

On the Areal Pattern of ‘Brittonicity’ in English and Its Implications

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1. Introduction

I begin with the following proposition, which I take as the founding principle of areal linguistics. Where neighboring languages show a pattern of extensive grammatical resemblances not attributable to genetic descent, such resemblances are more probably due to language contact than to coincidence. Since external and internal motivations are rarely mutually exclusive, the existence of ‘possible’ internal motivations is irrelevant, and does not refute or even affect this argument. From the evidence to be adduced below (sec. 3), it will be seen that if we apply this principle to the area of the British Isles, Brittany,¹ and West Germanic speaking continental Europe, our conclusion must be that language contact has created the extensive grammatical resemblances found in the British half of this spectrum, which fade away as we move into the continental Germanic half. For any number of obvious reasons, language contact in this case can only have taken the form of Celtic substratal influence in English, due to language shift from Celtic to English following the Anglo-Saxon Conquest. The problem is that this conclusion contradicts the conventional wisdom that there is essentially no Celtic influence in English. But this conclusion was based on the rather minimal extent of Celtic *lexical* influence in Old English, without regard for the evidence of Celtic *grammatical* influence in Middle English, and so cannot be regarded as secure.

If the conventional wisdom on the history of English is correct, we would expect to find 1) that within English dialects significant resemblances to Celtic should occur only in the known Celtic Englishes of Ireland, Wales, and Cornwall, 2) that Middle English should show no greater resemblance to Celtic than does Old English, 3) that within Middle English significant resemblances to Celtic should be no

¹ That Brittany is a legitimate part of the British language area is well-indicated by its name, and, of course, by evidence of significant colonization from Britain.

more common in the SW and N than in the SE, and 4) that within Germanic, especially medieval Germanic, English should show no greater resemblance to Celtic than does other Germanic. Resemblances to Celtic within 1) the English Englishes, 2) Middle English as whole, 3) SW and N Middle English in particular, and 4) English in general should be minimal, no more than would be expected from mere coincidence. All these predictions, though research on the fourth is not complete, are wrong. Therefore the conventional wisdom must be wrong.

If the traditional conventional wisdom on the history of England, that the Anglo-Saxon Conquest was what may be called a 'clean sweep,' is correct, we should find 1) genetic evidence showing that, even in areas without Norse settlement, the modern English are much more similar to the NW Germans, Danes, and Frisians than to the Irish, 2) archeological and toponymic evidence indicating both high Anglo-Saxon settlement and low Brittonic survival all across England. Over the last decades, it has increasingly been recognized that these predictions are in fact wrong, to the point that arguing against the traditional interpretation of the Anglo-Saxon Conquest has become kicking a dead horse. Recent evidence of a sort not available to earlier observers has perhaps provided the final nail in the coffin, for the evidence of genetics adduced by Capelli, et al. (2002) makes it quite clear that, outside of the old Danelaw, the English are much more similar genetically, in the paternal line (which might reasonably be expected to over-represent conquerors), to the modern Irish than to the modern NW Germans and Danes, or Frisians.² Upon reflection this is hardly surprising, given that serfs are more valuable than corpses. To sum up, it is now recognized, at least among specialists, that the English are not Germans, but linguistically Germanicized Celts.³

Or perhaps we should say that the English are *lexically* Germanicized Celts (at least in core lexicon). People who set out to acquire a second language typically wind up speaking something like their first language with second-language lexicon (or morphemes).⁴ It is not to be expected then that the process of language shift in early Anglo-Saxon England should have been utterly without linguistic result, at least initially. As speakers of English Brittonic went over to pre-English, the result should have been what will be called Brittonic English, a 'brogue' with a strong Brittonic 'accent,' in grammar as well as phonetic implementation.⁵ During the Old English period, characteristic usages of Brittonic

² Among the Frisians and in Frisian we find not only low-level genetic resemblances to Britons (Capelli, et al., 2002: 982f.), but also low-level linguistic resemblances to Brittonic. The traditional conception of the Frisians as pure Germans, is thus problematic at best.

³ Likewise, the 'Celts' of Roman and earlier Britain were surely Celticized 'something elses.'

⁴ The big exception here is fundamental word order, the ordering of elements within 1) sentence and 2) noun-phrase. This, being easily learned, is typically not affected by external influences.

⁵ English Brittonic will be taken to be essentially uniform, despite the fact that it quite probably was not. The reason is methodological: arbitrarily stipulating that the Brittonic of a given area just happened to have a given feature is no better than arbitrarily stipulating that a given feature just happened to develop in the English of this area, except that dragging Brittonic influence violates Occam's Razor.

English would have been for the most part stigmatized as vulgar and not used in writing, but the Norman Conquest might well have changed all that. Whether it did or not is a matter for empirical investigation, not theoretical speculation, and the facts adduced below will show that there is no evidence that Brittonic English died out during the Old English period, and strong evidence that it became the primary basis of Middle English, at least in the South.

Yet the new conventional wisdom on English, while admitting that the traditional interpretation of the Anglo-Saxon Conquest is wrong, still attempts to maintain that the traditional interpretation of English as having no significant Celtic influence is right. The idea these days seems to be that the 'fact' that there is no evidence of significant Celtic influence in English is surprising. Indeed it would be, save for one very serious problem: it is not a fact. As a general rule, surprise indicates failure of understanding, and it should come as no surprise that there has been a failure of understanding in this case. Perhaps most of those who assert the new conventional wisdom, intend 'influence' to mean 'lexical influence.' But the idea that language shift can confidently be expected to produce a certain 'magic minimum' amount of lexical influence, which 'surprisingly' does not occur in English, has been explicitly dismissed as wrong by specialists in language contact (Thomason and Kaufman 1988: 20f.). If, on the other hand, such observers intend 'influence' to mean, or at least include, 'grammatical influence,' then again what they assert is wrong, for there is abundant evidence of Celtic grammatical influence in English. Thus, regardless of what the purveyors of the new conventional wisdom mean by their repeated expressions of surprise, it is, not surprisingly, wrong. The purpose of the present paper is to begin, or perhaps continue, the process of eliminating 'the surprise factor' in our understanding of the history of English, by proposing a scenario of language shift with implications that make the evidence, in particular the general drift of English over time away from other Germanic and toward Brittonic, come out as predictable and motivated for a change rather than unpredictable and unmotivated as they are within the traditional denial of Brittonic influence. Hopefully, a new and improved understanding of the history of English can be integrated with our new and improved understanding of the history of England. There is no problem in the surprising 'fact' that there is not more Brittonic influence in English: there is.

2. Getting to the Seen from the Unseen

2.1. The Theory of the Zones

Among the most powerful reasons to believe that there is Brittonic influence in English is the geographic pattern evident in the dialectal provenance of possible Brittonicisms. Without exception (so far as I have yet been able to determine) they are first attested in, or later associated with, the (greater) SW or N, where independent evidence long known which, due to considerations of length

cannot be given here, strongly suggests a much lower level of Anglo-Saxon settlement than in the (greater) South East. In other words, the linguistic evidence is consistent with the non-linguistic evidence indicating that, to put it rather simplistically, the greater South East was more Germanic and the non-South East more Brittonic, both in language and population. It has long been recognized that Middle English had its Norse and non-Norse zones, going back to the Norse semi-conquest. Much that is otherwise mysterious in English is explained if we posit that Middle English also had its Brittonic and non-Brittonic zones, going back to the Anglo-Saxon Conquest.

The non-Brittonic or Anglo-Saxon zone is basically East Anglia and the greater London/Kent area, out to about Hampshire. The area of the earlier and smaller Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, East Anglia, Kent, Essex, Sussex, and Middlesex, gives a fairly good idea of what is intended. The rest of England to the west and north, the area of the later, larger, and more important Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, Wessex, Mercia, and Northumbria, is the Brittonic zone. Here the Anglo-Saxon element was largely an elite lording over masses of Brittonic peasants, with a few colonies, mostly of 'liberated' federates, thrown in for good measure, especially in the South.⁶

Since the Norse and Brittonic zones were not co-extensive, combining the two divisions leads to the four zones: 1) the South East: in neither the Norse zone nor the Brittonic zone, 2) the East: in the Norse zone but not in the Brittonic zone, 3) the South West: in the Brittonic zone but not Norse zone, and 4) the North: in both Norse and Brittonic zones. This scheme is of course simplistic, intended to account for the forest rather than the trees, but we have to start somewhere.⁷ In more detail, the zones are as follows: the South West is a greater South West, to the southwest of the Danelaw line and to the west of the usual line dividing SW from SE dialects, more or less from a little east of Oxford south to the coast east of Southampton. The North is the traditional North plus the north Midlands northeast of the Danelaw line (including Lincolnshire). The East is a sort of greater East Anglia, overflowing a bit into the east Midlands north of London, and the South East is the area around and to the south and east of London. What we would expect to find in accordance with this scheme is evidence of pure Brittonic influence in the South West, of mingled Brittonic and Norse influence in the North, of Norse influence alone in the East, and of neither Brittonic nor Norse influence, or rather of resistance to Brittonic and Norse influences, in the South East. This is basically what we find.

⁶ Even in the Anglo-Saxon zone, there is no good reason to posit a 'clean sweep' of the native Britons. A rough guess would be that, as of about 600 AD, the Anglo-Saxon element in the population of the Anglo-Saxon zone was about 25%, whereas in the Brittonic zone it was less than 10% in the SW, and less than 5% in the N. Significantly higher percentages, however traditionally assumed, simply cannot be justified on an objective and rational assessment of the evidence.

⁷ One problem is that the area around the Fens, where much of our early Middle English comes from (Peterborough, Ormulum), is of ambiguous status, as there are (non-linguistic) indications of Brittonic enclaves there. Evidence from this area has thus had to be thrown out.

The great advantage of the theory of the zones is that the geographic pattern seen in the appearance and spread of innovations in Middle English, traditionally regarded as random, where not connected with Norse influence, which alone is not enough (*pace* McWhorter 2002), can now be seen as non-random. That the North is innovative and the South East conservative is not explained on the basis of Norse influence alone, which would lead us to expect that the most conservative area should have been the South West. Once we have seen that the South West has stronger Brittonic influence than the South East, the pattern is explained. That the South West often rapidly accepts Northern ‘Norse’ innovations is a mystery under the traditional interpretation, but once we have begun to think in terms of Brittonic influence, we can see what lies behind this: the South West was receptive to the Brittonic half of Northern ‘Nordo-Brittonicisms.’ Likewise that the South West often innovates in ways, particularly those involved in nominalization of the verbal system, that have the effect of distancing English from other Germanic is not explained under the conventional wisdom, but is explained once we realize that the divergence of English away from other Germanic is also in most cases, particularly those involved in nominalization of the verbal system, a convergence toward Brittonic, obviously motivated by Brittonic substratal influence, which independent considerations would lead us to expect in any case. It is not, of course, traditional to think of developments of Middle English in terms of substrate surfacing, but once we get used to the idea, which is hardly outrageous, it in fact works fairly well.

2.2. *Brief Comments on Mechanism*

Due to considerations of length, little can be said on the mechanism of Brittonic influence. In terms of the theory of Thomason and Kaufman (1988), which I accept in relevant aspects, what we have here is a garden-variety case of language shift. More specifically, the situation in early Anglo-Saxon England appears to have been a case of the type described by Thomason and Kaufman (1988: 47): “... if the shifting group is so large numerically that the TL (target language) model is not fully available to all its members, then imperfect learning is a probability, and the learners’ errors are more likely to spread throughout the TL speech community.” Applying this rule to Anglo-Saxon England, it is well within the range of reasonable expectation that English would wind up Brittonicized. Two other principles are worth noting. First, in cases of language shift, imperfect acquisition typically results in significant grammatical influence with minimal lexical influence, at least for old or basic meanings. Certainly, there is no securely established ‘magic minimum’ amount of lexical influence that must occur (Thomason and Kaufman 1988: 21). Second, in order to avoid the problem of unfalsifiable *ad hoc* theorizing, it is best to insist on a large number of ‘across the board’ resemblances, before any given theory of substratal influence can be accepted (Thomason and Kaufman 1988: 60). But we surely have that here: the cases are numerous, and occur ‘across the board.’

Likewise, little can be said here on the mechanism of Norse influence, but as Brittonic influence, since it appears for the most part during the Middle English period, cannot be treated in isolation from Norse influence, something must be said. The position taken here will be that English and Norse were mutually comprehensible, if just barely, at the time of settlement, so that what happened was in effect extreme dialect leveling during extreme dialect mixture, along with some op-opportunistic incorporation of seemingly free variants like 'they.' The ultimate effect was similar in result, though not in mechanism, to what may be called weak creolization, as has happened with Afrikaans. Even if we have only theoretical reasons to believe this, in the absence of good parallel examples to provide empirical support, the theoretical reasons seem good, and my position has a long and respectable history in English studies, being adopted by Wright (1928: 80), among others.

3. *The Areal Evidence: Shared Features and Their Dialectal Provenance*

The original idea was to map the extent of 'Celticity' within the Celtic and Germanic languages from various time periods (roughly 1250 to 1950),⁸ ignoring Romance on the grounds that the probable presence of an unattested Celtic substrate for the Romance of much France (and Iberia) makes the evidence of Romance difficult to interpret. Theoretically, we might expect roughly nine degrees of Celticity within this spectrum, as found in: 1) Celtic, 2) known Celtic Englishes, 3) SW (Middle) English, 4) N (Middle) English, 5) Standard English, 6) SE (Middle) English, 7) Old English, 8) coastal West Germanic, most notably Frisian, but also some Dutch/Flemish, and 9) non-coastal West Germanic, which is best represented by High (or Middle) German.⁹ Due to limits of time and length, it has not proved possible to carry out this project at this point, and my findings in detail are restricted to the British Isles. On continental West Germanic, no more can be said at the moment than 1) that coastal West Germanic shows sporadic resemblances to Brittonic not found in non-coastal West Germanic (Schrijver 1999), paralleled by evidence of genetic similarity to British populations, and 2) Modern German, like Old Germanic, generally shows very low Celticity, and it seems improbable that Middle High German was very different in this regard. But guesses are not facts, and more research is needed.

Yet even within the limited scope of the present project, there is a problem. Not all resemblances to Middle Brittonic that appear in Middle English appear at the same time and, by the time the later resemblances appear, the earlier ones have of-ten spread so widely as to lose their original areal signature. The appear-

⁸ The variation in time periods is made necessary by variations in the time of the evidence. Evidence on 1) phonetic implementation, 2) certain minor aspects of non-standard dialects, and 3) the Celtic Englishes was not generally available till recently.

⁹ North Germanic is problematic, as it stands outside the Celtic/West-Germanic spectrum without, of course, being irrelevant to English. The degree of 'Celticity' in North Germanic has at all times been higher, though only by a little, than in non-coastal West Germanic.

ance of Brittonicisms in English, though it has some aspects of a package deal, is not a package deal, since some innovations, like the reduction of various inflections, were supported by the internal motivations already present in the language, while others, like the nominalization of the verbal system, were not. The approach that has been taken therefore is to attempt to determine the dialectal provenance of various innovations, on the understanding that SW or N dialectal provenance itself implies that mappings from one or more periods would show areal patterns, strongly suggesting a connection with Brittonic. The dialectal provenance of texts is generally taken from Laing (1993). But determining dialectal provenance is a labor that is not complete in all cases. In many cases, those, involving innovations that either have been well-studied or involve only one word (so that they are traceable in the OED and MED), the dialectal provenances given below are fairly secure. Other dialectal provenances, often from examples given in various secondary sources such as Mustanoja (1960), Kisbye (1971), and Visser (1969-73), are not necessarily secure, and further research will be required. My method is thus not entirely perfect. But if it is entirely bogus, it should be possible to use it to reach entirely bogus conclusions. For example, it should be possible to show that the Middle English dialect with the greatest resemblance to Brittonic is Kentish, or that the Middle Germanic language with the greatest resemblance to Brittonic is High German. Anyone who thinks this can be done is challenged to actually do it.

For simplicity, the various features have been sorted into several categories, despite the fact that some do not clearly belong in one or the other. Some possibilities that seem rather strained have not been included. Unfortunately, there is and can be no clear standard for identifying suspicious resemblances between languages, as only what is unusual can be regarded as suspicious, and what may be called 'unusuality' exists on a sliding scale. But the things noted below are hardly universals of human language. In general, I have regarded as 'suspicious' cases, where post-Anglo-Saxon English patterns with Brittonic rather than with modern German, but this is more a heuristic than a theory. In some cases involving innovations of the Modern period, when dialectal writing has ceased, information on dialectal provenance is not known, or at least not yet known to me, and will probably have to be gleaned from sources such as private letters. Since we have basically no Old English that is not either from the greater South West or North, or at least suspected (in the case of Kentish) of having been subject to influences from the greater South West or North, all features of Old English may be regarded as having a possibly non-South East provenance. Citations in italics are for a claim of Brittonic influence, or at least an observation of suspicious resemblance. Other citations are for the facts, where these are perhaps obscure. Citations given last are for dialectal provenance.

Innovations Established in Old English

- (1) habitual/future BE (Tolkien 1963: 30-32; Keller 1925: 56-60; Preusler 1956: 323f.; German 2001: 137)
- (2) 3ps habitual BE [biθ] (Tolkien 1963: 30-32)
- (3) 3ppl habitual BE incorporating 3ps (Tolkien 1963: 30-32) (N)
- (4) form with /b-/ as verbal noun of BE
- (5) absence/rarity of /s/ reflexives (pronominal and possessive)
- (6) change of front /y/ to /y/ (Jackson 1953: 454)
- (7) /an/ > /on/ (Jackson 1953: 272), (SW; Jordan 1974: 53; Strang 1970: 234)

Innovations in Progress during Old English, Mostly Late

- (8) internal possession ("you stepped on my foot" vs. *"you stepped on (to) me the foot") (Preusler 1938; Vennemann 2001, 2002 a) (non-SE?; MED; Kisbye 1971: 80)
- (9) reduplicative progressive comparison ("better and better;" Preusler 1938) (SW?; Mustanoja 1960: 282; OED)
- (10) distinction of closure in voiced obstruents
- (11) fronting of /ng/, change of /ung/ to /ing/ (Schrijver 2002: 99)
- (12) (sporadic) masculine gender of verbal nouns (Evans 1964: 159; Hemon 1975: 265) (N; Lass 1992: 107)
- (13) adjectival WHAT (Evans 1964: 76; Hemon 1975: 131f.)

Innovations Certainly or Probably of SW, Mostly Middle English

- (14) gerundial progressive (Preusler 1938; Keller 1925: 61-65; Braaten 1967; Vennemann 2001; Mittendorf and Poppe 2000; Gachelin 1990: 233; White 2002: 161-164; Filppula 2003) (Visser 1963-73: 1045)
- (15) absence of inherited distinct participle (Dal 1952; Vennemann 2001; White 2002: 161-164) (Grzega 1999: 38)
- (16) rise of the gerund (Preusler 1938; Evans 1964: 159; Hemon 1975: 264-266) (Mustanoja 1960: 531; Kisbye 1971: 31; Visser 1963-73: 1090)
- (17) DO constructions (Preusler 1938; Molyneux 1987: 86f.; Tristram 1997, 2000; German 2001: 132f.; Gachelin 1990: 238; White 2002: 160f.; Ureland 1978) (Mustanoja 1960: 603; Kisbye 1971: 148)
- (18) possessively construed reflexive pronouns (Preusler 1938; Tristram 1999: 24; Evans 1964: 89f.; Hemon 1975: 86f.) (OED)
- (19) identity of emphatic and reflexive pronouns (Evans 1964: 89f.; Hemon 1975: 86f.) (OED)
- (20) cleft and pseudo-cleft constructions (*it was yesterday they left*) (Preusler 1938; Tristram 1999: 22) (Mustanoja 1960: 131f.)
- (21) collapse of prepositional meanings (Grauer 1936; Preusler 1956: 325f.) (Mustanoja 1960: 350)
- (22) absence of 'semi-definite' article (*sum*) (Gregor 1980: 157) (Mustanoja 1960: 261)
- (23) special past habitual ("used to") (Evans 1964: 110; Hemon 1975: 253) (Visser 1963-73: 1414; MED)
- (24) motion-verb meaning 'become,' loss of *wurth* (Visser 1955: 292f.) (OED)
- (25) retroflex /r/ (Tristram 1995 a)
- (26) absence of distinction between /a/ and /æ/ (Hughes and Trudgill 1979: 30)
- (27) voicing of initial fricatives (Tristram 1995 b)
- (28) stressed /ë/ < /u/ (McCone 1996: 21) (Wells 1982: 336)¹⁰
- (29) pronominal /ën/ (Klemola 2003)
- (30) limited gender (Klemola 2003)
- (31) 'Pronoun Exchange' (Klemola 2002)¹¹

¹⁰ By /ë/ is meant a mid central vowel.

- (32) AND/WITH as subordinating conjunction (“and her with three children, with these matters understood;” *Filppula and Klemola 1992; Vennemann 2002 b: 305-308*)¹² (OED)
- (33) non-finite propositions with verbal nouns (“the tanks crossing the bridge was a surprise;” *Evans 1964: 162; Gregor 1980: 241*) (*Visser 1963-73: 1176*)
- (34) non-finite propositions with prep as COMP (“for the tanks to cross the bridge would be a surprise;” *Preusler 1938; Visser 1955: 279-286; Lewis and Piette 1990: 315; Gregor 1980: 240f.*) (*Visser 1963-73: 1097; OED*)¹³
- (35) specificational OF (“the City of London,” “the necessity of treating”) (*Gregor 1980: 144*) (MED)¹⁴
- (36) prop ONE (“the ugly one”) (*Evans 1964: 88f.; Hemon 1975: 127*) (OED)
- (37) (limited) prepositional possession (“belong to;” *Gregor 1980: 173f.*) (OED)
- (38) genitival compounds (“dogskennel;” *Gregor 1980: 144*) (*Wakelin 1972: 111*)
- (39) HEAD as a quantifier with livestock (*Hemon 1975: 41*) (MED)
- (40) identity of NOR and THAN (*Stephen Laker, pc.*)
- (41) distinction of voice in fricatives
- (42) loss of /ɣ/ (or [ɣ]) (*Jackson 1953: 433-470*) (*Strang 1970: 229*)
- (43) absence of BE/HAVE distinction in perfects (*Evans 1964: 111, 138; Hemon 1975: 246*) (*Mustanoja 1960: 501; MED*)
- (44) BY meaning ‘not later than’ (*Evans 1964: 193; Hemon 1975: 398; German 2003: 398*) (MED, OED)¹⁵
- (45) predicate WHO (*Evans 1964: 74; Hemon 1975: 131*) (*Mustanoja 1960: 181; Kisbye 1971: 122*)

Innovations Certainly or Probably of the N, Mostly Middle English

- (46) non-pronominal relative marking, zero-objects (“the man (as) I saw”) (*Preusler 1938; Poussa 1991; Tristram 1999: 24*) (N(SW)?; *Kisbye 1971: 134; Poussa 1998 b: 311-313*)
- (47) possessively construed emphatic pronouns (*Evans 1964: 89f.; Hemon 1975: 86f.*) (OED)
- (48) absence of regular relation between positive and comparative of NEAR (*Hemon 1975: 58; Evans 1964: 40*) (*Mustanoja 1960: 394*)
- (49) apocope, no final devoicing (*Preusler 1938; Hickey 1995*) (*Wright 1928: 70-72*)
- (50) concordially invariable adjective¹⁶ (*Tristram 1999, 2002; White 2002, 2003*) (N; *Mustanoja 1960: 276; Kisbye 1971: 164*)
- (51) concordially invariable article (*White 2002, 2003*) (N; *Mustanoja 1960: 233; Kisbye 1971: 4f.*)
- (52) absence of case (*Tristram 1999 a, 2002; German 2001: 129-132; White 2002, 2003*) (N; *Mustanoja 1960: 67; Kisbye 1971: 70*)
- (53) singular verb with plural noun (*Klemola 2000: 329-346; German 2001: 135; White 2002; Gregor 1980: 146*) (*Wright 1928: 176*)¹⁷

¹¹ This is not entirely restricted to the SW.

¹² Published suggestions of Brittonic influence mention only AND, but as Brittonic /a/ could mean both AND and WITH, a Brittonic role in subordinating WITH seems possible, though influence from the Latin ablative absolute is perhaps more probable.

¹³ For sanity it should be noted that the two Vissers here are not one.

¹⁴ This OF like most OFs is invisible (or ‘implied’) in Brittonic, but is present nonetheless.

¹⁵ This does not count an early attestation in Peterborough.

¹⁶ This is controversial, since it may not be old in Brittonic. But at least the absence of any strong/weak distinction, retained in all other Germanic standard languages, is an undoubted resemblance. The earliest example of this phenomenon in its own right seems to be SW (*Kitson 1997: 233*), from very early in the ME period, when there is no N English for comparison.

- (54) N singular /-n/ (Wakelin 1972: 109f.; Evans 1964: 31; Hemon 1975: 39-41)¹⁸
 (55) N /xw/ (*Laker 2002*)
 (56) absence of indefinite pronoun, indefinite YOU (McWhorter 2002: 245f.)
 (57) absence of dative/accusative distinction in personal pronouns (Evans 1964: 57; Lewis and Piette 1990: 24-27) (Mustanoja 1960: 129)
 (58) absence of prefix with past participles
 (59) distinction between attributive and non-attributive possessives ("mine" vs. "my;" Evans 1964: 53f.; Hemon 1975: 85f.) (Wright 1928: 166)

Innovations without Clear Dialect Provenance and Retentions

- (60) tag questions and answers, "yes"¹⁹ (*Preusler 1938; Vennemann 2002 b: 316-322*) (Visser 1963-73: 172-174; OED)
 (61) prepositional verbs ("give up") (*Tristram 1999: 23*)
 (62) co-patterning of verbal syntax in negative and interrogative sentences (*Ureland 1978: 112-119; Thompson 1957: xxiii; Jenner 1982: 115; Bliss 1972: 78*)
 (63) non-fricative /w/ (*Tolkien 1963: 20*)
 (64) interdental fricatives (*Tolkien 1963: 20; Tristram 1999*),²⁰
 (65) non-case control of pronouns ("it's me," "me and her left;" Evans 1964: 49-58; Hemon 1975: 69-86)
 (66) rarity/absence of pseudo-locative prepositional pronouns²¹ (E. "therewith" vs. G. "damit")
 (67) post-posing of complex nominal modifiers ("the people living in New York" vs. "die in New York wohnenden Menschen;" *Tristram 1999: 26*)
 (68) interrogatives as emphatics ("was he angry!") (*van Hamel 1912: 278*)
 (69) singular with numbers (Evans 1964: 47; Hemon 1975: 168)
 (70) non-standard passives with GET ("we are getting beating;" Evans 1964: 164)
 (71) consecutive gerunds ("he got on his horse, riding off into the sunset") (Evans 1964: 161; Hemon 1975: 266)
 (72) absence of dative or FOR to mean KIND OF (cf. Gm. "was für ein Pferd;" N. "hvat hrossi")
 (73) post-posing of prepositions with interrogatives ("what for" vs. *"this for;" Evans 1964: 77; Hemon 1975: 133)
 (74) late position of temporal adverbs ("he came home yesterday" vs. *"he came yesterday home")
 (75) secondary meaning of futures as habitual rather than probable ("That dog will bark at anything that moves" vs. Gm. "Er wird das Buch schon kennen;" Evans 1964: 108-110)
 (76) absence of contrastive internal geminates
 (77) centralization of short high vowels (McCone 1996: 21)

¹⁷ This rule is known to exist outside the North, but appears to be less common there than in the North.

¹⁸ In Brittonic, /-n/ can be a 'singulative' ending, which must have occasioned some cross-linguistic confusion, given that in OE /-n/ was (simplifying a bit) a plural ending.

¹⁹ The word 'yes' appears to be a fossilized tag answer (OED).

²⁰ Most other Germanic languages lost interdental fricatives during the Middle English period. Retentions have been argued to be possibly due to language contact (Lehiste 1988: 72; *Tristram 1999: 36; Tristram 2002 b: 260-262*), contrary to what might be thought (cf. Isaac 2003: 50-53).

²¹ Since these have never fully died out of literary English, though they are surely not colloquial, their decline is not easily traced. But as other West Germanic generally uses 'pseudo-locative' pronouns when the antecedent is inanimate, there can be no doubt that normal spoken English patterns with Brittonic in not having recourse to any such entities.

- (78) absence of front/round vowels²²
- (79) absence of static/dynamic distinction in predicative passives (Evans 1964: 114; Hemon 1975: 270)²³
- (80) decline of inherited derivational devices, lexical loss
- (81) long open /e/ rather than /æ/ (Schrijver 2002: 104)
- (82) decline of inherited Germanic V-1 conditionals (“had I known”)
- (83) decline of impersonal verbs
- (84) decline of reflexive verbs
- (85) reanalysis of WHETHER as indirect interrogative marker
- (86) counting by scores (Gregor 1980: 200)
- (87) ‘Shepherd’s Score’ (*Klemola 2000: 342-345*)

Simplifications Rather Than Resemblances

- (88) indefinite article with predicate nouns (Gregor 1980: 157) (SW; Mustanoja 1960: 261f.)
- (89) loss of grammatical gender (*Tristram 1999: 21; White 2002: 156f.*) (N; Mustanoja 1960: 44; Kisbye 1971: 44)
- (90) generalization of verb-medial position (V-2 > SVO) (SW; Kroch and Taylor 1997: 311-313, 321-324)
- (91) reduced verbal morphology (*German 2001: 134*) (N)
- (92) /-on/ (later ‘en’) for /-aθ/ in the present plural indicative (N).²⁴

It is worth noting that possible Brittonicisms show a pronounced tendency to be first attested 1) in the South West geographically, and 2) in the Middle period chronologically. This is exactly what we would expect if these *possible* Brittonicisms are *actual* Brittonicisms, but is difficult or impossible to explain otherwise.

Of the features treated above, which with only a few exceptions are resemblances to Brittonic, the number that shows evidence of having at one time existed in the South West but not the South East is 42. More research needs to be done in many cases, and there can be no firm line between what is certain and what is doubtful, but if we throw out what seem to be doubtful cases, the number of features that seem to have certainly existed at one time in the South West but not in the South East appears to be about 35, which though less than 42 is not dramatically less, strongly suggesting that the pattern in the evidence is not an artifact of incomplete research. Not counting features subsumed under these categories, the number of features that show evidence of having at time existed in the North but not the South East or East is 18. None of these is doubtful in its geography, so if we add them to the South West features just noted, the total number of possible Brittonicisms that either certainly or seemingly existed at some point in the Brittonic zone but not in the Anglo-Saxon zone is somewhere

²² It may be noted that certain late OE sound changes, like the change of ‘lyht’ to ‘liht,’ make more sense if ‘y’ had become central, as in Welsh, rather than front/round.

²³ This is of course related to loss of ‘wurth.’ Its replacement ‘become’ has never become part of the English verbal system. Modern ‘get’ as BECOME has not become a general AUX for dynamic passives.

²⁴ This is probably a case of equivalence interference, as Brittonic had /-on/ in the present and perfect both, whereas Old English had /-on/ only in the past. Identifying the two endings and then extending OE /-on/ to the present, like its Brittonic equivalent /-ont/, would seem logical to Britons.

about 60, while the number of possible Brittonicisms that existed at some point in the Anglo-Saxon zone but not in the Brittonic zone appears to be \emptyset . It can hardly be stressed too strongly that this is not what we would expect to result from a random distribution of innovations possibly attributable to Brittonic influence, if there is in fact no Brittonic influence in English.

Adding in those features not, or at least not yet, localized, the total number that occurs in English of some period but not in modern Standard German is 87. More research on coastal West Germanic is needed, but even at this point it is clear that Frisian cannot possibly be presented as having anything like the level of 'Brittonicity' that is found in English. To claim that English (of any post-Anglo-Saxon period) is really just like Frisian of the same period, each language having coincidentally developed resemblances to Brittonic for reasons having nothing to do with Brittonic influence, is not plausible and does not solve the problem. As far as I have been able to determine, the number of innovations theoretically attributable to Brittonic influence that appear in non-coastal West Germanic but not also in English is \emptyset . Again, this is less than ideal for those who might wish to plead 'mere misleading coincidence,' for if English has developed coincidental resemblances to Brittonic not found in German, it is far from clear why German should not have developed coincidental resemblances to Brittonic not found in English. If there has been no Brittonic influence in either English or German, then the 87 possible Brittonicisms that occur in either English or German should be more or less evenly split between English and German. This is not reality. Of the two West Germanic languages, it is only the one independently known to have developed on a Brittonic substrate that developed extensive resemblances to Brittonic. This makes a lot of sense if the Brittonic substrate under English created Brittonic influence in English, as would be expected, but makes absolutely no sense otherwise.

4. Explaining the Evidence Seen

4.1. Why It Is Not Due to Mere Misleading Coincidence

Unfortunately, many historical linguists seem reluctant to accept the reasoning behind speculative language contact. The relevant concept is indirect proof through what may be called 'anti-coincidence leverage:' the argument that the evidence of a certain case cannot plausibly be explained as being due to coincidence, and therefore must be due to something else, in this case language contact.²⁵ In order to more fully understand 'anti-coincidence leverage,' we will have to digress a bit in to the field of probability. The basic argument, which all observers should be able to tell is valid, is this: the more co-occurring features

²⁵ This is, it should be noted, exactly the same type of argument that has traditionally been used to justify proto-languages, which are inherently speculative, and it is to be desired that linguists who think of themselves as rejecting all speculation as a matter of methodological principle might consider more closely whether they really do this.

there are, the more the chance that they are all due to coincidence, as they must be if no language contact has occurred, goes down. If it goes down enough, coincidence ceases to be a plausible explanation. Linguists are accustomed to making impressionistic judgments about such things, which to an extent is inevitable, since hard numbers cannot be obtained. But linguists do not necessarily understand the power of the relevant math. The math involved in calculating all possibilities is inherently exponential. This quickly generates very large numbers for the denominator, and thus can quickly reduce that chance of coincidence to something very close to zero.

The math of calculating how probable it is that two languages would happen to share a certain number of grammatical features is in principle the same as the math of calculating how probable it is that two families would both happen to have boys at a certain number of birth positions. The chance of both families having a boy at any single birth position is 25%, the square of 50%. In practice, the chance of both families having a boy at any given birth position is the same as the chance of a single family having a boy at any given birth position would be if nature had made this chance 25% instead of 50%. In other words, we can in practice ‘abstract away’ from the two family scenario and proceed simply by adjusting the percentage chance of the result of interest, having a boy. But there are three differences between the family scenario and the language scenario.

First, in the language scenario the occurrences of interest, various grammatical features, surely have natural incidence of occurrence that is quite a lot less than 50%. No linguist looking over the list of shared features given above would say that they have an incidence of occurrence that is anything close to 50% in languages generally. So let us reduce our theoretical incidence of occurrence from 1 over 2 to 1 over the square root of twenty, which is to say to something between 20% and 25%. This number has been selected in part because 20, which is what we will wind up with when the necessary squaring is done, is a good round number, and in part because it is a ‘high side’ estimate of the average ‘unusuality’ of the features listed might be, so that the final estimated chance of coincidental co-occurrence will also be a ‘high side’ figure. Something closer to 10% might well be closer to reality.

Second, the number of grammatical features that a language might be said to have is quite a lot more than 4. For cases of possible substratal influence it is only what may be called ‘readily transferable’ features (from the substrate to the superstrate) that are of interest.²⁶ But even the number of readily transferable features existing in a typical language is surely quite a lot more than 4. For simplicity, just to get a rough grip on the relevant mathematics, let us say that it is about 100, and estimate the chance that 75 of these would just by coincidence happen to be shared between any two languages. There are two reasons 75 has been chosen. First, because it is a low-side estimate about how many shared features there are between Brittonic and English, and second, to cover the possibil-

²⁶ How clearly (or not) we are able to draw the line between readily transferable and not readily transferable features is beside the point for the present purposes.

ity of negative evidence: that there might be about 25 readily transferable features of Brittonic, not yet recognized as such, that were not transferred to English.²⁷

Third, as mentioned above, the numbers plugged in to the model are necessarily soft, not hard, which is to say that they are guesses, not facts. But they are fairly reasonable and safe guesses.

The chance that two languages would just happen to share at least 75 out of 100 readily transferable features with a frequency of occurrence as given above is the same as the chance that the total number of ones rolled over 100 rolls of a 20-sided die would be 75 or more. It may help to understand this to think of the first roll as being for co-occurrence of the first feature, etc. Unfortunately, calculating this number is a task well beyond the number-crunching abilities of a mere linguist. Fortunately, it is not a task beyond the abilities of a professional statistician, (Daniel Jenks, pc.), and the answer is: 1.8 over 10 to the 75th.

Now this is very small number, very close to zero, and quite probably closer to zero than the average linguist might impressionistically guess, which is of course the whole point of this section. Note that even this calculation assumes both 1) an average incidence of occurrence that is on the high side, and 2) 25 cases of negative evidence, when not even one has yet been found. The chance that 75 out of 75 features would just happen to be shared would of course be even lower: 1 over 20 to the 75th, which is close to 1 over 10 to the 100th. The number reached above is thus a conservative estimate, perhaps even a very conservative estimate.

But it gets worse for the conventional wisdom, for the calculation made above treats English as a monolithic whole, without regard for the evidence of dialectal provenance. In other words, no provision has been made for the theory of the zones. Once such provision is made, the chance that mere coincidence would cause resemblances between Brittonic and English to originate without exception in Brittonic half of England, as the theory of the zones predicts, rather than in the Anglo-Saxon half, would have to be much lower, by a factor of about ½ at each exponentiation. Since 2 to the 40th is more than a trillion, over even as few as 40 co-occurring features the chance of coincidence producing the evidence seen would have to be more than a trillion times lower than was estimated without regard to the evidence of dialectal provenance. Yet the number of shared features appears to be closer to 80 than to 40, which would reduce the chance of coincidence by something on the order of 10 to the 24th.

It might be thought that functional considerations might perhaps provide an explanation in terms of neither coincidence nor Brittonic influence. For example, prop ONE²⁸ may tend to occur in languages without distinct adjectival plurals. To say this would be to say that the number of truly independent features is

²⁷ Of course positives rather than negatives tend to attract attention. At present there does not appear to be even a single unequivocal instance of negative evidence. Sceptics are challenged to find a few, enough to affect the overall conclusion.

²⁸ I.e. expressions like "the ugly one(s)."

not as high as has been presented.²⁹ But even upon casual perusal it should be clear to any linguist that the various features listed above do not for the most part imply each other, and it seems quite improbable that the number of truly independent features could ever be reduced enough to yield a different final conclusion. Some sort of language contact is the only remaining realistic possibility.³⁰

Sceptics are challenged to justify different guesses, or propose a different theoretical model, or both, in such a way as to lead convincingly to a significantly different final conclusion. Failing that, the conclusion reached above must stand: *the grammatical resemblances seen between Brittonic and English cannot plausibly be regarded as due to coincidence.*

All this is quite relevant to the dismissal of Brittonic influence in English made by Isaac (2002), who selects four cases as ‘typical,’ and then in effect attempts to show that for each case ‘maybe’ rather than ‘yes’ is the answer to the question of whether Brittonic influence has occurred. Like a great many historical linguists, Isaac seems to think that ‘maybe’ is somehow logically equivalent to ‘no,’ and leaves the implication that the few resemblances treated must, for some unspecified yet universally agreed upon reason of methodology, be regarded as due to coincidence unless and until they can be directly ‘proven’ (whatever that would mean). Apart from failure to consider the possibility of indirect proof, the hidden assumption in Isaac’s argument is that the number of cases is not relevant, so that his “mere misleading coincidence” explanation, reached on the basis of only four cases, can easily and non-problematically be extended *to any number of cases*. But as a matter of simple math, four cases can by no means stand in for 75. Due to the exponential nature of the math involved, the plausibility of coincidence as an explanation is dramatically affected by the number of cases involved, since this is the number of exponentiations. Isaac’s assumption that no amount of ‘maybe’s can add up to a ‘yes’ may seem reasonable to a traditionally trained historical linguist (somehow unfamiliar with language areas and areal linguistics), but in practice a high enough number of ‘maybe’s can indeed add up to a ‘yes,’ or rather multiply down to a ‘no,’ for mere misleading coincidence as the explanation.

4.2. *Why It Is Not Due to French Influence*

First of all, French has no more than half of the features in question, so even if French influence could explain the French half, it could not explain the other half, which would still have to be explained by Brittonic influence. Second, French influence is not consistent with the evidence of geography. We would expect both 1) that French influence would tend to be stronger, if only by a little, around the centers of power in the SE, and 2) that French lexical and grammati-

²⁹ For convenience the issue of “semi-independence” will not be considered here.

³⁰ It is part of the definition of such areal cases that common genetic descent is not a possible explanation.

cal influences should tend to co-occur, there being no reason that any Middle English social-climber would want to resort to one without the other. The first expectation receives some empirical confirmation from the fact that there is indeed at least slightly disproportionate French lexical influence in the South East (Barber 1993: 140). We would expect then that French grammatical influences should occur in the same pattern as French lexical influences: spread throughout the country with a slight prejudice toward the South East. The problem is that this is not reality: the major grammatical innovations of Middle English originate *away from* the centers of power in the South East, and spread *into* rather than *out of* the language of London and the South East. This alone is enough to show that these innovations were of 'vulgar' origin, and spread in a 'bottom-up' rather than 'top-down' manner, which in turn shows that they were certainly not due to French influence. Finally, French influence in English is hardly an unplowed field. The idea that there is significant French grammatical influence in English is these days rightly rejected, for it is generally the case that serious problems arise when any theory of French influence is pressed in detail. If the features listed above were due to French influence, we surely would know it by now.

4.3. *Why It Is Not Due to Norse Influence*

McWhorter (2002) makes a heroic attempt to attribute just about everything that is odd about English to Norse influence. However, this attempt proceeds by 1) generally ignoring the often important innovations of the South West, particularly those involving nominalization of the verbal system, which cannot possibly be attributed to Norse influence, and 2) frequently ignoring the issue of whether the dialectal provenance of innovations that could conceivably be motivated by Norse influence is consistent with Norse influence. McWhorter's attitude seems to be that if an innovation is associated with the old Danelaw, that is evidence in favor of Norse influence, but if it is not, that is not evidence against Norse influence. Furthermore, many of the 'alienating' innovations of English treated by McWhorter cannot be regarded as predictable results of Norse influence, save perhaps with the most convenient hindsight. For example, there is no clear reason that Norse influence should be expected to lead to the loss of reflexive verbs, which even Afrikaans retains. None of this is meant to imply that there is not significant Norse grammatical influence in English. Of course there is. The point is that Norse influence *alone* cannot explain the pattern in the evidence, either the dialectal provenance of innovations or the divergence of English away from other Germanic. For that, we need *both* Norse and Brittonic influence.

4.4. *Why It Is Not Due to English Influence over Brittonic*

The short answer is that any English influence over Middle Brittonic, which could only be by prestige, would surely have been accompanied by substantial English lexical influence over Middle Brittonic, as the parallel case of French prestige influence over English shows clearly enough. In the case of Cornish, such influence does exist, but in the case of Welsh and (obviously) Breton it does not. In any case, significant English prestige influence is not historically plausible for Breton, which shows almost all of the features in question, not to mention medieval Irish, which shows many. Finally, positing that the resemblances seen are due to English influence over Brittonic would do nothing to solve the original and basic problem: 1) why English, alone among Germanic languages, develops extensive resemblances to Brittonic, and 2) why the innovations in question are for the most part associated with a) the South West and North and b) the Middle English period.

4.5. *Why It Is Due to Brittonic Influence*

So far we have seen reason to believe that the evidence is not due to 1) coincidence, 2) French influence, 3) Norse influence, or 4) English influence over Brittonic. This does not in itself mean that the evidence must be due to Brittonic influence, though since this appears to be the only remaining possibility, that would certainly be nice. It is conceivable, however, that Brittonic influence might be just as convincingly dismissed as the other possibilities. The conventional wisdom offers four reasons that Brittonic influence should be dismissed.

First, it is often assumed that the traditional interpretation of the Anglo-Saxon Conquest is correct, which would indeed make Brittonic influence in English impossible. The strength of any language in a contact situation is roughly numbers times prestige, so that where prestige is low numbers must be high for any significant effect to result. But it has been seen above that the old ‘clean sweep’ view is no longer generally, or perhaps even seriously, maintained. In fact, the supposed absence of Brittonic influence in English was one of the main props of the ‘clean sweep’ interpretation, which when paired with the traditional denial of Brittonic influence in English becomes at least partly circular. In any event, this objection can no longer be regarded as valid on its non-linguistic merits: the Britons of early Anglo-Saxon England quite probably did make up in numbers what they lacked in prestige.

Second, it is often assumed that Brittonicisms in English would be so little stigmatized that they should appear in Old English. This assumes a rather naive view of Anglo-Saxon society, which was by no means an egalitarian community of noble savages. If modern conditions are any guide, where there are classes there are class dialects, and there were surely classes in Anglo-Saxon England. Furthermore, the theory of Brittonic influence itself posits in its historical aspect that the Anglo-Saxon conquerors were for the most part an elite, who would by

no means feel inspired to adopt the 'brogue' of their British peasants. Significant lags in attestation are positively to be expected in substratal situations, because the very process that creates innovations simultaneously stigmatizes innovations. To assert then that the theory of Brittonic influence is somehow falsified by the fact that evidence of Brittonic influence does not appear in Old English is to assert that the theory predicts something that it both *does not* predict and *should not* predict, which is hardly appropriate.

Third, it is often assumed that Brittonicisms would be so greatly stigmatized as to never win acceptance in English, or at least written English. This proposition is the exact opposite of the one treated and dismissed just above, and one wishes Brittonophobes would make up their minds. If the Norman Conquest had not occurred, Brittonicisms might (or might not) have remained permanently consigned to vulgar status or even eliminated by top-down pressure, but it did, and to judge by later events, Brittonicisms began to rise in status from that point. This is hardly surprising, given that there were no longer any Anglo-Saxon nobles around to enforce previous notions of proper Germanic usage. If we average out the idea that Brittonicisms should have been so weakly stigmatized as to appear in Old English and the idea that Brittonicisms should have been so strongly stigmatized as to never appear in any (written) English at all, perhaps what we get is that Brittonicisms would be expected to appear in Middle English. We should hardly faint dead away with surprise then when this is what the evidence appears to show.

Fourth, it is often assumed that grammatical influence can only appear in tandem with what may be called a certain 'magic minimum' amount of lexical influence, which in this case does not occur. This principle, or pseudo-principle, of language contact, however widely invoked it may be, is explicitly rejected by Thomason and Kaufman (1988: 21), as has been noted, whose views on such matters are widely regarded as authoritative and must be regarded as within the range of reasonable informed opinion at least. There is no reason that substrate speakers shifting to a superstrate language must *necessarily*, as a convenience to linguists of the inconceivably remote future, bring across a certain 'magic minimum' number of substrate words into their version of the superstrate. Lexical influence, unlike grammatical influence, is fundamentally voluntary, and absence of a certain 'magic minimum' amount of substrate lexical influence indicates precisely nothing, save absence of motivation.

To sum up, there is no reason to think that the theory of Brittonic influence is falsified either by general principles of language contact or sociolinguistics, or by specific facts relating to the history and sociology of medieval England.

Returning now to the issue of coincidence versus language contact, the real question is not whether coincidence is 'impossible,' which it never can be, or at what point 'absolute' certainty is reached, which it never can be, but whether coincidence is more probable than language contact. From the italicized citations given above, it will be seen that specialist studies presenting, perhaps accidentally, the impression that a certain feature is an 'isolated case' of Brittonic

influence in English are not uncommon. Such claims have so far always been rejected, in part on the implicit grounds that coincidence is a more probable explanation, for a few isolated cases, than *ad hoc* or sporadic language contact. Indeed it would be, except that the various cases of possible Brittonic influence in English *are not isolated*. Rather, they occur in precisely the sort of ‘across the board’ pattern that would be expected. This fact dramatically tips the balance in favor of language contact rather than coincidence as the explanation, for as coincidence becomes less probable with an increasing number of cases, language contact simultaneously becomes more probable.

It should be noted that once we have admitted on probabilistic grounds that there must be at least one case of Brittonic influence in English, *even if this case is not specifically identified*, the game is up, for the theory that predicts even one, external influence through language shift, is by no means *ad hoc* and so predicts much more than one. If even one case is due *at least in part* to Brittonic influence (which is all that the method used above can show by itself) then all (linguistically plausible) cases must be seen as due *at least in part* to Brittonic influence, because these are predicted too, and so ‘come along for the ride.’ This conclusion may seem radical, but it is both logical and in accord with the nature of second-language acquisition: when people model a second language on their first language, or simplify a second language in order to reduce their learning load, they do so generally, not sporadically or randomly in one or two isolated cases. Externally motivated innovations therefore tend to occur ‘across the board,’ and as a rule where external influence has produced one innovation it should produce many. This is in part why Thomason and Kaufman (1988: 60) quite rightly insist that any proposed theory of external influence must involve many features, not just one. But clearly we have many features in this case, so the conclusion must be not only that this is not a plausible result of coincidence, but that this *is* a plausible result of language contact.

5. Conclusion

5.1. The Areal Pattern and Its Explanation

The areal pattern of ‘Brittonicity’ in Middle English (and English generally) is basically this: the highest level is found in the South West, the next highest level in the North, the next lowest level in the East, and the lowest level in the South East. This pattern is not a direct reflection of the strength of the Brittonic element in the population of these areas. The North has a lower level of ‘Brittonicity,’ not because there were less Britons there, but rather because Norse influence could often have the effect of reducing Brittonicity, and the East has a higher level than the South East, because Norse influence could often, especially in matters relating to reduction of morphology, motivate the same innovations. The critical difference, the only difference not muddled by the effects of Norse influence, is the difference between the South West and the South East. Here the

pattern is quite clear: resemblances to Brittonic without exception (so far as I have yet been able to determine) are first attested in (or are otherwise associated with) the South West rather than the South East. There is nothing about the traditional denial of Brittonic influence in English that predicts this, and the only thing that does predict this would seem to be the theory that South West English developed on a Brittonic substrate, as is indicated by other evidence in any case. Given that many of the innovations in question by no means remain restricted to the South West, but often spread fairly rapidly to the South East, a second conclusion must be that even South East English developed on a significant, though weaker, Brittonic substrate, which is at least consistent with other evidence.

The nature of our world should be clear, however long it has taken for it to be re-cognised. Within the area of the Celtic/West Germanic languages we have a spectrum of 'Celticity' or 'Brittonicity' ranging from very high in the Celtic languages to very low in non-coastal West Germanic. Though further research is needed to establish the whole spectrum, even at this point it is clear that we have a limited version of within the smaller world of Middle Brittonic and Middle English. This is a classic areal situation, and only some form of special pleading can deny that the general explanation in such cases, language contact, is the specific explanation in this case. As matters now stand, the traditional denial of Brittonic influence fails not only to explain *why* the major innovations of the Middle English period originate in the South West and North, but also to recognize *that* these innovations are for the most part resemblances to Brittonic. Likewise, the conventional wisdom fails not only to explain *why* English diverges from other Germanic, but also to recognize *that* in so doing English converges toward Brittonic. Obviously, explanation of the facts requires recognition of the facts, but in this case, the very act of recognition suggests an obvious and hardly improbable explanation: that there is pervasive Brittonic substratal influence in English.

5.2. *Substrate versus Superstrate*

Perhaps the most remarkable fact about the known Celtic Englishes is not how similar they are to Celtic which, given the nature of second-language acquisition, is hardly surprising, but how similar they are to (non-South East) English.³¹ This syndrome has given rise to the characteristic recurring issue in the study of the Celtic Englishes: whether the various features found are due to Celtic substratal influence or English superstratal influence, loosely defined.³² In other words, in terms of the conference topic, the issue is what (if anything) is truly 'Celtic' about the 'Celtic Englishes.' If we knock out the middle term of the tripartite semi-equation 'Celtic ↔ Celtic Englishes ↔ (non-SE) English,' what we wind up with is 'Celtic ↔ (non-SE) English.' It can hardly be stressed too strong-

³¹ In what follows, "(non-SE) English" will be used as a convenient shorthand for "English, most especially of the greater SW and N."

³² 'English superstratal influence' should refer to features found in Irish, not English.

ly that, within Germanic in general and English in particular, resemblances to Celtic are by no means confined to the known Celtic Englishes, but overflow significantly into the supposedly non-Celtic Englishes of England, including Standard English. Thus arises what may be called the ‘first place’ problem: why is English, alone among Germanic languages, similar to Celtic in the first place?

What appears to be the only good answer has been given above. Most of the non-Celtic Englishes of England are what might be called ‘guessed’ Celtic Englishes, the guessed colonization being the Anglo-Saxon Conquest. As a participant at the conference said, all Englishes are ‘Celtic Englishes.’ As strange as it may seem, England itself was England’s first Celtic colony, and the greater South West and North of England (including the Midlands) were England’s first ‘Celtic Fringe.’ The difference between the known Celtic Englishes of the ‘Celtic Fringe’ and the ‘guessed’ Celtic Englishes of (non-SE) England is one of time only, of early medieval language shift vs. recent modern language shift, as the evidence of Middle English alone is enough to show, not of whether the dialects do or do not show Celtic influence, much less of whether their speakers ‘are’ Celts or Saxons by genetic descent.

We are now in a better position to assess the idea that, positing superstratal influence from non-South East or ‘western’ English as the cause of various features of the known Celtic Englishes, might permit a somehow reassuring denial that Celtic substratal influence has ever occurred in any English. Harris (1986) regards habitual DO and habitual BE in Irish English as having come largely from non-standard western dialects of English, rejecting the idea that Brittonic influence lies behind the developments in British English as impossibly speculative.³³ This might be valid, if the cases in question were isolated, but we have seen that in fact they are not. Each is, but a small part of the larger pattern of areal resemblances between English and Celtic, established long before the modern Celtic Englishes ever came into existence. Harris’s “Expanding the Superstrate” argument thus does not solve, or even address, the “first place” problem: why is “western” English³⁴ so similar to Irish in the first place? Why does this problem, that certain features of Irish (and for that matter Welsh) English can with equal linguistic plausibility be attributed to the Irish substrate or the ‘western’ English superstrate, keep coming up? Perhaps it is because Brittonic was in many ways similar to Irish, and there is Brittonic substratal influence in English, especially ‘western’ English. We have seen many reasons to think that this is true.

³³ One thing that is rather disturbing about Harris’s article is that he repeatedly refers to Irish as having no habitual forms for regular verbs, when in fact it does (O’Siadhail 1988: 125). As a consequence, his claim that the tense/aspect system of Irish English makes more distinctions than the tense/aspect system of Irish, arguing against Irish influence, is wrong. The Irish English system, though expressed analytically rather than synthetically, is as exactly parallel (in the South at least) to the Irish system as could be desired, as Harris himself at one point notes (1988: 175). What view of the facts Harris intended us to come away with is far from clear.

³⁴ There is in fact no such dialect as ‘Western’ English.

As to the issue of whether features of Irish English that are common to both the Celtic substrate and the 'western' English superstrate are to be regarded as derived from one or the other, both theories make the same prediction, and it should go without saying that no evidence that could falsify one would not also falsify the other. Therefore only more indirect, and inherently secondary, considerations can enable us to reject one or the other. Such indirect considerations, specifically that positing Irish influence on Irish English is somehow speculative, seem to be what Lass has in mind when he says (1990: 148): "Given the choice between (demonstrable) residue [of earlier forms of English] and (putative) contact influence, the former is the more parsimonious and hence preferred account." Assuming that "putative" in this context is logically equivalent to 'speculative,' there is in fact nothing particularly speculative about the idea that 'contact influence' has occurred in Irish English, given that second-language acquisition is typically quite imperfect. It would arguably be more speculative to posit that the process of second-language acquisition in Ireland *was* perfect than that it was not. Whether Lass would have us believe that the process of second-language acquisition in Ireland was preternaturally perfect, or perhaps that later 'top-down' influences from non-Irish English soon eliminated Hibernicisms that had once existed, is not clear. But in any event, his conclusion, based on a convenient few selected features, that Irish English is not in any meaningful sense a 'contact language' (1990: 148) is idiosyncratic at best, and cannot be accepted. As Garrett (1998: 296) says: "... it is widely recognized that Irish has massively influenced the English of Ireland."

What has happened in the known Celtic Englishes that makes these not terribly different from most English is not that Celtic substratal influence has never occurred in any English, which, if it means that the Celts of the British Isles have demonstrated preternatural abilities as second-language learners, would be quite improbable, but rather that Celtic substratal influences in the known Celtic Englishes have for the most part occurred redundantly in a language that already (especially in non-South East varieties) had a lot of Celtic substratal influence in it, to the point that there was often little opportunity for additional Celtic substratal influences to be distinctively expressed. This syndrome can present the illusion that there is no Celtic influence in any English, which is surely reassuring to substratophobes, but the illusion begins to collapse as soon as we begin to consider why English, alone among Germanic languages, ever developed extensive resemblances to Celtic in the first place. The facts of English as a whole cannot be explained on the assumption that there has never been any Celtic substratal influence in any English.

5.3. *Some Final Arguments, and Good Questions*

The new ‘surprising’ conventional wisdom on the development of English, in accepting the new and improved version of the Anglo-Saxon Conquest, implicitly asserts that one of the following two propositions must be true: 1) that, though language shift on a massive scale did occur in Anglo-Saxon England, the process of second-language acquisition was so (surprisingly) perfect that no significant innovations were introduced into English, or 2) that, though the process of second-language acquisition was, not surprisingly, imperfect, the innovations initially introduced were soon eliminated, before they could be attested in Middle English, by ‘top-down’ pressure. Neither of these propositions, however reasonable (or not) it might seem in the abstract, is in fact confirmed by the evidence. If we want to know whether either is true, all we have to do is look and see, and for each the answer is a clear and resounding no: there is *no evidence* in favor of either. In view of the actual evidence, traditionalist ‘Brittonophobes’ must maintain either 1) that it is just a coincidence that resemblances to Brittonic do eventually appear in English, created by some mysterious and unspecified cause other than Brittonic influence, in just the areas where other evidence indicates that evidence of Brittonic influence would be expected to appear, or 2) that it is just a coincidence that the very innovations that had once been created by language shift from Brittonic, only to be stigmatized out of existence before they could ever be attested in Middle English, are in fact attested in Middle English, having in the meantime been recreated by some mysterious and unspecified cause other than Brittonic influence, in just the areas where they had once existed. That each of these propositions verges upon absurdity should be clear. But if it is true 1) that language shift did indeed introduce Brittonicisms into English, and 2) that such Brittonicisms were not later eliminated, then it follows that there are Brittonicisms in English. Any who reject this argument are challenged to say which of the two seemingly absurd propositions given above they would have us believe, and why.

Two competing views on the expected effects of language shift occur in the discussion of whether there is Brittonic substratal influence in English. The older view says that we expect a ‘magic minimum’ amount of lexical influence, higher than what occurs in English, while saying nothing definite about grammatical influence. The newer view says that we expect minimal lexical influence (for old or basic meanings), without any ‘magic minimum,’ and fairly high grammatical influence. The older view appears to be the majority view among specialists in the history of English, while the newer view appears to be the majority view among specialists in language contact. It seems reasonable to suppose that specialists in language contact might perhaps know more about language contact than do specialists in the history of English, but be that as it may, the disputed case of English may perhaps help to resolve this issue.

What we get if we assert the older view is that the non-linguistic evidence and the ‘linguistic’ evidence (which is in fact only the lexical half of the linguistic

evidence) indicate contradictory conclusions concerning the Anglo-Saxon Conquest, so that no coherent account of the history of England is possible. If that is not bad enough, on this view the lexical half of the linguistic evidence and the grammatical half of the linguistic evidence, which cannot rightly be ignored, indicate contradictory conclusions, so that no coherent view of the history of English is possible. On the other hand, what we get if we assert the newer view is that the non-linguistic and linguistic evidence (this time in both its lexical and grammatical halves), indicate the same conclusion, so that a coherent view of the history of England and the history of English is possible: the average peasant of early Anglo-Saxon England, especially in the greater South West and North, was (by genetic descent) a Briton and, as a consequence of this, English is, especially in the greater South West and North, a Brittonicized Germanic language. Granted that we presumably live in a single universe rather than in two parallel alternative universes, it should be clear which view of the expected results of language shift is correct. Brittonic substratal influence in English is the last piece of the puzzle in understanding the history of England and the history of English, and it fits.

The conventional wisdom on Brittonic influence in English is not 1) that there are many suspicious resemblances between Brittonic and English, which we must regard as due to coincidence in order to avoid the horror of speculation, but rather seems to be 2) that there are a few 'isolated' cases of resemblances between Brittonic and English, which we must regard as due to coincidence because a) there is too little Brittonic lexical influence in English for Brittonic grammatical influence to be possible, or b) coincidence is more probable than *ad hoc* or sporadic external influence. Proposition 2b) would be sustainable if it was based on an accurate appreciation of the facts, but we have seen that it is not. On any reasonable definition of 'few,' 'many,' and 'suspicious,' there are not few but many suspicious resemblances between Brittonic and English, which flips the balance between coincidence and language contact as convincing explanations.

Proposition 2a) is wrong in both aspects. It is most unfortunate that ignorance of Brittonic has been allowed to become in effect traditional among Anglicists, so that such an inaccurate view of our world has become entrenched as the conventional wisdom. Such ignorance is maintained in defiance of a general rule of historical linguistics, that *neighboring languages are always relevant*, and is founded largely upon the now discredited 'clean sweep' view of the Anglo-Saxon Conquest, itself motivated largely by the desire of English (and German) observers of the late 1800s to regard the English as members of the proud Germanic race. Proposition 1), if it is to become the new conventional wisdom, must now be explicitly argued for. But, unfortunately, for any who might wish to make the attempt, the difference between few resemblances and many resemblances is mathematically very significant, and renders the plausibility of the 'mere coincidence' argument something close to nil.

Any defence of orthodoxy will be expected to provide explicit and adequate answers to the following questions:

- 1) Why a conclusion reached on the basis of the lexical evidence only, without regard for the grammatical evidence, should be regarded as fully secure.
- 2) Why the old 'clean sweep' interpretation of the Anglo-Saxon Conquest should be regarded as right, in the face of overwhelming evidence from various fields that it is wrong.
- 3) Why the process of second-language acquisition by Britons in Anglo-Saxon England should have been perfect, when second-language acquisition is as a rule imperfect.
- 4) Whether stigmatization of Brittonicisms was a) so little that they should appear in Old English, or b) so great that they should never appear in any English at all.
- 5) If the evidence given above is not evidence of Brittonic influence, what would be, and if nothing would be, why this position is not essentially ideological.
- 6) Why Brittonic influence would not be expected to take the form of grammatical influences in Middle English rather than of lexical influences in Old English.
- 7) What the motivation would be for Britons to introduce significant numbers of Brittonic loan words into English, in the absence of any pragmatic need.
- 8) If there is a 'magic minimum' amount of lexical influence that must co-occur with grammatical influence, what this number is, and how it has been established.
- 9) What cause can be considered more likely than Brittonic influence to have produced the drift of English away from other Germanic and toward Brittonic.
- 10) What cause can be considered more likely than Brittonic influence to have resulted in possible Brittonicisms being very strongly associated with the South West and North.
- 11) Why a theory that achieves superior explanatory coverage in terms of predicting the areal evidence should be considered inferior to its competition.
- 12) Why speculation is to be seen as outrageous or 'circular' with regard to substratal influences in Germanic, but quite acceptable with regard to proto-Germanic.
- 13) What cause other than language contact creates language areas, and why the cause that applies to the world generally should not apply to Britain specifically.
- 14) What, if any, predictions the theory makes that are wrong, and if there are none, why a theory that makes no wrong predictions should be regarded as wrong.

- 15) How likely it is that mere misleading coincidence should have created the illusory impression that there is Brittonic substratal influence in English.
- 16) Why extraordinary coincidence should be considered a more probable explanation than ordinary language contact, where this is independently motivated.

6. *Addenda:*

Response to an Objection Raised by a Respondent: Theo Vennemann objects that my statement (in the original version) that SW Middle English is virtually Brittonic with Germanic words, with Germanic word ordering, is incorrect, since all non-English Germanic, even Afrikaans has Verb-second (V-2) ordering (McWhorter 2002: 247), whereas English over the Middle period gradually develops SVO ordering (at least as its default). Technically this objection is quite correct. My original wording was meant to forestall the objection that English does not have Celtic word-ordering, and was made on the assumption that SVO ordering can reasonably be taken as an acquirer's generalization from V-2 ordering, in a world where subjects are typically initial. Reasons to think that Brittonic influence played a significant role in the change over from V-2 to SVO ordering were given in the original paper, but cannot be given here.

Re example (7) in the list of features: It has become apparent that there is a typographical error, which cannot at this point be corrected. The author apologizes to all concerned.

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