Graphic geminates as diacritics in the Ormulum (12th cent.) and in Thomas Sheridan's General Dictionary of the English Language (1780)

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Non-ectymological geminates in orthography: word-finally and in clusters, sometimes intervocally (including glides)
<ennglish>, <togeddre>, <bro>rr>, <<trewwe

Clearly, these orthographic geminates cannot be interpreted as segmental, like the other alphabetical symbols: they are diacritics.

But what do they indicate?

→ double graphs ≠ long consonants (lack of “credible motivation” for gemination, Mailhammer 2007:40)

→ For Anderson & Britton 1999 and Mokrowiecki 2012 (among others), only vowel length is at stake – BUT what of the curls and acute accents also used to reflect vowel quantity (though not systematically)? BUT what of “Orm’s didactic purpose and consistency” (Mailhammer 2007:50; cf. Ormulum, l. 103-110)?

→ In order for Orm (as well as a number of his predecessors cf Mokrowiecki 2012 for thorough account) to generalize the “inherited orthographic-phonological interface” (Murray 1995:132) of OE, sequences containing geminates must have shared “an easily identifiable phonological property” (Murray 2000:636), necessarily a suprasegmental feature: syllable structure, syllable weight or syllable cut, which predicts a different “prosodic energy contour” for abruptly or smoothly cut syllables (Mailhammer 2007:46).

Diagram from Mailhammer 2007:46

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Late Old English/Early Mid. Eng.</th>
<th>Early Mid. E. (Orm)</th>
<th>Middle English</th>
<th>Late Mod. English (Sheridan)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SMOOTH CUT</td>
<td>(Quantity-based distinction maintained in open syllables) Homorganic Cluster Lengthening</td>
<td>CV or CV: Open Syllable Lengthening</td>
<td>CV:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABRUPT CUT</td>
<td>Closed Syllable Shortening</td>
<td>CV:C</td>
<td>CV:C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In both cases, vowel length cannot be the only justification for the representation; it is apparent that the representations refer to the syllabic configuration of their dialects: syllable-cut prosody accounts for the diacritic use of geminates in both Orm’s and Sheridan’s systems.

References


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Conclusion

In both cases, vowel length cannot be the only justification for the representation; it is apparent that the representations refer to the syllabic configuration of their dialects: syllable-cut prosody accounts for the diacritic use of geminates in both Orm’s and Sheridan’s systems.