

Title: The diachrony of complementizer-verb interactions in the Welsh left-periphery

Keywords: Structural change, left-periphery, reanalysis, corpus data, Minimalism.

This presentation will investigate why certain specialized forms of the verb meaning ‘be’ in Welsh have historically been unable to co-occur with complementizers, and why this is now showing signs of changing. This paper will look at known data on Middle Welsh (~1150-1500 C.E., cf. analyses by Tallerman 1996 and Roberts 2005) as well as known and novel data on Present Day Spoken Welsh. It will provide the first diachronic analysis of the left periphery in Welsh, doing so in a Minimalist framework.

During the development of Middle Welsh, a number of specialised forms of BE emerge. Two processes make this happen: (1) there is a phonological reanalysis of the boundary between certain pre-verbal complementizers and the verb (such that the final consonants of positive complementizer /əɾ/ and negative complementizer /nid/ become onsets of the verb ‘be’); and (2) overt expression of the complementizers is lost. Hence:

- (A) əɾ oið > ə roið > roið
 C_{+ve} BE.IMPF.3SG > C_{+ve} be.IMPF.3SG > be.IMPF.3SG_{+ve}
- (B) nid oið > ni doið > doið
 C_{-ve} BE.IMPF.3SG > C_{-ve} be.IMPF.3SG > be.IMPF.3SG_{-ve}

Although these newly created, specialized forms may look like a verb form that *agrees* with features hosted in a C position, they initially retain incompatibilities with overt complementizers, as shown by column 2 below. Even more crucially, when a new, main clause, positive complementizer, /vε/, emerges in stage 3, /roið/ cannot co-occur with it, even though /vε/ should have no conflicting features. This suggests that the verb is raised to a C position in stages 2 and 3, which is compatible with the VSO order of Welsh.

| CLAUSE TYPE | MIDDLE WELSH 1 | INTERMEDIATE STAGE 2 | INTERMEDIATE STAGE 3 | PRESENT DAY SPOKEN WELSH 4 |
|-------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| POSITIVE | əɾ oið | roið | *vε roið | vε roið |
| | | | roið | roið |
| | | | | vε oið |
| IF... | ɔs oið | ɔs oið | ɔs oið | ɔs oið |
| | | *ɔs roið | *ɔs roið | ɔs roið |

In Present Day Spoken Welsh (4), various reanalyses have taken place, leading to considerable variation in the current system, which is demonstrable thanks to findings from the CorCenCC corpus of Present Day Welsh. The analysis will discuss the different acquisition pathways that have made these options possible, and show that some complementizers in Welsh must occupy higher positions in the clause than previously thought. Thus, this presentation provides a useful case study on the use of corpus data in developing theories of structural change.

References

Knight, D., Morris, S., Fitzpatrick, T., Rayson, P., Spasić, I., Thomas, E-M., Lovell, A., Morris, J., Evas, J., Stonelake, M., Arman, L., Davies, J., Ezeani, I., Neale, S., Needs, J., Piao, S., Rees, M., Watkins, G., Williams, L., Muralidaran, V., Tovey-Walsh, B., Anthony, L., Cobb, T., Deuchar, M., Donnelly, K., McCarthy, M. and Scannell, K. (2020). CorCenCC: Corpws Cenedlaethol Cymraeg Cyfoes – the National Corpus of Contemporary Welsh. Cardiff University, <http://doi.org/10.17035/d.2020.0119878310>

Roberts, G., Ian. 2005. Principles and Parameters in a VSO Languages: A Case Study in Welsh. Oxford University Press.

Tallerman, Maggie. 1996. Fronting constructions in Welsh. In Robert D. Borsley and Ian Roberts (eds.), The Syntax of the Celtic Languages, pages 97–124, Cambridge University Press.