

Abstract Illés

The Celtic Hypothesis and relative clauses in Middle English

The Celtic Hypothesis investigates the at times substantial influence the Celtic languages are claimed to have exerted on the English language, both when the latter first entered British territory and in the course of later ages. Based on Thomason and Kaufman (1988) the social situation resulting from Anglo-Saxon dominance over the (Latino-)Celtic population is usually claimed to have led to some influence on phonology, morphology and syntax, but little to none on the lexicon. Within this framework, this PhD project concentrates on syntax, specifically the origin of Modern English relative constructions: pied piping, preposition stranding, and clefting.

The study is based on data from the PPCME2. The Middle English period was chosen since, because of the previous existence of a West Saxon standard, it is assumed that changes are more readily perceivable after the standard's replacement by French and Latin following the Norman Conquest and the subsequent return to a more local, i.e. dialectal form of vernacular writing. Further, it is believed that influence should be visible earlier and more conspicuously in areas of longer-lasting contact than in regions anglicised earliest. As far as possible, original prose texts were chosen, because they can be expected to be closer to spoken language and exhibit less influence of Latin structure than translations. Finally, the following relative structures have been identified as relevant to the study: clefting, pied-piping, and preposition stranding.

Interestingly, the results are very varied indeed and not at all clear. First of all, the corpus is very small; any such corpus will always remain no more than a small portion of available texts, which in turn are only a small portion of all texts that are likely to have been produced. Secondly, there are different results for each construction, so that a global view of "Celtic influence on relative clauses" can no longer be maintained. Although there are tendencies that point to some influence in some cases, the results are not at all conclusive. Influence is not ruled out, but cannot be claimed to have been the most important contributing factor with these constructions.

PPCME2: Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English, 2nd edition. (Available at: <https://www.ling.upenn.edu/hist-corpora/PPCME2-RELEASE-4/index.html>)

Thomason, Sarah Grey & Terrence Kaufman. 1988. *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.