the Early Middle English period. And while his evidence supports other scholars' findings concerning the Northern origin of the process, Welna argues against the hypothesis that the lowering was first attested in the speech of the lower class and then transferred to the language of higher classes (Welna 1999b). He was also first to devote a whole study to the problem of *e*-lowering in French loanwords (Welna 2002b) revealing the extent to which such items exhibited the workings of the rule. Apart from *e*-lowering, he also examined the reverse of the change (Welna 2002d), i.e. the restoration of the sequence /er/, which, he claims, was not a phonological process. The pronunciation was typical of educated people acquainted with Latin words that contained the /er/ sequence. From thence the pronunciation spread to the lower classes eliminating the /ar/ variants from their speech. The final *e*-oriented publication is from 2004 and discusses *e*-raising in Early



Middle English. This change of /e:/ into /i:/, Wełna argues, took place much earlier than suggested by historical grammars – Wełna dates it to the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century – and affected items in which the vowel in question was followed by *-r*.

Wełna also studies developments of new phonemes in English. One of his earliest papers (1978b) discusses the merger of /i, u, e/ followed by /r/ into the central vowel /ə:/, a new phoneme in English. Its development is attributed to the necessity of avoiding the confusion between pairs of words such as *sir* and *seer* – here the shortening of the initial element in a diphthong eliminated the distinction between /iə/ (in *sir*) and /i:ə/ (in *seer*) and would lead to the merger of such pairs, which was prevented by the appearance of the new phoneme /ə:/. His second study of novel phonemes (1997a) was written in response to the publication of the new *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary*, in which the symbols /i/ and /u/ appeared. Wełna examines the words transcribed with those symbols and points at inconsistencies in their usage, coming to the conclusion that the introduction of such symbols “before the new vowel attains the status of the phoneme seems premature” (Wełna 1997a: 99) since this sets a precedent in the usage of subphonemic variants in transcription.

Apart from vowels, Wełna reviews the status of English diphthongs. He strongly advocates the monomorphemic interpretation of diphthongs, providing phonological arguments (1980b, 1990a) in the form of various rules whose operation proves that diphthongs behave like single units. Yet another contribution to the history of vocalics is that presenting the geographical distribution of the monophthongization of /ei/ before /ç/ and /ou/ before /x/ (2009a). The investigation is one of many illustrating Wełna’s fascination in minor contexts of common rules – here the rules discussed produce an input for the well-described Great Vowel Shift. The data are indeed very scant, suggesting only that monophthongization is attested more often in the East Midland than in other dialects. The analysis of peripheral contexts of phonological processes is continued in the publications on Homorganic Cluster Lengthening. Contrary to standard historical publications, which typically mention the main contexts and repeat the most characteristic examples, Wełna analyses the changes in vowels in the nonprimary contexts, i.e. of the velar cluster <ng> (1999a) and the combinations with initial *-r*, i.e. <rd, rl, m, rp, rs> (2000a). In all those contexts vowels show a considerable variation in length. In his investigation, Wełna employs various tools: the accounts of early grammarians, the relationship between phonological rules (especially Old English voicing and Homorganic Cluster Lengthening)

and evidence from spelling, mostly that of Orm, who employed a system of marking the length of vowels. He also faces a hypothesis concerning frequency, which he considers as partly responsible for changes in unstressed syllables (2002c), but in this case, he admits, the hypothesis has drawbacks and the process is better explained in terms of phonological conditioning. Among the texts devoted to the changes affecting consonants are those discussing metathesis (2002a), devoicing (2009b) and (de)spirantization (2005f). None of those processes, Welna concludes, is possible to date with any real precision. Both metathesis and the post-sonorant devoicing of /d/ in past forms are believed to have followed the route of lexical diffusion. The rules of spirantization and despirantization affected consonants in several different periods, each of which had its own characteristics.

## 2.6 Insertion or a loss of a sound

The texts from the third group address the insertion or loss of a sound. These five articles all focus on consonants and discuss the labial *b*, dental *d*, *t*, liquid *l*, and semivowel *w*. The studies concerning stops (2005de, 2014b) examine both the process of their loss and that of their insertion, and attempt at their dating. It is noteworthy that the loss of *b* in homorganic clusters, Welna argues, was initiated in the Old English Southwestern area, again proving the importance of that dialect region for peripheral phonological changes in English. Welna also demonstrates that the loss/insertion of *t* did not exhibit any dialectal bias, whereas the loss of *d* began much earlier than previously assumed and, contrary to the traditional statements, was not initiated in the North. Both the study on the loss of *l* (2007b) and that on the elimination of *w* (2006b) reveal the pattern of lexical diffusion. The author gives lists of the most common words showing how the changes spread from one item to another, beginning with *every* (for the liquid) and *so* (for the semivowel) as the initiators. Characteristically, the elimination of dark *l* proves to have commenced in the western areas.

## 2.7 Relation between spelling and pronunciation

Although in historical studies in general, and phonological in particular, it is difficult to escape spelling usage as fundamental to arguments, though some studies rely on orthography more than others. As regards Welna's

publications, spelling is of special importance to nine articles and one monograph. The book entitled *English Spelling and Pronunciation* was published in 1982 as Wełna's second major work. The publication, designed for students of English, discusses the relation between English spelling and English pronunciation – beginning with vocalics and consonantals, moving on to the problem of prefixes and suffixes, and then finishing with a separate chapter devoted specifically to American English. The author introduces the various patterns in pronunciation: with respect to vocalics, he makes a distinction between the contexts in which the vocalic is followed by (1) a single consonantal (e.g. <a> in *agent*) and (2) at least two consonantals or a single final consonantal (e.g. <a> in *anger*). Further, each of those situations is split into two depending on whether or not the consonant following is <r>. The system takes some getting used to, but once the reader becomes familiar with it, it proves quite effective. The presentation of consonantals is different: each grapheme is accompanied by a list of possible pronunciations which are illustrated with examples, and, of course, special cases are noted in detail. Prefixes and suffixes are specified as stressed or unstressed, and the appropriate pronunciation(s) are followed by examples. Due to such a structure, all forms of a certain prefix/suffix as well as words containing them are put together, which is of great value to people learning the pronunciation. Although the book deals with Modern English pronunciation, unsurprisingly, it also contains a diachronic element in the form of an appendix, which is an overview of spelling and pronunciation in the history of English.

Spelling is an important factor in several other studies by Wełna. Two of them are texts discussing ways of transcribing Chaucer's (1988b) and Shakespeare's (1990b) language. They are overviews of the essential differences in pronunciation postulated by various scholars. These analyses end with illustrations of two types of transcriptions of certain passages – the more conservative and the more progressive. Hence, those contrastive studies are very beneficial for students and others interested in the relevant periods of the history of English. The studies (2011a) and (2014c) treat the spread of new spellings in English: the former concentrates on the pseudo-learned spellings making English words resemble Latin or Greek ones, which, although typically believed to have emerged during Renaissance times, as shown by Wełna, appeared as early as c. 1300, and the latter examines the replacement of <u> by <o>, a novelty which seems to have lacked a consistent orthographic rule. The next paper (2013a) examines how spelling mirrored the loss of word-final velar fricatives - the new spellings

<-ow, -u, -f> replacing the traditional ones with <-h> or, later, <-gh>. In the remaining three investigations, spelling is essential to the phonological analyses. The basis for the identification of whether the initial <h> was pronounced in native and foreign words is the form of the preceding article or pronoun (2021) – in the case of forms such as *a* or *my*, it is assumed that the initial <h> is pronounced (cf. *a house*) if the form is *an* or *mine*, the fricative is presumably silent (cf. *an house*). The main conclusion of this study is that the first signs of the contemporary distribution, i.e. *a* before consonants and *an* before vowels, belong to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. One additional publication uses spelling as evidence for phonological change, and it highlights the cluster /ln/ (2005a), which underwent assimilation and degemination (/ln/ > /ll/ > /l/, as in e.g. *miller* or *elbow*). The operation of the rule finds reflection in orthography in the presence/absence of the nasal, allowing the author to establish the dating of the new forms for the words under scrutiny. The rules seem to have been active for several centuries, between the 9<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

## 2.8 Rhymes and stress in poetry

The fifth group of phonological publications consists of articles whose main subject is the examination of rhymes or stress in poetry. Two such publications are oriented by the works of particular poets. Yet again, these are Chaucer (2000b) and Shakespeare (2016), representatives of Middle and Early Modern English, respectively. The former study (2000b) discusses different stress patterns of native and foreign words employed in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. The data adduced are instances of the same word, which in different places in the work demand different stress patterns (e.g. *man'ere* vs. *'manere*). Here, Wełna concluded that the assignment of stress has to be preceded by a careful analysis of a given metrical foot and versification rules in general. The study devoted to Shakespeare analyzes rhymes in *Venus and Adonis* and attempts to assess them as pure or impure. Obviously, the value of the rhyme is dependent on the assumed pronunciation, which, Wełna remarks, often differs according to the source (cf. also his publication on transcribing Shakespeare (1990b)). The final article exploiting the notion of rhymes is on the loss of the /ei/ - /ai/ opposition (2007a). Here, Wełna notes the immense value of the rhymes of words containing <ei/ey> and <ai/ay> spellings because they suggest a levelling in pronunciation. The analysis of poetry from the *Literature Online Corpus* shows that the change [ei > ai],

initiated in the North, was not finished by c. 1300, as claimed by e.g. Luick, but was still very much in progress then.

## 2.9 Morphology

The number of Wełna's publications devoted to morphology is much smaller than that focusing on phonology, but this does not diminish the importance of his work in this area. Especially since one of those publications is the monograph *English Historical Morphology*, which, at the time of its publication in 1996, was one of only two such books on the market (the first being that by Bammesberger (1984), which focused mostly on Old English). It remained so for the next 25 years until the appearance of Ringe's *A Historical Morphology of English* (2021), a work, in fact, much less exhaustive.

*English Historical Morphology* was intended to be the second instalment (after *A Diachronic Grammar of English: Part One, Phonology*) in the planned multivolume series *A Diachronic Grammar of English*, but ultimately it was published under a new name. The two monographs, however, do complement each other and form a complete survey of the phonological and morphological changes which affected English and contributed to its present shape. The book, which Voss in his review calls an "admirable" work which "should certainly be applauded" (Voss 1997: 278), discusses all the major morphological processes in the language since c.700 with profuse illustration. Since the Proto-Germanic portion is missing from the treatment, the reader may find the structure of presentation somewhat surprising, especially with respect to the nouns evidenced, which are grouped according to the type of root rather than, as usual, according to the declension (strong, weak, and minor). But again, as in the case of the monograph on phonology, the list of words provided at the end makes searching for relevant sections simple. The sections consist of an introduction to the grammatical category under discussion, a brief description of a given group of words (e.g. strong verbs) at the particular diachronic stage, and then lists of examples illustrating each class. The (sub)sections end with sets of notes explaining all types of irregularities. Quite contrary to the author's assumption in the preface that the book is "primarily designed for the students from the departments of English Philology" (Wełna 1996: 8), the abundance of material and numerous references to theoretical literature make it not just a student handbook, but in fact a genuine resource for scholars of English historical morphology (note that the book is cited by such eminent scholars as

Dance, Minkova, and Fisiak). Admittedly, the scope of the book is limited to inflectional morphology, and does not cover word-formation processes. The discussion includes dialectal features but mostly those that had an impact on the shaping of present-day English, whereas other variants, due to their abundance, are disregarded. Still, the book remains the only thorough study of English historical morphology published to date.

One of the morphological issues that has definitely attracted Wełna's attention is the shift between the two major classes of verbs: strong and weak. His article from 1991 discusses the general historical pattern, i.e. strong verbs developing weak forms. Although the topic seems a well-exploited one, Wełna manages to pinpoint some correlations between the root-structure of the verb and its likeliness to shift that other scholars missed. He notes, for instance, that in Classes 3 and 7 all verbs with a root-final cluster beginning with a liquid (i.e. lC or rC) attached weak endings (Wełna 1991: 133). He also stresses the importance of the levelling of root vowels in the present and past forms of strong verbs, which resulted in the need to find a new marker for the past, which, in turn, led strong verbs to take *-ed*. The other paper on the shift of verbs focuses on the reverse direction, presenting weak verbs that developed strong forms (1997b). Interestingly, apart from listing originally weak verbs that began to be conjugated as strong ones, the study also mentions foreign items which, surprisingly, most often exhibited features of strong verbs. The author concludes that this change cannot be referred to as a "shift", a term reserved for more regular developments that lead to the new contrasts, since it is too rare and its driving force is analogy, the process that leads to a closer resemblance between items. However, Wełna surmises that "a kind of a shift may have occurred in Scottish English, where the ending *-en*, characteristic of strong verbs, came to be very frequently attached to the stems of weak verbs" (1997b: 226-227), this process being the result of the elimination of the prefix *ge-* that used to serve as a distinguishing marker between past and past participle forms. Hence, present-day English forms such as *driven* or *given* illustrate the Northern influence.

It is worth noting that Wełna's works contain but a single examination of word-formation processes, one which addresses the suffix *-ling* as used in Middle English (2013b). The author comments on the small productivity of the element, which was mostly encountered in words that are now obsolete. Like in many articles on phonology, also here the problem is discussed from the dialectal perspective. Such an approach is also adapted in the two remaining texts on peripheral problems: the replacement of *ēode* by *went* (2001) and the distribution of the variants of the numeral *two* (2012b).

Interestingly, the reasons Wełna postulates for the changes discussed are not morphological. For *ēode* replacing *went*, he seeks functional reasons: since the number of variants of *ēode* was very high (more than 30 forms), its substitution by *wente* was a matter of economy and an attempt to avoid confusion. As regards the numeral *two*, the difference between *tway/twain* and *two* no longer denoted a contrast in gender and “began to symbolise a lexical contrast (conservative TWAIN/TWAY vs. standardised TWO)” (Wełna 2012b: 127).

Although the actual number of publications in historical morphology is not great, the quality of those works, and the recognition that they have received, leaves no doubt that Wełna is widely regarded as an expert in that field. This is best confirmed by the fact that he was invited to contribute to the two-volume comprehensive overview of all major aspects of the history of English, published by De Gruyter (ed. Bergs and Brinton 2012a), as an author of the section on Middle English morphology. The main focus of the chapter is post-Conquest inflectional morphology, especially the decay of inflections and the generalizations of markers still employed today (e.g. plural *-s*). Characteristically, the changes are presented against the background of dialectal variation.

### 3. Other works

As stated above, in the early stages of his scholarly career, Wełna concentrated on contrasts between Polish and English. This interest resulted in two lexical studies: “Some Polish agent substantives and their equivalents in English” (1976a) and “Deceptive words. A study in the contrastive lexicon of Polish and English” (1977a).

The first article is an important contribution to the early studies of word-formation processes in Polish. At the time of the publication of the paper, as Wełna points out, apart from a few general reviews of word-formation, there was “no full structural description” (Wełna 1976a: 83) of this process in Polish. In his investigation, Wełna thoroughly examines the structural differences between Polish agent suffixes (*-ista/-ysta*, *-ik/-yk*, *-ant/-ent*, *-ator*) and their English equivalents. In English there are many examples of equivalent agent nouns with similar suffixes (cf. P *antagonista* – E *antagonist*, P *katolik* – E *catholic*, P *emigrant* – E *emigrant*), but numerous forms have different (non-related) agent suffixes (e.g. P *planista* – E *planner*, P *kryminalista* – E *criminal*). The study emphasizes that grapho-phonemic

similarity between Polish and English agent noun suffixes, especially in forms with common etymological stems, may result in potentially incorrect translations. For instance, a Polish learner might form the following incorrect English agent nouns: P *futbolista* > E \**footballist* (for *footballer*), or P *botanik* > E \**botanic* (for *botanist*).

The problem of misleading similarity between Polish and English words is continued in Wełna's study of false cognates, or, as he calls them, *deceptive words*. The text deals with the "lexico-semantic interference" resulting from "the grapho-phonemic similarity of the stems" found in pairs of words of the two languages (Wełna 1977a: 75). Earlier literature proposed a number of labels for such examples, e.g. *heteronyms* (Schach 1951), *synonymous diamorphs* (Haugen 1956), *deceptive cognates* (Lado 1957), *false friends* or *misleading words*. However, Wełna introduces the term *deceptive word*, which he defines as "a word in the lexicon of some language which exhibits easily identifiable grapho-phonemic similarity to a word (words) in another language. The resemblance is accompanied by either partial correlation in the meaning or by the absence of any direct semantic correspondence" (Wełna 1977a: 76). Contrary to Lado's (1957) *deceptive cognates*, i.e. "words that are similar in form but mean different things", Wełna's term has a wider scope, as it includes (i) words characterized by no semantic correspondence (cf. Lado's *deceptive cognates*), e.g. E *fatigue* 'weariness' : P *fatyga* 'trouble', (ii) lexical items with some degree of semantic overlap, e.g. E *platform* : P *platforma* (and P *peron*), and (iii) words whose meanings correlate only partially, i.e. "can be rendered by its partner but the reverse is confined only to part of the meanings" (1977a: 74), e.g. P *fikcja* : E *fiction*, but E *fiction* : P *fikcja* (and P *beletrystyka*). The study reveals that in the first two groups of *deceptive words* examined, i.e. groups (i) and (ii), lexico-semantic interference is always present and, obviously, may disturb communication between speakers of Polish and English. As for the third group, the degree of lexico-semantic interference depends on the directionality of the translation. Thus, if we take a pair of words (e.g. E *fiction* > P *fikcja*) in which the source item has a wider range of meaning than the target item (E *fiction* 'sth. imagined, invented' and 'type of literature' and P *fikcja* 'sth. imaginary, invented'), then the possibility of interference is much higher than in the reversed situation, i.e. P *fikcja* > E *fiction*.

The second important group of Wełna's articles concentrates on gender assignment to loanwords. Particular attention is put on the cases of loanwords from languages with gender systems other than that of the target language. In the first of his studies, "Gender determiners in American English" (1976b), which examines loanwords from American and Canadian



English in languages of immigrants from Europe, Wełna introduces a method of structural description of the reasons for gender assignment. The decisive role in the process, he believes, is played by *gender determiners* (a term found in Haugen (1969) but not defined there), that is semantic or formal features of “an L<sub>1</sub> noun undergoing the importation which gives rise in the mind of the speaker of L<sub>2</sub> to associations indicating some concrete gender, masculine, feminine, or neuter” (Wełna 1976b: 96). Semantic determiners are based on associations concerning meaning: e.g. natural gender of L<sub>1</sub> is continued in L<sub>2</sub> as a grammatical category (cf. AmE *daddy* (male) > Ger. *der daddy* (masculine)). Formal determiners rely on structural similarities, e.g. AmE *army* upon entering German is feminine because of its similarity to Ger. *die Armee* (feminine), which is structurally similar to but not synonymous with the English term.

The structural method for explaining the process of gender assignment is also used in two other of Wełna’s publications (1978a and 1980a). The former reveals the reasons for the assignment of complex gender to loanwords from Latin and Old Icelandic on their entering Old English, whereas the latter explains, among other things, the tendency to simplify grammatical gender in Old English loanwords. Wełna’s works on gender assignment are often cited as important contributions to gender (assignment) studies, cf. the works by Jones (1988), Kilarski (2013), Corbett (1991), Thornton (2009) and Ringe (2021).

Years later Wełna turned his attention to the investigation of the rivalry between selected lexical items in Middle English. Three publications (2009c, 2011b, 2014d) concentrate on the competition between the adjective *bad* and its Middle English synonyms *evil* and *ill*. The analysis, based on an examination of the chronological and regional distribution of the terms, allows for the formulation of important conclusions. By the end of Middle English (c. 1500) the adjective *bad*, which was prevalingly used in contrastive phrases like *good and/or bad*, was not as frequently used as the other two lexical items. Thus, the replacement of *evil* and *ill* by *bad*, and the creation of a new opposition GOOD vs. BAD, must have taken place in Early New English. The scrutiny of the three adjectives also reveals that the increasing popularity of *bad* may have influenced the change of meaning of *ill*, from ‘bad’ to ‘unhealthy’. In addition, Wełna demonstrates that, disputing claims made in earlier studies on *ill*, the adjective did not change its meaning in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century but around 75 years later.

His next lexical contribution (2005c) deals with two high frequency verbs of Middle English: OE *nim* and ON *take*. The examination, based on

a thorough analysis of the distribution of the competing verbs in Old and Middle English dialects, reveals that the native form, contrary to *take*, had numerous variant forms and eventually went obsolete in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, though some records are found in non-standard varieties of English down to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Welna also manages to identify the approximate date (i.e. 1330) when the Scandinavian form began to dominate.

Another important paper (2011c) discusses the process of the replacement of Norman French loanwords by those from Parisian French in Middle English. As Welna points out, little attention had been devoted to this change and the previous studies did not provide satisfactory explanations of the fates of the examined Romance forms. Therefore, Welna offers a more detailed discussion of the factors responsible for the replacement of Norman French forms. The study examines the following pairs of words: *leal/loyal*, *real/royal* and *viage/voyage*, where the first form in each pair comes from Norman French. And, as in his earlier works, Welna thoroughly examines the temporal and geographical distribution of the two types of forms. Although not stated explicitly, the list of variant forms of the six forms examined (Welna 2011c: 305) reveals that one of the conditioning factors for the prevalence of Parisian French items was that they did not have as many variant forms as their Norman French equivalents. In addition, as Welna's statistical account shows, the displacement of Norman forms was more advanced in London, whereas in the North older forms (i.e. Norman French) are retained. Thus, the study demonstrates (confirming Diensberg's (1985) hypothesis) that the replacement of the examined forms must have been dialectically conditioned.

The rivalry between native forms and Romance loanwords is also discussed in the paper (2017d) concentrating on two intensifiers: *full* and *very*. Originally (i.e. in medieval English), both items functioned as adjectives ('full' vs. 'true') but soon they underwent the process of grammaticalization and developed intensifier functions. Yet, of the two only *very* retained this function. The establishment of *very* as an intensifier had already been discussed by Mustanoja (1960), who concluded that the competition between *very* and *full* took place at the turn of the Early New English period. In order to verify this finding, Welna conducts a regional and temporal analysis of the use and distribution of the two items in Middle English texts. His statistical data confirm and support Mustanoja's conclusions.

Apart from producing his own research publications, Welna reviewed fifteen important works on historical linguistics. He evaluated, among others, Strang's (1970, reviewed in 1974a) book on the history of the English

language. He was also a reviewer of publications on Old and Middle English grammar by Reszkiewicz (1973, reviewed 1974b), Jordan (1974, reviewed 1977b) and Elmer (1981, reviewed 1983)) as well as monographs on English historical phonetics and phonology by Prins (1974, reviewed 1976c) and Steponavičius (1987, reviewed 1989). Together with Barbara Kowalik, he wrote a review of Pugh's (2013, reviewed 2014e) introduction to the life and works of Geoffrey Chaucer.

#### 4. Beyond scholarly pursuits

The material for this introduction is so abundant that it is hardly possible to do credit to Wełna and all of his publications. The above, we hope, is a worthy summary of the most important contributions he has made to linguistic research. His activity has always been very intense, and he remains a true institution in the area of English historical linguistics in Poland and beyond.

As Professor Wełna's former students and, we would like to believe, present colleagues, we must add a personal note to this piece. We are truly grateful for his constant encouragement and professional advice. We have always been amazed by his profound knowledge of the history of English as well as other areas - apart from being a linguist, Professor Wełna is also an eager reader of classics (including crime stories), an ardent football fan, and a walking encyclopedia of Polish history and Warsaw monuments. Good Professor, we will ever be thankful for your inspiration, and will ever wish you well in your quests.

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Address: ANNA WOJTYŚ, Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw, Dean's Office (room 2.310), ul. Dobra 55, 00-312, Warsaw, Poland.

ORCID code: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5433-8619>.

Address: MARTA SYLWANOWICZ, Institute of Specialized and Intercultural Communication, Faculty of Applied Linguistics, University of Warsaw, room 3.520, ul. Dobra 55, 00-312, Warsaw, Poland.

ORCID code: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5547-4551>.

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