

'En[dj]uring [tʃ]unes or ma[tj]ure [dʒ]ukes? Palatalization in eighteenth-century English: Evidence from the Eighteenth-Century English Phonology Database'

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The palatalization of alveolar consonants before LME /u:/ is still variable and diffusing in PDE. The OED gives several pronunciations for **mature**: e.g. /mə'tʃʊə ~ mə'tjʊə/, but provides only unpalatalized (/dj tʃ/) transcriptions for **endure**, **tune**, and **duke**, despite the common occurrence of palatalized (and yod-dropped) variants in many varieties of British English. Extensive variability is not recent in origin, and we can already detect relevant patterns in the eighteenth century from the evidence of a range of pronouncing dictionaries, e.g. Beal (1996, 1999) notes a tendency for northern English and Scottish authors to be more conservative. She concludes that we require 'a comprehensive survey of the many pronouncing dictionaries and other works on pronunciation' (1996: 379) to gain more insight into the historical variation patterns underlying PDE.

This paper presents preliminary results from such a 'comprehensive survey': the *Eighteenth-Century English Phonology* database (ECEP). Transcriptions of palatalization keywords are compared across a range of eighteenth-century sources in order to determine the internal (e.g. stress, voice, word-position) and external (e.g. prescriptive, geographical, social) motivations for the presence or absence of palatalization. The greater abundance of contextual and sociolinguistic evidence available for these later periods tends to present a fascinating, complex picture.

References

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