The topic of identifying elements enabling the reconstruction of dead languages has always been a core part of historical linguistics. Until recently, only texts with minimum third party interference were deemed useful, which was supposed to enable researching a language in its original form. Hence, forgeries or texts containing changes, commentaries, and corrections were ignored. However, the latest linguistic approach assumes that those elements bear a potential for providing some of the missing information on the elements of a language in the period of the creation of a given forgery, such as morphology or syntax.

The twelfth century was the time of major linguistic change in the history of English. From the perspective of traditional historical linguistics, there are relatively very few original works which date back to the 12th century. The aim of this project is to analyse 12th century forged legal documents in order to identify the elements of the English language in its 12th century form, therefore, filling the knowledge gap on this topic as well as the development of suitable methods of detecting forged historical documents from a linguistic perspective.

The phenomenon of forging documents increased in England after 1066, when the Normans took over the power over England, based on the alleged rights of their leader, William the Bastard – who soon after the Conquest changed his name to William the Conqueror – to the English throne. The Conquest affected virtually every aspect of life in England, including the language, which suffered a dramatic loss of prestige being replaced with French and Latin. Although William the Conqueror's right to the English throne may have been – at least partially – legitimate, the same cannot be said about his barons and their rights to their new, English possessions. Contrary to the popular belief, Normans were actually concerned with legitimizing their rule in England, which, among other things, resulted in exogamy between Norman men and English women. On the other hand, the Norman concern with legality set off the production of forged legal documents in English; English landowners, including the English Church, forged documents through such means as deliberate archaisation, so that they gave an impression of ancient, Old English documents. They did this believing that the forged ancestry of their rights legitimized them. Hence, there are numerous examples of legal documents which chronologically were written in the 12th century, but are styled as Old English texts.

We believe that these forgeries can allow us an insight into the state of the English language in its twelfth-century form. Through comparative analysis of genuine Old English legal texts and their genuine later copies we will be able to establish characteristic features which, when comparedwith forgeries, will allow us to determine the features which must have represented twelfth-century English. The project assumes that twelfth century forgers, while not having common access to Old English texts, had to rely on their knowledge and imagination, and thus the forged documents they produced must, at least partially, reflect their everyday Middle English language. The following project will not only provide data for the future reconstruction of twelfth century English, but also it will provide methods of data collection and analysis for similar research in the future. The results of this study will also enable verifying the originality of questionable source texts, filling in the indubitable gap in the field of research on historical texts.