OLD ENGLISH <ie>: THAT IS (,)
AN ORTHOGRAPHIC PROBLEM (*NOCH EINMAL*)

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1. What's the problem now?

The West-Saxon Old English use of the graphic sequence <ie> has been the subject of so much controversy (with respect to, for instance, the phonetic quality of the *i*-mutated diphthongs so represented, the signification of <ie> following graphs representing palatal consonants, as well as its putative representation of either monosyllabic or disyllabic phones: see below) that the reader may well sigh at the prospect of yet another foray into its interpretation. For Roger Lass, however, I want to ask a question explicated as the problem to be defined in this section.

The discussion may well start with a version of the summary in Hogg (1992: §5.163) of putative sources of a monosyllabic sequence of segments represented in West Saxon by <ie>:

(i)   Palatal diphthongisation of */e(:)/
(ii) *i*-umlaut of */æɑ, æ̆ɑ̆, io, ĭŏ/ (On Hogg's diacritic for short diphthongs see §2.29.)
(iii) Resolution of hiatus in, e.g., **sī–e* 'be' subj. sg., to monosyllabic *sīe*.

The (long and short) diphthongs putatively represented by WS <ie> did not survive: indeed, they have been assumed to have become obsolete by the time of written Old English. Representative accounts are: "*ie* was merely an archaic spelling even in the earliest extensive W-S manuscripts ... the sound which it represented had become *i*" (Campbell 1959: §39); "it is clear that W-S *ie* had undergone monophthongisation *before* [italics FC] the period of our early W-S manuscripts" (Campbell 1959: §300); "the considerable confusion of spellings

in EWS ... make'it certain that original *ie* had already monophthongized to some kind of high front vowel by the time of these texts, if it was not originally monophthongal" (Hogg 1992: §5.168; on interpretations of <ie> as 'originally' monophthongal see below). Such accounts are echoed in Lass (1994: 68). They imply the use of <ie> in early West-Saxon as a digraph representing a vowel which had already merged with a monophthong represented by <i> (or <y>: see below).

The problem, then, is this. If the diphthong 'represented' by <ie> was already a monophthong by the time of the earliest West-Saxon texts, why did the early West-Saxon orthography contain <ie> at all? (Further, I do not see how a spelling can be 'archaic', as Campbell puts it, in the earliest writings). How was it that a spelling system was devised to include a representation for a non-existent phoneme (or rather, given contrastive vocalic length for Old English, two phonemes)? We could simply (if hubristically) suggest that the descriptions cited above are wrong, and that <ie> was not redundant. But, as these descriptions suggest, certain West-Saxon spellings, notably back-spellings, are interpretable as evidence for the redundancy. Whatever the phonetic quality of early West-Saxon <ie>, forms such as <hiene> acc. sg. masc. 3 pers. pronoun, <hiera> gen. pl. 3 pers. pronoun, <hieder> 'hither' (see, e.g., Campbell 1959: §§300, 703), with etymological /i/, surely confirm that whatever <ie> might have represented had, at least in contrastive terms, become equivalent to whatever <i> represented (or <y> in the neighbourhood of a labial consonant and /r/: see Hogg 1992: §5.166, where other contexts, as well as occasional back spellings of <ie> for etymological /y(:)/ are also noted). And the account of another source of <ie> spellings in Hogg (1992: §5.113), namely 'Palatal Umlaut', would confirm this. As the result of this post-textual pandiatopic monophthongisation and raising before (what must have been) palatal allophones of /x/, "the diphthongs *eo, io,* and the monophthong *e,* all became *i*" (Campbell 1959: §304). In the next paragraph, Campbell remarks: "[i]t is doubtful whether occasional *ie* spellings indicate that the change *eo/io > i* was through a stage *ie,* or whether they were merely graphic...". The latter is surely confirmed by Hogg's (1992: §5.113) observation that the <ie> forms occur only in early West-Saxon texts, and "presumably are merely instances of <ie> for <i>": in other words, more instances of back spellings providing evidence that <ie> and <i> did not represent contrastive monosyllabic phones. Why, again, was <ie> adopted at all?

2. <ie> and *i*-umlaut

The initial approach to the discussion here is via the putative diachronic sources of possible significations of W-S <ie>. As the major, and least controversial, sound-change producing monosyllabic vowels represented by <ie>, *i*-umlaut

(source number (ii) cited in §1 above) is the first to be addressed. There is, however, considerable uncertainty about the phonetic quality of such vowels: possible diphthongal reconstructions include [i(:)y], [i(:)e], [i(:)ə] (see, e.g., Colman 1985, 1987; Lass 1994: 68-69; Pilch 1970: §15.4; Kim 1984: 28-29). And Hogg (1992: §5.164) suggests that <ie>, as the representation of *i*-umlaut reflexes, never had a diphthongal signification. Invoking the possibility of *i*-umlaut as having exerted a monophthongising influence, at least in Anglian, he suggests that '*ie*' from *i*-umlaut was originally monophthongal: high and front, but not equivalent to /i(:)/ or /y(:)/, "since it develops differently from these sounds in both EWS and LWS" (see further below). Hogg suggests a vowel "intermediate between [i(:)] and [e(:)], say ['i'(:)]", so "<ie> would be a compromise spelling indicating a vowel half-way between those represented by <i> and <e>" (see also Luick 1921: §263: "einem Mittellaut zwischen *i* und *y*"). This account appears to correlate with that of Kim (1984: 28-29), cited by Hogg, inasmuch as Kim has also suggested that "O[ld]WS *ie* could not have merged with either OWS *i* or *y* in EWS, since neither the two *i*'s nor the two *y*'s behave alike". Kim's interpretation of <ie> as representing "the retracted quality of *i*", however, differs from Hogg's, in that it presupposes an original diphthong "at first [ie], then weakened to [iə]".

At first sight, an interpretation of the graphic sequence <ie> as representing a combination of features in a stressed syllabic is not inherently implausible: compare Old English <æ> and <œ>, digraphs which represent respectively, the lowness, unroundness, and frontness of [æ], and the midness, roundness, and frontness of [ø] (and here may also be relevant the interpretation in Hockett 1959 of the digraphs <ea>, <eo>, <io> as representing central monophthongs, rather than diphthongs). But <æ> and <œ> are sequences of graphs representing back and front features respectively, whereas <ie> would represent a combination of front plus front. This, although a fact to be noted, may not matter (though it seems that Old English orthography generally eschewed sequences of graphs representing monophthongal sequences of the same frontness, even where such a device might have served to indicate (phonemic) vocalic length: <ee>, <oo>, for /ee/, /oo/, etc. are rare).

More important is the point about early versus late West-Saxon developments of the *i*-umlauted reflexes of the diphthongs. The fact that these seem to develop differently in early and late West Saxon is not necessarily evidence that they were originally equivalent to neither /i(:)/ nor /y(:)/: rather, as Hogg himself suggests, the different developments are compatible with a view of early versus late West Saxon as different with respect to more than purely diachronic descent (see, in particular, Hogg 1992: §163): a view that undermines Hogg's own objection to an original diphthongal signification for <ie>. Whether the output of *i*-umlaut of West-Saxon diphthongs was diphthongal or monophthongal will

become relevant to the concerns of section 4 below; but it still seems reasonable to agree with the claims that <ie> for *i*-umlauted reflexes of West-Saxon diphthongs was unnecessary by the time of the earliest texts.

3. <ie> and palatal diphthongisation

Controversies over this putative pre-Old English West-Saxon sound change may be summarily dealt with by a statement of two opposing views and their repercussions for an account of the function of <ie> in early West-Saxon. The traditional view (re-argued by, e.g., Hogg 1992: §47-73; Voss 1995), that <ie> after graphs representing palatal consonants signified a diphthong of the same type as that produced by *i*-umlaut of West-Saxon diphthongs, leaves us with the same problem of the redundancy of the digraph by the time of the earliest texts. The view that the <i> of <ie> in such contexts functions as a diacritic to distinguish palatal significations of the preceding consonant graph from velar ones would allow <ie> a place in the orthographic system of early West Saxon (and to some extent in that of late Northumbrian: for a summary see Lass 1994: §3.9.4)

4. <ie> and hiatus-resolution

Hogg's (1992: §5.163) third possible source of a monosyllabic vowel represented by <ie> (§1 above) is resolution of original hiatus. The immediately relevant forms are <sie> (subj. sg. 'be'), <hie> (acc. fem. sg. and nom., acc. pl. 3 pers. pronoun) and <þrie> (nom., acc. pl. numeral), with originally disyllabic /iː/ + /ə/ (Luick 1921: §245; Hogg 1992: §5.146; Colman 1985: 19; other instances of originally disyllabic <ie> are invoked below). Historically, the inputs to hiatus-resolution are sequences of stressed stem-final (and therefore long) monophthongs or diphthongs, followed by an inflectional vowel (Campbell 1959: §§235-236; Hogg 1992: §5.131). Sequences potentially available for resolution are appropriately defined by Hogg (1992: §5.131) in terms of the quality of the unstressed vowel, as specified below:

(1) long monophthong or diphthong + front vowel (examples to follow)

(2) long monophthong or diphthong + back vowel, subdivided as follows:

(2a) front + back, e.g., *bi-o* > *beo* 'I am'
(2b) back + back, e.g., *do-an* > *don* 'do'
(2c) diphthong + back, e.g., *ea-am* > *eam* 'uncle'

Two strategies were available for hiatus-resolution. One was merger of the hiatus vowels with existing diphthongs (i.e., diphthong-types for which a tem-

plate exists, as in (2a)). The corollary of this is that two vowels in hiatus do not become monosyllabic in the absence of an existing template in the dialect in question for a diphthong of the resulting type (see Colman 1988, and the interpretation therein of Luick 1921: §245; Hogg 1992: §5.147). The other strategy was loss of the unstressed vowel (as in (2b) and (2c)). (Campbell's (1959: §234) treatment of this as "absorption of the unaccented vowel" presumably aims at accounting for the lengthening of the stressed vowel in forms such as <slean>, [slæːɑn], historically [slæxɑn] > [slæɑxɑn] (breaking) > [slæɑɑn] (/x/-loss/). But the lengthening is better regarded as compensatory for the loss of /x/ (Colman 1985: 20), followed, or accompanied by, loss of unstressed [ɑ].) Loss of the unstressed vowel was "most regular if the unstressed vowel is front, but subject to variation if the unstressed vowel is back" (Hogg 1992: §5.131). While the unstressed vowel was regularly lost after a long diphthong (as in <slean>, above), there is variation in loss of an unstressed back vowel after a long monophthong. In West Saxon, earlier [doːɑn], [gɑːɑn], [foːɑn] appear regularly as <don> 'do', <gan> 'go', <fon> 'seize' (on non-West-Saxon variation between, e.g., <don> and <doan> see Hogg 1992: §5.143); but the sequence of [uː] + [ɑ] was never resolved: e.g., <buan> 'dwell, build' (Hogg 1992: §5.143). This sequence could not have been resolved by diphthongisation, in the absence of a diphthong-type /uːɑ/. But since the other strategy (loss of the unstressed vowel) operates in, e.g., <fon>, why does it not in <buan> (an "anomalous exception" for Hogg 1992: §5.147)? As hinted in Colman (1988: 151), it seems that sequences with maximal difference in place of articulation are less likely to lose the unstressed vowel: so, [uː] + [ɑ] remains. But [oː] + [ɑ] is susceptible to reduction (as in <fon>), as is (synchronic) [uː] + [ə] in the past part. form of *buan*, <gebun> (even in Northumbrian, where hiatus-inflections are retained longer than elsewhere: Hogg 1992: §§5.132, 5.144; and see the examples in Colman 1988: 151; Luick 1921: § 245 cites <gebuen> as analogically based on <buan>).

Hiatus-resolution involving an unstressed front vowel, however, is achieved by vocalic loss (rather than by diphthongisation) after both diphthongs and monophthongs. Examples from Hogg (1992: §5.132, 134) include WS <feos> gen. sg. 'cattle, fee', [feːos] < [feːoəs] < [feoxəs], Anglian <fes> [feːs] < [feːəs] < [fexəs] (smoothing) < [feoxəs]; and pandiatopic <dry> 'magician', [dryː] < [dryːi] (*i*-umlaut) < [druːi] (Irish loan). As Hogg (1992: §5.146) comments: "the hiatus sequence *i-e* should have been resolved by the loss of the unstressed vowel". And in early West Saxon, <i> does appear for hiatus <ie> (e.g., <hie> / <hi>); in late West Saxon, <ie> is frequently replaced by <y> (see, e.g., Campbell 1959: §703). But as long as early West Saxon has been assumed to have a diphthong represented by <ie> (despite apparent internal contradictions in various grammars, notably in relation to the evidence against such an as-

sumption), the way has been open to assume that a sequence of vowels represented by <ie> but historically in hiatus had, in that dialect, become monosyllabic via merger with an existing diphthong-type. Hogg (1992: §5.147) argues that "in WS at least, diphthongization normally did take place when that was a method for resolving hiatus". The question is, whether diphthongisation was a 'method' available to disyllabic <ie>.

Hogg (1992: §5.146) suggests that "[t]he most obvious interpretation" is of West-Saxon resolution of hiatus by diphthongisation to the (*i*-umlauted) sound represented initially by <ie>. By merging with the sound represented by <ie>, the 'resolved' diphthong shared its subsequent developments. So <hi> would represent the normal development of the diphthongal significations of <ie> in early West Saxon to the monophthong represented by <i>, as in <hiran> / <hieran> 'hear'. For late West Saxon, <ie> would be expected to merge with the significations of <y>, as in <hyran> (Hogg 1992: §5.163). This is apparently testified to by the predominance of <hy> and <sy> in the *Homilies* of Ælfric and Wulfstan (Hogg 1992: §5.146; cf. §5.167 n.1). But merger of 'hiatus <ie>' with 'umlaut <ie>' would still not account for the presence of <ie> in the earliest texts, since the merged hiatus sequence would have monophthongised, along with the umlaut reflex, before documented Old English.

A further problem arises from Hogg's claim that <ie> represents an original monophthong from *i*-umlaut, different from existing /y(:)/ and /i(:)/. If this is right, then the development of the vowels in hiatus must have been to the same monophthong. There would have been no existing diphthong of a type created by diphthongal resolution of <ie>: no template with which the original hiatus sequence could merge. The output then would have been not just resolution of hiatus, but (simultaneous?) monophthongisation of the resulting diphthong.

If, on the other hand, the reflexes of the *i*-umlauted diphthongs were at first diphthongal, then resolution of hiatus in, e.g. <sie>, must have been to a diphthong of the same quality. But even for those who maintain that the pre-Old English diphthongs *i*-mutated to original diphthongs (long and short, represented by <ie>), the phonetic quality of the diphthongs is controversial (see §2 above). Therefore, once again, it is not immediately obvious that a sequence of disyllabic /i:/ + /ə/, as in <sie>, necessarily had a phonetic template with which to merge, via resolution of hiatus. But let us suppose a phonetic quality of [i(:)ə] for the long and short diphthongs.

Hiatus resolution via diphthongisation necessarily involves merger with only the long diphthong. Short vowels in hiatus represented by <ie> cannot include a stem vowel (which, as stressed-syllable-final, must be long). In <lufie> 1 sg. pres. indic., <lufien> pl. subj. 'love', for instance, the <i> represents a short vowel (see §5 below on morphological analysis and stress-assignment for this <i>). The sequence here represented by <ie> could not merge with the short

(mutated) diphthong in, for instance, <fierd> (interpreted at present as [iə]), given the ban in (Old) English on diphthongs in syllables not fully stressed (see, e.g., Colman 1985: 21). I have not located any reference, in discussions of hiatus-resolution, to the post-stem <ien> sequence; but Campbell (1959: §201.3. fn.2) on verbal stems plus <en> would implicitly confirm hiatus in this instance.

In word-medial position the hiatus sequence /i:/ + /ə/, as in the plural subjunctive form <sien> would, arguably, merge with the long (mutated) diphthong represented in a form such as <hieran>. But there may be a problem with the word-form-final /i:/ + /ə/ in <hie>, <sie>, <þrie>. It is historically predictable that diphthongal inputs to *i*-umlaut should not occur word-finally; and therefore that <ie> for *i*-umlauted diphthongs should not appear in this position. This may be extrapolated from, e.g., Campbell (1959: §120), on the origins of West Germanic diphthongs, and from the observation that the pre-Old English breaking diphthongs were conditioned by a consonantal coda. If this is right, then the historical developments might have resulted in a synchronic phonotactic constraint, whereby [i:ə] could not occur word-finally. *I*-umlauted [i:ə] had defective distribution, in that, unlike other long diphthongs ([æ:ɑ] in <ea> 'river', [e:o] in <feo> dat. sg. 'fee'), it could occur only word-medially. This observation may mitigate the force of arguments in favour of diphthongisation of /i:/ + /ə/ in a form such as <sie>.

But even if hiatus-resolution via merger with diphthongs is accepted, then if such resolution produced something identical with the *i*-umlauted diphthongs represented by <ie>, once again, as suggested by the back-spellings cited in §1 above, <ie> is redundant. So we are brought back to the question of what is <ie> doing there?

5. <ie> and morphology

The preceding section raised some (primarily) phonological problems associated with hiatus resolution via diphthongisation of original disyllabics represented by <ie>. This one invokes (overtly) the morphological structures associated with the relevant forms, and attempts (albeit inconclusively) to relate the orthographic and phonological behaviour of the latter to morpho-phonological contexts and to lexical semantics.

That at least original hiatus between /i:/ and /ə/, represented by <ie> in <hie>, <sie>, <þrie> is so commonly assumed, accords with a morphological analysis of the /ə/ here as realising a morphological suffix: thus, each of the two vowels functions as the syllabic in a discrete part of the word-form structure: /i:/ in the stem, e.g., {si}, and /ə/ in the inflection {ə}. The same analysis applies to <lufie>, <lufien> (§4 above). Although here the <i> is not part of the stem, its function is morphologically salient: as a syllabic representing a

class marker ({i}) of (non-past forms of) weak 2 verbs (on the morphological status of, and degree of stress assigned to this {i} see Colman (1994). The <e> / <en> here represent inflectional suffixes ({ə} / {ən}): compare, for instance, infinitive <lufian>, where <ian> represents {i} plus infinitive inflection {an} (see also Colman 1985: 21).

Therefore <ie>, as a sequence of graphs representing a sequence of morphologically discrete syllabics, was necessary to the orthographic system of early West Saxon: for the same reason that the system needed, for instance, the sequence <ia>. A morphological analysis intimates an answer to the question posed in §1 above: why did early West-Saxon orthography adopt the graphic sequence <ie>? If the <e> represents an inflectional suffix, its absence can be interpreted as evidence of morphological loss. Specifically, <si>, <hi> for <sie>, <hie> represent loss of {ə}. The claim, then, is that morphologically complex <ie> was not resolved by diphthongisation. Rather, hiatus resolution was effected by the alternative strategy: that of unstressed vowel loss, as witnessed by the <i> and <y> forms cited in §2 above.

Late WS <hy> / <hi> may similarly be interpreted, but in the additional light (or obscurity) of late West-Saxon alternations of <i> and <y> for the etymological unrounded and rounded vowels respectively (as suggested in Colman 1988: 150). Various accounts of the significance of such alternation suggest definable contexts for unrounding of /y(:)/ and rounding of /i(:)/. Examples include Campbell (1959: §316, for suggested contexts for unrounding, and §318, where rounding is claimed "in the neighbourhood of labials and before r") and Hogg (1992: §§5.170–5.175, where the alternation is interpreted in terms of vowel-laxing "in a number of environments", in an account invoking a complex set of sub-phonemic front vowel phones). Were the alternation phonologically predictable, the result would simply have been lexical re-distribution of /i(:)/ and /y(:)/. But the disparate natures of the environments described call into question such predictability (and supra-segmental as well as segmental contexts are invoked: low-stress is claimed to promote rounding: see, e.g., Hogg 1992: §5.170). Moreover, what is one man's phonological context may be another's analogy: so, Campbell (1959: §318) cites <mycel> as phonologically conditioned, pace Luick 1921: §285 Anm.2, who attributes the rounded vowel to analogy "unter dem Einfluß des Bedeutungsantipoden lytel 'klein' und vielleicht von an. mykill". It may be that the late West-Saxon alternation between <i> and <y> intimates a context-free merger (and see Campbell 1959: §317 on alternation in some late West-Saxon manuscripts "where there is nothing to cause rounding"). But whatever the signification of <y> and <i> (whether there has been a merger, or merely lexical redistribution), late WS <hi> / <hy> may be interpreted as evidence of loss of inflectional {ə}, leaving only the etymological stem vowel /i:/, itself available for representation by <y>.

A claim invoking inflectional loss for ninth-century West Saxon may not at first seem tenable, given other forms providing evidence of the same declensional categories expressed by the inflectional {ə} in <hie>: acc. sg. fem. (e.g., <giefe>, and, as also in <þrie>, nom./acc. pl. (e.g., <wine>: Campbell 1959: §§585, 599), or conjugational categories as in <sie> (e.g. 1 sg. subj. <lufi(g)e>: Campbell 1959: §754). But the three forms at issue, with long (stem-internal) monophthongs, fulfill the morpho-phonological condition for hiatus-resolution via loss of the unstressed vowel identified in §2 above (and {ə}-loss does not occur after short /i/: so, although <ie> for stressed i-umlauted short vowels is replaced by <i>, <lufien> is not replaced by *<lufin>). In this light, the question then becomes, not why the schwa was lost, but why was it retained so long: i.e., into the post-textual period of Old English: compare pre-textual loss in, e.g., <feo>, <feos>, <fes> §4 above).

Unstressed-vowel-loss was associated in §4 (above) both with the backness of the unstressed vowel (i.e., non-back vowels were more susceptible to loss), and with maximal difference in place of articulation of the stressed and the unstressed vowel (identified as promoting retention of the latter, as in, e.g., <buan>, [bu:an]). In a framework of Dependency Phonology, the articulatory gestures of the sequence [i:] + [ə] can also be classified as maximally different, in terms of unitary features, specified as {i}, {u}, {a}, and {ə} (see, e.g., Lass 1984: 277). (Although what is represented here as [ə] is the reflex of a merger or 'reduction' of historically distinct front unstressed vowels, the continued contrast between [ə] and the unstressed back vowels, [u], [o], [ɑ], prompts the adoption of {ə} as a primitive, rather than the specification of [ə] as a non-contrastive reduction vowel, lacking any underlying articulatory specification: see Anderson – Ewen 1987: 218-220.) In, for instance, WS pre-OE [fe:oəs], the schwa, uniquely specified as {ə}, follows a (non-syllabic) segment ([o]) whose characterisation combines {u} and {a}; in Anglian pre-OE [fe:əs], it follows a syllabic segment ([e:]) combining {i} and {a}. In such instances, the unstressed vowel is lost. In [bu:ɑn], the unstressed back vowel, unitarily characterised as {a}, follows a syllabic vowel ([u:]) which is also unitarily characterised: as {u}. Here, the unstressed vowel remains. Now, if {ə} represents a unitary feature, then the sequence of [i:] + [ə] is analogous to that of [u:] + [ɑ]: each vowel is unitarily characterised, but in this instance as {i} and {ə}. The following generalisation suggests itself: in pre-Old English, hiatus sequences with a long (stressed) vowel and a non-identical unstressed vowel (cf. eam §4: (2c) above) were not resolved by vowel-loss if the articulatory gestures of the stressed and unstressed vowels can be unitarily specified (the dative plural form <cuum> 'cow', Hogg 1992: §5.143 suggests that even identical vowels need not be subject to resolution).

Such a generalisation, however, would be contradicted by <gebun>, alongside <gebuen> (§4 above), with an original sequence characterised as {u} and {ə}. Perhaps, once again, morphological salience plays a part: the [ə] in <sie> etc., and the [α] in <buan> are reinforced by their inflectional role. Loss of [α] in the infinitve <buan> would confuse the form with the past participle. Present-participle forms of this verb consistently retain the schwa: <buend>, <buendum> etc.

This returns us, however, to the claim that in <hie>, <þrie>, <sie>, resolution did occur in post-textual West-Saxon, via unstressed vowel loss. If [ə]-loss in these forms did not happen, along with other instances of [ə]-loss, in pre-Old English, why could it happen in ninth-century Old English, earlier than other instances of inflectional [ə] (cited above)? What is it about these forms that allows the loss of a morphologically salient vowel?

The three forms in question (<hie>, <þrie>, <sie>) represent words of light lexical yield: they all belong to closed-class grammatical (syntactic) categories. As a pronoun form, <hie> has no lexical semantic content: it represents no more than a set of inflectional morphological categories: person, number, case (and gender, for the singular). As a numeral, <þrie> shares properties with pronouns: for instance, it cannot be modified. The verb 'be' is atypical of its notionally-based class: it does not denote an action, and its complements are typically subject-predicatives. The three forms therefore share a property with proper names, in that their function is primarily deictic or referential (Colman 1992: Chapter 1, §4). Lacking, like proper names, the denotational range of common words, they are free to behave differently from the latter with respect to phonology and morphology.

Arguably, <ie> could be seen to have a place in West-Saxon orthography, despite its redundancy with respect to umlauted diphthongs: it could have been (a) a sequence of diacritic plus vowel graph following graphs respresenting palatal consonants, and (b) a sequence representing disyllabic vowels, the second of which was lost in certain forms by, or after, the ninth century. But this does not account for the frequency of <ie> for reflexes of i-umlauted diphthongs, which, despite the back spellings cited in §1 above, suggests that the scribes got it etymologically 'right' a lot of the time. Could <ie> have been adopted early enough to capture a residue of the umlauted diphthongs - and re-inforced by a need for <ie> for morphologically salient hiatus syllabics?

Of course, the framework in which such questions are asked may not be appropriate. In a non-phonemic analysis, monophthongal versus diphthongal reflexes of the umlauted diphthongs might be seen as variables, allowing for 'leaks' such as unetymological <hiene> (§1 above). Back spellings might not be as conclusive as has been claimed, for monophthongisation before the time of the earliest texts, of the original diphthongs represented by <ie>.
6. Apologia

This paper has attempted to identify a problem arising from recurring accounts of Old English <ie>, and its putative function in West-Saxon orthography. It does not pretend to have an answer; rather it aims to offer to Roger Lass some evidence of gratitude for his inspiration in a common pursuit: that of reconstructing the history of the English language.

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