

Questions from the Terminology Panel (2022 June)

1) ***Burm* - what should the spelling be if borrowed from Old English?**

There are at least three possible developments of Old English *oer* + consonant.

- (a) Middle English /er/, followed by lowering of the vowel, giving /ar/;
e.g. *heorte* > *heart*, *teoru* > *tar*, *steorra* > *star*.
- (b) Middle English /er/ > Modern English [ɜ:r]; e.g. *eorl* > *earl*, *eorpe* > *earth*.
- (c) Middle English /ur/ > Modern English [ɜ:r]; e.g. *weorc* > *work*, *weorþ* > *worth*

In English, *beorma* > *barm*; i.e. development (a) was followed. Had the word been borrowed into Cornish at an early stage, one would have expected it to be spelled *berm*. The form which is actually found is *burm*, recorded by Borlase. This corresponds most closely to development (c). Note that in Welsh, both *berm* and *burm* are recorded (also forms with an epenthetic vowel: *burum*, *burym*, *berem*). Development (c) is also found in Cornish *yurl*, compared with English *earl* (development (b)).

One may conclude that the attested form *burm* is a possible and indeed likely spelling for a borrowing from Old English; this spelling should remain.

2) ***Botell* - should it have two Ts?**

This word is not attested in traditional texts, but was introduced by Nance. He was not sure about how to spell it, giving *botel* in CE38 and *bottel* in EC52. This is not perhaps surprising, since it is spelled with <t> in French *bouteille* and <tt> in English *bottle*. Despite being unattested, the word was almost certainly borrowed into Middle Cornish, a bottle being a common object, and would have taken the same form as that of Middle English. This was *botel*, *botelle* < Old French *botele*, which suggests that <t> was found originally and that Modern English <tt> reflects the shortening of the preceding vowel. The Welsh word is *potel*, borrowed from Middle English *botel*, with devoicing of the [b-]. There is a clear case for <t> rather than <tt>.

The plural is also of interest. Nance gave *botellow* in CE38 and *bottellow* in EC52. Perhaps he based his forms on *farthel* ‘bundle’ (OM.1617b), pl. *fordellow* (OM.1593). A closer template would be Middle English *bataile* < Old French *bataille*, borrowed as Middle Cornish *bateyl* (RD.0109), *batel* (BM.1630). With the well-known sound-change [-εC] > [-aC], the word became *batal* (BK19.27, 33.18). To this was added the plural suffix -yow, giving *batallyow* (TH28r). If *botel* is used for the singular, then *botelyow* would be the most appropriate plural.

3) Epic - should it be *epik* or *epyk*?

This word is not attested in traditional Cornish. It appears only in Nicholas Williams' dictionary with the spelling *epyk*, for both the adjective and the noun. With an unattested word, a useful approach is to ascertain what form the word would take had it been borrowed at an early stage. The word *epic* comes from Latin *epicus*; had this been borrowed into British, the [p] would have been lenited to [b], giving in the course of time Middle Cornish **ebyk*. In view of Latin *asinus / medicus* > Middle Cornish *asen / methek*, there is also a case for **ebek*. Neither of these forms is considered satisfactory.

The word *epic* is first recorded in English in 1578, which indicates a late borrowing from Latin. It is therefore better to adopt in Cornish a form which reflects the pronunciation of Modern English *epic*; but as is asked by Terminology: *epik* or *epyk*?

Consider the words for 'I saw' and 'seen'. In Old Cornish, these would have been pronounced differently, [gwɛ'li:s] and [gwɛ'li:s] respectively; but by the time of Middle Cornish, they were both spelled *gwelys*, and so far as we can tell, both pronounced [ˈgwɛːlɪs]. Unified Cornish followed the Middle Cornish spelling, but *Kernewek Kemmyn* distinguishes the two words by writing *gwelis* for 'I saw' and *gwelys* for 'seen', even though the difference between the two phonemes /i/ and /ɪ/ has been neutralized. This is done because it considered more important to distinguish the two words than to represent faithfully the sounds involved. Interestingly, SWF does the same, even though it is nominally a phonetic orthography. (SWF does not do so in the case of unstressed /-nn/ being pronounced as [-n], however; here SWF, unlike *Kernewek Kemmyn*, spells historic /-nn/ as <-n>). It follows that both <-ik> and <-yk> are appropriate to represent the final syllable [-ɪk] in the borrowing from Modern English *epic*. The choice is therefore to be made on grounds other than phonological. The Research Panel note that the borrowing in Welsh is spelled with <i>: *epic*, and recommend that <i> is used also in Cornish, giving *epik*.

4) Should *skapya* have two Ps?

In *Gerlyver Meur*, this word is regarded as the Middle Cornish loan-root *scap* plus the verbal noun suffix *-ya*. The convention used in *Kernewek Kemmyn* for spelling stressed monosyllables ending in unvoiced occlusive consonants (almost all loan-words) is to use <p, t, k> for those with preceding long vowels and <pp, tt, kk> for those with preceding short vowels. This was adopted in SWF as part of the revision of 2013. The use of <pp, tt, kk> does not imply that the consonants are geminate [pp, tt, kk] in these loan-words; it indicates merely that the preceding stressed vowel is short. Thus in the case in question, if the root has a long vowel, it should be spelled *skap*; if it has a short vowel, it should be *skapp*.

Unfortunately, it is rare for vowel-length to be shown in Middle Cornish; *shap* 'shape' (which certainly has a long vowel) and *happ* 'chance' (which has a short vowel) are both written with <-ap>. Thus the four attestations of the root (3rd sg. pres. ind. 'escapes'):

scap (RD.0378, RD.0383; BK31.61), *skap* (RD.2019)

do not tell us whether the vowel was long or short. In *Gerlyver Meur*, the root *scap* is taken to be an apthetic form of English *escape*, whose stressed vowel is clearly long; the root is therefore spelled *skap* and pronounced [ˈska:p].

When the verbal noun ending *-ya* is added to the root, the word becomes disyllabic, and is spelled *skapya* in *Gerlyver Meur*. According to the quantity rules, in polysyllables the stressed vowel is short if followed by a cluster of consonants, and half-long if followed by a single consonant. In *skapya*, the stressed vowel is followed by a consonant [p] and a semi-vowel [j] (known as yod). If this combination of consonant + yod were to behave as a cluster of consonants, then the stressed vowel would be reduced to [a], according to the quantity rules; thus the verbal noun would be pronounced ['skapja], irrespective of whether the vowel in the root is long or short. The pronunciation given in *Gerlyver Meur* does **not** treat the combination as a cluster; instead, a long vowel followed by yod [j] is regarded as being half-long so the recommended pronunciation therein is ['ska:pja].

The attestations of the verbal noun, and of other parts of the paradigm containing /pj/, are as follows:

Verbal noun 'to escape'

scapya (OM.1656), *scapye* (OM.1706)

scappya (CW.1973), copied by Pryce (PV178)

3rd pl. pres. ind. 'they escape'

schappyons (BM.2469)

3rd sg. pret. 'escaped'

scappyas (BM.1581)

3rd sg. pres. subj. 'may escape'

scapyo (PC.0990), *scapye* (PC.1888), *schapye* (RD.2270), *schappya* (BM.1559)

The spellings with <-ppy-> indicate shortening of the long vowel in the root, but there is clear variation between <-ppy> and <-py->, even in the same text. <sc-> has been taken to mean [sk-], though it could represent [ʃk-]: <sch-> almost certainly means [ʃk-]. Thus there also appears to be variation between [sk-] and [ʃk-], even in the same text. Instead of two potential spellings for the verbal noun, there are now four: *skapya*, *skappya*, *shapya* and *shappya*. We can dismiss <shap->, however, because it would be confused with *shap*- 'shape'.

The attested spellings of the root, and of parts containing /pj/, are evidently of little help in answering the question of length of the stressed vowel. We turn again to etymology. The English verb *escape* (with a long *a*) comes from Old Norman French *escaper*, while the French verb *échapper* (with a short *a*) comes from the Old French form *eschaper*. Both forms are found in Middle English. Both come from Vulgar Latin **excappare*, literally "get out of one's cape, leave a pursuer with just one's cape," from Latin *ex*- 'out of' + Late Latin *cappa* 'mantle'. One might imagine that the <pp> in Latin *cappa* would count in favour of *skappya*, but this is not the case; Latin /pp/ was reduced to /p/ in French. The [k-] in Latin *cappa* remained in French *cape* ['kap] 'cape (garment)', but changed in French *chape* [ʃap] 'cope (garment)'. In English, the vowel was lengthened.

There are two further attestations which throw light on the length of the stressed vowel in Cornish: the past participle *scappys* ‘escaped’ (BM.1030) and a shortened form of the verbal noun *skap* (BK30.07, possibly miscopied as *stap*). The form *scappys* is helpful because it does not contain yod; the <-pp-> therefore points to a short stressed vowel. It may be compared with the word *frappys* ‘blows’ (BK32.53), which contains short *a*, since it comes from French *frappe* [‘frap] + English plural suffix -ys. Note that the attested past participle of *shapya* is *schapys* (OM.2562), with <-p-> after a half-long vowel. At BK30.07, *skap* is rhymed with *frap* ‘blow’; it is always possible that this is a sub-perfect rhyme [‘a:p] ≈ [‘ap], but the author of BK is noteworthy for his precision in rhyming: it is more likely to be a perfect rhyme [‘ap] ≡ [‘ap], which again suggests that the vowel is short.

In summary, the evidence is weak, but slightly stronger in favour of the stressed vowel being short rather than long or half-long. It is therefore recommended that the verbal noun be spelled *skappya*, and the root be spelled *skapp*.

5) *Ruttya* or *rutya*?

The only attestations are in Late Cornish, of the verbal noun:

- ‘to rub, chafe or fret’ *Dho rhittia* (AB061b), Welsh *Rhuttio*
- ‘to rub all over’ *Dho rhyttia ’n dha* (AB118a), copied by Pryce (PV158) as:
- RHYTTIA, dho rhyttia’n dha, *to rub all over*

No etymology is given for the Welsh word *rhwtio* ‘to rub’ in *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*. The Welsh and Cornish words may be associated with English *rut*, nothing to do with the mating of deer, but ‘a groove worn in the ground, as from the passage of many wheels along a road’. The semantic link is that the **rut** is formed by **rubbing**. English *rut* is thought to be from the same source as *route*, viz. Old French *route* < Vulgar Latin **rupta* ‘broken’, but with a short instead of a long vowel. The word *rutter* ‘navigational directions’ also has a short vowel. (Old French *route* also gave Cornish *rout* ‘mob’ and its variant *routh* ‘crowd’, both with long vowels).

In *Gerlyver Meur*, the word is spelled *rutya*, which implies a long vowel in the root *rut-*: but Lhuyd’s <ytt> and the English word *rut* (if that is the source) point to a short vowel in the root. The stressed vowel *w* in the Welsh *rhwtio* is also short (if long, it would be spelled *ŵ*). Using the convention explained above for *skappya*, this indicates that <tt> is better than <t>.

It is also necessary to consider the spelling of the stressed vowel. <u> was used in *Gerlyver Meur*, because it fits English *rut*, and because Middle Cornish /y/ <u> was unrounded to /ɪ/ <y>. This does not tie in, however, with the phonological development outlined above:

Old French *route* > Middle English *route* [‘ru:t] > *rut* [‘rʌt]

If [‘rʌt-] were borrowed into Cornish, it would not develop into Late Cornish [‘rɪt-].

If there is a link to English *rut*, it is a loose one, not supported by the phonology. A closer fit for the Cornish word appears to be the Welsh plural noun *rhytion* ‘particles worn off by friction, scourings’. It is therefore recommended that the Cornish verbal noun ‘to rub’ be spelled *ryttya*. Interestingly, this forms a minimal pair with *ryddya* [‘rɪdja] ‘to rid’.

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