The Case for Contact and the History of English

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Contact: Some preliminary distinctions

1) Language contact is really contact between speakers of different languages.

2) Contact can be motivated by necessity (the filling of lexical gaps, new terms for new phenomena, e.g. scientific inventions) but it can also be the result of status/prestige (granted, these are difficult concepts), or just a passing fashion, as with the many borrowings from English which are not strictly speaking needed by the modern European languages which have them.
Contact: Some preliminary distinctions

3) Language contact can cause considerable structural change if it is very intense and it is present for speakers in the first years of life, i.e. during first language acquisition.

4) Language shift is a special situation which leads to the transfer of speech habits from the source to the target language, usually during unguided adult second language acquisition and effects syntax and phonology most and morphology least.

5) Such features can remain in the target language forming a variety which is seen by later generations as part of their identity.
Linguistic levels and contact
(not shift scenarios)

*Levels most affected*
- Vocabulary (loanwords, phrases)
- Sounds (present in loan-words)
- Speech habits (general pronunciation, suprasegmentals [stress, intonation])
- Sentence structure, word-order
- Grammar (inflectional morphology)

*Levels least affected*

Caveat: If communities are in prolonged contact with each other but they have negative attitudes towards their respective languages then the above order may be reversed.
A word about morphology

The development of inflectional morphology is generally a community-internal phenomenon which takes several centuries to mature, consider all the morphology in Indo-European languages.

With adult language contact, morphological features are not usually transferred unless they are transparent and productive. However, with child language learners, morphology can be borrowed with ease.
A word about phonology

Sound variation can be used to differentiate quite small areas as opposed to grammatical variation which tends to be typical of much larger regions.

The reason is probably that phonetic variation is immediately available for assessment in anyone’s speech whereas grammatical features might not occur in any given stretch of discourse and so are not so suitable for fine differentiation, either spatially or socially.
A word about language shift

The original language of a speech community is abandoned and (nearly) all the speakers shift to the new language within a fairly well delimited period of time, a few centuries at most.

The time factor is important because the rate and intensity of language shift has consequences for the structure of the resulting shift variety.
## Contact scenarios in the history of English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language 1</th>
<th>Language 2</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old English</td>
<td>British Celtic</td>
<td>5c onwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old English</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>7c onwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old English</td>
<td>Scandinavian</td>
<td>9c onwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle English</td>
<td>Anglo-Norman/ Central French</td>
<td>11c/13c onwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Modern English</td>
<td>Latin/Greek</td>
<td>17c/18c onwards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Convergence and divergence in geographical areas
Feature spread and areality

‘Areality’ = the areal concentration of linguistic features

Areal studies are not about applying the label ‘linguistic area’ but to studying the processes and developments which lead to shared features or which work against such sharing.

Publications by author on this subject:


The dynamics of areality

Certain developments in a language, deriving from the community which speaks it, can be viewed as (i) *areality-enhancing* and others as (ii) *areality-diminishing*.

*areality-enhancing*
- accommodation during contact (without shift);
- feature transfer during language shift leading to sharing across at least two languages

*areality-diminishing*
- dissociation between languages or varieties;
- processes of standardisation or de-creolisation;
- importation of outside features to only some of the languages/varieties in an area.
Increase in areality due to close contact

Language / Variety A

Speakers of A and B are in close contact across several generations.

Features from A are copied into B and vice versa.

Language / Variety B

Result: A and B converge structurally.
Increase in areality due to language shift

Language / Variety A

Speakers of A shift to B and transfer features of the former to the latter.

Language / Variety B

Result: A and B converge structurally.
Feature development: decrease in areality

Language / Variety A

Language / Variety B

Feature X arises independently of A and is not adopted into A.

Result: B diverges from A.
Feature development: decrease in areality

Language / Variety A

Language / Variety B

Feature X in B arises as a reaction to Feature Y in A (dissociation scenario)

Result: B diverges from A.
Contact scenarios by region in the anglophone world
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The British Isles</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historical contact in:</td>
<td>African American English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>Chicano English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>German-influenced English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>Cajun English (Lower South of US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Canada</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Newfoundland English (dialect contact)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>English in Quebec (contact with French)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta, Gibraltar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel Islands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| South Africa                         | South Asia                                         |
| Afrikaans English                    | India, Pakistan                                    |
| South African Indian English         |                                                    |

| Australia                            | South-East Asia                                    |
| Aboriginal English                   | Singapore, Malaysia                                |
| New Zealand                          | Hong Kong                                          |
| Maori English                        | The Philippines                                    |

| Pacific                              |                                                    |
| Hawaii, Fiji, Solomon Islands        |                                                    |
| Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, etc.      |                                                    |
Contact scenarios with language shift

- Irish English
- Scottish English
- South African Indian English
- Native American English
- Aboriginal English
- Maori English

There are also various other smaller anglophone locations where indigenous peoples have shifted or are still shifting to English. See the cases presented in the following volume:

Language contact in the history of English
Celtic Britain

Historical distribution of Celts in Europe
Routes taken across the North Sea by Germanic tribes in the 5c. The Jutes came from Jutland and settled in Kent. The Saxons came from the area of present-day (Lower) Saxony and settled largely south of the River Thames. The Angles came from the lower part of the the Jutland peninsula which is now Schleswig Holstein in Germany and settled in central and northern England.

The lines in the above map are very approximate. Many of the settlers may have crossed the North Sea from the area of present-day Belgium as this would have involved the shortest sea journey.
The Celts and the Germanic settlers, 1

Germanic invaders of England came into contact with Celts, speakers of Brythonic, as of the mid 5c CEs. As opposed to former views, one now assumes that the Celts were subjugated by the Germanic tribes rather than banished to unpopulated parts of the west of England and Scotland.

Onomastic evidence points to a gradual spread of the Germanic tribes from east to west, with some new settlements, e.g. indicated by placenames ending in –ham, but with many Celtic retentions, e.g. Kent, London, etc.

Later historians, of an ‘Anglo-Saxonist’ persuasion, favour a purely Germanic lineage for the English and did not entertain the possibility of ethnic and linguistic mixture during the Old English period.
The Celts and the Germanic settlers, 2

Historians nowadays favour the ‘acculturation theory’ whereby there was a gradual assimilation of the Celts by the Germanic peoples and no major battles or acts of extermination.

The exact quantitative relationship of the Celts to the Germanic settlers is unknown. But even the most favourable estimate for the latter would see them as not representing more than one fifth of the population, probably considerably less, more like one twentieth or even as little as one fiftieth.

This means that the middle of the Old English period the majority of English-speakers were the descendants of shifters from Brythonic (British Celtic).
Quantitative relationship of Germanic settlers to British Celts in the 5th century AD
Viking longship ‘Hugin’ (Ramsgate, Kent)
The Celts and the Germanic settlers, 3

Confirmation of the assimilation view has been forthcoming from other quarters: the *Oxford Genetic Atlas Project* collected and analysed both matrilinear mitochondrial DNA and patrilinear Y-chromosome samples of over ten thousand subjects from all over Britain and Ireland.

The results provide strong evidence for the survival of the Celtic-speaking population in Britain and Ireland and for the fact that is there is no clear delimitation of a genetic group deriving from the Germanic settlers and one from the Celtic population of Britain.
Mothering Sunday in the UK

is on March 30th this year. Celebrate by exploring the precious genetic link you have with your mother.

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Bryan Sykes MA PhD DSc
Chairman and Professor of Human Genetics

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'British prehistory will never look the same again.' Colin Renfrew

THE ORIGINS OF THE BRITISH

THE NEW PREHISTORY OF BRITAIN AND IRELAND
FROM ICE-AGE HUNTER GATHERERS TO THE VIKINGS AS REVEALED BY DNA ANALYSIS

Stephen Oppenheimer

THE TRIBES OF BRITAIN

WHO ARE WE? AND WHERE DO WE COME FROM?

David Miles
Literature on Celtic Britain and on language questions involving the Celtic peoples.
Re-evaluating the Celtic hypothesis, ed. Markku Filppula and Juhani Klemola
References on Celts and Germanic settlers


References on Celts and Germanic settlers


Language contact and shift in the Old English period
How is contact supposed to have worked?

It is important to note that the Old English lived together with the Celts (the Old English word for Celt is *wealh* and the feminine form *wielh* means female servant or slave). The children of both groups would have grown up together so that the Old English language learners would have been affected during unconscious first language acquisition by the speech of the Celts surrounding them. That way features of pronunciation and grammar could have been transferred from the substrate Celts to the superstrate Old English.

But perhaps more importantly, large numbers of Celts shifted to English in the period after the conquest so that by the seventh/eighth centuries the majority of speakers of English would have been the descendants of shifters from Celtic.
The sociolinguistic scenario for contact

Substrate and superstrate

In standard treatments of language contact, it is assumed that the superstrate influences the substrate and not vice versa. But on levels of language with relatively low speaker awareness, e.g. syntax and probably realisational aspects of phonology (i.e. pronunciation) the substrate may well influence the superstrate as can be seen with the Celtic influence on Old English.
Contact as the sole source?

Feature 1:

*Internal possessor construction* (use of possessive pronouns with parts of the body, i.e. with cases of inalienable possession).

The case of inalienable possession is probably the clearest example of contact-induced change in Old English deriving form Celtic. Consider that other Germanic languages do not demand the use of possessive pronouns before parts of the body, e.g. German *Mir tut der Kopf weh* ‘My head is sore’, lit. ‘me.DAT does the head hurt’. However, in English, and in Celtic, possessive pronouns are obligatory here, i.e. the external possessor constructions (with a pronoun in the dative) disappeared in such cases.
Contact as the sole source?

Feature 1:  
*Internal possessor construction* (cont.)

There are still instances of the external possessor construction in English, cf. *He hit him in the face*. But the remarkable fact of English is that the internal possessor arose in the first place.  
The internal possessor construction is only found in languages of the British Isles and in the extreme South-East of Europe, in Turkish which uses a possessive suffix including cases inalienable possession.
Feature 2:  
*Identical forms for intensifiers and reflexives*

In present-day English (and Celtic languages) intensifiers and reflexives have the same form, e.g. *The mayor himself held the speech* and *He cut himself with the razor.*

This is a *typologically unusual feature*, not present in other European languages. It is true that Old English lost the s-reflexives (like German *sich*) but that does not explain why intensifiers and reflexives ended up with the same formal expression.
Contact as the sole source?

Feature 3:  
*The use of the progressive for duration*

The rise of the progressive, as in *She is talking to her neighbour*, is not such a simple matter. In Old English there was already a structure which involved a gerund (a nominal form of the verb) where one could say something like ‘He was on reading’. It is only a small step from this to ‘He was reading’ in the modern progressive sense, so an internal explanation is possible.

What one must also entertain is the possibility of convergence, i.e. the interplay of both internal developments within Old English and transfer from Celtic in the rise of the progressive.
**Feature 4: Clefting in Old English**

*It*-clefts are a common feature of Modern English and would appear to have their origin in the Old English period if examples like the following (with clefting in a relative clause) can be taken as evidence

\[ Þa cwæð Iohannes to Petre þæt hit wære se hælend þe on ðam strande stod; \]
‘Then said Johannes to Peter that it was the Saviour who stood on that strand;’

(Ælfric’s *Homilies*)

Such clefting is also found in the Celtic languages and there may have been some influence of these on the rise of this feature in English. In addition those modern varieties of English in contact with Celtic languages (Welsh, Scottish and Irish English) do indeed show a wide range of clefting possibilities.
Feature 4: Clefting in Old English (cont.)

Clefting in main clauses (examples from modern Irish English)

It’s to Galway he is gone for the weekend.
It’s early in the morning they gets up in the summer.
It’s out of his mind the man is.

So the phenomenon itself – *it*-clefting – may well be an internal development in English, but its range may be due to contact with Celtic speakers who had more clefting, or, importantly it may be due to shifters from Celtic to Old English who transferred their range of this phenomenon from Brythonic (the Celtic language in England before 1000 AD) to their English which they initially spoke as a second language.
Feature 5: *Clause final prepositions*

Authors working on Celtic, like the Finnish scholars Markku Filppula and Juhani Klemola, have noted the similarity between English and the Celtic languages in their use of word-final prepositions (or verbal particles depending on interpretation) and postulate Celtic influence in English.

However, such elements occur in word-final position in languages not in contact with Celtic, e.g. Swedish and the other North Germanic languages, so it may be a phenomenon which developed under the influence of Old Norse in England.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>That's something I don't know <em>about</em>.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Celtic (Irish)</td>
<td><em>Sin rud nach bhfuil fios agam faoi.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>That is something which we will look <em>at</em>.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td><em>Det är något som vi ska titta på.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The question of chronology

Elements which arise through contact do not necessarily have to appear (in the textual record, i.e. in written documents) during the period of contact. Take, for instance, the loans from Old Norse. Many of these are first attested in the mid-to-late Middle English period (13th-14th century), i.e. several centuries after the active period of Old English – Old Norse contact. Examples are given on the following slides.
bask, v.

[app. for earlier *bathask*, a. ON. *bask*; in later Icel. *bodast* to bathe oneself, refl. of bade to bathe. (With loss of th cf. or from other, sou', west, etc.)]

1. intr. (also refl., and with pa. pple. quasi-trans.) To bathe, especially in warm water or liquid, and so trans. to be suffused with, or swim in, blood, etc. Obs.

1393 Gower Conf. i. 290 The child lay bathend in her blood...And for the blood was hot and warme He basset him about therin. 1450 LPAG. Chron. Troy V. xxvii. Seyne his brother baksynge in his blut. 1525 MIDD. Replye. V. i. 208 Basked and bathed in their wyelde surlyng...mode. 1530 FAULK. 444/1. I basked, I bathe in water or any lycur, je baigne (Lydgate).

2. trans. To expose to a flood of warmth, to suffuse with genial warmth. (Cf. to bathe in sunshine.) Chiefly refl.; = 3.


3. intr. To expose oneself to, or disport oneself in, an ambient flood of genial warmth, as in the sunshine, the rays of a fire; to lie enjoying the heat which radiates upon one.
sky, n.

[OE. skie, ON. sky (Icel. sky, Norw. sky, Du. sky) neut., cloud (—original *skjöta*), directly related to OS. skie masc., OE. assé (doubtful), and more remotely to OE. souca, ON. skugga shade, shadow, whence SCUDD A. See also SCREW n."

1. A cloud. Obs.

1.1200 Byt. 66 Up he twel, till he be become seel, Sair, sikes same and seasons till he come to beone. 1250 Corr. & Ex. 3055 Bl. forces harm for an idle house but right harm he was he was lit. 1373 Chichester H. Poets. ii. 1805 A certainty wondrous news so hydraulically and byse That bys he cast not a skye. In all these volumina. 1500 Corr. Conf. ii. 60 All evidently take part, as it were a skye. All close out of this last skye. 1640 Lend. Poems & Son. 1007 As storns in the frosty night, Whanne walkes is most wyght. With-soundes or an any skye. 1439 — Mrs. Poems (Forsy Soc.) 164 The somery day is. salken sayn. With so clere haye, but that ther is som skye. 1500-20 DryDEN. Poems int. 3 Quesn to all the havin armay. With mystic vapourys, choldis and skyes. 161350 Stowe of Redemption. 32 in Dougs's Poems (1687) 329 To the supreme eternall region; Quesn newell skyes may make no sognor.

fig. 14. — Epig. in Tindale's Vis. (1845) 121 Thus. twre monging dailie and wi with a skye That we in English call a fantury, 1529 Stowe's Epig. 165 Ye spoke over byse. Your names to magnify, Among the scabbred skies Of Wydlysse flees skyes.

2. a. the skies, the clouds (obsc.); the upper region of the air; the heavens. Chiefly poet.

1500 XV Signe in F.F. (1852) 11: the hole man talcb. bat he skye so sal gese joo. In stenc. as kit wer man. 1596 Gowers Conf. ii. 261 Sabe were first forth both cher and skel. Above in their among the Skies. 1600 Daven. Troy. 6016 The day was done, gremot the skyes. 1508 DryDEN. Gold. Peregrine. The dreames for advaunt of the laste 1590 Suscr. Mid. iv. 111 The skye, the fontering, every number were. Susc. also master.
Conclusion

The influence of Celtic on early English has, on the one hand, to take into account the demographic situation after the conquest and, on the other hand, the syntactic parallels between Brythonic and later Old English and to consider these as possible contact phenomena.

Typological unusualness, as with the isomorphy of reflexives and emphatics, strengthens the case for contact while internal developments and parallels with further languages rightly demands that one relativises the transfer through contact and shift, hopefully leading to a more balanced view of the status of these factors in the historical attested changes in the grammar of English.
Thankyou for your attention

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