

A response (21/09/2005) by the author to the review by Paul Russell (2004 *WHR* 22:588–90) of Iwan Wmffre *Language and Place-names in Wales: The Evidence of Toponymy in Cardiganshire*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press. 2003.

I would like to respond to an important point raised in Russell's review of my work. He states, as a basic rule of historical dating of phonological change, that "the first datable instance of a sound-change having occurred simply indicates that the change occurred at some point before then, and that countless earlier examples which do not show the change cannot be used as evidence that the change has not occurred" (589). I think this rule is generally true but not invariably so. In real-life conditions, phonological change does not establish itself instantaneously across a given speech but slowly over not less than the span of a human generation and in some cases over a number of centuries. The process of change probably usually evolves along the lines of an S-curve starting with a tentative incidence of the new feature which, at some point, gains momentum and ends with, perhaps, a slightly inconclusive termination. Here then ensues the first problem when dating a particular phonological change, at what point in the drawn-out process should one assign the date of change? The answer should probably be at the steepest part of the S-curve, though in many periods that is hardly ascertainable because of the sparsity of the extant documentation.

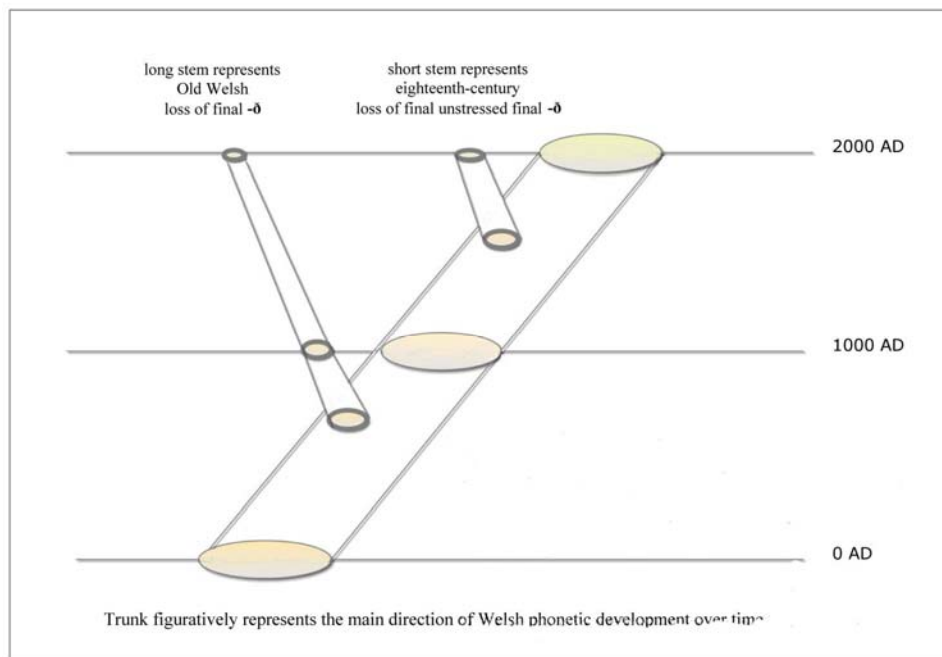
The second problem as to the dating of a particular phonological change is a rather more fundamental one than the first. The dynamic and prolonged nature of the process of phonological change in a given speech outlined above explains the possibility of uneven, and even of recessive, developments (the existence of the latter can be taken as proven by the occurrence of hypercorrections). Thus it is clearly possible that there will be instances of sound change that do not ultimately succeed in establishing themselves in every similar context where they might be expected, a phenomenon which challenges the basic rule enunciated by Russell. An instance of a sound-change does not necessarily mean that that sound-change has established itself wholly at the expense of the pre-existing sound.

I am very much aware that the historical dating of phonological change previous to the late nineteenth century is basically premised on texts which constitute imperfect distorting reflections of the actual language of any period. In view of the lack of controlling evidence I accept the methodological rule enunciated by Russell as the basic rule in deciding dates for phonological change. However it would be a false simplification of reality if this basic rule constituted the only methodological rule for deciding upon dating phonological change. To illustrate this I will take issue with Russell's criticism of my dating of a phonological feature which he suggests might prove that my conclusions that the phonological divergences between northern and southern Welsh originate for the most part after 1500 are "illusory" (590).

The feature which Russell highlights is the elision of final *-ð/* in final syllables of polysyllables which is characteristic of south-western Welsh

and which change is dated by me to the late eighteenth century. Invoking the basic rule (above), Russell (589–90) believes that it is “more coherent” to link elision of final *-ð̊*/ to the occurrence of OW. *triti*, *issi* for Modern Welsh *trydydd*, *sydd* and that by not making this link I was far too late in dating the change, in fact too late by seven centuries at the very least. Nonetheless, there are structural reasons why the change witnessed in south-western Welsh cannot be directly connected to any elision of final *-ð̊*/ in Old Welsh. The elision of final *-ð̊*/ attested since the late eighteenth century is found only in final unstressed syllables of polysyllabic words and not in all final syllables. Thus in south-western Welsh *bedd* always remains *be:ð̊*, with no elision, whereas *trybedd* regularly becomes *trəbɛ* or *tri·bɛ*, with final *-ð̊*/ elided. The fact that elision of final *-ð̊*/ is related to a syllabic position governed by a penultimate stress accent proves that such a pattern of elision has nothing to do with Old Welsh since the penultimate stress accent only established itself after that period (for an elementary statement of my own opinion concerning the establishment of the penultimate stress in Welsh, see page 78 of my book). The figure below illustrates, I hope, in a figurative way modelled on plant growth, what I mean by separate developments of phonetically identical processes.

Figure 1. Separate developments of phonetically identical processes.



It is true that I wrote (298) that the few attested Old Welsh forms *triti*, *issi* are orthographical slips for what is also written *tritid*, *issid* in Old Welsh. My wording was a little too dismissive of these forms and I agree wholeheartedly with Russell when he writes (590) that “slips in spelling are often slips in the direction of the actual pronunciation”. In later Welsh it is known that a final *-ð̊*/ sometimes elides anomalously (i.e. with an irregular incidence), e.g. *eistedd* > *eiste'*, *i fynydd* > *i fyny'* etc. (see pages 302–03 of

my book) and in view of this Old Welsh *triti, issi* conform with the later realisations of Modern Welsh *trydydd* and *sydd* as: (1) *trydy* in south-eastern Welsh dialects where otherwise no elision of final unstressed *-/ð/* is found (see page 298 of my book) and as (2) *sy* in all present-day forms of colloquial Welsh. Nevertheless, the elision of final *-/ð/* in some Old Welsh words can have nothing to do with the generalised loss of unstressed final *-/ð/* in south-western Welsh in the eighteenth century. The identical phonetic process of the elision of final *-/ð/* clearly occurred at different times under different accentual circumstances and any attempt at connecting them directly as part of one phonological process is mistaken. The restricted geographical area in which it occurs in itself suggests a later rather than an earlier development of the generalised elision of final unstressed *-/ð/*.

Though he is not judgemental in any way, Russell highlights (589) my “rejection of a pure IPA notation” which, formulated as it is, is quite misleading. In pages 5–6 of my book I note the conventional variation existing in the IPA tradition (which shows that the notion of “a pure IPA notation” is hardly a sustainable one) and far from rejecting the IPA tradition it is patently obvious that I do adhere to its principles. Neither do those IPA transcriptions bereft of any bracketing “indicate a broad phonemic notation” (589) but rather a narrow transcription that covers all phonemic and some allophonic realities of the Welsh speech encountered (as I explain in the abovementioned pages of my book). My rejection of unnecessary bracketing is both the result of esthetic considerations and unease at what I see as the binaristic reductionism into phonemic versus phonetic transcription (to which I prefer a spectrum of broad (phonemic) transcriptions leading to ever narrowing phonetic transcriptions).

Russell (590) is quite correct in noting the discrepancy on page 10 concerning “Figure 3: *Additional vowel phonemes*”. The commentary “Figure 3 displays ‘additional’ vowels in phonetic notation in square brackets.” should read “Figure 3 displays ‘additional’ vowels in phonemic notation in slashed brackets.” and the following [ɔ:], [ɛ:] should have been noted /ɔ:/, /ɛ:/. Russell (590) is also quite correct in having noticed that “The loss of [-n] in final [-rn] clusters ...” in the penultimate paragraph of page 90 should have read “The loss of [-r] in final [-rn] clusters ...”.

