A number of phonological processes in early Germanic languages have long suggested that syllables were grouped in larger prosodic units of some sort. Early Old English provides a good starting point for the investigation of early Germanic foot structure, with good morphophonological evidence coming from deletions of high vowels in certain paradigms. For example, the neuter plural suffix -u is retained after the 'light' stem scip-u 'ships', but lost after the 'heavy' word 'words'; disyllabic nouns beginning with an open syllable, e.g. werod 'troops', behave like 'heavy' monosyllables and delete the -u. There have been a number of attempts to describe, or do away with, the prosodic units (feet) that determine 'resolution' and vowel deletions. Various earlier analyses have posited Old English feet, or branches of feet, that consist of two or more moras, but they differ in their treatments of how unstressed syllables are grouped. For example, the plural of hēafod 'head' occurs in texts as hēafudu, hēafud, and hēafdu, and interpretations have varied about which is 'correct' for Old English generally (e.g., Kiparsky and O'Neil 1976, Gąsiorowski 1997, Dresher and Lahiri 1991). My analysis posits a change in foot structure between earlier and later Old English, triggered by the elimination of contrastive vowel length in unstressed syllables, predicting hēafudu as the correct older form, with hēafud and hēafdu representing well-motivated prosodic innovations. This accords well with the textual and morphological arguments of Fulk (2010). Building on earlier theories, I argue for an optimally bimoraic foot in early Old English. Monomoraic, 'light' syllables recruit moras from following syllables to fill a foot. Under stress, a foot may exceed two moras to avoid a monomoraic foot, as in earlier approaches: [cy.ning] [μ.μμ]. I further argue that unstressed syllables will be left unfooted and prone to syncope if they cannot be placed in precisely bimoraic feet: early dative singular [hēa.]fu.[dē] [μμ.]μ.[μμ] >> hēafdē. This new observation about foot formation in unstressed syllables receives support from the poetic phenomenon Kaluza's Law, and serves a starting point for interpreting other foot-structure-dependant phenomena in the other early Germanic languages.


