



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## British Celtic influence on English phonology

Laker, S.

### Citation

Laker, S. (2010, September 23). *British Celtic influence on English phonology*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/15976>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/15976>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

# **British Celtic Influence on English Phonology**

Stephen Laker



# **British Celtic Influence on English Phonology**

PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van  
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,  
op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof.mr. P.F. van der Heijden,  
volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties  
te verdedigen op donderdag 23 september 2010  
klokke 16.15 uur

door

Stephen Laker

geboren te Guisborough, Engeland  
in 1976

## **Promotiecommissie**

Promotores: Prof.dr. R.H. Bremmer Jr  
Prof.dr. P.C.H. Schrijver (Universiteit Utrecht)

Overige leden: Prof.em.dr. C. van Bree  
Prof.dr. R. Coates (University of the West of England)  
Prof.dr. C.J. Ewen  
Prof.dr. A.M. Lubotsky

## Preface

Very few publications have considered what influence, if any, British Celtic had on the development of English sounds. Owing to recent interest into British and Anglo-Saxon relations – not only from linguists but also from historians, archaeologists and even geneticists – such a study is timely. Writing on a new topic presents many challenges, but it has the advantage of allowing one to look at the data afresh, and one is not forced too much into long discussions about the ideas and theories of earlier scholars. Fortunately, a large number of books and publications, while not directly concerned with the question of Celtic influence on English, have in fact been very adaptable to the needs of this investigation. By using research not directly associated with Celtic influence on English it has been possible to maintain the required level of impartiality throughout.

My interest in historical linguistics and the topic of Celtic influence on English began when I was a student at the University of Munich. There I came under the inspiring influence of Theo Vennemann, who has had a great influence on my subsequent work and therefore also on this dissertation. I am grateful for his guidance and support over many years. With the arrival at the same university of Peter Schrijver, I was able to receive the best possible training in Celtic historical linguistics that I needed to initiate and ultimately complete this project. I am grateful for his help and input, both as a student in Munich and later during my occasional visits to Utrecht. While much of my linguistic training was received in Munich, the place did not however necessarily provide the ideal working conditions for me to write a doctoral dissertation. Circumstances changed when Rolf Bremmer took me under his wing as a PhD student in a funded position at Leiden University. I have been immensely fortunate to have profited from his expertise while writing this dissertation. His support and criticism have been indispensable to the completion of the project.

Leiden provided me with an excellent base to do research in an amicable environment surrounded by many talented linguists with diverse interests. Many friends and colleagues at Leiden, especially in the English Department and the Centre for Linguistics, helped me in many ways during my time there. These are too many to thank individually, but I do wish to record my special thanks to Rob Goedmans, Vincent van Heuven, Gea Hakker-Prins and Jeroen van de Weijer for much help especially in the early stages of my appointment. I am also grateful for the support and encouragement of my former colleagues at Manchester University, especially Eva Schultze-Berndt, David Denison, Nuria Yáñez-Bouza, and to my new colleagues at Kyushu University, in particular Nobuaki Nishioka and Taras Sak. Furthermore, I have benefitted from the assistance of numerous scholars who have often generously sent me their publications, provided feedback on queries or offered other help. Among many others, I here wish to thank Andrew Breeze, Nick Higham, Petri Kallio, Angelika Lutz, Donka Minkova, Patrizia Noel, Guto Rhys, Karling Rottschäfer, Patrick Stiles, Hildegard Tristram, Peter Trudgill, Michiel de Vaan and David White.

I am particularly indebted to those who helped me in the process of writing up this dissertation. Robert Mailhammer read and commented on earlier drafts of each chapter. The corrections and comments of Rolf Bremmer, Peter Schrijver and, later, the reading committee – Cor van Bree, Richard Coates, Colin Ewen and Alexander Lubotsky – greatly improved the quality of the final version. For the faults that remain I must of course accept full responsibility.

Finally I wish to thank my parents, family and friends for their continuing love and support.

Stephen Laker

6 August 2010

# Contents

Preface.....	iii
Contents .....	v
Maps.....	ix
Tables.....	x
Figures.....	xi
Abbreviations and symbols.....	xii
<b>PART I: INTRODUCTION AND PRELIMINARIES .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 Aim and scope.....	3
1.2 Languages and periodisation.....	4
1.3 Structure of this investigation .....	9
<b>2 Changing views about Anglo-Saxons and Britons .....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1 Historical sources.....	13
2.2 Archaeology.....	21
2.3 Genetics.....	29
2.4 Linguistics.....	32
2.4.1 Loanwords.....	35
2.4.2 Morphosyntax .....	41
2.4.3 Phonology .....	46
2.5 Summary.....	53
<b>3 Approach and methods .....</b>	<b>55</b>
3.1 Contrastive methodology.....	55
3.2 Prognosis and diagnosis of Brittonic phonological influences .....	58
3.3 Summary .....	60
<b>PART II: CONSONANTS .....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>4 The consonants of Late British .....</b>	<b>63</b>
4.1 Synchronic overview of Late British consonants .....	63
4.2 Derivation of Late British consonants .....	64
4.2.1 Proto-Celtic consonants .....	65
4.2.2 Lenition.....	65
4.2.2.1 Lenition of */p, t, k, b, d, g, m/ .....	66
4.2.2.2 Lenition and further developments of PCl. */s/ .....	67
4.2.2.3 Lenition of */n, l, r/ .....	70
4.2.3 Creation of voiceless fricatives.....	71
4.2.4 Spirantisation .....	72
4.2.5 Provection .....	74

4.3	Summary .....	74
<b>5</b>	<b>The consonants of Pre-Old English .....</b>	<b>77</b>
5.1	Synchronic overview of Pre-Old English consonants .....	77
5.2	Derivation of Pre-Old English consonants .....	78
5.2.1	Proto-Germanic consonants .....	79
5.2.2	North-West Germanic developments.....	79
5.2.3	West Germanic developments .....	80
5.2.4	Voicing of fricatives .....	80
5.2.5	Palatalisation of velar consonants.....	82
5.3	Summary .....	85
<b>6</b>	<b>Developments of English consonants .....</b>	<b>89</b>
6.1	Contrastive overview .....	89
6.2	Developments of consonants .....	91
6.2.1	Plosives .....	92
6.2.1.1	Palatalisation and assibilation of velars .....	92
6.2.1.1.1	Lack of palatalisation in place-names.....	92
6.2.1.1.2	Lack of palatalisation before /æ/.....	95
6.2.1.1.3	Lack of palatalisation in final positions .....	98
6.2.1.1.4	Palatalisation in relation to <i>i</i> -mutation.....	99
6.2.1.2	Non-etymological double consonant graphs.....	100
6.2.1.3	Phonation of plosives.....	104
6.2.1.4	Glottal stop.....	108
6.2.2	Fricatives.....	110
6.2.2.1	interdental fricatives /θ, ð/ .....	110
6.2.2.2	Voicing of initial fricatives .....	112
6.2.2.3	Phonemicisation of a voice contrast in English fricatives .....	118
6.2.2.4	Glottal fricative .....	123
6.2.3	Nasals.....	131
6.2.3.1	Phonetics of /n/ and [ŋ].....	131
6.2.3.2	Phonetics of /m/ .....	132
6.2.4	Liquids .....	134
6.2.4.1	Phonetics of /l/ .....	134
6.2.4.2	Phonetics of /r/ .....	135
6.2.5	Approximants /w/, /j/ .....	137
6.2.5.1	Labial-velar approximant /w/.....	138
6.2.5.2	Palatal approximant /j/ .....	139
6.3	Summary .....	140
<b>7</b>	<b>Developments of English consonant clusters.....</b>	<b>143</b>
7.1	Contrastive overview .....	143
7.2	Developments of initial clusters.....	150
7.2.1	Loss of the cluster /fn/.....	150
7.2.2	/sC/ clusters.....	151

7.2.2.1	The phonetic variability of the cluster /sk/ .....	152
7.2.3	/hC/ clusters .....	154
7.2.4	/Cw/ clusters.....	156
7.2.4.1	Merger of /kw/ and /hw/ .....	157
7.3	Summary .....	170
<b>PART III: VOWELS AND DIPHTHONGS .....</b>		<b>173</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>The vowels and diphthongs of Late British .....</b>	<b>175</b>
8.1	Synchronic overview .....	175
8.2	Derivation .....	176
8.2.1	Proto-Celtic vowels.....	176
8.2.2	Monophthongisation of */ai/, */oi/ and */au/.....	176
8.2.3	The Great British Vowel Shift.....	177
8.2.3.1	Progression of the back vowel chain shift ca. 450–700.....	178
8.2.4	Final <i>i</i> -affection of short vowels.....	182
8.2.5	Reduction and deletion of vowels: centralisation, apocope, syncope.....	183
8.2.5.1	Apocope .....	183
8.2.5.2	Syncope.....	183
8.2.5.3	Centralisation .....	183
8.2.6	Internal <i>i</i> -affection of short vowels.....	184
8.2.7	Shortening of pretonic long vowels.....	185
8.2.8	The Late British quantity system.....	185
8.2.9	Late British diphthongs.....	187
8.2.9.1	/Vu/-diphthongs .....	187
8.2.9.2	/Vi/-diphthongs .....	188
8.3	Summary .....	190
<b>9</b>	<b>The vowels and diphthongs of Pre-Old English.....</b>	<b>193</b>
9.1	Synchronic overview of Pre-Old English vowels.....	193
9.2	Derivation of Pre-Old English vowels.....	194
9.2.1	Proto-Germanic vowels .....	194
9.2.2	Developments of Proto-Germanic long mid-front vowels.....	195
9.2.3	Fronting of PGmc */a/ .....	198
9.2.4	Developments of PGmc */ai/ and */au/ .....	198
9.2.5	Breaking.....	200
9.2.6	<i>i</i> -mutation.....	201
9.2.7	The date of <i>i</i> -mutation.....	202
9.3	Summary .....	204
<b>10</b>	<b>Developments of English vowels and diphthongs .....</b>	<b>207</b>
10.1	Contrastive overview (long vowels).....	207
10.2	Developments of long vowels.....	209
10.2.1	Previous attempts to explain vowel developments .....	211
10.2.1.1	Suggestions of Gaelic influence.....	212
10.2.1.2	Suggestions of Scandinavian influence .....	213

10.2.1.3	Suggestions of French influence.....	217
10.2.2	Comparisons with Late British .....	219
10.2.2.1	Merger of /y:, ø:/ at /i:, e:/.....	220
10.2.2.2	Raising of /æ:/ to /ɛ:/.....	221
10.2.2.3	Development of (Pre-)Old English /ɑ:/ to /ɔ:/ (South) and /a:/ (North).....	222
10.2.2.4	Fronting of /o:/ .....	228
10.3	Contrastive analysis (short vowels) .....	235
10.4	Developments of short vowels.....	236
10.4.1	Merger of /y, ø/ with /i, e/.....	236
10.4.2	Merger of /æ ~ ɑ ~ ɒ/ at /a/ .....	237
10.5	Contrastive overview (diphthongs).....	238
10.6	Developments of diphthongs .....	239
10.7	Quantity changes.....	243
10.8	Summary .....	246
<b>PART IV:</b>	<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>247</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>249</b>
11.1	Results.....	249
11.2	Geography of results .....	250
11.3	Interpretation.....	255
11.4	Outlook .....	258
	Bibliography .....	261
	Samenvatting in het Nederlands .....	289
	Curriculum Vitae .....	291