III Региональный конгресс молодежи и школьников

“Молодые исследователи севера”

Секция Лингвистика (английский язык)

##### The Welsh language

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г. Мурманск, 1999

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The Welsh language, like most of the languages of Europe, and many of those of Asia, has evolved from what linguists term Indo-European. Indo-European was spoken about 6000 years ago (4000 BC) by a seminomadic people who lived in the steppe region of Southern Russia. Speakers of the languages migrated eastwards and westwards; they had reached the Danube valley by 3500 BC and India by 2000 BC. The dialects of Indo-European became much differentiated, chiefly because of migration, and evolved into separate languages. So great was the variety among them that it was not until 1786 that the idea was put forward that a Family of Indo-European languages actually exists. In the twentieth century Indo-European languages are spoken in a wide arc from Bengal to Portugal, as well as in countries as distant as New Zealand and Canada, to which they have been carried by more recent emigrants. The Indo-European Family is generally considered to consist of nine different brunches, which in turn gave rise to daughter languages. Welsh evolved from the Celtic brunch, as did its sister languages - Breton, Cornish, Cumbric, Irish, Scots Gaelic and Manx.

Сornish was a language of people who lived in Britain in the Cornwall inlet and died out towards the end of the eighteenth century. Dorothy Pentreath, who died in 1777, is usually considered to be the last native speaker of Cornish. Manx was spread on the Isle of Man in the Irish Sea, survived until well into the second half of the present sentury and the last native speaker died at the age of 97 in 1974. Other languages are still alive and a lot of people talks on them. But nevertheless all this languages developed from the Celtic language and the people who used this language were the Celts.

The Celts is a group of people who were classified as such by communities who belonged to a separate cultural (and literate) tradition. Celtic area is considered to be the north of Alps and beyond the Mediterranean. It was observers from mediterranean lands of Greece and Rome who called their neighbours Celts. But today scientists ask the question who the Celts really are. The problem of defining what is meant by the terms "Celt" and "Celtic" centres around the relationship, if any, between material culture, ethnicity and language. Judging by archaeology, documentary sources and linguistic material the scientists came to the conclusion that by the last few centuries BC, Celtic territory stretched from Ireland to eastern Europe and beyond, to Galatia (see map). The Celts were technically advanced. They knew how to work with iron, and could make better weapons than the people who used bronze.

Early linguistic evidence for the Celts is extremely rare because northern Europe was non-literate during most of the first millennium BC. When writing was adopted in the Celtic world in the late first millennium it appeared almost entirely in Greek and Latin. Early Celtic evidence consists of inscriptions, coin legends and the names of people and places contained within classical documents.

Now I would like to tell about the Brittonic brunch of Celtic languages, which was spread over the territory of Britain. Because of our knowledge of the Celts is slight, we do not even know for certain how Britain became Celtic. Some scholars think that the Celts invaded Britain, another - that they came peacefully, as a result of the lively trade with Europe about 750 BC on wards. But we know for certain that the language introduced into Britain was similar to that spoken in Gaul (the territory of Celts in Central Europe); indeed, the Celtic speech of Gaul and Britain at the dawn of the historic era can be considered as one language, frequently, referred to as Gallo-Britonic. Three successor languages of Brittonic evolved: Cumbric in southern Scotland and north-west England, Welsh in Wales and Сornish in south-west Britain. The speakers of all three of them were known by their Anglo-Saxon neighbours as *Wealas*, or *Welsh*. The word is usually considered to mean foreigner, but it can also mean people who have been Romanized. To describe themselves, the Welsh and the Cumbric speakers adopted the name *Cymry* and called their language *Cymraeg. Cymry* comes from the Brittonic *combrogi* (fellow countryman) and its adoption marks a deepening sense of identity.

It is very interesting to show common and different things between the words of these languages. You can sea these comparison in following table.

**Cognate Celtic words**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| welsh | breton | Irish | gaelic |
| ty (house) | ti | teach | tight |
| ci (dog) | ki | cu | cu |
| du (black) | du | dubh | dubh |
| cadair (chair) | kador | kathaoir | cathair |
| gwin (wine) | gwin | fion | fion |

You see that almost all words are similar to each other, that’s why they were united in one brunch.

The transition from Brittonic to Welsh took place somewhere between 400 and 700 AD. The major problem in tracing this transition in paucity of evidence. Not a sentence of Brittonic has survived. The language was almost certainly written down, but the writing materials used more probably perishable, the more highly esteemed Latin being used for permanent inscriptions. Brittonic, like Latin, was a synthetic language; that is, much of its meaning was conveyed by a charge in the endings of words, as in Latin *puella* (girl), *puellae* (to the girl), *puellarum* (of the girls). In an analytic language, like Welsh, the relation of one word to another is conveyed by the use of prepositions or by the placing of the word in the sentence. It is difficult to date the change from synthetic to analytic, from Brittonic to Welsh, with any certainty. It is generally accepted that it had occurred by about 600 AD but it may have taken place in the spoken language much earlier. The most obvious sign of the change was the loss of the final syllables of nouns; when *bardos* (poet), *aratron* (plough) and *abona* (river) had become *bardd, aradr* and *afon,* Brittonic had become Welsh.

There are four periods in the history of the Welsh language: early, old, middle and new. Early Welsh, a phase in the history of the language, extending from its beginning to about 850, only survives in a few inscriptions and marginal notes or glosses. The most interesting of the inscriptions is that on a memorial in the Paris church of Tywyn in Мeirionnydd. It was carved in about 810 and consist of the words cingen celen tricet nitanam (the body of Cingen dwells beneath). Although the inscription incomprehensible to the Welsh speaker of the present day, the words *celen*, *tricet,* and *tan* (in *nitanam*)are related to the modern forms *celein* (corpse), *trigo* (dwells) and *dan* (beneath). In that time took place the influence of Latin and Irish. The Romans invaded Britain in 43 AD and their power had collapsed by 410 AD and Britannia ceased to be the part of the Empire. Of course during all that period Latin was influxing Welsh because it was the language of law and administration.

**Words of Latin origin in Welsh**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| WELSH | LATIN |
| pont (bridge) | pons |
| eglwys (church) | ecclesia |
| lleeng (legion) | legio |
| ystafell (room) | stabellum |
| trawst (joist) | transtrum |
| bresych (cabbage) | brassica |

Ireland never experienced Roman occupation but its settlers created colonies in western Britain before the collapse of the Empire. They were numerous in north-west Wales. That’s why there are a lot of Irish place-names; for example *Dinllaen*, *Gwynedd,* and a lot of words of Irish origin appeared in Welsh: *cadach*(rag), *cnwc* (hillock), *talcen* (forehead), *codwm* (fall).

Old Welsh, the succeeding phase in the history of the language, extends from about 850 to 1100. Again the evidence is slight of the material that has indubitably survived unchanged from that period, there is little beyond marginal notes and a few brief texts and poems. Approximately in 930 a few settlements or Norse appeared in Britain. I don't think that the norsemen influenced greatly on the Welsh language, because only one Welsh word - *iarll,* from *iarl* (earl) - is indisputably a Norse borrowing, but they influenced English (ugly, rotten and husband - borrowings from Scandinavian language) and Scots Gaelic.

Thus, by the end of the eleventh century, Welsh was a rich, supple, and versatile language. It had an oral literary tradition which was one of the longest in Europe. It had an enviable coherence, for the literary language was the same in old parts of Wales. It was spoken throughout the land to the west of *Offa's Dyke* and in some communities to the east of it. It was deeply rooted in the territory of the people who spoke it. They had used it to name their churches and their settlements, their rivers and their hills. Following the Battle of Hastings in 1066, it came face to face with the French of the Normans.

The victory of William of Normandy led to the expropriation of the land of England by the knew king and his followers.

French words become assimilated into Welsh (*cwarel* (windowpane), *palffrai* (palfrey), *ffiol* (viol), *barwn* (baron), *gwarant* (warrant)) and Welsh literature come to be influenced by French forms and conventions. A few places in Wales, such as *Beaupry*, *Beaumaris*, *Grace* *Dieu* and *Hay* (*la Haie Taillee*) were given French names and Norman French personal names - Richard, Robert and William, for example - eventually won popularity among the Welsh.

As a result of population movements English has been the spoken language of some communities in Wales for at least 800 years. That’s why in Welsh appeared words from it: *capan* (cap), *sidan* (silk), *berfa* (wheelbarrow), *bwrdd* (table), *llidiart* (gate). But despite the influx of French and English speakers, Wales remained overwhelmingly Welsh-speaking throughout the Middle Ayes and beyond. In most of the marcher lordships - *Brecоn* and *Abergovenny*, for example - the vast majority of the population was monoglot Welsh, and in lordships such as *Кnockin* and *Сlun* and *Huntingdon* and *Clifford* the Welsh speaker population was considerable.

Indicative of the growth of English influence was the adoption of fixed surnames, after the English pattern, instead of Welsh patronymics. Thus Richard ap Meurig ap Lleurig apliywelyn of Bodorgan up Gwilym of Brecon become Richard Meyrick, and John ap Rhys Gwilym of Brecon become John Price. Most of the new surnames were based upon the father's Christian name - Jones (John), Davies (David), Powell (ap Hywel), but some were based on a nick-name - Lloyd (Llwyd - grey), Voyle (Moel - bald), an occupation - bought (Gof - blacksmith). The changes had occurred among the gentry by the mid-sixteenth century and virtually completed among all classes by the late seventeenth century, but as late as the mid-nineteenth century there are examples of a son taking his Father's Christian name as his surname.

From the seventeenth century, in the era of industrialisation in Welsh language changes took place. The growth of industry allowed Wales to sustain far more people than had been possible under the old agricultural economy. Some of them came from beyond the borders of Wales. In 1851, the Welsh population included 115000 people born in England and 20000 born in Ireland. Of course they took their languages with them, which little by little mixed with Welsh. But most of areas were Welsh-speaking and, in colonising their own country the Welsh brought their language from the countryside to the towns. That’s why alone among the Celtic languages, Welsh has had a considerable degree of success in becoming an urban tongue. By 1851, large numbers of Welsh speakers lived in mass urban communities in which the language could be used in a new range of activities. Also in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was widely practised in Wales the coining of new words, which has been greatly stimulated by the needs of modern society. *Cyfrifiaduron* (computers) with their *maddal medd* (software) and *caledwedd* (hardware) are one of the many fields in which a new Welsh terminology has been invented. Coinages such as *darllediad* (broadcast), *tonfedd* (wave length) and *orian brig* (peak hours) trip naturally off the tongues of broadcasters. Sports commentaries lead to a wide range of neologisms, with those for rugby (the work of Eric Davies) being particularly apt and idiomatic. Words old and new have been collected in the most ambitions lexicographical project yet undertaken in Wales.

Analysing all the information about Welsh-speakers I made a table which I called "Development of Welsh-speaking population in Wales".

**Development of Welsh-speaking population in Wales.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| years | welsh-speaking population | % of total population |
| 1891 | 910280 | 54,4 |
| 1901 | 929824 | 49,9 |
| 1911 | 977366 | 43,5 |
| 1921 | 922092 | 37,1 |
| 1931 | 909261 | 36,8 |
| 1951 | 714686 | 28,9 |
| 1961 | 656002 | 26,0 |
| 1971 | 542425 | 20,9 |
| 1981 | 508207 | 18,9 |
| 1991 | 510920 | 18,7 |

As you see from the table, the Welsh-speaking population of Wales reduces greatly on 1931-51. The main reason of it is the Second World War. And it also reduced greatly from 1961 till 1971. I don't know exactly, but it seems to me the main reason from it is the problems in the industry (mostly in coal-mining) and migration.

Also, the population of Welsh-speaking people was decreasing from 1921 to 1971, and was increasing from the beginning of the Welsh language to 1911 and from 1981 till our days. At once the question arises: "What happened in 1981?" There are a lot of factors which influenced the growing of Welsh-speaking population from the 1981. They are: development of education in Welsh, appearance of the periodical press and books in Welsh, creation of radio and TV stations in Welsh, appearance of "institutions" which protect the Welsh, and the growing of national identity. Of course all this factors were present in the 1950s and 1970s, but in 1990s they were in its heyday.

It is very interesting to say that many pupils who learn Welsh think that Welsh is not a difficult language to learn and that it is easier to learn than English. Unlike English, it has the inestimable advantage of being largely phonetic; that is, the words are pronounced as they are written, with non of the confusion which arises in English over such words as cough, bough, through, though and thorough. While English has several letters (*g, h* and *k*, for example) which are often not pronounced at all, every letter in Welsh is pronounced.

The Welsh alphabet consists of twenty simple letters and eight digraphs (two letters combining to produce a different sound, as with *ch* and *th*), an unusual feature to include in an alphabet. Welsh has no *j, k, q, l, x* or *z*. Most of the simple letters present no difficulties, but it should be noted that *c* is always pronounced to correspond with the English *k, f* with *v* and *s* with *ss.*

**The Welsh alphabet:**

*a b c ch d dd e f ff g ng h i l ll m n o p ph r rh s t th u w y*

**Pronunciation of digraphs:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *ch* as in loch | *ll* ch followed by l |
| *dd* as in that | *ph* as in pharmacy |
| *ff* as in fair | *rh* as in Rhein |
| *ng* as in singing | *th* as in thin |

In almost all Welsh words, the stress falls on the last syllable, but one: *gorymdaith; athro; ammnydifуad*. In those cases where the stress falls on the last syllable, it is usually the result of a contraction in the word: *Cymraeg* was originally *Cym-ra-eg*, and *paratoi pa-ra-to-i*. Some words borrowed from English also retain the original accentuation: *apel; polisi; paragraff*.

The noun has two genders, masculine and a feminine. The "it" of English doesn't exist.

As an French everything is either "he" or "she". Some adjectives have masculine and feminine forms. Thus *gwyn* (white) is *(g)wen* when following a feminine forms. Some adjectives also have singular and plural forms. *Dyn tew* is a fat man*, dynion tewnion* fat men. Where plurals are concerned, Welsh recognises that some things come in pairs. Thus *llaw* (hand) has the plural *dwylaw* (two hands). To anyone used to English plurals, with almost universal addition of *s*, the variety of Welsh plural forms can appear wilfully multifarious. There are seven ways of forming the plural.

**Plural forms in Welsh:**

adding a termination: *afal* (apple) *afalau*

vowel change: *bran* (crow) *brain*

adding a termination with a vowel change: *mab* (son) *meibion*

dropping a singular ending: *pluen* (feather) *plu*

dropping a singular ending with a vowel change: *hwyadden* (duck) *hwyaid*

substituting a plural for a singular ending: *cwningen* (rabbit) *cwningod*

substituting a plural ending for a singular with vowel change: *miaren* (bramble) *mieri*

The numerals in Welsh also have distinctive features. Twenty is the basic unit in counting: *ugain* (twenty), *deugain* (two twenties - forty)*, trigain* (three twenties - sixty), *pedwar ugain* (four twenties - eighty), followed by *cant*(a hundred) and sometimes by *chwe ugain* (six twenties - a hundred and twenty). The teens offer interesting complications: fourteen is *pedwar ar ddeg* (four plus ten), and eighteen is *deunaw* (two nines).

In English, the order of the words in sentence is subject, verb, object, indirect object. (The girl gave a book to her friend) In Welsh it is verb, subject, object, indirect object:

*Rhoddodd y ferch lyfr i'w chyfaill*

Gave the girl a book to her friend

This order can be varied for the sake of emphasis or to ask a question:

*Ceffyl a welodd y plentyn?*

Horse saw the child (Was it a horse the child saw?)

The adjective is almost always placed after the noun. When it is not, the meaning may be different*. Ci unig* means a lonely dog, but *unig gi* means the only dog; *hen gyfaill* means a friend of long standing, but *cyfaill hen* means an aged friend.

The genitive expressed in English by an apostrophe *s*, is expressed in Welsh by putting what is owned immediately before the owner: *ci Lowri -* Lowri's dog; *ty y dyn -* the man's house.

It is very interesting to say that written Welsh and spoken Welsh are very different. For a example, it is continued use in written Welsh of the ending *nt* in the third person plural of the verb, as in *daethant* (they came), which in speech becomes *daethan*. Another example is *hwy,* which in speech becomes *nhw.*

“I sing” in standard written Welsh is *canaf*, but the usual spoken form is yr wyf i canu (I am singing). This use of the verb to be (*yr wyr*) with the verb noun (*canu*) may have been inherited by the incoming Celts from the pre-Celtic population. The construction has been copied in English to give the form “I am singing”, a construction not found in other Germanic languages.

Although Welsh has no indefinite article. Thus, the dog is *y ci*, but a dog is simply *ci*. This a feature Welsh shares with the other Celtic language, as is the conjugation of prepositions and the absence of over purpose words for years and no.

Although Welsh has absorbed words from other languages, Latin, French and particularly English among them, its basic vocabulary is still largely of Celtic origin. This is also true of more technical words. Thus, while English words such as national, political, industrial and philosophical have equivalents in French, German, and other European languages which are very similar, Welsh uses its own indigenous words – *cenedlaethol, gwleidyddol, diwydiannol* and *athronyddol.* Indeed, it has a very considerable ability to coin words from its resources, although the sloppy speech of many Welsh-speakers, overloaded as it is with unnecessary English borrowings, can give the contrary impression.

The Welsh language has survived at all. Since the act of union in 1536 when it was virtually banned, it has been subjected to direct and indirect bombardment which should have demolished it once and for all. It has been neglected and discouraged for over four hundred years yet it is still very much alive. Today it is tolerated by many, rejected by many. It is used by a large number of people as a natural means of communication.

Now the scholars discussed the problem of the position of the Wales language. It could be claimed that its position is precisely in the centre, a point emphasised by Tom Nail in his analysis of the non-state nationalities of Europe. Although the Welsh-speakers are by no means among the larger groups, Welsh has a far higher status than several of the more widely spoken languages. Although the density factor if fairly low, Welsh-speakers live in a country, the other inhabitants of which recognise their kinship with the language, a bonus of immerse importance. The centrality of Welsh is interesting in itself. It may also be important, for if Welsh can solve its problems, other languages can hope to do so too

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