

# Features of Substratum Influence with Special Reference to English-Celtic Contact

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Dvopredmetni prijediplomski studij Sociologija i Engleski jezik i književnost

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**Osobine utjecaja jezika supstrata s posebnim osvrtom na kontakt  
engleskog i keltskog jezika**

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Mentorica: izv. prof. dr. sc. Dubravka Vidaković Erdeljić

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Bachelor's Thesis

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## **Sažetak**

Rasprava između sljedbenika tradicionalne perspektive i sljedbenika Keltske hipoteze traje i danas. Dok sljedbenici tradicionalne perspektive zagovaraju malen utjecaj Kelta na engleski jezik, osim utjecaja na imena naselja, sljedbenici Keltske hipoteze tvrde da se utjecaj može pronaći i u drugim, strukturalnim, dijelovima jezika. Ovaj rad prati debatu kako bi se utvrdilo postoji li dovoljno dokaza za potvrđivanje Keltske hipoteze te kako bi se ustanovilo odgovara li utjecaj Kelta na engleski jezik onome što se očekuje u situaciji promjene jezika te u okolnostima podređenog utjecaja. Ovaj rad napisan je u obliku preglednog članka, gdje je istraživačka metoda prikupljanje dosadašnjih spoznaja, iz znanstvenih radova, kako bi se ostvarili ciljevi istraživanja. Nakon provedenog istraživanja, utvrđuje se da je za potvrđivanje Keltske hipoteze potrebno pronaći više dokaza nego što ih je sada pronađeno, ali ustanovljeno je i da su Kelti utjecali na engleski jezik više nego što se do sada mislilo od strane zagovornika tradicionalne perspektive. Također, s obzirom na društveno-povijesni kontekst zbivanja na Britanskim otocima, utjecaj Kelta na engleski jezik odgovara onome što se očekuje u situaciji promjene jezika i u okolnostima utjecaja podređenog jezika na superiorni jezik.

**Ključne riječi:** keltski jezik, keltska hipoteza, jezik supstrat

## **Abstract**

The debate between the traditional perspective adherents and the Celtic hypothesis adherents still continues today. While the traditional perspective argues there is no Celtic influence on the English Language, except for the influence on place-names, the Celtic hypothesis adherents state there is influence on the other aspects of language as well. This paper follows the debate in order to see whether there is enough evidence to accept the Celtic hypothesis and to determine if the influence of the Celtic language on the English corresponds to what would be expected in a situation of language shift and substratum influence, this was researched through detailed examination of already existing literature on this topic. After conducting the research, it is concluded that for the full acceptance of the Celtic hypothesis there should be more evidence in regard to the other aspects of the language influence, but Celts influenced English language more than it was previously thought by the traditional perspective adherents. Furthermore, due to the socio-historical contexts, the Celtic influence on the English does correspond to what would be expected of the substratum influence on the superstrate language.

**Keywords:** Celtic language, Celtic Hypothesis, substratum language

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction .....	1
2. Celtic and English in Contact.....	1
3. Celtic Influence on the English language.....	5
3.1. The Old English verb <i>to be</i> .....	5
3.2. Periphrastic <i>do</i> .....	6
3.3. The progressive.....	8
3.4. Cleft construction .....	9
3.5. Northern Subject Rule .....	11
3.6. Phonological Influences .....	12
3.6.1. Preservation of /p/ and /w/ in English (Tolkien 1963).....	12
3.6.2. <i>i</i> -mutation in Old English.....	13
3.6.3. Low-level influences .....	14
3.7. Lexical Influence .....	14
4. Conclusion.....	17
5. List of references.....	18



## 1. Introduction

Language contact occurs when there is presence of several different languages in a single location at the same moment (Thomason 2001: 1). It most often involves face-to-face interactions (Thomason 2001: 3) and in bilingual communities where one person is fluent in all four language skills and/or the person's parents speak two different languages (Thomason 2001: 3, 197). Languages have always been in contact (Thomason 2001: 1) and in situations of a quick language shift, usually occurring with limited proficiency in the language use, substratum language can influence superstratum's phonology and syntax more than lexicon (Thomason 2001: 226).

In this research, the main focus will be on the contact between English and the Celtic languages, with the aim to find whether there are any influences of Celtic on the English language, with the focus on i. lexical level ii. phonological level iii. morphological level and iv. syntax. The second aim is to see, based on the previous studies, if the Celtic influence on the English language corresponds to what is expected in the situation of the substratum influence during the language shift. In order to establish what kind of influences were exerted on English by the Celtic languages, we will review the literature published on this topic. For the purpose of illustrating the Celtic influence on the English language as detailed as possible, several structures and phenomena are to be examined and summarized in this paper; 1) the Old English verb *to be*, 2) periphrastic *do* 3) the progressive form, 4) cleft construction, 5) the Northern Subject Rule, 6) phonological influences on the English language, and 7) lexical influence.

The topic of the Celtic influence on the English language is not only complex, but also scholars are not unanimous about neither the extent nor the validity of the Celtic influence on the English language. More precisely, scholars are torn between a) the traditional view – that argues that the Celtic influence is purely lexical and is seen only in place names (Jespersen 1905: 40) and b) the Celtic Hypothesis adherents, who believe that there is more to the Celtic influence on English than merely the lexical influence. In this work, one of the goals is to portray both perspectives in order to gain broader picture of what has happened to English. This will be done by researching about contact induced language change, historical events, and socio-political status of the Celts during the Anglo-Saxon invasion.

## 2. Celtic and English in Contact

Although every speech community is different and unpredictable, there are certain rules of what is more likely to be borrowed in a language. Thomason (2001: 63) argues that anything can be borrowed, and agrees with the language-borrowing hierarchy stating that words are first to be borrowed and that grammar is only borrowed afterwards. However, as Thomason (2001: 64) notices, this structural language borrowing is applicable when people are fluent in both languages. Thomason also adds that in the cases where the people in charge of the language innovation are second-language learners, “the first and most significant interference features are structural, not lexical” (Thomason: 64). Depending on the social context, one language is a subordinate language, while the other is the superstratum language.

Substratum interference occurs when a community is socio-politically subordinate, has lower social status, to those whose language they are transitioning to (Thomason 2001: 75). To exemplify, Anglo-Saxon invasion placed Celts in subordinate position where Celts had to shift to Anglo-Saxon language, Lutz (2009: 229) argues that this substratum language could employ structural interference on phonology, morphology, and syntax of the superstratum language. However, this substratum influence is usually flawed because of the inadequate understanding of the superstratum language in the time of the language transition (Thomason 2001: 277), additionally, Thomason (2001: 75) declares that the process through which substratum interference is introduced into the target language has two or three components. Thomason (2001: 75) declares that the way in which substratum interference is inaugurated into the target language has two or three elements. These elements, components, vary due to the level of integration between the speakers who go through language shift and superstratum language speakers (Thomason 2001: 75). Due to the imperfect learning, substratum influence occurs when speakers transfer certain aspects of their first language into their adaptation of the language they are shifting to, speakers also might be unable to acquire or refuse to acquire the newly dominant language properly so their errors influence the superstratum language (Thomason 2001: 75). Lastly, if the lower-status speech community is not merged into the higher-status speech community, then the target language – under the substratum influence, establishes as the group’s permanent version of the target language (Thomason 2001: 75)

Celts and Anglo-Saxons did integrate and were politically intertwined after the Anglo-Saxon conquest of Britain, which occurred in the fifth century AD, the year 449 is cited as the crucial date (Filppula et. al. 2008: 7), marking a new era for the Celts, the earliest settlers of the British Isles, and the Celtic languages in the intertwined relationship with the Anglo-Saxons. Before the Anglo-Saxon conquest and the Roman conquest, the Celts were prevalent throughout the European

continent, their language being the descendant of the Indo-European language. After the Anglo-Saxon invasion of the British Isles, it was not possible for the whole Celtic population to vanish without leaving any influence on the Old English (Coates 2007: 173ff, cited in Lutz 2009: 228, Jespersen 1982: 35), it is more likely that they have become slaves or have intermarried with the invaders (Jespersen 1982: 36). Even though large groups of the conquered Celts have migrated to the West (Baugh and Cable 2002: 54, cited in Lutz 2009), over the centuries the number of Celtic language speakers decreased (Lutz 2009: 228). Furthermore, after the Anglo-Saxon invasion Celts had to learn the language of their masters (Jespersen 1905: 3) and had become politically submissive towards the English state (Davies 1993: 4), at this moment Celtic languages have become substrate languages. Anglo-Saxons and Celts' descendants were taught the Celtic language mixed with the Old English, which resulted in Celts leaving almost no evidence of their first language in English (Lutz 2009: 227). As Jespersen (1905: 39) states, Celtic influence on the English language was lost due to the fact that newer generations spoke Old English instead of Celtic languages. However, Celtic hypothesis adherents argue that exactly this submissive position resulted in substratum influence of the Celtic languages on English (Filppula et al. 2008, Filppula and Klemola 2014, McWhorter 2009, Vennemann 2009). In addition to that, Filppula and Klemola (2014: 33) argue that the Celtic lower social status created features of “Celtic Englishes”<sup>1</sup>, such as extended usage of the verbs in progressive construction, periphrastic *do*, and clefting, which provide strong evidence for substratal influence on the English language from the Celtic languages (Filppula and Klemola 2014: 33).

Moreover, proponents of the new perspectives on the origin and extent of the Celtic influence on English disagree with traditional views, according to which except for geographical terms, the Celtic influence on English was bounded with nearly no impact in phonology or syntax (Filppula and Klemola 2014: 35). Filppula and Klemola (2014: 35) in their discussion also refer to Keller (1925, cited in Filppula and Klemola 2014: 35) and Tolkien (1963, cited in Filppula and Klemola 2014:35) while arguing for the Celtic influence on the Old English functions of the verb *be* stating “their work on this feature of English was long forgotten, but has become a topic of discussion in some recent works” (Filppula and Klemola 2014: 36). These authors state that there are several parallels between Celtic and English that do not exist between Celtic and other languages. According to Thomason (2001: 93) the argumentation for a contact origin will be compelling only “if it is supported by evidence of interference elsewhere in the language’s structure as well”

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<sup>1</sup>Celtic Englishes is a term used for the languages that share the same or similar background. In regard of their creation, Celtic Englishes have developed in environment of fierce language contacts, large-scale bilingualism and without adequate access to formal language education (Filppula and Klemola 2014: 33)

(Thomason 2001: 93). Phonological and syntactic interference usually appear together (Thomason 2001: 93), which is why scholars, as well as the author of this work, focus on several, rather than one, structural features resulting from the contact between the Celtic and Anglo-Saxons languages.

The Anglo-Saxons, after conquering the British Isles inhabitants – Celts, had no particular need to learn the Celtic languages that were spoken on the British Isles (Filppula et al. 2008: 24). This means that the transfer of the Celtic characteristics to English must have taken place during the language shift from Celtic to the superstratum language Anglo-Saxons used for means of communication (Filppula et al. 2008: 25). To exemplify, the rapidly increasing number of Brythonic<sup>2</sup> speakers shifted to Anglo-Saxon language in order to communicate with their new rulers (Filppula et al. 2008: 24). But, as Jackson (1953: 44, cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 126) points out, British names were common among the Anglo-Saxon royalty, implying considerable intermarriage and fusion between Anglo-Saxon and the Celts, Brythonic speakers. Furthermore, the adoption of Celtic names displays certain respect for the Celtic tradition (Filppula et al. 2008: 126), however the presence of the British names in the Anglo-Saxon royalty stays as one of the “great puzzles in the history of the language” (Crystal 2004: 33, cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 126).

Any Celticisms in the syntax of Old English would have been labelled as debased and due to that would not have had place in the accepted standard of the Anglo-Saxon era. (Dal 1952, cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 26). Due to that, spoken, colloquial language was not written down during the Anglo-Saxon period, which means that the Celtic language merged together with Anglo-Saxon only verbally. As Lutz (2009: 233) states, at the beginning of the eighth century, in the texts of all kinds it was shown that the distinction between certain Celtic languages, in this case distinction between the two paradigms of *to be*, changed its former status and was no longer a characteristic restricted to lower-class speech only (Lutz 2009: 223). That could result in a drastic change in speech patterns of Celtic and English, such as coalescence of using the verb *to be* similarly throughout the British Isles (Lutz 2009: 231, Vennemann 2011: 228).

Scholars are not unanimous regarding the overall Celtic influence on the English language, resulting in two streams of thought appearing: i. authors with traditional views, who believe the Celtic influence, if there was one, is present only in place-names and personal names, and ii. Celtic hypothesis supporters. Celtic hypothesis supporters suppose that Old English was drastically

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<sup>2</sup> Celtic languages are thought to have derived from the Proto-Indo-European language and are divided into Insular Celtic and Continental Celtic. Brythonic languages, part of the Insular Celtic languages, comprise the extant languages Breton, Cornish, and Welsh. In this paper author focuses on the Insular Celtic languages (Filppula et al. 2002: 309, Matasović 2009: 4-11).

changed when used as “a second language by speakers of the Celtic languages, Brythonic, Welsh, Cornish and possibly the extinct and sparsely documented Cumbric” (McWhorter 2009: 163). The Celtic hypothesis has been regularly dismissed by most scholars of English diachrony, a major objection has been that the purported Celtic influences do not appear in the historical records until the Middle English period despite the contact with Celts beginning several centuries before this. Another has been that English has only few Celtic lexical items (McWhorter 2009:164), but authors (Filppula et al. 2002, Laker 2018, McWhorter 2009, Vennemann 2011) emphasize syntactical and phonological Celtic features in the English language as well.

In the remaining part of the paper we will discuss structural features in the English language which are believed to originate from the language contact between Celtic languages and English. As previously said, the focus is on the i. lexicon, ii. phonology, iii. morphology, and iv. syntax. In the following section we will try to frame as many examples as possible from different perspectives. In addition to that, there is a constant need for the self-reflection due to the two perspectives prevalent in the field of Celtic influence on the English language; the traditional perspective and the Celtic hypothesis.

### **3. Celtic Influence on the English language**

#### **3.1. The Old English verb *to be***

The assumption of direct Celtic substratum influence on the Old English, i.e. the substratum influence due to the sociohistorical events and the status of the Celtic languages, is probably best noticeable in the Old English usage of the present tense form of the verb *to be* (Lutz 2009: 231). Lutz (2009: 231) additionally argues that this feature is the crucial structural piece of evidence for the Celtic substratum influence on the English language. This notion (the usage of the present tense of the verb *to be*) corresponds both formally and structurally with the Celtic languages in all Old English dialects (Lutz 2009: 231), and at the same moment it contrasts with all other Germanic languages<sup>3</sup> (Vennemann 2011: 228). There is the functional difference between the two forms of *to be* that suggests the influence from the Celtic Welsh, this refers to the context and tense in which

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<sup>3</sup> For example, in German the verb *sein* (Eng. to be) is not reused in the conjugation, but there are rather additional forms of *sein* introduced; *ich bin*, *du bist*, *er/sie/es ist*, *wir sind*, *ihr seid*, *sie sind*. In English, the *are* form of *to be* is reused in the plural; *I am*, *you are*, *he/she/it is*, *we are*, *you are*, *they are*. (Bennet 2023)

one wishes to speak. In Old English “*es*-forms”<sup>4</sup> were used for the actual present, while the “*b*-forms”<sup>5</sup> were only used to express future (Filppula and Klemola 2014: 42), this suggests drastic language change from Celtic to Old English in terms of expressing tenses. Keller (1925: 60, cited from Lutz 2009: 233) argues that this feature was borrowed from Brythonic languages, meaning that while other Germanic languages create additional words to express the verb *to be* regarding the person and number, English uses the same form *are* throughout all plural pronouns. Keller (ibid.) additionally suggests that the twofold paradigm of the verb “to be” was introduced into pre-Old English by the early Britons in order to obtain the new language spoken by the Britain’s conquerors (1925, cited from Lutz 2009: 232), this follows up the language shift expectation of a language shift situation. Furthermore, the existence and certainly preservation of a double-copula paradigm<sup>6</sup> in English (Vennemann 2011: 228) can be ascribed to the Celtic language shifters in Britannia (Keller 1925, cited in Vennemann 2011: 228). The evidence for Celtic contact influence, regarding the evolution of the verb *to be*, stays solid (Filppula and Klemola 2014: 42) and Lutz (2009: 238) adds that this Celtic influence on (pre-)Old English was clearly substratal.

### 3.2. Periphrastic *do*

English and Celtic intertwine in using extensively discussed construction – periphrastic *do* – in negated and interrogative sentences (Filppula and Klemola 2014: 43). Periphrastic *do* refers to the use of the verb *to be* as an auxiliary in order to form questions, negatives, and emphatic statements (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 43). The usage of periphrastic *do* construction is one of the most prominent characteristics of Modern English and it also sets English apart from other Germanic languages (Filppula et al. 2008: 49). Due to that, the research of “the roots of the periphrastic auxiliary verb *do* has been one of the central problems in English historical linguistics” (Filppula et al. 2008: 49). As with twofold paradigm of the auxiliary *to be*, there are different opinions on the periphrastic *do* matter.

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<sup>4</sup> There are three basic forms in English, the base form, past form and *-ed* form. The base form is used as the infinitive form and for the present simple, except the third person singular where *-s* morpheme is added to create the *-s/-es* form. (Cambridge Dictionary n.d.)

<sup>5</sup> Depending on the function (bare infinitive, present tense, past tense, past participle, present participle), the verb *to be* has five forms. In the present tenses verb *to be* changes depending on the person and the number of the subject, (I) *am*, (he/she/it) *is*, (you, they) *are*. (Cambridge Dictionary n.d., British Council n.d., Ellis 2022)

<sup>6</sup> Forms of the verb *to be* are also known as copulas. The double-copula construction involves two instances of the verb *to be* occurring together, it occurs most commonly after NPs such as *the problem*, *the reason*, *the issue*, *what is nice*. e.g. *The problem always is is hypersensitivity*. (Curzan 2012:211)

Regarding the historical approach towards the usage of periphrastic *do*, the oldest evidence of the construction is located in affirmative declarative sentences in the thirteenth century (Filppula et al. 2008:50), these findings were noticed in the southwestern Cornish texts (McWhorter 2009: 164). Even though today in declaratives the construction has nearly disappeared, in negative declaratives the construction started occurring frequently from the end of the fourteenth century (Filppula et al 2008: 51). By the early eighteenth century periphrastic *do* became well established “in negatives, questions and in emphatic contexts” (Filppula et al. 2008: 50).

“Cornish’s auxiliary *do* presents a plausible model for English’s periphrastic *do*” (McWhorter: 164), in Cornish *do* functions in finite forms and in complex sentences with the verbal noun (McWhorter 2009: 164). Here is the example of auxiliary *do* in Cornish in the negative (1) and the interrogative (2):

(1) Ni                    *wrigaw*                    vi    dha    welas.  
       negation        *do* past 1<sup>st</sup> sing.        I        you    see  
       translation: I did not see you. (Jenner 1904: 160, cited in McWhorter 2009: 165)

(2) *Gwra*                    cara?  
       *do* present 2<sup>nd</sup> sing.    love  
       translation: Do you love? (Jenner 1904: 117, cited in McWhorter 2009: 165)

In Modern Welsh the connection to English’s periphrastic *do* is noticeable only in the present tense (McWhorter 2009: 166), however, in Welsh auxiliary *do* is used in negative (3) and interrogative (4):

(3) *nes*                    I        ddim                    agor  
       *do* past 1<sup>st</sup> sing.        I        negation                    open  
       translation: I did not open. (McWhorter 2009: 166)

(4) *nes*                    I        agor?  
       *do* past 1<sup>st</sup> sing        I        open  
       translation: Did I open? (McWhorter 2009: 166)

McWhorter (2009: 167) argues that Welsh is a plausible source for creation of the English’s periphrastic *do* construction, even though periphrastic *do* in Cornish corresponds better to English, due to usage of this auxiliary “in semantically neutral position that acts as a place-filler with all verbs” (McWhorter 2009: 164). The case for the Celtic contact influence (this time *via* Cornish



language) on this feature of the English syntax seems strong enough to be taken seriously enough to be thought and researched by many historians and linguists (Filppula and Klemola 2014: 43). Filppula et al. (2014: 51-59) investigated the origins of the periphrastic *do* construction by researching regional distribution of unstressed periphrastic *do* in English. Authors concluded that the construction has not changed drastically since being recorded for the first time and that “the geographical distribution of the construction supports the conclusion that Celtic, especially Brythonic, contact influence must be taken into account” (Filppula and Klemola 2014: 59) as a likely associate in introducing the construction in the English language (Filppula and Klemola 2014: 59).

On the other hand, criticism of the Celtic Hypothesis says that there is no sure way to know whether Cornish influenced English with this feature, or whether it was English the one to influence Cornish and then Cornish overtook the periphrastic *do*. McWhorter (2009: 167) tackles this issue by looking at grammatical features of Breton, the language whose speakers emigrated from England to north-western France in the 400s and 500s, shortly after the invasion. If English influenced Cornish, it would be expected that the Breton language does not contain the periphrastic *do* structure, however modern Breton uses auxiliary verb *do* in the affirmative, in the negation for emphasis and in interrogative (McWhorter 2009: 167). Furthermore, the Celtic hypothesis opposers state that periphrastic *do* appears too late, in the Early Middle English texts around thirteenth century (Filppula and Klemola 2014: 61). Due to the Celts’ lower social status, it is expected not to find written colloquial English language interfering with the Celtic language(s) (Filppula and Klemola 2014: 59). McWhorter (2009: 178) confirms this by saying that constructions, like periphrastic *do*, could easily be restricted to vernacular, oral register spoken by the ruling class.

### **3.3. The progressive**

Celtic has a verbal noun construction that is structurally and functionally similar to English *-ing* progressive form (Filppula and Klemola 2014: 43). Dal (1952, cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 61) also notes shared features of the verbal noun characteristics in English and in Celtic constructions, and also adds that the construction is distinctive compared to other Germanic languages.



Regarding the emergence of the stable progressive construction, scholars have different opinions where e.g. Dal (1925, cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 61) argues that the Old English “verbal abstract ending *-ung /-ing*” (Dal, *ibid.*) had been used in a few northern Old English texts, where the northern areas were not as dominated by the West-Saxon literary tradition as other areas, as a verbal noun preceded by the verb *be* (Filppula et al. 2014: 61). Ahlqvist (2010, cited in Filppula and Klemola 2014: 43) shows in his works that the progressive form was a stable and confirmed feature of Old Irish. On the other hand, Vennemann (2011: 229) argues that although witnessed in the late Old English period, it took centuries for English to evolve a complete and stable progressive form. Moreover, Keller (1925: 66, cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 60) proclaims that the verbal noun construction does not become stable nor established feature in English until the fourteenth century. Furthermore, there is a distinct timing difference between the emergence and stability of the twofold paradigm of the verb *to be* and the rise of the progressive form in the Middle English, according to Filppula et al. (2008: 60). At last, Filppula et al. (2008: 61) mention Braaten (1967: 180) and his synopsis of the vital elements that show how Modern English progressive form could not have developed out of the Old English present participle construction without a particular extent of interference of the Celtic language (Braaten 1967: 180, in Filppula et al. 2008: 60). Some of those factors are: i. the construction *be* + present participle in other Germanic languages has not developed into continuous tense ii. progressive tenses are more commonly used in Celtic-speaking areas iii. the similarity between Modern English and Welsh progressive construction is too remarkable to be accidental (Braaten 1967: 180, cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 61).

### 3.4. Cleft construction

Cleft sentences are used “to connect what is already understood to something new” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.), new information is placed in the same sentence, which allows a listener to focus on the new information (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). *It*-clauses are the most common types of the cleft clause (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.), and the example given by Cambridge Online Dictionary (n.d.) is:

(5) A: *Sharon’s car got broken into yesterday, did it?*

B: *No. It was Nina’s car that got broken into.*

In this example, *it was Nina's car* is the new piece of information provided by the speaker, and that a car got broken into is an old piece of information that was already understood by the listener.

The *it*-cleft construction is a feature present in both Modern English and earlier Irish English, consisting of an introductory *it* and followed by a noun phrase or adverbial phrase (Filppula and Klemola 2014: 44-45). Filppula et al. (2008: 27) mention cleft construction as another syntactic mark that could have derived from the Celtic languages, and the authors add that “clefting is a robust feature of all Celtic languages” (Filppula et al. 2008: 75). In addition to that, the cleft construction emerged rather lately in English, while it existed long before in its Celtic counterparts (Filppula et al. 2008: 72). This indicates a possibility of contact induced change in English. Although over the centuries a gradient increase of using cleft-construction has been noticed, especially in the Middle English (Visser:1963: 63, cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 72), “clefting seems to have been rather rare even as late as the late Middle English and Early Modern English periods” (Filppula et al. 2008: 75). After this period cleft constructions increase in frequency and variety, both functionally and syntactically (Filppula et al. 2008: 75).

Filppula et al. (2008: 76), in order to exemplify and elaborate the Celtic clefting, cited Gregor (1980: 147) and showed his example from Irish (6), Scottish Gaelic (7), Cornish (8), Breton (9), and Welsh (10):

(6) Irish: (Is é) an bhean a thainig.

(7) Scottish Gaelic: Is a'boirannach a thàinig.

(8) Cornish: An venen a dheth.

(9) Breton: Ar wreg a zeuas.

(10) Welsh: Y wraig sydd wedi dod.

translation: (It is) the woman (who) came.

In these examples, Gregor (1980: 147, cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 76) shows how for the sake of emphasis subject and/or object part of the sentence is put first, and a sentence is placed at the final position in the form of a relative clause.

Authors (Filppula et al. 2008: 70-78, Filppula and Klemola 2014: 36-45) argue that the fact that this construction is evident in the Celtic languages indicates that the Celtic languages, at one point in the past, influenced English construction. However, scholars are still unable to agree in which period that change in the English language happened. Ahlqvist (1977, cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 77) suggests the probability that the cleft construction is essentially of the Celtic origin, and adds “that clefting has been prevalent in Irish earlier than in any other Western European language”

(Ahlqvist, *ibid.*). On the other hand, aside from the Celtic languages, clefting is established feature of French syntax (Filppula et al. 2008: 78) where French has an introductory “dummy pronoun *ce*, similar to English *it*” (Filppula et al 2008: 78). The mentioned similarity raises the issue of potential contact between English and French, particularly after the Norman conquest, and the question of who influenced clefting in English – Celts or French – arises.

### 3.5. Northern Subject Rule

The name the Northern Subject Rule was firstly introduced by Ossi Ihalainen (Filppula et al, 2008: 43) and by the definition refers to a process where, “in the present tense, the verb takes the *-s* in all persons, singular and plural, unless it is adjacent to a personal pronoun subject” (Filppula et al. 2008: 43), today, this pattern occurs in Northern English and Scottish dialects (Benskin 2011: 158-167, McWhorter 2009: 185). Traditionally, scholars seem to have agreed with the theory that this rule “originates from levelling of the Old English reduced inflection” (Benskin 2011: 159). On the other hand, lately, researchers believe that the Northern Subject Rule originates from Brittonic (Filppula et al. 2008: 47).

To exemplify, in (13) no *-s* ending is used because the subject is an adjacent personal pronoun, whereas in (14) *-s* ending is used because the subject is a noun phrase (NP) in function of a subject and it is not adjacent to the verb (Filppula et al. 2008: 43). “The Standard English subject-verb agreement pattern, where the suffix *-s* is attached only to third person singular forms, is a badly mutilated survivor” (Filppula et al. 2008: 42) of an earlier pattern, so it is hardly surprising that, during centuries, three non-standard patterns of English have developed in regiolects (Filppula et al. 2008: 42). For example, in the south-west of England and East Anglia the inflectional marker *-s* is completely removed (11), while in some southern dialects the inflectional marker *-s* is used with all pronouns (12) (Wakelin 1977: 119, cited in Filppula et al.: 43), the third variant – the Northern Subject Rule – is seen in dialects on the northern part of the British Isles, here “the inflectional marker *-s* depends on the nature and position of the subject” (Filppula et al. 2008: 43) and is shown in examples (12) and (13) (Ihalainen 1994: 221, cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 43).

- (11) I/you/he/she/it/we/you/they *jump*
- (12) I/you/he/she/it/we/you/they *jumps*
- (13) They *peel* them and *boils* them.
- (14) Birds *sings*.

Typological comparison, as Filppula et al. (2008: 49) conclude, shows the parallel between this “rare type of subject-verb agreement pattern” (Filppula et al. 2008: 49) and Brythonic languages. What is more, they emphasise the probability of the Northern Subject Rule creating substratum influence from the Britons in England’s northern region (Filppula et al. 2008: 49). On the other hand, there are authors who disagree with the extent of the Celtic influence on Old English and Middle English, but Filppula et al. (2008: 49) further state that there is enough evidence to suggest that there was contact between English and Brythonic resulting in the rise of the Northern Subject Rule.

### **3.6. Phonological Influences**

#### **3.6.1. Preservation of /p/ and /w/ in English (Tolkien 1963)**

While very little has been written about phonological changes due to the Celtic-English induced contact change, mainly because academics do not see any noteworthy phonological changes in Old English, sometimes it is important to evaluate stable and non-changing features in a language (Filppula et al. 2008: 118). Example of this preserved feature is existence of interdental fricatives in English, Welsh, and Brythonic (Filppula et al. 2008: 118).

English fricatives, as well as stops, are *obstruent* sounds, which means that during their production there is a closure, partial or total, of the vocal tract, stopping or interfering with the airflow coming from the lungs (Monroy-Casa and Arboleda-Guirao 2014: 51), as Filppula and Klemola (2014: 46) add, interdental fricatives are a feature of Welsh (Filppula and Klemola 2014: 46). Authors also mention Tolkien’s work (1963, cited in Filppula and Klemola 2014: 46) where he suggests that preservation of /p/ and /w/ in English was under the influence of the Celtic languages. He concludes this due to the fact that there is no Germanic dialect that preserves both fricatives /p/ and /w/ (Tolkien 1963, cited in Filppula and Klemola 2014: 46). Furthermore, Laker (2009, cited in Filppula and Klemola 2014: 47) discusses the Old English voiced fricatives [v], [ð], [z], that have been considered allophonic variants of /f/, /θ/, /s/, stating that in dialectal regions of England, through contacts between British and Anglo-Saxon speaking communities, “the phonemicization of the previous allophonic voice alternation in fricatives had already taken place” (Laker *ibid.*). Moreover, there are findings of both voiceless and voiced fricatives in the Brythonic language (Laker 2009, cited in Filppula and Klemola 2014: 47) and other than Icelandic, which preserves

/θ/ sound, English is the only language that preserves both /ð/ and /θ/ (Tolkien 1963, cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 119).

Nonetheless, there are authors who disagree with this phonological feature saying that dental fricatives do not represent a novelty, neither in Germanic nor Celtic languages, which is why they argue that dental fricatives cannot be considered as a consequence of the contact (Isaac 2003, cited in Filppula et al 2008: 119). According to Isaac (2003, cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 119), shared innovations are features relevant for researching and show language contact, not shared archaisms, as the author calls them. Filppula et al. (2008: 119) answer to that with stating that the existence of dental fricatives in Welsh, and other Celtic languages, could clarify the preservation of the same feature in English. Authors (Filppula et al. 2008: 120) conclude that preservation of this characteristic shows the influence of Celtic languages on the English.

### 3.6.2. *i*-mutation in Old English

“Mutation is a change in a vowel sound caused by a sound in the following syllable, *i*-mutation is a change in the sound of a vowel so that it is pronounced with the tongue higher and further forward” (Koivisto-Kokko, n.d.). What happens during the *i*-mutation is that when a front vowel follows a stressed syllable, low front vowels are produced higher in the mouth (Koivisto-Kokko, n.d.). This is best seen in examples of irregular plurals in English. few examples of this *i*-mutation on nouns: “For example, in the nominative plural '*fo*t - *fo*ot' becomes '*fe*t - *fe*et', '*go*s - *go*ose' becomes '*ge*s - *ge*ese', and '*to*p - *to*oth' becomes '*te*p - *te*eth'.” (Koivistko-Kokko n.d.)

Regarding the origin of the *i*-mutation, Tolkien (1963, cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 120) argues that the process of *i*-mutation started in pre-invasion times and emphasizes the importance of place-names borrowed by English from the Celts for the precise dating of *i*-mutation. This could help scholars appoint period in time when the *i*-mutation first started. However, parallels between *i*-mutation and Welsh have not been researched, probably due to the dating problems and “because of the cross-linguistic generality of this type of change” (Filppula et al. 2008: 120).

As this author finds, *i*-mutation has not been researched enough to conclude whether it derives from Celtic languages or not and should be researched more in order to show the Celtic influence on English, in regard to the *i*-mutation.

### 3.6.3. Low-level influences

As Filppula et al. (2008: 120) state, “low-level refers to such non-distinctive sound phenomena as allophonic realisations, phonetic reductions and mergers” (Filppula et al. 2008: 120). Authors quote Hickey (1995, cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 120-121) who suggest that contact between the Celtic languages and the Anglo-Saxons may have contributed, even accelerated, the gradual weakening and eventual disappearance of unstressed syllables. Due to that process, in linguistics and phonetics called lenition, consonants become voiced or deleted from the sound production of a word (Dictionary.com, n.d.).

There is the question of similarity between the Celtic languages and Germanic, and which one influenced the other – and in the end the English language. This question arises because of the similar features, in this case initial stress, in Celtic, Germanic and Italic (Filppula et al 2008: 121). Hickey (1995: 98, cited in Filppula et al 2008: 121) argues that the phonological correspondences between continental Celtic and Germanic “are accidental if they occur at all” (Hickey *ibid.*). Nonetheless, the possibility of Celtic low-level influence on English still exists and Hickey states that there is a definite influence of the British Celts speech patterns on the occupiers (cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 121), such as initial stress and vowel reduction (Hickey *ibid.*). Filppula et al (2008: 121) support this statement by mentioning the development of the Celtic languages in the early periods, where the elimination of intervocalic consonants and vowel weakening in unstressed syllables led to change in speech pattern.

### 3.7. Lexical Influence

While substratum language may influence phonology, morphology, and/or syntax of the superstratum, as shown in previous sections, it is believed to have little lexical effect on the superstratum (Lutz 2009: 230). Regarding the lexical borrowing, non-basic nouns, even verbs, are easiest to borrow (Thomason 2001: 69-71), however, there has been “a certain tradition of under-reporting of Celtic loan words” (Gillies 1994: 165, cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 28) in the field of English lexicography, which Gillies (1945: 165, cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 29) puts down to either the lack of knowledge or to ideological bias. This ideological bias refers to the authors with traditional views on the Celtic influence, where influence, if it exists, is (barely) seen only in place names. In addition to that, Lutz (2009: 229) mentions Jespersen’s speculation that the few lexical

borrowings were a result of inconsistency of the contact situation, but Lutz criticizes him for not looking “for possible structural traces in English left by Celts who shifted to the language of the victorious Anglo-Saxons” (Lutz 2009: 229). Although Filppula et al. (2008: 29) predict the quantity of acknowledged Celtic loanwords is expected to increase significantly more than it was previously thought, Grant (2009: 370) states that less than 1% of the items in the English subdatabase is of Celtic origin.

Scholars have categorized loanwords taken into English from the Celtic languages into these categories: personal and family names, patronyms, names of occupations, place-names, river-names (Filppula et al. 2008: 26), and other usually common nouns from Welsh, Cornish, Breton or Old Irish (Forster 1921, cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 26). The substratum language speaking community, Celts in this situation, had to learn the language of the invaders and in doing so would adapt to invaders’ language. Therefore, due to the nature of the contact situation between the two groups “large-scale lexical influences were not even to be expected” (Filppula et al. 2008: 26). But, not only did Celts influence the vocabulary regarding the expressions related to animals or household objects, such as *assa* ‘ass’ (G. *Esel*), borrowed from Old British *\*as(s)in* (itself from Latin *asinus*) and Old English *bin(n)* “basket” (G. *Korb*), *trousers* and *clan* taken from Scottish Gaelic (Grant 2009: 383), Old Irish also influenced language in aspect of religious terms, through the influence of early Irish missionaries, introducing terms such as e.g. Old English *cross(s)* ‘cross’, from Old Irish *cross*; Old English *cursian* ‘curse’, from Old Irish. *cūrsagim*, *cūrsaim* ‘I reprove’ (Forster 1921, cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 26).

Scholars usually agree on the hypothesis that the Celtic languages have influenced English vocabulary, especially in terms of place names and personal names, however they do not agree on the extent of that influence nor on the creating a clear-cut between what is Celtic influence and what is not. When it comes to place names, Celts have “the advantage and the prestige of having been there first” (Minkova 2020: 453) so the transfer from one language to the other is predictable and faster than borrowing, for example, basic words that another language already uses. Examples of such names are seen in town names, river names, names of the hills: *Thames*, *Severn*, *Kent*, *Canterbury*, *Dover*, *Yorkshire*, *Devonshire*, *Lancaster*, *Exeter*, *London* (Minkova 2020: 453). Furthermore, there are findings of a significant number of personal names in Anglo-Saxon that are of Celtic/British origin (Filppula et al. 2008: 125) and some examples of them are Irish (15) and British (16) male names intertwined with English names. Examples are taken from the ninth-century document *Liber vitae Dunelmensis* that list members of a Northumbrian brotherhood (Filppula et al. 2008: 126):

- (15) Abniar, Adamnan, Bressal, Brōn, Crīnoc, Cuna, Cunen, Demma, Dengus, Fergus, Fīnan, Faelfi, Fladgus, Mucca, Ultan (Filppula et al. 2008: 126)
- (16) Adda, Arthan, Cada, Clyduinin, Coloduc, Cundigeorn, Hiudu, Penda, Pobbidi, Rī-uuala, Rī-uualch, Tūda, Ūnust (Filppula et al. 2008: 126)

When taking examples, and making conclusions, for the Celtic lexical influence, scholars usually refer to Forster’s list of early loanwords into Old English (Filppula et al. 2008: 127), however Filppula et al. (2008: 127) argue that in the Middle English and in the Early Modern English the number of Celtic loanwords in English becomes notably larger due to “the time-lag between adopting a loanword and its first attestation in written texts” (Filppula et al. 2008: 127). To confirm this, Filppula et al. (2008: 128) mention Andrew Breeze and his “extensive series of articles” suggesting that words which have so far been unclear are of Celtic origin. Here Breeze (cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 128) includes items in the Old English (17) and Middle English (18s):

- (17) Old English: *deor* ‘brave’, *trum* ‘strong’, *truma* ‘host’, *cursung* ‘curse’, *gafeluc* ‘javelin’, *stær* ‘history’, *syrce* ‘coat of mail’
- (18) Middle English: *clog(ge)* ‘block, wooden shoe’, *cokkunge* ‘striving’

Furthermore, according to Breeze (2002, cited in Filppula et al. 2008: 128) there are at least seven types of Celtic loanwords in English:

“(1) Brittonic words in Old English; (2) Irish words in Old English; (3) Welsh words in Middle English; (4) Irish words in Middle English; (5) Welsh words in Early Modern English; (6) Irish words in the same; and (7) Scottish Gaelic words in the same” (Breeze 2002, cited from Filppula et al. 2008: 128).

Considering these findings, it is clearly noticeable that the Celtic loanwords in Old English and Middle English are more prevalent than is widely assumed (Filppula et al. 2008: 128).



#### 4. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to conduct a survey of existing literature on the topic of the Celtic influence on English, in terms of i. lexicon, ii. phonology, iii. morphology, and iv. syntax, in order to create as detailed review paper as possible regarding the Celtic influence on English. This was researched through the analysis of structural inflections evident in English language; the verb *to be*, periphrastic *do*, the progressive, and cleft construction, Northern Subject Rule, phonological features and lexical peculiarities. The second goal was to see if the Celtic influence on the English language, if there is any, corresponds to what is expected in the situation of the substratum influence during the language shift.

When it comes to the Celtic influence on the English language, scholars of the traditional point of view will mention only sparse influences on the English lexicon. However, as seen in the paper, there are more features in the English language that could possibly derive from the Celtic languages. The question of the extent of the Celtic influence on English is complex and scholars are not unanimous regarding any of the features, except for the influence on place names. There are those whose point of view is traditional and those who tend to confirm the Celtic hypothesis.

In short, in order to fully accept the Celtic hypothesis, there should be more firm evidence in regard to the syntax and phonology, but Celts did influence English language more than it was previously thought, which was shown in this paper. Due to the collected evidence, it was concluded that Celtic influence on the English does correspond to what would be expected of the substratum influence on the superstate language.

The review of literature has been done and in conclusion, it is important to emphasize that the Celtic influence on the English language has to be researched not only from the linguistics perspective, but from the sociolinguistic and historical point of view as well. Lastly, when one includes historical events and socio-political situation(s) Celts and English went through, the results become more precise. Furthermore, it is necessary to make a call for objectivity in researching this topic in order to get valid results.

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