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11 Prolegomena to the diachrony of Cornish syntax

1 Prelude

Little scholarship has been conducted upon Cornish syntax, including the configuration of the affirmative root clause.¹ In this preliminary study, we examine the configuration of this clause-type in Cornish from its earliest records through Late Cornish and attempt to establish what can be said about it, or, at times, what possibilities should be considered when nothing definitive may be said.

2 Old Cornish

We follow Schrijver (2011: 2–5) in the view that the earliest neo-Brittonic did not diverge into discrete languages until the eighth century and that what have been termed Old Cornish and Old Breton did not diverge from each other prior to the eleventh century. Until that time, they formed a unitary Old Southwest Brittonic. Under such an analysis, there are, in fact, no attested Old Cornish verbal sequences.

2.1 VSO in Old neo-Brittonic

On the basis of comparison with Old Welsh and Old Southwest Brittonic, we presume that Old Cornish was VSO on the way to becoming V2. Cf. the following VSO clauses:

- (1) a. Old Welsh
rodesit elcu guetig equs . . .
give_{3SG.PRET} Elcu then horse
‘Elcu then gave a horse . . .’ (Jenkins and Owen 1984, cited after Watkins 1987 [The “Surexit” Memorandum])

¹ There is no controversy over the fact that negative root clauses and all embedded clauses, through all periods of the attestation of Cornish, were V1. A constituent is permitted to appear before the negator in negative clauses, but they look like other V1 clauses in that the verb is not third person singular but is conjugated.

b. Old Southwest Brittonic

dadarued epac(dou) . . . int rid ou mod
 occur_{3SG.PRES} epacts PTCL free 3PL_{POSS} manner

‘Adviennent les épactes sans obstacle [The epacts occur without hindrance].’ (Fleuriot 1964b: 412 [Bibliothèque Municipale d’Angers, MS. 477])

On the basis of compound or negated verbal forms such as Old Welsh *imm-it cel* (Lambert 2003: 113, gloss 85; Schrijver 2011: 49) ‘it conceals itself’ and Old Southwest Brittonic *ni-s-guilom* (Fleuriot 1964b: 262 [Bibliothèque Municipale d’Angers, MS. 477]) ‘nous ne la voyions pas [we would not see it]’, which contain object agreement affixes that continue pronominal morphemes – which are known to occur in the lower left periphery of the clause – we understand the verb in these VSO clauses to occupy Fin and to move there synchronically because Fin bears uninterpretable ϕ -features (viz. person, number), i.e. [u ϕ], that trigger movement through T into the left periphery.²

2.2 V2 in Old neo-Brittonic

There is also evidence for V2 root clauses in Old neo-Brittonic. Borsley, Tallerman, and Willis (2007: 290) cite one token from Old Welsh and Fleuriot (1964b: 413) several from Old Southwest Brittonic:³

(2) a. Old Welsh

[*Gur dicones remedaut elbid*] *a ’n guorit*
 man make_{3SG.PRET} wonder world PTCL 1PL_{INFX} redeem_{3SG.PRET}

‘The man who created the wonder of the world redeems us.’ (Williams 1980: verse 5^{a–b} [Juvencus Englynion])

b. Old Southwest Brittonic

[*do(u) cuntraid*]. . . *a int im pop un mis*
 two neap.tide PTCL be_{3PL.PRES} in each one month

‘Deux marées de morte-eau . . . sont dans chacun mois [There are two neap-tides every month].’ (Fleuriot 1964b: 413 [Bibliothèque Municipale d’Angers, MS. 477])

² An uninterpretable feature must be checked for a clause to be interpretable. In this instance, the ϕ -features on the verb check the uninterpretable ϕ -features in Fin by movement of the verb into Fin. For further discussion, see Svenonius (2007).

³ See Fleuriot (1964a: 151) for the full text of the token cited. All glossed examples cited after other authors adopt their respective glossing.

It appears likely that these V2 clauses developed out of cleft-type constructions (Manning 2001; Willis 2009: 146–147). From the synchronic point of view, such clauses, like V1 clauses, bear [u ϕ] features on Fin that draw the verb into the left periphery, but, unlike V1 clauses, also an Edge Feature that causes an XP to move into SpecFinP, which then may move higher into the left periphery.

3 Middle Cornish

There is considerable diversity of opinion about the configuration of affirmative root clauses in Middle Cornish as reflected in the title of Mark Kille’s Harvard University B.A. Honours thesis, “*What thing is next I don’t quite know*”: *An analysis of variation in word order and subject-verb agreement in Middle Cornish* (1995).⁴ Lewis (1946: 47), followed by Kille (1995: 5), maintains that both SVO and V1 are unmarked configurations in Middle Cornish. Though he notes that a variety of constituents can precede the verb – and also observes that V1 occurs, and, importantly, that some forms of *bos* ‘be’ require a V1 configuration – Williams (2011: 336) suggests “that Middle Cornish is in essence an SVO language”. George (1991) compiles all of the surface configurations attested in the play *Beunans Meriasek* (BMer., composed ca 1500, edited in Stokes 1872), but is satisfied to conclude by listing only the most common ones.

3.1 Surface V2 in Middle Welsh and Middle Breton

It is clear that affirmative root clauses in Middle Welsh and Middle Breton are V2, i.e. the preverbal XP is not restricted to the Subject, but may be also an Object or Adverb(ial). The post-verbal position of the Subject in (3b) and (4c) is diagnostic of the V2 character of these clauses. The following tokens are cited after Borsley, Tallerman, and Willis (2007: 287–290):⁵

⁴ The translated quotation is from BMer. (line 107): *pandryv nessa ny won fest*.

⁵ For unequivocal demonstrations that Middle Welsh affirmative root clauses bear V2 configuration, see Willis (1998) and Meelen (2016). Middle Breton has not been the focus of similar studies, but see Schafer (1995) and Borsley and Kathol (2000) for Modern Breton.

(3) Middle Welsh

a. Subject-initial

[*Riuedi Mawr o sswydwyr*] *a gyuodassant y uynydd . . .*
 numbers large of officials PTCL rise_{3PL.PRET} up
 ‘Large numbers of officials got up . . .’ (PKM 16.18–19)

b. Object-initial

Ac [ystryw] a wnaeth y Gwydyl
 and trick PTCL make_{3SG.PRET} DEF Irish
 ‘And the Irish played a trick.’ (PKM 44.11)

c. Adverb(ial)-initial

[*Yn Harlech*] *y bydwch seith mlyned ar ginyaw . . .*
 in Harlech PTCL be_{2PL.FUT} seven years at dinner
 ‘In Harlech you will be at dinner for seven years . . .’ (PKM 45.2–3)

(4) Middle Breton

a. Subject-initial

[*Cesar*] *a respontas deze . . .*
 Caesar PTCL reply_{3SG.PRET} to_{3PL}
 ‘Caesar replied to them. . .’ (Ernault 1887a: 82 § 12 [La vie de sainte Catherine])

b. Object-initial

hac [an holl doueouse] . . . a meur an oll
 and DEF all gods=PROX PTCL have_{1SG.PRES} DEF all
dispriset. . .
 renounce_{PST-PTCPL}
 ‘. . .and I have renounced all those gods. . .’ (Ernault 1887a: 80 § 8)

c. Adverb(ial)P-initial

hac [en continant] ez aparissas an eal dezy
 and immediately PTCL appear_{3SG.PRET} DEF angel to_{3SG.FEM}
 ‘. . .and immediately the angel appeared to her.’ (Ernault 1887a: 84 § 13)

3.2 Surface V2 in Middle Cornish

Recent theoretically oriented scholarship, e.g. Borsley, Tallerman, and Willis (2007: 291), notes that identical structures are found in Middle Cornish, some tokens of which follow:

(5) a. Subject-initial

[ny] a 'th wor the pen an gluas
 1PL PTCL 2SG_{INFX} put_{3SG.PRES} to Land's End
 'We will bring you to Land's End.' (BMer. 1. 594)⁶

b. Object-initial

[guyr] a gousaf vy
 truth PTCL speak_{1SG.PRES} 1SG
 'I speak truth.' (Norris 1859, 2: 1. 909)

c. Adverb(ial)-initial

[ragon] y pesys y das
 for_{1PL} PTCL beseech_{3SG.PRET} 3SG_{MASC.POSS} father
 'For us he beseeched his father.' (Stokes 1860–1861: 6, stanza 9^a, [The Passion])

3.3 Surface V3* in Middle neo-Brittonic⁷

All of the Middle neo-Brittonic languages allow more than a single constituent to occur before the verb, though, by and large, only one of these constituents may be an argument,⁸ e.g.:

(6) a. Middle Welsh

ac [ar hynny] [at Uath uab Mathonwy] yd aethant wy
 and on DIST to Math uab Mathonwy PTCL go_{3PL.PRET} 3PL
 'And thereupon they went to Math uab Mathonwy.' (PKM 68.15–16)

⁶ Though we cite the standard edition and translation by Stokes (1872), we occasionally silently adopt improvements in the text and translation by Ray Edwards in Syed and Edwards (1996).

⁷ The asterisk indicates that the verb appears in third or later position in the clause.

⁸ The reason for this constraint requires further research. Under the view that V2 structures in the Brittonic languages developed out of cleft-type structures (see section 2.2), a preliminary hypothesis may be that since only a single argument can appear before the relative pronoun in a cleft structure, as affirmative root clauses were interpreted as V2, there would not have been any evidence for a language learner that more than a single argument could appear in the left periphery.

b. Middle Breton

[breman] [a crenn] [me] a gourchemen dit
 now PTCL plainly 1SG PTCL ask_{3SG.PRES} to_{2SG}
 ‘Now, I plainly ask of you.’ (Ernault 1887b: 256 l. 240 [Vie de sainte Nonn])

c. Middle Cornish

ha [my] [lemmen] a 'th vygeth
 and 1SG now PTCL 2SG_{INFX} baptise_{3SG.PRES}
 ‘And now I will baptise you.’ (BMer. l. 941)

These structures do not undermine the V2 analysis, for the important characteristics of the configuration are that the [u ϕ] features on Fin draw the verb into the lower left periphery and that its Edge Feature causes an XP to move into SpecFinP.

3.4 The architecture of the left periphery

Since Rizzi (1997), it has become clear that the left periphery of the root clause is highly articulated (see further Poletto 2002; Benincà and Poletto 2004; Rizzi 2004, 2013; Haegeman 2012, *inter alios*). Under this analysis, the *communis opinio* understands the hierarchical architecture of the left periphery to be:

(7) [FrameP [ForceP [TopP [FocP [FinP . . .]]]]]

Within this framework, FrameP is the locus of scene-setting locative and temporal adverb(ial)s and hanging topics, ForceP is the locus of markers of illocutionary force and clause-typing, TopP is the locus of topical XPs, FocP is the locus of focussed XPs, and FinP expresses the finiteness or non-finiteness of the clause.

However, in a more refined analysis, Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl (2007: esp. 88) propose that there are, in fact, three different types of topics, each of which is projected separately within the left periphery. In this regard, Hinterhölzl and Petrova (2010: 320–321) write:

- (a) ABOUTNESS TOPIC: “what the sentence is about” (Reinhart, 1981; Lambrecht, 1994), “what is a matter of standing and current interest or concern” (Strawson, 1964);
- (b) CONTRASTIVE TOPIC: an element that induces alternatives which have no impact on the focus value and creates oppositional pairs with respect to other topics (Kuno, 1976; Büring, 1999);

(c) FAMILIAR TOPIC: a given, D-linked constituent, which is typically destressed and realised in a pronominal form (Pesetsky, 1987)⁹

The hierarchical architecture of the left periphery in (7) is, thus, expanded to:

- (8) [FrameP [ForceP [AbTopP [ContrTopP [FocP [FamTopP [FinP . . .]]]]]]]

Poletto (2002) was the first to propose that the locus of the V2 phenomenon can be either FinP + ForceP or FinP alone. In the former, the verb and initial XP move through FinP to ForceP, as in (9), thus severely restricting the number of constituents that can appear before the verb.

- (9) [FrameP [ForceP **XP** [Force **V**] [AbTopP [ContrTopP [FocP [FamTopP [FinP ~~XP~~ [Fin **V**] . . .]]]]]]]

In the latter, however, the verb and XP remain in FinP, as in (10), and FrameP, ForceP, AbTopP, ContrTopP, FocP, and FamTopP may all host constituents that precede the verb.

- (10) [FrameP [ForceP [AbTopP [ContrTopP [FocP [FamTopP [FinP **XP** [Fin **V**] . . .]]]]]]]

We may look to medieval Romance for an illustration. Wolfe (2016, 2018) discusses this microvariation and demonstrates that later Old French is a Force V2 language and restricts the number of constituents that can precede the verb. In (11), a frame-setting clause appears in SpecFrameP (adapted from Wolfe 2018: 69):

- (11) *Et quant il est apareilliez, il prent ses*
 and when he be_{3SG.PRES} appear_{PTCPL} he take_{3SG.PRES} his
armes et monte . . .]
 weapons and ride_{3SG.PRES}
 ‘When he appeared, he took his weapons and rode . . .’ (Pauphilet 1923:
 l. 129 [*La queste del Saint Graal*])

In Wolfe’s sample, there are but two tokens of V4 out of 632 clauses (0.32 %). On the other hand, in Wolfe’s sample of 622 clauses in Old Occitan, not only does V3 occur more often than in later Old French,¹⁰ but V4 occurs in 8.04 % of clauses, as well as V5 in 1.29 % and V6 in 0.64 %, none of which appear in Old

⁹ With regard to the givenness/accessibility characteristic of *familiar topics*, cf. also Chafe (1987).

¹⁰ Old Occitan 29.74%, Old French 24.53%.

French. Thus, V5 clauses, such as (12), are possible in Old Occitan, but not in later Old French (cited after Wolfe 2018: 68):

- (12) *E* [*per aisso*], [*illi*] [*adones*], [*am gran confusion*] *comandet*
 and for this she therefore at great confusion command_{3SG,PRET}
a totas
 to all
 ‘Because of this, amongst great confusion, she commanded everyone to . . .’ (Albanès 1879: 96 § 41 [*La vie de sainte Douceline*])

It is this ‘relaxed’ instantiation of the V2 phenomenon that we find in Middle neo-Brittonic languages. A definitive V6 token is cited by Borsley, Tallerman, and Willis (2007: 293) after Poppe (1991: 178), with an analysis in the present framework indicated:

- (13) *Ac* [_{FrameP} *o ’r dywed*] [_{ForceP} *gan wuyhaf grym a llafvr*]
 and of DEF end with greatest power and toil
 [_{AbTopP} *gwedy kaffael o ’r Brytanyeyt penn e mynyd*],
 after get_{VN} of DEF Britons top DEF mountain
 [_{FocP} *en e lle*] [_{FamTopP} *wynt*] *a lle*] *dangossasant . . .*
 in DEF place 3PL PTCL place show_{3PL,PRET}
 ‘And in the end with the greatest power and toil once the Britons had gained the top of the mountain in that place they showed . . .’ (Roberts 1971: lines 795–797 [*Brut y brenhinedd*])

3.5 Preverbal Object DP + pronominal Subject

George (1991: 216) calls attention to tokens of an Object DP + pronominal Subject + affirmative particle *a* + verb construction and labels it “a valid one” – which we interpret to mean that he believes it to be generated by the grammar – upon the basis of the fact that there are 29 tokens of it in *Beunans Meriasek*, five of which, he states, “are [not] dependent on the rhyme”. He regards it as a Cornish innovation (George 1990: 229–230, 239–240). Such constructions are found not only in *Beunans Meriasek*, but in earlier texts, as well, e.g.:

- (14) a. *ag* [ol 3e v03] [hy] a *wra*
 and all 2SG_{POSS} will 3SG_{FEM} PTCL do_{3SG.PRES}
 ‘And she will do all of your will.’ (Toorians 1991: l. 20 [*The Middle Cornish Charter*])
- b. *ha* [henna] *sur* [my] a *greys*
 and DIST surely 1SG PTCL believe_{3SG.PRES}
 ‘... and I surely believe that.’ (Norris 1859, 1: l. 1263 [*Origo Mundi*])

We understand the pronominal Subjects in the Middle Breton clause in (6b) and the Middle Welsh clause in (13) clearly to be hosted in SpecFamTopP. For a clear Middle Cornish example, consider the following passage, in which Teudar addresses St Kea:

- (15) *Mars o Christ Du mar rajak,* ‘If Christ was God so gracious,
pew o e das? who was his father?
Te pen boba lagajak, You goggle-eyed head of a clown,
ro gorthyb vas. give a satisfactory answer.
Bith war! Na fal! Watch out! Don’t fail!’
 (Thomas and Williams 2007: lines 208–212
 [*Bewnans Ke*])

Second person singular deixis having been established, the succeeding line is:

- (16) [*Anotho*] [*te*] *re gowsys*
 of_{3SG.MASC} 2SG PERF speak_{3SG.PRET}
 ‘You have spoken of him.’ (Thomas and Williams 2007: l. 213 [*Bewnans Ke*])

There can be little doubt but that the pronominal Subject is hosted by SpecFamTopP.¹¹

3.6 More on preverbal Object DP + pronominal Subject

Though there clearly are available Specifier positions to host an Object DP within the left periphery while a pronominal Subject is hosted by SpecFamTopP, we are not certain that such is the correct analysis, for, as mentioned in section 3.3, a

¹¹ For a discussion of this construction in Old English and Old High German, see Walkden (2015).

constraint exists against more than one argument appearing in the left periphery. It may be that all tokens of this construction are not generated by the grammar, but represent an over-determination of it by the necessity to enable a rhyme (here marked by underlining: single and double, dashed and wavy).¹² Consider the surrounding context of the two tokens of this construction cited in (14):

- (17) a. *lemen y3 torn my as re*
ha war en grey3 my an te
nag vs y far
an bar3ma 3e Pons tamar
{ad} my ad pes warty by3 da
ag ol 3e vo3 hy a wra
rag flog yw ha gensy so3,
ha gassy 3e gafus y bo3.
- ‘Now I give her into your hand,
 and upon the . . ., I swear it,
 there is not her equal
 from here to the Tamar bridge.
 I beg you, be good to her,
 and she will do all your will,
 for she is a child, and . . .
 And allow her to have her will.’
 (Toorians 1991: lines 15–22 [*The Middle Cornish Charter*])¹³

¹² We recall Jakobson’s (1923: 16 = 1979: 15) “teoriju organizovannogo nasilija poëtičeskoj formy nad jazykom [theory of organised violence of poetic form over (natural) language]”. For an example, consider the twelfth stanza of the early Irish poem *Fo réir Choluimb céin ad·fias* [As long as I speak, (may I be) obedient to Columb]:

- Do-ell Éirinn, indel cor,*
cechaing noib nemed mbled,
brisis tola, tindis for,
fairrge al druim dánae fer.
- ‘He turned away from Ireland, having made covenants (?),
 he traversed in ships the whales’ sanctuary,
 he broke desires, he was illuminated (?),
 A brave man over the ridge of the sea.’ (Kelly 1973:
 § 12)

In this poem of 4 | 3 heptasyllabic lines, one finds linking alliteration between the last word of a line and the first word of the succeeding line, line-internal alliteration, and rhyme. As observed by Watkins (1995: 121), the words in the final line of this stanza occur virtually in the reverse of unmarked order, viz. *Fer dánae al druim fairrge*, in order to enable the 4 | 3 scansion and retain the alliterative patterns:

<i>fairrge</i>	<i>al</i>	<i>druim</i>		<i>dánae</i>	<i>fer</i>
sea _{GEN}	over	ridge _{DAT}		brave _{NOM.SG.MASC}	man _{NOM}
- ‘a brave man over the sea’s ridge’

¹³ The text is difficult in places. We provide the reference to the most recent published edition and translation, but provide the reading of Bruch (2005: 335) and his unpublished translation when either are uncertain.

- b. *me a vyn mos the'n temple*
ha dev ena a worthyē
kepar del goth thy'mmo vȳ
ef yv arluth nef ha'n beys
ha henna sur my a greys
a luen colon pur theffry
- 'I will go to the temple,
 And will worship God there,
 As it is incumbent on me
 He is Lord of heaven and earth,
 And that I surely believe
 With full heart, very earnestly.'
 (Norris 1859, 1: lines 1259–1264)

It is clear from these passages that the preverbal Object DP + pronominal Subject construction exists to enable the rhyme.

3.6.1 Apparent exceptions

There are apparent exceptions to the hypothesis that preverbal Object DP + pronominal Subject constructions are always poetic overdeterminations, but we are uncertain whether they ought to be considered as authentic instances of Middle Cornish clausal configuration.¹⁴ We provide an example. Consider the following stanza:

- (18) *Arluth henna ny a ra*
desempys duen alema
aspyans pup ay quartron
me agis gyd rum ena
pur uskis bys in cambron
- 'Lord, that we will do.
 Straightway let us go hence.
 Let every one spy from his corner.
 I will guide you, by my soul,
 Very quickly, as far as Camborne.'
 (BMer. lines 978–982)

The first verbal clause of this stanza is glossed as:

- (19) [*henna*] [*ny*] *a* *ra*
 DIST 1PL PTCL do_{3SG.PRES}
 'We will do that.' (BMer. l. 978)

Clearly the configuration of this line, as can be seen in (18), enables the rhyme, but one may note that the configuration **ny a ra henna* would also enable the rhyme, while yielding a configuration with only one argument before the verb,

¹⁴ See the appendix for a discussion of the five tokens that George states are not the result of poetic overdetermination.

hence the position of *henna* must be serving a pragmatic purpose and is not merely the result of poetic overdetermination. Indeed, this is correct, but there is more to be said. Consider the immediately preceding stanza addressed by Teudar to the torturers:

(20) <i>Meryasek ythyv gelwys</i>
<i>in crist yma ov cresy</i>
<i>genogh why bethens sesijs</i>
<i>gruegh y tormontya besy</i>
<i>crist mar ny veth denehys</i>
<i>pegh then horsen trewesy</i>
<i>genogh kynfove lethys</i>
<i>me agis menten defry.</i> | ‘Meriasek is he called:
In Christ he believes.
By you let him be seized
Do ye torment him.
If Christ be not denied,
A thrust to the doleful whoreson!
Though he be slain by you,
I will maintain you certainly.’
(BMer. lines 970–977) |
|--|--|

In context, then, it is clear that *henna* in (19) is a response to the directions in the passage in (20), and, thus, that it, in fact, has been moved into the left periphery to occupy SpecAbTopP. But we must also look at the position of the pronominal Subject in this line and, indeed, determine why it is present at all. Were *ny* not in preverbal position, we might expect the clause to appear as **Arluth, henna a ren* with a conjugated verb, but not only would such a line not rhyme, it would also be a syllable short. In *Beunans Meriasek*, a pronominal Subject, though not required after a conjugated verb, could be included in order to make rhyme or syllable-count, but **Arluth, henna a ren ny* would not provide the necessary rhyme in this token. In this clause, it is not that the Object DP has been displaced by poetic overdetermination, but that the grammatically unnecessary pronominal Subject has been inserted in order to enable the correct syllable-count.¹⁵

3.7 Preverbal Subject DP + Object DP constructions

In this section, we merely observe that, just as the preverbal Object DP + pronominal Subject construction exists to enable the rhyme and/or syllable-count, constructions with both Subject DP and Object DP before the verb, in either order, occur for the same reason, e.g.:

¹⁵ Indeed, chevilles are very commonly employed in Middle Cornish verse in order to achieve the necessary number of syllables in a line.

- (21) a. [dew ʒen] [cris] a ʒanvonas
 two man Christ PTCL send_{3SG.PRET}
 ʒe berna boys ha dewas
 to buy_{VN} food and drink
 ‘Christ sent two men to buy food and drink.’ (Stokes 1860–1861: 16, stanza 42^a [*The Passion*])
- b. [mab marya] [mur a beyn]
 son Mary great of pain
 a woʒevy y ’n vr na
 PTCL endure_{3SG.IMPF} in DEF hour DIST
 ‘The son of Mary endured great pain in that hour.’ (Stokes 1860–1861: 18, stanza 54^a [*The Passion*])

A good illustration of the extent to which displacement can occur in order to enable necessary rhyme and syllable-count is the following, the first four lines of an ABABAB stanza:

- (22) [pur wyr] [certan] [an den ma]
 very true certain DEF man PROX
 [lyes den] re wruk treyle
 many man PERF do_{3SG.PRET} turn_{VN}
 [agan laha] [ef] yma¹⁶
 1PL_{POSS} law 3SG_{MASC} be_{3SG.PRES}
 [pup vr] ow contradye
 every hour PROG contradict_{VN}
 ‘Truly, this man certainly has converted many men. He is always opposing our law.’ (Norris 1859, 1: lines 2423–2426 [*Passio Christi*])

3.8 Some comments on variation in Middle Cornish texts

The number of clauses that deviate from affirmative root clause V2 in the Middle Cornish corpus varies amongst texts. Deviation is fairly common in the poem

¹⁶ Note that *yma* is one of the few verbs that usually requires V1 configuration even in affirmative root clauses. The occurrence of an adverb(ial) or participle to the left of *yma* is not unusual, but a DP in that position is very unusual. Note, furthermore, that, in Breton, *emañ* is employed only after an adverb(ial) or participle, while Subject + V + Complement requires *a zo*; this construction does not have an equivalent in Cornish, however.

Pascon agan Arluth (ca. 1400), but considerably less frequent in the two saints' plays, *Beunans Meriasek* and *Bewnans Ke*, which were probably written around a century later. The *Ordinalia* cycle of mystery plays, which are roughly contemporaneous in date of composition with *Pascon agan Arluth*, do not exhibit nearly as many tokens of such divergent affirmative root clauses as the poem. This is particularly telling when we consider that the central play of the *Ordinalia* cycle, *Passio Christi*, contains some lines which are also found in *Pascon agan Arluth*, although scholarly opinion is divided as to whether the play or the poem is the older text – or original source of the lines in question.¹⁷ It is worth considering, however, that the configurational differences amongst the texts may relate to the fact that *Pascon agan Arluth* is a poem, while the *Ordinalia*, *Beunans Meriasek*, and *Bewnans Ke* are plays.

The medieval Cornish dramas seem clearly to have been written as texts to be performed aloud by actors. Evidence from historical records and in the manuscripts of the plays themselves suggests that they were actually staged (Joyce and Newlyn 1999: 541–558; Bakere 2009: 213). But, as a poem, *Pascon agan Arluth* may have been written as a more purely “literary” text, to be read privately or even silently, rather than recited or performed for an audience. It is, therefore, possible that the language and number of configurational liberties found in it represent a more “literary” register of Cornish, while the plays stay closer to the norms of the spoken language, though displaying divergent clausal configuration when demanded by rhyme and syllable-count.

Another factor is the type of verse form that *Pascon agan Arluth* employs. Whereas the other works of Middle Cornish verse are written in a wide variety of stanza forms, most of which require only three or four pairs of rhyming lines – such as AABCCB or ABABCDDC, in which there are two A lines, two B lines, and two C (and D) lines – *Pascon agan Arluth* is written almost exclusively in eight-line stanzas rhymed ABABABAB, in which the poet is obliged to supply two sets of four rhyming words, i.e. four A rhymes and four B rhymes.¹⁸ It may be that these much stricter rhyming requirements are what spurred the author of *Pascon agan Arluth* – who, unlike the Middle Welsh or Irish bards, was probably not a professional or

¹⁷ Nance (1949: 368), Murdoch (1981: 823–826), Williams (2006: 66), and George (2010: 493) believe that *Pascon agan Arluth* is the older text. Fowler (1961: 104–111) takes the opposite view. Bruch's current opinion tends to side with Fowler upon the basis of metrical evidence.

¹⁸ Bruch (2009: 90–91) remarks upon the difficulty of finding the necessary rhyming words for an ABABABAB stanza in Middle Cornish, and suggests that this may be a reason why this rhyming pattern is employed less over time, occurring less commonly in *Beunans Meriasek* than in the *Ordinalia*, and not being present at all in the surviving text of *Bewnans Ke*.

highly trained poet – to scramble the constituent order of his affirmative root clauses quite freely simply to get an appropriate syllable at the end of each line. It seems as though some of the most divergent affirmative root clause configurations in the *Ordinalia* also occur in stanzas with ABABABAB rhyming stanzas such as in (22), suggesting that it was the need to provide a particular end rhyme, more than any other consideration, that prompted poets to depart so widely from the V2 norm that likely was typical of spoken Middle Cornish.

4 Late Cornish

General opinion is that affirmative root clauses in Late Cornish, presumably under the influence of English, had become SVO (e.g. Jenner 1904: 158; Lyon and Pengilly 1987; Wmffre 1998: 62–63; Brown 2001: 248–249; Gendall 2004: 98–100, 140; Williams 2011: 336). This may be, but the textual sources are often not of high trustworthiness.

4.1 The *Tregear homilies*: A transitional text

Williams (2011: 336) states that the *Tregear homilies*, dated to ca. 1558, are characterised by some Middle Cornish features and some Late Cornish features.¹⁹ He states that they are written “in fairly colloquial prose” (Williams 2011: 336); indeed, in his judgement, Tregear’s “morphology and syntax are perfect” (Williams 2011: 338). However, a close examination of the text, a translation of Edmund Bonner’s *A profitable and necessary doctrine, with certayne homelyes adioyned therevnto* (1555), indicates that Tregear’s translation closely follows the clausal configuration of his English exemplar, violating a variety of features of Cornish syntax. We note, furthermore, that Tregear deletes, enlarges, or paraphrases portions of Bonner’s text. See the appendix for an illustration of his translation practice, several points concerning which we discuss in the following subsection.

¹⁹ For example, Tregear’s language generally evinces the Late Cornish unrounding of /œ/ so as to merge with /ɛ/ and shows frequent use of periphrastic constructions in preference to conjugated verbs, but does not provide any trace of the Late Cornish pre-oclusion of nasals and unrounding of /y/ to /i/.

4.1.1 Comments upon John Tregear's translation practice

The *Tregear homilies* appear likely to be a poor, overly hasty, and unpolished translation of Bonner, in which Tregear, though a native speaker of Cornish, tends to preserve the configuration of constituents in his English exemplar whenever possible (perhaps because he was translating one phrase at a time). It is clear that he was sufficiently influenced by English lexis and syntax to the extent that he introduces English words and configurational syntax, e.g. Adj + N relative ordering, not only in untranslated borrowings such as *sufficient cawse* 'sufficient cause' in folio 1^r, l. 5, but also in his own additions to the text, such as *perfect colonow* 'perfect hearts' in folio 1^r, l. 3, in which the noun is Cornish. This may be evidence that, for educated bilinguals such as Tregear, there was a kind of "priests' Cornish" equivalent to the Breton *brezhoneg beleg* 'priests' Breton', which incorporated elements of French lexis and syntax (see Williams 2006: 189).

Though Tregear gives the impression that he wishes to stay faithful to English configurational syntax wherever possible, there are instances in which his knowledge of Cornish sometimes encourages him to make a different choice. Examples of this include tokens in which he substitutes Cornish V1 for English SVO in negative root clauses and embedded clauses, e.g.:

- (23) a. *ny rug eff leverall in pegh, mas i*
 NEG do_{3SG.PRET} 3SG_{MASC} say_{VN} in sin but in
'n plural number, in pehosow.
 DEF plural number in sins
 'He saieth not sinne, but in the plural number, sinnes.' (folio 8^v, l.14)
- b. *lymmyn pan rug du . . . creatya ha gull den*
 now when do_{3SG.PRET} god create_{VN} and make_{VN} man
 'Now when god had . . . cre[a]ted man . . .' (folio 2^r, lines 18–19)

There are also clausal tokens in which he breaks up long English sentences or reorders the constituents of those sentences so as to produce coherent Cornish sentences that are closer to the syntax of the traditional texts (including, perhaps, a preference for V2 configuration in affirmative root clauses). Tregear is not reluctant to place two DPs before the verb in a root clause, at least in instances in which his English exemplar does, so '[onely one kynde of fruyte] [he] charged hym . . .' becomes [*Saw vn kynda a frut*] [*an tas dew*] *a chargias mab-den* . . . 'only one kind of fruit, God the Father charged mankind' in folio 4^r, lines 2–3. Since two DPs can occur before the verb in Middle Cornish verse texts, perhaps such phrasing sounded acceptable to Tregear as a Cornish

speaker. On the other hand, Tregear renders the following clause from folio 4^r, l. 3, in which he wishes to construct an embedded negative clause meaning ‘that he might not meddle with or touch it [i.e. the fruit],’ as *na rella myllya na tuchia wort*a with V1 (Aux [S] V PP) configuration, not S Aux V PP as it would be in English.²⁰

Tregear is perhaps most useful as a source of negative evidence concerning the syntax of Cornish, since there appear to be clauses in which he chooses (or is forced) to avoid duplicating the English clausal configuration, even though the latter seems to be his default approach to translating Bonner’s prose. Like Breton clergy, he seems quite comfortable with producing overdetermined DPs such as *an frut an wethan* for Bonner’s ‘the fruite of the tree,’ for which **frut an wethan* is expected. But when faced with ‘The Prophette, Dauid . . . alledgeth,’ Tregear produces progressive *yma an profet dauid ow allegia* ‘The Prophet David is alleging,’ since this is how he usually expresses the simple present tense in Cornish, employing *yma* + verbal noun and the V1 configuration normal for this verb (Williams 2016: 120–124) or the progressive particle *ow* + verbal noun.²¹

In our view, the *Tregear homilies* cannot be employed to establish much about Middle or Late Cornish affirmative root clause configuration.

4.2 The writings of the Boson family

Three members of the Boson family left Late Cornish texts from ca 1660 to ca 1730. They were not native speakers of the language, however, so one must be suspicious of English influence in the texts that they produced. In the folktale *Dzhûan Tshei an Her* ‘John of Chyannor’, said to have been written by Nicholas Boson,²² one does not find diagnostic V2 structures such as Object DP/Adverb-(ial)P + affirmative particle + verb + Subject DP, but there are a number of tokens in which an Object DP and a pronominal Subject precede the affirmative particle *a* and verb, e.g.:²³

²⁰ Of course, the English clause that he is translating, *vtterly to refrayne from* [eating the fruit], is not itself negative or V1 or even an embedded clause, as it lacks a finite verb (we note that Cornish has no equivalent to such a negated infinitive).

²¹ Unlike Breton, in which it is permissible to formulate an SVO sentence of the type *D. a zo* + verbal noun, Cornish does not have a means of constructing an SVO root clause employing Subject DP + *a yw* + verbal noun; cf. n. 16.

²² Printed by Lhuyd (1707: 251–253) in an idiosyncratic orthography.

²³ We preserve Lhuyd’s orthography in these tokens.

- (24) a. [*Kibmiaz tēg*] [*ev*] *a* *kȳmeraz* . . .
 leave fair 3SG PTCL take_{3SG.PRET}
 ‘He took fair leave . . .’ (Padel 1975: 15 § 3)
- b. *Ha* [*an mona*] [*an dzhei*] *a* *gavaz*; *ha* [*n*
 and DEF money 3PL PTCL find_{3SG.PRET} and DEF
bara] [*dzhei*] *a* *dhabraz*
 bread 3PL PTCL eat_{3SG.PRET}
 ‘And they found the money; and they ate the bread.’ (Padel 1975: 19
 § 46)

It seems to us that clauses such as these may well be the result of L1 interference from English, but they do not provide secure evidence that, as in English, the clausal configuration was SVO with the possibility of fronting another constituent for topicalisation, not least because of the presence of the affirmative root clause particle.

4.3 The Bible translations of Wella Rowe

The Bible translations of Wella Rowe,²⁴ which date from ca 1690, are thought to represent some of the latest surviving works written or translated by a native speaker of Cornish. As translations, one must be cautious about his Cornish replicating the configuration of his English exemplar. One passage from Genesis 3:14, however, may suggest that Cornish was moving towards SVO:

- (25) *War tha doer chee ra moaze, ha douste chee ra*
 upon 2SG_{POSS} belly 2SG do_{2SG.PRES} go_{VN} and dust 2SG do_{2SG.PRES}
debre oll deethyow tha vownyas
 eat_{VN} all days 2SG_{POSS} life
 ‘Vpon thy belly shalt thou goe, and dust shalt thou eate, all the dayes of
 thy life.’ (Cornish: Loth 1902: 180; trans. KJV Genesis 3:14)

This passage contains a token of OSV configuration in the Cornish text, *douste chee ra debre*, which probably is intended to parallel the configuration of the English exemplar with topicalisation, *dust shalt thou eat*. Interestingly, the English text shows two tokens of V2 configuration, *vpon thy belly shalt thou goe* and *dust shalt thou eate*, in which *shalt* is in second position following an initial

²⁴ Comprised of Genesis 3, the ten commandments, and Matthew 2 and 4.

PP or DP, respectively; in both tokens, however, Rowe's Cornish translation has altered the configuration to SVO: *War tha doer chee ra moaze* (PP S Aux V) and *douste chee ra debre* (O S Aux V). This may well comprise the best – though hardly conclusive – evidence we have for Late Cornish moving towards becoming SVO in affirmative root clauses.²⁵

4.4 William Bodinar's letter to Daines Barrington

William Bodinar's letter to Daines Barrington, written 3 July 1776, is often credited as the last text in the traditional Cornish corpus. It is worth noting, however, that Bodinar is not considered to have been a native speaker of Cornish because he, as described in the letter, learnt the language as a boy from older fishermen during expeditions out to sea:²⁶

- (26) *me rig deskey Cornoack termen me vee mawe*
 1SG do_{3SG.PRET} learn_{VN} Cornish time 1SG be_{3SG.PRET} boy
 'I learnt Cornish when I was a boy.' (Pool and Padel 1975–1976: 234.7)

Bodinar employs S Aux V O configuration in *me rig deskey Cornoack* 'I did learn (= learnt)²⁷ Cornish', which is consistent with both English SVO and Middle Cornish V2, but note that he employs SVO configuration in the embedded clause *termen me vee mawe* – though this is, perhaps, owing to that fact that he is a native speaker of English, and so may not be diagnostic.²⁸ In his discussion of this clause in Pool and Padel (1975–1976: 236), Padel cites a comparable token of *termen* employed as a complementiser in a letter written by John Boson in 1710 in which the configuration is also SV in the embedded clause – but, of course, Boson also was not a native speaker of Cornish.

²⁵ The anonymous reviewer asks whether we think that in prospective SVO Late Cornish, as in English, the Subject occupies SpecTP and there is no V→T movement. Unfortunately, upon the basis of such slight information, such a determination cannot be made.

²⁶ We note, however, that Pool and Padel (1975–1976: 235) comment that Bodinar's "Cornish is authentic – better than that of John Boson some sixty years earlier."

²⁷ Aux V in place of a conjugated verb is typical of Tregear and Late Cornish.

²⁸ We observe that Bodinar's letter contains 12 lines of Cornish, none of which include the affirmative particle *a*, which could suggest that it had become phonologically null in the variety that Bodinar acquired, leading him to have constructed an SVO grammar. Such a small sample is hardly probative, however.

4.5 Concluding remarks about Late Cornish

The analysis of Late Cornish syntax is inherently problematic. Aside from the *Tregear homilies*, a text in transition from Middle to Late Cornish, which, in our view, shows considerable interference from English, the corpus is very small and composed of translations by a native speaker and texts by non-native speakers. As mentioned in section 4.3, Wella Rowe's use of XP S Aux V in place of the XP V S O attested in two instances in his English exemplar appears to be legitimate evidence in favour of Cornish moving towards SVO in affirmative root clauses, but such crumbs are little upon which to hang a definitive judgement.

5 Future work

The preliminary remarks presented herein have sketched the broad outlines of the diachrony of the configuration of the affirmative root clause in Cornish. Clearly, much more work remains to be done. The next step for us, now underway, is to create parsed corpora for *Passio Christi*, the central play of the *Ordinalia* (ca 1400), and *Beunans Meriasek* (ca 1504) to make hard data available for Middle Cornish. The prospect for progress on Late Cornish – barring the discovery of more texts – appears doubtful. An edition of the *Tregear homilies* is required before its syntactic structures can be systematically investigated.

Appendix I Remarks on George's "valid" tokens of preverbal Object DP + pronominal Subject constructions

George (1991: 216) notes that the preverbal Object DP + pronominal Subject construction in the clauses at BMer. lines 1807–1808, 1888–1889, 3224–3225, 4340–4342, and 4515–5156 are not required to enable the rhyme. The Subject and Verb in each token occur in the first half of a line and, thus, do not participate in the end-rhyme pattern of the stanza. In each token, it is possible to posit a grammatical line that would preserve V2, as well as the syllable-count of the phrase.

– **The five tokens**

The relevant lines follow:

- (27) a. *ha thyso age hanov*
 and to_{2SG} 3PL_{POSS} name
me a leuer pur ylyn
 1SG PTCL say_{3SG.PRES} very fair
 ‘And to thee their names
 I will tell very fairly.’ (BMer. lines 1807–1808)
- b. *ha the borse mes a ’th askra*
 and 2SG_{POSS} purse out of 2SG_{POSS} bosom
me a ’m beth ha ’th margh uskis
 1SG PTCL 1SG_{INFX} have_{3SG.PRES} and 2SG_{POSS} horse swift
 ‘And thy purse out of thy bosom
 I will have, and thy swift horse.’ (BMer. line 1888)
- c. *v lon bowyn dufunys*
 five steer beef mince_{PST-PTCPL}
y a depse in ij deth
 3PL PTCL eat_{3SG.COND} in two day
 ‘Five beef steers minced
 They would eat in two days.’ (BMer. lines 3224–3225)
- d. *the volnogeth*
 2SG_{POSS} will
par del deleth
 even as be.fitting_{3SG.PRES}
ny a ra snell
 1PL PTCL do_{3SG.PRES} quickly
 ‘Thy will
 ‘Even as is meet
 We will do swiftly.’ (BMer. lines 4340–4342)
- e. *dadder the lues huny*
 good to many one
eff a ruk ze ihesu gras
 3SG_{MASC} PTCL do_{3SG.PRET} to Jesus thanks
 ‘Goodness to many a one
 He did, to Jesus thanks.’ (BMer. lines 4515–4516)

– **Commentary**

All five tokens can be recomposed as V2 clauses that maintain the correct syllable count with the Object DP in the left periphery by employing a conjugated verb, as in (28a, c–d), and/or placing the pronominal subject in post-verbal position, as in (28b–e):

- (28) a. BMer. line 1808: *me a leuer* → *a lauaraf*
 b. BMer. line 1889: *me a'm beth* → *a'm beth vy*
 c. BMer. line 3225: *y a depse* → *a thepsens y*
 d. BMer. line 4342: *ny a ra* → *a ren ny*
 e. BMer. line 4516: *eff a ruk* → *a ruk eff*

In (28b–e), the V2 alternative requires the use of a postposed pronominal Subject in order to maintain the necessary syllable-count.²⁹ We note that George (1991: 228–229) discusses clauses with an Object DP in the left periphery, but the tokens that he cites are a negative clause and a *wh*-question and thus not relevant. It may be that, while the preverbal Object DP + pronominal Subject construction in earlier Middle Cornish texts existed to enable rhyme and syllable-count, as in (14) and (17), the author of *Beunans Meriasek*, writing roughly a century later, simply preferred not to employ V2 structures with only the Object DP in the left periphery. Clearly, further research making use of multiple texts is required, which we intend to take up in the future.

We note that *me a leuer* in (28a) is a separate case, since *a lauaraf* with conjugated verb provides the necessary syllable-count itself, i.e. without an overt post-posed pronominal Subject. We call attention to the fact, however, that *me a leuer* occurs earlier in the stanza, as illustrated in (29), so perhaps the author chose to employ the same phrasing, as parallelism is a well-known feature of literary language (Fabb 1997: 137–164 *et passim*).

(29)	<i>Nyns o an rena dewov</i>
<i><u>me a leuer</u> costentyn</i>
<i>ij abostel caradov</i>
<i>y o ze crist cuff colyn</i>
<i>Myr age ymach heb wov</i>
<i>mars yns y havel certyn</i>
<i>ha thyso age hanov</i>
<i><u>me a leuer</u> pur ylyn</i> | ‘Those were not gods,
I say, Constantine.
Two beloved apostles
They were to Christ the dear heart.
Behold their images without a lie
Whether they are like them certainly,
And to thee their names
I will tell very fairly.’
(BMer. lines 1801–1808) |
|------|--|--|

²⁹ In (28b), the post posed pronominal *vy* in fact cross-references the object agreement affix.

Appendix II Illustration of John Tregear's translation practice

Grey highlighted text = Bonner's English not translated by Tregear

Bold text = Bonner's English altered or replaced with an equivalent phrase by Tregear

SMALL CAPITAL text = additional words or phrases added by Tregear

Single underscore = English word that had already been borrowed directly into Cornish or that was left untranslated by Tregear

u>

Double underscore = English word (or word previously borrowed from English into Cornish) added by Tregear in his Cornish translation

– *Tregear Homilies*, folio 1^r, lines 1–5:

The Prophette, Daudid in **his** fore score and nintenth
*IMA an profet dautit i 'n peswar vgangs ha nownsag*³⁰
 be_{3SG.PRES} DEF prophet David in DEF four score and 19

psalme, exhorting all people to **syng**e prayse
psalme, |² ow exortya oll AN bobyll the ry prayse HAG HONOR
psalm PROG exhorting_{VN}³¹ all DEF people to give_{VN} praise and honor

to **almighty** god, and to serue him in gladnes, and
the du |³ HA th 'y servya in lowendar, ha
 to God to 3SG_{MASC.POSS} serve_{VN} in gladness and

reioyse in **his** sight,
GANS PERFECT COLONOW THE reiosya |⁴ in sight AGAN CREATOR HA
 with perfect³² hearts to reioyce_{VN} in sight 1PL_{POSS} creator and

30 Note that Tregear here employs the cardinal, rather than the ordinal, numeral.

31 Tregear has converted this phrase, which uses a present participle in English, to a Cornish clause with a progressive construction (i.e. a periphrastic present as general present tense; cf. colloquial Modern Welsh). He has also broken what is one sentence in Bonner's text into two sentences in Cornish (each using the periphrastic present tense), with the break coming in line 4.

32 Note the use of the preposed adjective, as per English. This is not unusual when Tregear employs English adjectives to modify a noun, even when the noun itself is translated into Cornish. Note also that the adj. *perfect* does not appear in Bonner's English text. It is an addition by Tregear, who seems to enjoy embellishing and expanding upon Bonner's text as he translates. A comparable example of an untranslated English Adj + N phrase is *sufficient cawse* in line 5.

alldgeth thys
 REDEMAR.³³ yma AN PROFET DAVID ow |⁵ allegia helma
redeemer be_{3SG.PRES} DEF prophet David PROG allege_{VN} PROX
 as a sufficient cause thereof.
 kepar ⟨ha⟩ dell³⁴ EW-A sufficient cawse AGAN REDEMPCION
 as (as) (as) be_{3SG.PRES}-3SG_{MASC} sufficient cause 1PL_{POSS} redemption

– *Tregear Homilies, folio 4^r, lines 2–6:*

onely³⁵ one kynde of fruyte he charged
 saw vn kynda a frut AN TAS DU |³ a chargias
 only 1 kind of fruit DEF Father God PTCL charge_{3SG.PRET}
 hym vtterlye to refrayne from, on
 MABDEN NA RELLA MYLLYA NA TUCHIA WORTA war
 mankind NEG_{SUB} do_{3SG.IMPF.SUBJ} meddle_{VN} nor touch_{VN} at_{3SG.MASC} upon
 payne of death, (and) that not of the body
 |⁴ bayne MERWALL a vernans henn o MERNANS an corfe
 pain dying_{VN} of death DIST be_{3SG.IMPF} death DEF body
 alone, but of the soule also) which was the fruyte of
 ha 'n ena |⁵ inweth henna o a frut a
 and DEF soul also DIST be_{3SG.IMPF} DEF fruit of

33 Note that the Cornish repeats the preposition the ‘to’ of this infinitive construction, although to is omitted in the English exemplar.

34 *Kepar ha* (as originally written) is equivalent to English ‘as’ + DP, e.g. ‘as a sufficient cause,’ but the usual way to say ‘as a cause’ would be *avel* + DP, not *kepar ha* + DP, which usually means ‘just like . . .’ or ‘even as . . .’ Even more surprisingly, Tregear has altered it here to *kepar dell*, which is equivalent to English ‘as’ + V, which requires him to introduce a new verb *ewa* ‘it is’ and add a subordinate clause.

35 Or ‘the sufficient cause of our redemption,’ depending upon how we interpret this ambiguous Cornish phrase. Presumably, Tregear felt it necessary to replace ‘thereof’ with a phrase that specifies ‘of our redemption,’ even though this seems to change the meaning of the text from ‘cause to sing praise to almighty God’, which is how we understand Bonner’s English text.

the tree called in scripture the tree of knowledge
 'n wethan (*gylwys in scripture*) |⁶ *an wethan a wothfes*
 DEF tree call_{PST-PTCPL} in scripture DEF tree of know_{VN}

of good, and euyt.
a 'N da ha 'N drog.
 of DEF good and DEF evil