

Introduction — Word order in Brythonic

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Studies in Brythonic Word Order

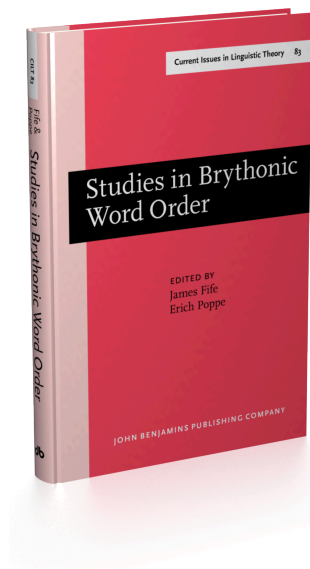
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Introduction--Word Order in Brythonic

Word order and word order typology has been an area of increased interest in linguistics since the 1960's. This is partly explained by the logarithmic effect of new discoveries in this field: the more we learn about the causes and effects of basic word order in language, the more detailed research it stimulates. We have now amassed a significant store of information relating to grammatical effects of constituent arrangement and this naturally draws further attempts to explain the phenomena observed. Another reason for the present interest is the fact that many modern theories (the prime example being TGG and its successors) make critical use of configuration and sequence to trigger and control syntactic functions. Even when deliberately eschewing fixed ordering at abstract levels (as, e.g., in GPSG or Dik's functional grammar) many other theories must nonetheless posit principles of linearization in order to generate appropriate surface forms. These factors combine to make word order a major concern of linguistics, whether descriptive or theoretic.

In this regard Celtic languages are especially attractive objects of investigation, as they are the only members of the Indo-European stock with dominant VSO order. Because of this, the syntax of Celtic languages has been keenly studied in recent years. Inasmuch as Proto-Indo-European is posited to be SOV in basic order and the majority of its descendants are SVO, the uniqueness of Celtic provides a veritable laboratory for testing various hypotheses on word order effects and the rules of word order change.

The languages of the Brythonic branch of Celtic (comprising Welsh, Breton and †Cornish) are particularly valuable for study of the evolution of word order, since they exhibit extraordinary fluctuation over the course of their attested history. Whereas the Goidelic branch (Irish, Scots Gaelic and †Manx) have been rather consistently rigid VSO languages, the attested evidence of Welsh shows an apparent swing from verb-initial to verb-medial order and back again, while Cornish and Breton to different degrees had early abandoned verb-initial order. It is still a matter of keen debate what

constitutes the "basic word order" (however defined) for these languages' attested periods, as well as the significance of the variation. As will be seen, that debate is taken up in several places in this collection.

The study of Celtic word order has shown its own fluctuations. Early studies supported a substratum theory to account for the unusual ordering, though this was later superseded by historical solutions from within Indo-European. More recently scholars have turned to relatively synchronic explanations to account for the variation in orders. It is not necessary here to survey the history of word order research in Brythonic; the relevant works are reviewed in the individual contributions which follow. In compiling this collection, the editors hope to carry present research forward in this, an area which holds much promise for understanding problems of word order.

We attempted to cover as wide an area of contributions as possible from researchers who have partaken in the discussion of Brythonic word order in recent years. The types of studies included range over diachronic, synchronic, comparative, typological and descriptive analysis of the data. We have not tried to limit the discussion to one approach; the papers represent the range of current thinking on the topic, from philological to functional to GB frameworks. Consequently there is a degree of methodological diversity between the approaches and not a small amount of disagreement at times. This we considered salutary in stimulating new debate on old questions. This has also resulted in cases where terminology differs from study to study, as with the use of terms such as "focus", "topic" and "emphasis". But by adopting this pluralistic scheme, we were able not only to provide the reader with a fairly comprehensive overview of the state of research on all three languages, but also to present them in a continuous cline of diachrony within the branch, from the Brittonic proto-language right up to current, colloquial usage.

Koch's article is a reconstructive analysis of Brittonic syntax based primarily on comparison of Gaulish and Old Welsh exemplars in an effort to deduce the intermediate forms. His study deals with the *terminus a quo* for Brythonic word order.

Mac Cana's article is in many ways a reaction to reconstructive syntax and adopts what could be called a more familial origin for the evolution of orders in Brythonic. The study compares functionally similar constructions diachronically within Welsh and comparatively with Irish.

The paper by Fife & King takes a more typological and functional approach to the anomalous order of Middle Welsh. In proposing an analysis based on parallels in unrelated languages, the authors place the 'abnormal sentence' into its typological context.

Poppe provides detailed statistics of the occurrence of different word order patterns in a Middle Welsh text and suggests a functional framework to explain the near-obligatory fronting of some sentence constituent.

George's article on word order patterns in *Beunans Meriasek* is an exhaustive descriptive compilation of the observed orders. These data are presented to address a central question in any word order research: just what constitutes a language's basic order, in this case, Middle Cornish.

Exposition of empirical data is likewise a centrepiece of Fife's analysis of three Classical Welsh texts. The paper adduces information to illuminate the critical transitional period between Middle Welsh verb-medial and Modern Welsh verb-initial orders.

The pragmatics of Modern Breton NP-initial structures is the subject of Timm's article. She presents statistical data and some functional explanations for frontings in a language whose typological classification as VSO is often called into question on account of such constructions.

Tallerman discusses the relative ordering of head constituents in Modern Welsh dialects. Her study is unique in the volume; while other papers are concerned with the question of 'macro-order' of the clausal constituents, Tallerman provides a look at the 'micro-order' of elements within clausal/phrase constituents.

Finally Watkins discusses the roles of cleft and non-cleft sentences in Modern Welsh. In this he is extending his analytical framework previously used for Old and Middle Welsh texts to account for present-day word order phenomena.

The editors hope not only that this collection of work on Brythonic will be stimulating to specialists in Celtic linguistics, but equally that it will be useful and enlightening to Indo-Europeanists and general linguists interested in word order, word order change and typology. By spotlighting a group of languages whose features appear in some ways unusual, if not unique, it is hoped new knowledge will result of what is common between Brythonic and other languages' ordering problems which can further our understanding of this crucial area of syntax.

