What do affrication and vowel unrounding have in common? The case of velar palatalization

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In this talk I look at two seemingly unrelated historical processes: affrication of the Old English (OE) palatalized velars [k^j] > [tS], e.g. OE *cild* > PDE *child*, OE *ciosan* > PDE *choose* and the Middle English (ME) vowel unrounding [y] > [i] and [P] > [e]. More specifically, it is argued that the front rounded vowels [y] and [P], as well as the palatalized velars [k^j] and [J], are complex melodic expressions containing two antagonistic resonance elements |I| and |U|. Furthermore, it is proposed here that the phonological system of ME witnessed a drastic change as a consequence of the introduction of the ban on the |I| and |U| merger. This *|I U| constraint is responsible for the loss of the resonance element |U| from the internal structure of both segments, which leads to the unrounding of the *i*-umlauted vowels and the affrication of the palatalized velars. This paper provides a detailed analysis of velar palatalization and its subsequent affrication, while additionally I address the questions of the lack of affrication before both *i*-umlauted and unrounded vowels, the palatalization and vocalization of the voiced velar fricative /V/ and the chronology of affrication in the history of English.

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