

Phonology of Old English and the Brythonic languages between 5th and 11th centuries A.D. in the light of language contact theory

This research project aims at analysing and comparing phonological systems of Old English and Brythonic languages, especially of Old Welsh, during the period of 5th-11th century A.D. Every language at any stage of development uses a definable set of phonemes (the smallest elements of speech) to convey messages verbally; phonological systems are susceptible to change and fashion as every element of life is. Taking a look at two different language branches, at Old English and at Brythonic languages, in the period of time traditionally ascribed to Old English (5th-11th century) has potential to answer the questions about relations and contacts between the Anglo-Saxons and Britons during this eldest stage of coexistence in Britain. The period has not been chosen randomly – it is the time of Anglo-Saxon settlement and beginning of their domination in today's England, but it is still the period before the strongest influence of Norman French on English, i.e. before the victory of William the Conqueror in the battle of Hastings. The attempts to address the issue of mutual influence of Old English and the Brythonic languages have been already taken, even during the last couple of years (eg. by Schrijver in 2009 or by Laker in 2010); however, those research projects are not conclusive. Scholars such as Tristram (eg. 2004) are arguing in favour of state of diglossia in Anglo-Saxon England; Filppula, Klemola and Paulasto in *English and Celtic in contact* (2008) are citing previous research supporting a theory of Celtic influence not only on demographic structure in England, but also on the English language – on its grammar, vocabulary and even sounds. Despite the already published studies, the issue of mutual influence of Old English and the Brythonic languages remains still open to discussion.

However, only because those previous studies have been published further research can be conducted on a bigger scale and can take into consideration aspects not addressed yet. This research project aims at analysing and re-checking the previous publications on the topic; then, it is to confront them with data from historical sources understood here as diplomatic editions and facsimilia, original manuscripts of texts which are dated to be composed between the 5th and 11th centuries, and the corpora for adequate language stages. The next step is to trace the changes that are visible in the phonological systems of Old English and the Brythonic languages. Noting the changes by themselves does not guarantee drawing decisive conclusions; the changes have to be compared between the languages and all similarities and drastic differences have to be described and, if possible, explained. Models of acquisition of the second language sounds (eg. Perceptual Assimilation Model, Perceptual Magnet Effect, Ontogeny Phylogeny Model) are implemented at this point of the analysis; this means that the research tools of other linguistic subfields than historical linguistics are planned to be used. The last 200 years of historical linguistics is bound to help in this project, as it is not a study “drifting in scholarly void”, but connected with achievements in the field of humanities.

The goal of basic studies is development of science and expansion of knowledge; and it is exactly the task of this research project as it gives a chance to further our understanding of the past and of the mechanisms behind influences of languages, and societies, on one another. The main thoughts driving this study are the lack of project on similar scale as well as the honest intention to describe the past as fully as possible, to understand the mutual interactions of very different languages remaining in close contact and to understand the interplay of two societies with very dissimilar political position. Additionally, introduction of research tools new to historical and comparative linguistics as well as language contact theory can potentially develop and advance methods used for historical language data analysis, which fulfils the requirements of basic research in terms of improvement of theoretical knowledge.