

The sounds and orthography of Middle Cornish

1.0. Symbols used

between /.../ = phoneme
between <...> = grapheme
between [...] = phonetic approximation
V = any vowel
C = any consonant
= word boundary

1.1. Vowels

/i/	[i]	<y, i; -y#>
/y/	[i̠]	<i, y, e, ey>
/e/	[e]	<e>
/ou/	[u]	<ou, ov> when stressed; <ou, o, u> otherwise
/oe/	[ø]	<oy, oi, oe> when (half) long; <u> when short
/o/	[o]	<o, oy>
/a/	[a]	<a, ay>
/u/	[y]	<u>
/eu/	[ø]	<u, ue, eu, e>

Spellings with <Vy> which are not indicating a diphthong, represent (half) long vowels. In LateCo. we often find <VCe#> instead.

1.2. Diphthongs

/ey/	<ei, ey, y>
/oy/	<oy>
/ay/	<ay, ey>
/iw/	<yw, ew>
/yw/	<yw, yv, ew>
/ew/	<eu, ev, ew>
/ow/	<ou, ov, ow>
/aw/	<au, av, aw>

1.3. Semivowels

/y/	<#y-, #3->, <-y-, -i->
/w/	<u, v, w>

1.4. Consonants

	<C-> = word initial		
	<-C> = word final		
	<-C-> = internal (between vowels)		
/p/	<p>	/b/	, <-p>
/t/	<t>	/d/	<d>, <-t, -dt>
/k/	<c> before /a, o, u, l, r/ <k> elsewhere	/g/	<g>, <-k>
/ch/	[č]	<ch>	
/j/	[j]	<s, g>, <g> before /e, y, i/, <i, j> before /a, o, ou/, <-g>	

/f/	<f>	/v/	<v->, <-f-, -u-, -v->, <-f,-ff>
/th/	[θ] <th; 3>	/dh/	[ð] <3, th>
/gh/	[χ] <gh, h, Ø>	/h/	<h>
/hw/	[χ ^u] <wh, w>		
/s/	<c> before /y/		
	<s> elsewhere		
/sh/	[ʃ] <sch, sc, sh>		

2. The sound system

2.1. Vowels

/i/	/u/	/ou/
/y/		/oe/
/e/	/eu/	/o/
	/a/	

2.2. Semivowels

/w/	/y/
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2.3. Consonants

	plosives		fricatives and affricates	
	unvoiced	voiced	unvoiced	voiced
labial				
	/p/	/b/	/f/	/v/
post-dental				
	/t/	/d/	/th/	/dh/
			/s/	
palato-alveolar				
			/ch/	/j/
			/sh/	
velar				
	/k/	/g/	/gh/	/h/
	nasals		liquids	
labial	/m/	/mm/		
alveolar	/n/	/nn/	/l/	/ll/
			/r/	/rr/

N.B. /s/ and /gh/ are voiceless phonemes which in voiced surroundings (i.e. between vowels and/or voiced consonants) have voiced allophones.

3. Vowel length and stress

3.1. In Middle Cornish vowels can be long, half long and short. Around 1600 all half long vowels became long. Vowel length is conditioned by the following rules:

- a. All unstressed vowels are short.
- b. In stressed monosyllables, either open or closed by a single voiced consonant the vowel is long. (So, when closed by a consonant cluster or by a single voiceless consonant the vowel is short.)
- c. In other stressed syllables the vowel is short before a consonant cluster or before a single voiceless consonant, and half long before a single voiced consonant.

3.2. Accent in Middle Cornish is a stress accent. Words are accentuated – as in Welsh and in most dialects of Breton – on the penultimate (i.e. the last but one) syllable.

3.3. Some monosyllabic words are always unstressed:

- the definite article /an/ (etymologically /ann/);
- the possessive pronouns /ow/, /dha/, /y/ and /hy/;
- the verbal particles;
- the monosyllabic conjunctions and prepositions.

Possibly the suffixed forms of the personal pronouns had the accent (which thus rested on the ultimate syllable).

N.B. For the rules governing vowel length it is important that epenthetic vowels were *not* phonemic and so had no influence on these rules. In nearly all instances the epenthetic vowels were written and they did in fact count metrically in poetry. (E.g. /marw/ 'dead' is (phonemically) monosyllabic and thus closes with a consonant cluster. This means the vowel is short (as in B *marv*, W *marw*). The normal MCo. spelling however is <marow>, <marrow>, and both in pronunciation and for metrical reasons the word had two syllables.)

4. Vowel reduction

4.0. During the MCo. period *unstressed* vowels in final syllables went through a number of changes which resulted in the fact that more and more vowels in this position merged, with as final (LateCo.) result a total merger in /a/. This reduction went through a number of consecutive stages:

4.1.1. Until c. 1425 (i.e. in *Pascon agan Arluth*). Unstressed /eu/ was unrounded early and merged with /e/. The back vowels were unrounded, and /a/, /e/ and /y/ (<older /-ydh/) in *absolute final position* were reduced to *schwa* ([ə]). The system for unstressed vowels thus was:

/i/	/u/	/ou/
/yC/		/oe/
/eC/	[ə]	/o/
	/aC/	

4.1.2. From c. 1425 until c. 1475 (i.e. in the *Ordinalia*). Unstressed /e/ had become *schwa*. Unstressed /u/ was unrounded and first merged with /i/. Subsequently /i/ and /y/ merged, first in /y/, then in a new /e/:

				/ou/ /oe/
/e/	[ə]	/o/		
		/a/		

4.1.3. From c. 1475 to c. 1525/1575 (i.e. in *Beunans Meriasek*). Around 1475 *schwa* from the earlier stages merged with /a/, after which a new *schwa* came into existence as a result of the reduction of /o/. Subsequently /ou/ and /oe/ merged in a new /o/:

/e/	[ə]	/o/
	/a/	

4.1.4. After c. 1525/1575, so in LateCo. unstressed /e/ and /o/ finally merged together with /a/. The steps leading up to this are: 4a. c. 1525 /-o#/ > /a/; 4b. c. 1550 /e/ > /a/; 4c. at latest c. 1575 /-oC/ > /a/.

4.2. Some other important developments in LateCo.:

4.2.1. Vowels

c. 1525 /eu/ > /e/ in stressed syllables (with this /eu/ is no longer a phoneme in LateCo.)

c. 1625 /u/ > /i/

4.2.2. Consonants

c. 1575 /mm/ > /bm/

/nn/ > dn/

After this change an epenthetic vowel arose between the stop and the nasal in these new clusters, which ultimately developed into an extra syllable. (E.g. /penn/ 'head', > /pedn/ > /pedden/.)

5. Mutations

5.1. The system:

radical	lenition	spirantisation	provection	'mixed mutation'
/p/	/b/	/f/		
/t/	/d/	/th/		
/k/	/g/	/gh/		
/b/	/v/		/p/	/f/
/d/	/dh/		/t/	/t/
/g/	Ø, /w/		/k/	/gh/, /hw/
/m/	/v/			/f/

Grammars for *Revived Cornish* use numbers or the terms 'soft', 'breathed', 'hard' or 'mixed' to indicate these mutations.