THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 190: UNION, DIVISION AND UNUSUAL ‘U’

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 190: Union, Division and Unusual U. This time, as we work our way through the story of English, we're going to turn our attention to the decade of the 1640s. This decade saw England descend into Civil War. And it was a war that had far-reaching consequences – not only for the British Isles, but also for North America – and for the English language. At the same time that political divisions were leading to war in England, there were also new divisions within English itself. The letter U was acquiring a new sound – which added a new vowel sound to the phonetic inventory of English. When all was said and done, the letter ended up with four distinct sounds – making it one of the most variable letters in English. So this time, we'll explore those developments.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can sign up to support the podcast and get bonus episodes at Patreon.com/historyofenglish.

Now let's pick up where we left off last time – with the year 1640 and the beginning of a new decade. And let's begin with an interesting book that appeared in that year. It was a collection of proverbs assembled by a poet and writer and priest named George Herbert. Herbert collected proverbs from around the world and featured them in this book, which explains the title of the book. It was called 'Outlandish Proverbs.' Now ***outlandish*** didn't mean 'crazy or incredible or remarkable,' it meant proverbs from near and far. We've actually encountered that word ***outlandish*** before. It literally meant 'outside the land' or 'from another land.' And in this case, it was used for these proverbs because they were collected from places far and wide. An expanded version of the book with additional proverbs was published a little over a decade later.

Now this collection is notable because it includes the first recorded English version of several common proverbs that we still use today. In the book, we find "He that makes his bed ill, lies there." That's the earliest known version of "You've made your bed, now lie in it." We also find this one – "In the kingdome of blindmen the one ey'd is king." Of course, that's the earliest known version of the modern proverb "In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king."

The collection also includes the phrase, "To him that will, waies are not wanting." That's an early version of "Where there's a will, there's a way." And we also find this saying – "Never had ill workeman good tooles." That's the earliest known version of "A bad workman blames his tools."

Again, some of those proverbs are much older than this book, but they were recorded for the first time in English in this collection. In fact, it appears that a copy of this book made its way to the early American printer and publisher – and founding father – Benjamin Franklin. Early in his career, Franklin published a yearly almanac called Poor Richard's Almanack. And several popular proverbs are attributed to that almanac. It turns out that some of those are also found in this earlier collection assembled by George Herbert.

For example, it is often said that Franklin wrote, “A penny saved is a penny earned.” That’s actually a modern version of the phrase. The original quote from Franklin’s almanac was “A penny saved is two pence clear.” But the earliest known version of that proverb in English comes from Herbert’s 1640 collection. His version was “A penny spar'd is twice got.” So we can see that Herbert’s version was very close to Franklin’s version, with both suggesting that a penny saved is worth twice as much. Again, Herbert’s was “A penny spar'd is twice got,” while Franklin’s was “A penny saved is two pence clear.”

Another well-known Franklin quote can also be found in its earliest form in Herbert’s collection. Herbert had this proverb referring to horseshoes – “For want of a naile the shoe is lost, for want of a shoe the horse is lost, for want of a horse the rider is lost.” Ben Franklin’s version extended that proverb to a rider in battle. The version from Franklin’s 1758 almanac is:

> For want of a nail the shoe was lost;
> for want of a shoe the horse was lost;
> and for want of a horse the rider was lost,
> being overtaken and slain by the enemy,
> all for want of care about a horse-shoe nail.

So Franklin’s version extended the proverb to an attack or a battle. And perhaps that is appropriate because George Herbert’s proverb collection included many sayings related to warfare. We find “Warre makes theeves, and peace hangs them.” There was “War encourages opportunists; peace executes them.” There was also “Advise none to marry or to go to war.” We also find, “When war begins, then hell openeth,” which was an early version of “War is hell.” Herbert also includes this one – “It is a great victory that comes without blood.” And there is another proverb in the collection that was eerily relevant to the decade that was about to unfold. We are told that “A wolfe will never make war against another wolfe.” But shortly after that saying was published, the English ignored this sentiment and made war against themselves. It was a war that came about through a series of poor decisions and miscalculations at a time when anger, frustration and paranoia ran rampant throughout the country. Time and again, when one of the parties could have stepped back and sought some type of compromise, they chose instead to plow ahead and force a confrontation. In that environment, war was probably inevitable.

At the end of the last episode, I mentioned the skirmishes that are sometimes called the First Bishops’ War. King Charles had tried to impose religious reforms on the Church of Scotland, which was met with fierce opposition and rioting in Scotland. Charles sent troops there to put down the opposition to his reforms, but little more than a few skirmishes resulted. Charles simply didn’t have the manpower or the money to launch a full-scale invasion of Scotland, which of course, was his home country being both the king of Scotland and England.

At that point, Charles was forced to recall Parliament. After more than a decade of personal rule without the assembly, he decided to reconvene Parliament so it could grant him the funds he needed to wage war. But when the members of Parliament assembled in April of 1640, they weren’t interested in the king’s military plans. They immediately started to complain about every aspect of Charles’s reign which they felt had been illegal and unjust. Not only did the members

show little interest in Charles's campaign in Scotland, if anything, they actually appeared to be more sympathetic to the Scots and than the king himself. After just three weeks, Charles dissolved the parliament because it wasn't willing to go along with his plans. Since it only lasted less than a month, this parliament has become known to history as the 'Short Parliament.'

Despite the political opposition, Charles wasn't willing to give up on his plans in Scotland. So he borrowed money and put together a makeshift army, which was little more that a group of laborers from around the country who were pressed into service and didn't really know how to fight in battle. In August, 20,000 Scottish soldiers crossed the border into northern England. They issued a statement declaring that they were not marching against the English people. They were only there to oppose the people who were trying to impose religious reforms in Scotland. The Scottish army was much larger than Charles's, and they easily routed the king's makeshift forces. It was the first time that the Scots had defeated the English in a major battle in three centuries. This brief conflict in northern England is known as the Second Bishop's War. And it was a humiliating defeat for Charles, which only added to his problems back in England. When news of Charles's defeat reached London, there were actually celebrations in the city. A significant portion of England was now firmly opposed to its king and appeared to be rooting for his defeat.

In trying to create a uniform manner of worship throughout Britain, Charles and his advisors had only created disunion and division.

Now the way I worded that sentence was intentional because it illustrates something very interesting about the English language and something that I want to address at this point in the podcast. Specifically, it's the part where I said that Charles was trying to create "a uniform manner of worship." Notice that I said "a uniform." We have a grammatical rule in English that says we should use the article '***a***' when the following word begins with a consonant, like 'a cat' and 'a dog.' And we use the article '***an***' when the following word begins with a vowel, like 'an apple' and 'an orange.' So if that's the way English is supposed to work, why do we say 'a uniform,' and 'a unit,' and 'a united front,' and 'a utility bill.' All of those words begin with a [u], so shouldn't we say 'an uniform,' and 'an unit,' and 'an united front'? Well, this is one of the rare exceptions to the general rule about the use of the articles ***a*** and ***an***.

The reason why this exception exists is because the 'u' sound at the front of all of those words is not a pure vowel sound. It actually begins with a slight 'y' sound – what we might call a 'y glide.' It's not 'oo' like most other European languages. It's 'yoo.' According to most textbooks, that's the so-called 'long' sound of letter [u] in English. So whereas an institution of higher learning is called an ***universidad*** in Spanish, it's called a ***university*** in English. And that little 'y' glide at the front of the English U makes all of the difference. It's basically a consonant sound at the front of the vowel, so in the same way we say 'a yard' and 'a year,' we also say 'a university' and 'a union.' So when it comes to the articles ***a*** and ***an***, we do look at the beginning of the following word, but it's not the first letter that drives the rule; it's the sound at the front of that word. And in the case of that so-called 'long U,' it begins with that little 'y' sound or 'y' glide at the front which we don't always notice.

Interestingly, the long sound of letter [u] didn't always have that little 'y' glide at the front in English. It was once simply 'oo' like in most other European languages. So people once said 'oonity' instead of ***unity***, and 'ooniversity' instead of ***university***. So why did the sound of the letter [u] change in English? Why did it pick up that little 'y' sound at the front? And when did that change occur? Well, the answer to those questions probably won't come as any great surprise if you have listened to the earlier episodes of the podcast. The change occurred in the early modern period thanks to a combination of the Great Vowel Shift and the French influence on English. But that quick and simple answer belies a complicated process that shaped the sound in English.

Now, I'm going to take you through that process and explain what happened, but you're going to have to stick with me because it involves several moving parts. There were really three specific developments that occurred around the same time in the 1500s and early 1600s that produced the modern 'long' sounds of the letter [u].

First of all, as I noted earlier, the letter [u] was traditionally used to represent the 'oo' sound. That was the so-called 'long' sound of the letter. We still use the letter [u] for that sound in words like ***super***, and ***rule***, and ***illusion*** and so on. And there was also a short version of that 'oo' sound, which was /u/. It was literally pronounced shorter and quicker than the long sound. So linguists call that the 'short U' sound, and of course, we still use the letter [u] for that short sound in words like ***put*** and ***push*** and ***pull***. And if everything had stayed that way, English phonology and spellings would be much simpler today, and they would also be more like other European languages. But in the 1400s, the Great Vowel Shift got underway and changed everything. And that series of vowel shifts is a key part of this story.

During the late 1400s and 1500s, words that contained that long 'oo' sound started to be pronounced differently. That vowel sound changed from /u:/ to /əu/ – and then later changed again to /au/. So during the Old English period, a person's home would have been referred to as a ***hus*** – spelled [h-u-s]. Then during the Middle English period, a new spelling was introduced when scribes adopted the French practice of spelling that 'oo' sound with the letter combination [ou] rather than a simple [u]. Scribes adopted that practice because the letter [u] tended to get lost in the middle of a word with the Gothic script that was used at the time. By putting the letters [o] and [u] together, the vowel stood out in the line of letters using that script. So the spelling went from [h-u-s] to [h-o-u-s]. Then, as the Great Vowel Shift got under way, and people started to pronounce that would differently, /hu:s/ became /həus/. And then after another century or so, the pronunciation shifted again from /həus/ to /haus/ in most standard dialects of English, though some dialects still use the older pronunciations. The word also picked up a silent [e] at the end. So when all was said and done, Old English ***hus*** – spelled [h-u-s] – became Modern English ***house*** – spelled [h-o-u-s-e]. And the same thing happened to convert ***mus*** into ***mouse***, and ***dun*** into ***down***, and ***hlud*** into ***loud***, and ***ule*** into ***owl***, and so on.

So through this combination of spelling change and sound change, something very important happened to native English words. The letter [u] stopped being used for its traditional 'oo' sound, at least as a general rule. And that was the first of the three developments that I alluded to earlier.

Now let's consider the second development. And again, it involves the Great Vowel Shift. As I discussed in the earlier episodes about the Great Vowel Shift, that phenomenon didn't just affect one or two long vowel sounds. It affected all of them. It was like a game of musical chairs. So when one vowel sound shifted to a new sound, another vowel sound moved in and filled the gap that was left behind. So when all of those words with an 'oo' sound in Old English – like ***hus*** – acquired a new vowel sound, a separate group of words took their place and acquired the 'oo' sound that was left behind. And those new words that were experiencing their own vowel shift were the words pronounced with the 'oh' sound. Words that had the so-called 'long O' sound started to be pronounced with the 'oo' sound that was being left behind by those other words. Remember, this was like musical chairs. And many of the words affected by this change were spelled with [oo] to reflect their traditional 'long O' sound. And that's why words like ***moon***, and ***soon***, and ***food***, and ***room***, and so on, have that 'oo' sound today, but are spelled with [oo]. The [oo] reflects how those words were pronounced before the Great Vowel Shift. They were historically pronounced /mo:n/, /so:n/, /fo:d/ and /ro:m/. But during the Great Vowel Shift, they became ***moon***, ***soon***, ***food***, and ***room***. And that was the second notable development in our story.

So let's consider the consequences of all of this. Thanks to these shifting vowel sounds, the 'oo' sound in English generally came to be represented with [oo]. Meanwhile, the letter [u] had stopped being used for that 'oo' sound as a general rule. At this point, the letter [u] still had its short /u/ sound as in ***push*** and ***pull***, but its traditional long sound was taken over by [oo].

So those are the first two developments in our story. And if that was it, the letter [u] might not even have a long sound today in Modern English. But something was happening at the same time as the Great Vowel Shift to give English a new 'long U' sound. And that 'something' was the massive influx of words from French that I've talked about in earlier episodes. A fair number of those French words came in with a new 'u' sound, and that new French sound was the source of the modern 'yoo' sound associated with the letter [u] today.

Now that new French sound wasn't actually 'yoo,' it was /ü/. I've talked about this sound before. It is still common in French and some other European languages. And it was once common in Old English, but it had disappeared during the Middle English period. This /ü/ sound is formed by rounding the lips like you would do if you were making the 'oo' sound, but instead of saying 'oo,' you say 'ee' with those rounded lips. And when you do that, you get /ü/. Again, it isn't considered a phoneme or basic sound of English because we only use that sound when we're pronouncing foreign words that have that sound. And in fact, many English speakers don't even pronounce that sound in those cases because it can be difficult for them to make that sound since it isn't part of the English inventory of sounds. So English speakers tend to modify that sound to the closest sound that approximates it. And in English, that is 'yoo.' And that's what happened in the early modern period as many French words were borrowed into English with that /ü/ sound. English speakers simply modified it from /ü/ to 'yoo.'

In French, that /ü/ sound was usually spelled with a simple letter [u]. So a lot of words with that French sound came into English spelled with a [u]. That includes words like ***use***, ***huge***, ***university***, ***music***, ***usual***, ***acute***, ***fume***, ***universe***, ***union***, ***unite***, ***nude***, ***uniform***, ***cube***, ***unit***, ***unique***, and many others. All of those words are recorded in English by the early 1600s. And all

of those words came to be pronounced with their modern ‘yoo’ sounds as English speakers anglicized those words and converted that French /ü/ sound into ‘yoo.’ And as all of those French words were incorporated into English, that gave English a new long sound represented by letter [u], which of course is its modern ‘yoo’ sound. And since the letter [u] was rarely being used for its traditional ‘oo’ sound in English by that point, that new ‘yoo’ sound became the default sound of the letter in English, and also became the name of the letter. Of course, the letter [u] also retained its traditional short sound as well, which was the /u/ sound in words like ***push*** and ***pull***.

By the way, this little bit of phonetic history explains some interesting contrasts in Modern English. For example, we have the words ***moot*** and ***mute***. ***Moot*** refers to something that is endlessly debatable. It’s an Old English word that went through the Great Vowel Shift. It has the ‘oo’ sound spelled with [oo] just as we would expect. Meanwhile, the word ***mute*** refers to something or someone who is silent or can’t speak. It’s a French word that came into English during the Middle Ages, and it is spelled with a [u], and it has that little ‘y’ glide at the beginning of the vowel sound.

The same thing is true of ***ooze*** and ***use***. ***Ooze*** means ‘to seep or slowly emit liquid.’ It has the ‘oo’ sound, is spelled with [oo] and is an Old English word. Meanwhile, the word ***use*** means ‘to utilize something.’ It’s a French loanword spelled with a [u], and it has that little ‘y’ glide before the ‘oo’ sound.

So those are some common word pairs in English that are distinguished by the presence or absence of that little ‘y’ sound at the front of the vowel. If the word has an ‘oo’ vowel sound that is spelled with [oo], it probably came from Old English and experienced the Great Vowel Shift. If the word has a vowel sound pronounced as ‘yoo’ and is spelled with letter [u], then the word probably came from French. All of that phonetic history is preserved in the modern spellings and pronunciations.

As I have suggested, the development of the ‘yoo’ sound for letter [u] took place in the late Middle English and early Modern English period, so generally speaking, from the 1400s though the 1600s. It was probably a common pronunciation in and around London in the mid-1500s. In fact, that pronunciation is recorded in John Hart’s books on English pronunciation and spelling during the mid-1500s. I talked quite a bit about Hart in earlier episodes because his writings on English pronunciation were so extensive and so precise. And his phonetic spelling system indicates the presence of that ‘y’ glide at the beginning of the vowel in words like ***use***, ***abuse***, and ***acute***. But he wasn’t consistent. Sometimes he indicated the little ‘y’ glide and sometimes he didn’t.

Another clue to the pronunciation of the letter [u] in words during the 1500s and 1600s comes for the use of the articles ***a*** and ***an*** as I noted at the beginning of this discussion. Where an ***a*** appears before a word beginning with the letter [u], we can assume that the word was pronounced like today, as in ‘a university.’ But when ***an*** was used before the word, we can assume that the vowel was pronounced with the more traditional ‘oo’ sound, as in ‘an ooniversity.’

If we peruse the citations for these words in the Oxford English Dictionary, we find mixed results in the 1500s and 1600s, suggesting that some people pronounced the [u] in these words with the older 'oo' sound and some pronounced it with the newer 'yoo' sound. But over the course of the 1600s, the use of the article ***a*** before those words becomes more and more common, suggesting that the modern pronunciation was emerging as the default pronunciation.

And around the current point in our overall story in the 1640s, we have a strong indication that the modern pronunciation as 'yoo' was firmly entrenched. In a book called 'The English Primrose' by a writer and grammarian named Richard Hodges, we get a specific description of the sound of the letter [u]. Hodges specifically noted the letter had two competing 'long' sounds. He distinguished the traditional 'long U' from the newer 'long U,' and he specifically noted that the newer version was pronounced as 'yoo,' which he spelled [yoo].

Hodges also provided some more interesting information about the sounds of this letter, but I'm going to save that discussion for later in the episode.

And one other note before we move on. When Hodges distinguished the 'long' sounds of letter [u], he was acknowledging that the older 'oo' pronunciation without the little 'y' glide at the front still survived in the mid-1600s. And, of course, we still have that pronunciation in contemporary English in words like ***super***, and ***rule***, and ***illusion*** and ***lute***, and so on. Again those are all French loanwords. At one time, the 'u' sound in those words was also pronounced as 'yoo,' resulting in pronunciations like 'syoo-per,' and 'ryool,' and 'il-lyoo-zhun,' and 'lyoot.' But the 'y' glide at the front of the vowel was lost in those words over time, mostly in the 1700s. And that process occurred in a lot of other words as well. Linguists refer to this phenomenon as 'yod-dropping.' And in a sense, it brings us back full circle because the 'u' sound in those words is once again pronounced as 'oo' – the original long sound of the letter [u]. This phenomenon is even more widespread in American English than in British English. I'll deal with this development in more detail in an upcoming episode, but the main point to take away from this discussion is that the letter [u] in Modern English now has two standard 'long' sounds – 'oo' and 'yoo.' The usage varies from word to word and from dialect to dialect.

So that's the 'long' sounds of letter U. What about the 'short' sound of letter U – the /u/ sound of ***put***, and ***push***, and ***pull***. Well, of course, we still have that sound. But we are about to introduce a brand new 'short' sound as well, thereby giving the letter [u] two standard 'long' sounds and two standard 'short' sounds. But I'll cover that development a little later in the episode. For now, we need to return to other developments in the early 1640s.

[MUSIC]

For King Charles, the decade of the 1640s got off to an ominous start. His defeat at the hands of the Scots was humiliating, and many of his own people seemed to be turning against him. Following that defeat, the Scottish army made their camp in northern England. Charles was forced to agree to a truce – a truce that compelled him to pay 25,000 pounds to the Scots. Of course, that was a very large sum of money at the time, and Charles didn't have it. [*SOURCE: Rebellion: Peter Ackroyd, p. 197*]

Given the circumstances – with a Scottish army now stationed in England and Charles owing them a significant amount of money – he had little choice but to recall Parliament once again. But this time, the patience of the assembly had run out, and the frustration of the members boiled over. Parliament was no longer willing to maintain its traditional subservient role. From this point forward, it would try to dictate terms to the king, even to the extent of relegating the king to the junior role in running the country's affairs.

The Parliament that was called late in the year 1640 refused to be dismissed or dissolved by the king. In fact, it would remain in session for nearly 20 years. And that it why it has become known to history as the 'Long Parliament.' And it was the conflict between the Long Parliament and King Charles that led to civil war over the following decade.

Parliament had been angry and frustrated with Charles for a long time, even before he tried to rule without the assembly for a decade. But now, Charles was vulnerable because of the Scottish forces camped in northern England. Without Parliament intervening, the Scottish forces could head south to London, and there wasn't much that Charles could do to stop them. Parliament seized on that vulnerability – and the king's general unpopularity – to begin operating on its own largely independent of the king.

Much of the blame for the king's unpopular polices fell on his main political advisor, Thomas Wentworth, who was the Earl of Strafford, and William Laud, the archbishop of Canterbury. Well, one of the first things that the Long Parliament did was to arrest both of those advisors. To arrest a prominent advisor to the king took a lot of nerve. To arrest the leading church official in England took even more nerve. But Parliament was willing to risk a confrontation with the king. The assembly also began considering a series of wide-sweeping political and religious reforms that would give the assembly complete control over England's finances and also restructure the Anglican Church to remove the traditional power of the bishops. [*SOURCE: Rebellion: Peter Ackroyd, p. 204*]

During this period, each side accused the other of conspiring with England's enemies or rivals. The king accused Parliament of conspiring with the Scots to overthrow him. Meanwhile, Parliament accused the king of conspiring with the king of France to bring in French troops to overthrow Parliament. Remember that the queen of England – Henrietta Maria – was the sister of the French king. She was also Catholic, so she was a repeated target of the Puritans, and there were persistent claims that she was conspiring to overthrow Parliament. These competing conspiracies led to paranoia on each side which also fueled the conflict to come.

In the spring of 1641, Parliament continued to ratchet up the tensions even further by proceeding against the earl of Strafford – the king's political advisor who had been arrested a few weeks earlier. The assembly found him guilty of treason without a formal trial, and he was executed a few days later on May 12.

In July, as the parliamentary reforms proceeded, the assembly made a decision which had far-reaching consequences, so much so that it actually impacted the overall story of English. So let me explain what happened.

The issue concerned an institution in England known as the Star Chamber. It was essentially an appeals court that heard cases involving prominent members of the nobility or other prominent people who were considered too powerful or too influential to be tried in the normal lower courts. It had existed since the late 1400s, but over time, it was accused of abusing its authority. It was routinely used to go after prominent critics of the king or the Anglican Church, and during Charles's reign, it was especially used to go after his Puritan critics. So in July of 1641, Parliament abolished the Star Chamber. Again, that decision had far-reaching consequences.

For purposes of our story, it impacted the printed word in England because, about a decade earlier, the chamber had effectively banned all newspapers – or what it called 'news books' – in the country. Now back in episode 186, I mentioned that the first newspaper appeared in England in the early 1620s. It was essentially just a Dutch news sheet about the Thirty Years' War on the continent that had been translated into English. Well, Spanish and Austrian diplomats in England didn't like the way those news sheets were depicting the war, so they were able to convince the English authorities to ban those news sheets about a decade later in 1632. That ban came through a ruling of the Star Chamber. So for much of the 1630s, during the time when King Charles governed without Parliament, those new sheets were banned or highly restricted in England. But when the Star Chamber was abolished in 1641, all of its proclamations and rulings no longer had any legal effect. So people were once again free to print and publish news sheets in England without fear of censorship or punishment. In fact, the abolition of the Star Chamber led to an explosion of printing shops throughout London. The number of print shops doubled over the course of the following decade. And news sheets and pamphlets were suddenly available all over the streets of London. [*SOURCE: Rebellion: Peter Ackroyd, p. 216-7*]

Those news sheets and pamphlets were a very effective way of spreading the news. As the Civil War got underway in a few months, they were used to inform people about the outcome of each battle – sometimes within twenty-four hours of the battle. The people of England had never received news about a war in almost real time like that before. Very often, short new sheets printed immediately after the battle were followed by longer, more detailed descriptions of the battle a few days later. [*SOURCE: Greenburg, Steven. "Dating Civil War Pamphlets, 1641–1644." The North American Conference on British Studies. Web. 14 March 2015*]

And this mini-printing revolution in England in the 1640s played a significant role in further standardizing English spellings. I've noted in prior episodes how spelling had been somewhat standardized in the 1500s. But there was still some variation. Much of that variation was related to the printing process. Traditionally, most publications had justified margins meaning the left and right margins were straight and vertical. Each line of text ended at the same point. In order to justify those margins, printers would routinely alter the spelling of words to add a few extra letters or to delete them if needed. As I've noted before, a lot of words were spelled with an extra silent [e] at the time for that purpose. If you needed to extend the line, you could add a few silent [e]'s to words. If you needed to shorten the line, you could delete those [e]'s. Along the same lines, consonants at the end of a word were sometimes doubled. So words like 'alphabeticall' and 'beneficiall' were often spelled with double [l]'s at the end. But of course, those extra [l]'s could be dropped to shorten the line. Similarly, vowel letters were sometimes doubled to indicate a

long vowel sound, but they could also be reduced to one vowel letter if the line needed to be shortened.

Well, in the rush to print those news sheets and pamphlets about the Civil War in the 1640s, many printers no longer bothered to justify the lines of text. They just printed each line as it was – often centered on the page. That meant that there was no longer any need to vary the spellings to make the line contain a certain number of letters. And that meant that spellings became less variable and more fixed since those adjustments were no longer necessary. Once printers adopted a particular spelling or spelling convention, they tended to stick with it. And those extra [e]'s and extra consonants that had been variable now started to become fixed. All of that was done for expediency to produce those news sheets and pamphlets as quickly as possible. There was no time to bother with spelling adjustments to make the lines look neat and pretty. And by the end of the century, spelling was pretty much fixed in the form it is today. [*SOURCE: A History of English Spelling, D.G. Scragg, p. 73, and Spellbound, James Essinger, p. 248*]

Again, all of that stemmed for the explosion of quick, overnight printing in the 1640s when the Star Chamber and its censorship rulings were abolished by Parliament.

Of course, with most of the printing restrictions removed, people were free to print and publish their own version of the news and their own arguments about which side of the conflict was right and which side was wrong. In other words, people were largely free to publish propaganda, which only added to the extremism and conspiratorial mind set that was in the air at the time. [*SOURCE: Rebellion: Peter Ackroyd, p. 216-7*]

Though the word ***propaganda*** isn't found in an English document for a few more decades, the word has its origin in the political and religious events of this period. But in this case, the events didn't involve the Anglican Church in England. The word ***propaganda*** actually has its origins in a special task force established by the Catholic Church in 1622. This task force was a group of cardinals organized by Pope Gregory XV to promote the Catholic faith and to coordinate Catholic missionary work. The group was called the 'Sacred Congregation for Propagating the Faith' – or in the original Latin – 'Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide.' Again, ***propaganda*** was the original Latin form of the word ***propagating*** as in 'propagating the faith.' And part of propagating the faith involved publishing materials that promoted the faith and the Catholic mission. Of course, Protestant critics felt that the material sometimes took liberties with the truth. And the word ***propaganda*** in the name of that department – the 'Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide' – is the ultimate source of the word ***propaganda*** in English. Over the centuries, the meaning of the word has acquired more of a sense of false or misleading information used to promote a particular point of view.

As I noted, the explosion of printing in England during this period stemmed from the abolition of the Star Chamber and its restrictions, which meant that official approval was no longer required for a work to be published. So it wasn't just news sheets, and pamphlets, and propaganda that flourished in the 1640s. Other works flew off the presses like poetry, plays, ballads, sermons, petitions and even playing cards. In fact, there was sometimes an overlap between those works. Propagandists could also be poets. In fact, one of the most famous poets of the 1600s was a very

prominent propagandist on the side of Parliament in the 1640s. His name was John Milton. At this point, he was regularly producing pamphlets opposing the royalist cause and arguing in favor of Church reform. It wasn't until well after the Civil War was over that he turned his attention back to poetry and composed Paradise Lost, which is one of the most well-known works of the entire century. [*SOURCE: The Seventeenth Century: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature 1603-1700, Graham Parry, p. 82-3*]

Again, the abolition of the Star Chamber was just one of the aggressive moves by Parliament in 1641 as the assembly let it be known that it intended to have a permanent role in the government moving forward, and it was willing to act without the king's consent if necessary. Naturally, divisions started to form as people sided with either Parliament or the king. Distinct parties emerged. The supporters of Parliament started to be referred to as ***Roundheads***, and the king's supporters were called ***Cavaliers***. The term ***Roundheads*** apparently referred to the short hair preferred by many Puritans. The specific origin of the term is disputed with some sources attributing it to an army officer who threatened to "cut the throat of those Round-headed Dogs," while other sources attribute it to the queen who supposedly referred to the Parliamentary leader John Pym as "the roundheaded man." Whichever story is true, they are both dated to this year of 1641. [*SOURCE: The Chronology of Words and Phrases, Linda and Roger Flavell, p. 163-4*]

Meanwhile, the term ***Cavalier*** for the king's supporters is derived from the same Latin root as words like ***cavalry*** and ***chivalry***. So when the word ***cavalier*** first entered English, it was associated with knighthood, and specifically with the codes of honor and chivalry associated with knighthood. But the word eventually acquired a negative or pejorative sense. It came to refer to someone who was overconfident and bullying and always ready to fight. That was why the Puritans adopted the term for the king's supporters, and specifically for his soldiers and those who fought on his side.

While the term ***Roundhead*** is a purely historical term today, the word ***cavalier*** survives as a common adjective. The original sense of the word ***cavalier*** as someone who is haughty and full of bravado led to the use of the word to refer to a type of behavior that is confident or bold or risky. So if you act in a ***cavalier*** manner, you're acting with confidence and bravado and without much regard for the consequences. Again, that sense of the word ***cavalier*** can be traced back to its use as an insult during the English Civil War.

Now before we move on, there was one more notable development late in the year 1641. With Parliament asserting its authority and the king in a weakened and vulnerable state, the people of Ireland saw an opportunity to remove the English who had settled there over the prior few decades. Back in Episode 180, I talked about the mass migration of people from Britain to northern Ireland that began in the early 1600s. Of course, those migrants largely displaced the native Irish in the region. And as we saw in earlier episodes, there were also English settlements in other parts of Ireland going back to the 1500s. And Dublin had been a center of English settlement going back to the Middle Ages. The people of Ireland largely opposed those settlements, and of course, religion was also a factor because Ireland was staunchly Catholic, while most of the settlers from England and Scotland were Protestants.

In October of 1641, with England weakened and divided, the Irish rose up and attacked the English settlements throughout the island. [*SOURCE: Rebellion: Peter Ackroyd, p. 226*] About 10,000 people were killed on both sides of the conflict over the following months. In England, Parliament responded by raising an army to defend the English citizens in Ireland, but Parliament didn't want Charles to use the army for his own purposes, so they made sure the new army was under the control of Parliament. [*SOURCE: Rebellion: Peter Ackroyd, p. 227*] Only a few of the troops were actually sent to Ireland though. Parliament chose to keep most of the soldiers in England – awaiting a potential conflict with the king. [*SOURCE: Rebellion: Peter Ackroyd, p. 230*]

As the year 1641 came to a close, all the pieces were in place for a military confrontation between the king and Parliament, and the following year (1642) was the year that the war finally got underway. The year began with one of the most famous events leading up to the war. In January, King Charles along with 300 armed men strode into Parliament at Westminster during one of its sessions. That was unusual in itself. But Charles then accused five of the members of plotting against him and the queen, and he demanded that the members be turned over to him. But the five members had received word of the king's arrival before he entered the chamber, so they were able to flee the building. They got away, and Charles was forced to leave Parliament empty-handed. One again, Charles was humiliated, but this time, there was a general outrage at his audacity. From this point on, Charles lost what little support he had in London. He was forced to flee the city, and he wouldn't see it again until he was returned as a prisoner seven years later. [*SOURCE: Rebellion: Peter Ackroyd, p. 236-7*]

Realizing that a confrontation was inevitable at this point, Parliament took control of the country's military arsenal around this same time – suspecting that Charles would try to use it against them. [*SOURCE: Rebellion: Peter Ackroyd, p. 236-7*] Their suspicions were confirmed a few weeks later when Charles and his men approached the arsenal and was turned away by the men Parliament had put in charge. In July, the king's forces assembled in the Midlands, and a few weeks later, he issued a formal proclamation of war against his opponents in Parliament.

Over the following months, there were several skirmishes between the king's forces and those supporting Parliament as the king tried to make his way south back to London. Several small and indecisive battles took place as the opposing armies stumbled upon each other. But in October, the first major confrontation occurred at Edge Hill in the Midlands. The outcome of the battle was indecisive, which meant that neither side had the ability to impose its will on the other.

During this early stage of the war, Charles's primary goal was to make his way back to London so his forces could retake the city. But he was never able to do that. He faced strong opposition in the capital city, and the closest he got was in the early months of the war.

And this points to an interesting aspect of the English Civil War. A regional divide emerged in England as the north tended to side with the king, and the south tended to side with Parliament. Now this wasn't the clear geographical split that occurred in the later American Civil War in the 1800s. In the English Civil War, the divisions ran throughout the country. In general, the gentry and great landowners supported the king, as did the university and cathedral cities. Meanwhile,

common laborers, especially those in the cloth-making industry, tended to support Parliament, as did some of the larger cities and seaports. But the biggest factor that determined a person or a region's support was religion. Puritans overwhelmingly sided with Parliament, and Catholics sided with the king. Anglicans were divided between the two groups. [*SOURCES: The Cousins' Wars, Kevin Phillips, p. 52-3, and Rebellion, Peter Ackroyd, p. 244-5*]

But despite those personal and individual factors, there was still a bit of a regional divide, which was loosely based on religion. As we saw in prior episodes, the region known as East Anglia in the southeast of the country was heavily Puritan, so that region strongly supported Parliament – as did the nearby city of London. In fact, Parliament's support was centered in the south and southeastern parts of England where Puritanism had strong roots.

But further north, families were less likely to be Puritan, and in fact, Catholicism was still common in many rural areas in the north. That's where the king found his strongest base of support extending from the north, down to parts of the Midlands, and westward to Wales and part of the West Country. So all of this means there was a bit of a north-south divide in England with the north supporting the king and the south supporting Parliament, but again, there were lots of exceptions with divided loyalties in both regions. [*SOURCES: The Story of Britain, Rebecca Fraser, p. 341, and The Cousins' Wars, Kevin Phillips, p. 52-3*]

This regional divide actually benefitted Parliament because the population of the south was greater than the north. And the south also had a larger portion of the country's wealth, as well a larger share of the country's shipping and manufacturing base. [*SOURCE: The Cousins' Wars, Kevin Phillips, p. 41*]

I should note that this regional divide also extended to North America. As we saw a couple of episodes back, most of the settlers in New England were Puritans from East Anglia. So not surprisingly, New Englanders strongly supported Parliament. In fact, it was around this time in the early 1640s that the decade of migration from East Anglia to New England largely came to an end. Rather than leaving England, the Puritans mostly chose to stay and fight for Parliament, which was now dominated by their fellow Puritans. And in fact, quite a few recent arrivals in New England returned to England to join the fight. So English migration to Massachusetts and other parts of New England slowed to a trickle after this point in the early 1640s. In fact, if you are from New England and trace your ancestry to the original English settlers, they were probably in place in the region by this point in history. [*SOURCE: Albion's Seed, David Hackett Fischer, p. 17*]

But while New Englanders were strong supporters of Parliament, the southern colonies of Virginia and Maryland remained loyal to the king. Unlike the settlement model in New England which focused on small towns, the settlement model in the southern colonies was based around farms and large estates. The southern colonies were more gentrified, and like most of the gentry back in England, they tended to support the king.

In fact, some of this legacy can still be felt today. As many of you may know, the official team nickname of the University of Virginia is the ***Cavaliers***, which traces back to this period of history.

So interestingly, there was a north-south divide in North America from the beginning, and it sort of mirrored the north-south division in England, only it was reversed. Parliamentary support was strongest in the northern colonies of North America, but in the southern parts of England. And loyalty to the king was strongest in the southern colonies of America, but in the northern parts of England. This reverse image is also reflected in other ways. The south of England was the more populous region of the country, but in North America, the northern colonies grew faster and acquired a larger population over time. In England, the south was the center of power and industry in the 1600s, while in the colonies, the northern region emerged as the center of power and industry. Also much of the printing in England came from south, while much of the printing in early America came from the north. And one of the consequences of these various factors is that the form of speech used in the south of England became the accepted standard there, while the form of speech used the northern parts of early America eventually emerged as the accepted standard in American English. And as a result, the northern dialects of England were often stigmatized, while southern dialects of North America came to be stigmatized over time. So both regions have a historical north-south divide that extends to politics, culture, society and language.

I'll have a bit more to say about the north-south divide in England a bit later, but for now, let me mention another important development that took place in the 1642 before we move on the next year.

In this year, with Parliament ascendant and asserting its authority, a decree was adopted that banned all stage plays, secular music and public sports in England. Earlier, I mentioned the abolition of the Star Chamber and the increased freedom of the press that followed, and that may have made it seem like this was a time of great personal liberty and freedom of expression. But that wasn't necessarily the case. There were conflicting trends at the time. And the Puritans in control of Parliament had opposed the theater industry in London for decades.

When I talked about the growth of the Elizabethan theater in earlier episodes, I mentioned that it wasn't held in the same high regard as it is today. Many people considered plays to be bawdy, subversive, ripe with gossip and intrigue, and in general, a bad influence on society. Of course, that was probably why they were so popular. You might recall that the great theaters were often located in the seedy parts of town, next to brothels and gambling dens. A lot of people loved going to plays, but just as many people despised them. Fortunately, the theaters had the support of Queen Elizabeth during her day, and King James in the years that followed. The current king – Charles I – was also a fan, but not as much as his wife. Queen Henrietta Maria loved the theater, and even took part in plays presented at the royal court. All of that probably made the Puritans hate the theater even more, especially given that Henrietta Maria remained a Catholic even after she married Charles and became the queen.

A few years earlier, a prominent Puritan named William Prynne has composed a massive work attacking the theatre called Histriomastix. He said plays were immoral and condemned by the

Scriptures, but there were parts of the book that seemed to allude to the queen herself, and appeared to attack her personally for her love of the theater. As a result, Prynne had been prosecuted by the Star Chamber. He had been condemned to prison, and he had is ears cut off as a punishment. But now with the Star Chamber abolished and the Puritans pushing forward with their reforms – and Prynne himself now ascendent in the movement – the Puritans finally got their way and officially banned the performance of plays in England.

The ban on stage plays had an immediate impact on theatres around London. Shakespeare's famous Globe Theatre was pulled down a couple of years later. Blackfriars was leveled about a decade after that. Some of the other Elizabethan playhouses were also abandoned or dismantled. The ban remained in effect throughout the war and the republic that followed. And it wasn't lifted until the restoration of the monarchy in the 1660s. [*SOURCE: Shakespeare: The Evidence, Ian Wilson, p. 417*]

[MUSIC]

We can now turn our attention to the year 1643. During this year, the English Civil War continued with more skirmishes and battles. In general, the king's forces seemed to have the upper hand, but the tide would soon shift in favor of Parliament.

During this year, an English grammarian named Richard Hodges published a work called 'The True-Writing of English.' I mentioned Hodges earlier in the episode in the context of the modern 'long U' sound, which he confirmed was sometimes pronounced as 'yoo' with that little 'y' sound at the front.

Well this particular work called 'The True-Writing of English' is notable because it contained a long list of sentences with homophones. So these were distinct words with distinct spellings, but he reported that they were pronounced the same way at the time. What's so interesting about many of those sentences is that the words he identified as homophones in 1643 are not necessarily homophones today. In many cases, the pronunciation of at least one of the words has changed over time.

Let me give you a few examples. Hodges tells us that the word ***corpse*** (c-o-r-p-s-e) meaning 'a dead body' was once pronounced the same way as ***course*** (c-o-u-r-s-e). They were both pronounced /cors/. Hodges gives us two different sentences to illustrate the homophones. The first is "Take your course. Let them bury the corpse" (spelled c-o-r-p-s-e). The second sentence is "To take good courses . . . Dead corpses" (again spelled c-o-r-p-s-e-s).

Now this example isn't a surprise because the history of the word ***corpse*** is well-documented. It was originally the Latin word ***corpus*** meaning 'body.' So it had a letter [p] and a 'p' sound in the middle. But the sound was lost in French. The word was routinely spelled without a [p] in Old French as simply 'c-o-r-s.' So it was pronounced the same way as the word ***course*** as in a 'golf course,' just as Hodges tells us. But this was one of those words that had its spelling revised by scholars in the 1500s to reflect its Latin origins. So it got its [p] back, even though it was silent, in the same way that words like ***doubt*** and ***debt*** got their [b]'s back because their original Latin

roots had a ‘b’ sound. I described this phenomenon in some detail back in Episode 153 called ‘Zombie Letters.’ Well, appropriately enough, the word ***corpse*** has a ‘zombie letter’ – a dead letter that was brought back to life. But sometimes, people became so influenced by the spelling of a word that they started to pronounce those silent letters. And that’s what happened here. In the early modern period, people started to pronounce the [p] in the word spelled [c-o-r-p-s-e]. And when that happened, the pronunciation shifted from /cors/ to /corps/.

Hodges homophone sentences suggest that that change in pronunciation had not occurred yet – that a dead body was still called a /cors/. But other evidence makes clear that some people were already starting to pronounce that [p]. Hodges obviously preferred the older, more traditional pronunciation, but the change was already underway. That may be why he gave this specific example. He may have been trying to stem the tide of a change that he thought was wrong.

By the way, both pronunciations are still with us today. The pronunciation with the silent [p] survives as the word ***corps*** (/kor/) spelled [c-o-r-p-s], as in the Marine Corps or Peace Corps. In that version of the word, the meaning has evolved into a collective body of people. But in ***corpse*** with the pronounced ‘p’ sound, the meaning refers to a dead body. Again, both versions are variations of the same word – one with a silent [p] and one with a pronounced [p].

While this phonetic history is known and well-documented, Richard Hodges’s work is important because it sheds some light on the general state of the sound in the mid-1600s.

Along the same lines, he tells us that the words ***ream*** and ***realm*** had the same pronunciation at the time. Both were pronounced as /ri:m/ or /re:m/. The Great Vowel Shift was changing that vowel sound during this period. But ***realm*** did not have an ‘l’ sound at time, at least not in Hodges’s dialect. Again, this is another case where a letter was added to reflect the original Latin form of the word, and eventually people started pronouncing that letter. The word ***realm*** is derived from the Latin word ***regalis*** – the same root that gave us the word ***regal***. But as it passed through French, this form of the word lost its ‘l’ sound. When the [l] was later added back to the word to reflect its Latin origins, it started to be pronounced again, and that gave us the modern word ***realm***. But again, Hodges indicates that the [l] was still silent, at least in his form of speech or preferred form of speech.

Hodges also indicates that ***least*** and ***lest*** were pronounced the same – both probably as /lɛst/. And the same vowel was also shared by ***raison*** and ***reason***, both of which were probably pronounced as /rɛ:-zun/.

He says that ***melon*** and ***million*** were homophones. They were both probably pronounced as ***melon*** or something similar.

The city of ***Rome*** was pronounced the same as ***room*** at the time. So people referred to /ru:m/, Italy. We also know that was the case based on rhymes and puns used by Shakespeare and other writers in the late 1500s, but it is interesting to see from this text that those older pronunciations were still common – and perhaps even ‘standard’ in many dialects – at this late date.

He tell us that the word ***suit*** (s-u-i-t) was pronounced the same way as the word ***shoot*** (s-h-o-o-t). Again, I mentioned this in an earlier episode because we have evidence of this from Shakespeare and other poets of the late 1500s and early 1600s. So Hodges gives us this example, "To shoot an arrow. A sute of apparel. A suit in Law" – so a 'law-shoot' instead of a ***lawsuit***. The 'h' sound was obviously lost in the word ***suit***, but it survives in some other words spelled with [s-u] like ***sugar*** and ***sure*** (s-u-r-e).

Hodges also tells us that the words ***reddish*** and ***raddish*** were pronounced the same. He gives the example of "A reddish colour. A radish root." But at the time, they were presumably both pronounced as 'reddish.' So 'a reddish colour' and 'a /reddish/ root.' There is evidence throughout the Middle English period and the early modern period that the 'short A' sound as in ***hat*** and ***bad*** was sometimes pronounced with a 'short E' sound as /het/ and /bed/. Shakespeare also has several examples of this pronunciation. For example, he rendered the word ***lattice*** as 'lettice' (l-e-t-t-i-c-e) in one of his works, and in Henry IV Part 2, he also renders the word ***raddish*** as 'reddish.' Also, think about the verb 'to thrash' and the noun 'thresher.' They are both variations of the same word and show the fluctuation between those two sounds in earlier periods of English. So when Hodges tells us that ***raddish*** was a homophone of ***reddish***, we can discern that his dialect also had this feature where the 'short A' was sometimes pronounced as a 'short E.'

Now speaking of so-called 'short' vowel sounds, Richard Hodges is even more notable for something he has to tell us about the 'short U' sound. This comment comes from a separate work Hodges published the following year called 'The English Primrose.' This particular work is notable for what Hodges has to tell us about the actual sounds of the letter [u]. As I noted earlier, he confirmed that the letter [u] had two 'long' sounds – 'oo' and 'yoo.' But he also tells us that the letter had two distinct 'short' sounds. And in doing so, he is really the first writer to confirm a development that had been emerging for some time. But again, we don't have firm, concrete evidence of this new vowel sound until this particular work by Richard Hodges. And this is also where I can bring together the two major themes of this episode. First, the division of the traditional sounds of letter [u] into separate distinct sounds, and secondly, the general division of England between the north and the south. This final development taps into both of those aspects of our story.

Now, earlier in this episode, we examined how the letter [u] is unique in that it doesn't have a single 'long' sound. It has two distinct long sounds – 'oo' and 'yoo' – because of developments in the early modern period. Well, something very similar happened to the basic 'short' sound of the letter as well. It also split into two different sounds, thereby giving the letter [u] two distinct 'long' sounds and two distinct 'short' sounds. But this division of the 'short' sound didn't happen throughout England. It only happened in the south. And it served to reinforce the north-south split between English dialects in England. In fact, in modern England, this final development provides a quick way to distinguish accents of the south from those of the north.

So what was this final development? Well, remember that the traditional 'short' sound of letter [u] was the /u/ sound heard in words like ***put***, ***push*** and ***pull***. Like the other sounds of letter [u], that /u/ sound is pronounced with rounded lips. So linguists call it a rounded vowel. Well, in the

late 1500s and early 1600s, some speakers stopped rounding their lips when they pronounced that sound. Linguists would say that is became 'unrounded.' And in doing so, the tongue also started to flatten out a bit, rather than being raised in the back like happens when we say the /u/ sound. The result was a new vowel sound – the /ʌ/ sound. And that development gave us the distinction between ***put*** (p-u-t) and ***putt*** (p-u-t-t).

So through this process, the word for 'a laceration' went from /cut/ to /cʌt/. The opposite of 'down' went from ***up*** (/up/) to /ʌp/. 'A drinking vessel' went from a ***cup*** (/cup/) to a /cʌp/. 'To move quickly' went from ***run*** (/run/) to /rʌn/. And 'good fortune' went from ***luck*** (/luk/) to /lʌk/. You get the idea.

Again, there are allusions to this development in prior decades, but we don't get a clear description of the change until Richard Hodges in 1644. In his phonetic spelling system, he represented these two 'short' vowel sounds of letter U with two different characters or symbols. And he is really the first grammarian to do that. So it is fair to day that this development had been around for a few decades in the speech of some people, but it wasn't considered 'standard' or widely accepted until mid-1600s. And in fact, after this point, other grammarians also confirm this development as a common and standard feature of the language.

But as I noted, this new vowel sound didn't really emerge in the north of England. And modern studies have confirmed that the line that separates this development in England hasn't moved very much at all since the 1600s. It remains one of the best ways to quickly identify an accent from the north. If the speaker says /up/ and /cup/ and /luk/ with the older, traditional rounded vowel, rather than /ʌp/ and /cʌp/ and /lʌk/ with the newer unrounded vowel, then they are probably from the north. And again, this distinction became somewhat standard in England in the mid-1600s around the same time as the English Civil War, which also featured a similar north-south divide.

Now before I wrap up this episode, let me mention a few other notes about the emergence of this new 'short U' sound in the 1600s.

First of all, when this new short vowel sound emerged in the south of England, it was very widespread among words that had a 'short U' sound. But it didn't tend to happen when the [u] was preceded by a 'p' sound or 'b' sound. And that's why I have given you words like ***put***, and ***push***, and ***pull*** to represent that older vowel sound because it never changed into those words. And after a [b], we hear that same older vowel in words like ***bull***, and ***bullet***, and ***butcher***. So that's why standard English has both 'short U' sounds today. The older sound has survived in certain words.

Secondly, while this change didn't happen in the north of England, it did tend to spread to other parts of the English-speaking world. So we find the newer /ʌ/ sound in most other English dialects today. But there is considerable variation as you move around the British Isles. For example, in parts of northern England and Scotland, you will even hear these words pronounced with the original 'long U' sound. So you might hear the word ***bus*** pronounced as /bu:s/ and ***much*** pronounced as /mu:ch/. In some of those regions, the 'short U' sounds barely exist at all.

And in other regions, you are likely to hear variation between these various ‘u’ sounds. And that was probably the case in southern England in the 1600s as this new vowel sound was emerging.

And one last note about this new unrounded ‘short U’ sound – the /ʌ/ sound. And it has to do with its relationship to the schwa sound that I discussed in the last episode. Last time, I talked about the emergence of the schwa sound in unstressed syllables and how that schwa sound has become so common in English. Well, that schwa sound is the /ə/ sound that we hear at the front of words like ***about*** and ***around***, and at the end of words like ***China*** and ***Georgia***, and at the beginning and end of the word ***America***. So is that schwa sound the same sound as this newer ‘short U’ sound that we hear in words like ***up*** and ***putt*** and ***strut***. Well, they’re certainly very similar. I think the general view among most linguists is that the sounds are somewhat distinct in British English, but they are basically the same sound in American English. So as a speaker of American English, I don’t really make a distinction between those sounds. But if you are British, there is probably a slight difference in the pronunciation of those sounds. But regardless, they are very similar. The main thing about the schwa sound is that it is associated with unstressed syllables. So if this sound is located in an unstressed syllable, I might call it schwa, but if it’s in a stressed syllable, I might call it ‘short U.’ But again, there isn’t much of a difference in the sound quality – especially in American English.

At any rate, between the rise of the schwa sound and the emergence of this new ‘short U’ sound, we can identify a strong trend in the 1600s where these various ‘uh’ sounds were becoming very common in English. The schwa sound itself is considered to be the most common vowel sound in Modern English, and when we add in all the words with this new ‘short U’ sound, we can see how Modern English is really characterized by the prominence of these ‘uh’ sounds.

Now in titling this episode, I called it ‘Union, Division, and Unusual U.’ And I obviously chose that title for a reason. The word ***union*** contains the new ‘long U’ sound that emerged in the early modern period, and together with the word ***division***, those words capture the political developments of the period, as well as the division of the sounds of letter U. But I also included the word ***unusual*** in the title for a specific reason. It contains both of the new ‘U’ sounds that emerged in the early modern period – the new ‘short U’ in the prefix ***un-*** – which you can also call a schwa – as well as the new ‘long U’ sound in the ***-usual*** part. So it captures the evolving sounds of the letter U in English. And the letter U is indeed ‘unusual’ because it has those two distinct short sounds and those two distinct long sounds. And while most of the vowel letters in English can be used to represent multiple sounds, the letter U is really the only one to have two ‘standard’ short and long sounds.

But I also included the word ***unusual*** in the title for another reason. It contains the /zh/ sound in the middle – /un-yoo-zhu-al/. And that is notable because Richard Hodges – the man who gave us the first confirmation of the new ‘short U’ sound – also gave us the first clear confirmation of the /zh/ sound in English. Since I’ve thrown a lot at you in this episode, I’m going to save the discussion about the /zh/ sound for next time. But I wanted you to know that Hodges’ work extended beyond the sounds of letter U to cover other developments in the language as well.

So next time, we'll look at the emergence of that /zh/ sound, while we also continue to look at the progress of the English Civil War, and we'll see how that war continued to shape the English language going forward.

So until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.