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## The Welsh Noun Phrase: A Preliminary Grammar

The aim of this paper is to present a preliminary version of a model accounting for selected morphological, semantic and syntactic features of the Welsh noun phrase. Before we concentrate on our model of grammar, it will be useful to provide a brief description of the Welsh noun and noun phrase.

### 1. The Welsh noun phrase: A brief characteristics

The description of the Welsh noun phrase – illustrated with a number of examples – is based on various sources such as grammars, dictionaries, coursebooks and phrase books, including Convery (1991 [1960]), Edwards (2002), Evans and Thomas (1985 [1958]), *Gramadeg Cymraeg Cyfoes: Contemporary Welsh Grammar* (1976), Griffiths and Jones (1997 [1995]), Gruffudd (2003), Jones (1985 [1977], 1991), King (1993, 1995, 2000), *Learn Welsh: Grammar* (2002), Lewis (1997), Thorne (1992, 1993) and Williams (1980).

#### 1.1. The Noun

##### 1.1.1. Gender

With regard to gender, Welsh nouns can be divided into two groups: masculine and feminine.<sup>1</sup> In (1) and (2) we present examples of masculine and feminine nouns respectively.

- (1) *arian* ‘money’, *cariad* ‘love’, *cyfrifiadur* ‘computer’, *drws* ‘door’, *newyn* ‘hunger’, *mwnci* ‘monkey’, *rhew* ‘ice’, *ty* ‘house’

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<sup>1</sup> In this respect, Welsh resembles French and Spanish.

- (2) *cath* ‘cat’, *enedl* ‘nation’, *einioes* ‘life’, *ffenestr* ‘window’, *gwisg* ‘dress’,  
*mainc* ‘bench’, *moment* ‘moment’, *nefoedd* ‘heaven’

As can be seen, both groups contain words for objects (e.g. *cyfrifiadu* (m), *gwisg* (f)), animals (e.g. *mwnci* (m), *cath* (f)), and abstract notions like feelings and sensations (e.g. *cariad* (m), *einioes* (f)). Besides, borrowings are found in both groups as well. What is also worth mentioning is the fact that synonymous words may exhibit different genders, e.g.

- (3) *gobennydd* (m) and *clustog* (f) ‘pillow’  
*cwpl* (m) and *deuddyn* (f) ‘couple’  
*cynulliad* (m) and *cyngres* (f) ‘congress’  
*dryswch* (m) and *anhrefn* (f) ‘confusion’  
*llwyn* (m) and *perth* (f) ‘bush’

Again, among masculine and feminine nouns we can find both English borrowings (e.g. *cwpl* (m), *cyngres* (f)) and words of native origin (e.g. *deuddyn* (f), *cynulliad* (m)). The fact that synonymous words may have different genders supports the claim that there are no semantic grounds for gender classification in Welsh. However, the distinction between the sexes is reflected in the division into the masculine and the feminine, e.g.

- (4) *dyn* (m) ‘man’ – *menyw* (f) ‘woman’  
*tad* (m) ‘father’ – *mam* (f) ‘mother’  
*mab* (m) ‘son’ – *merch* (f) ‘daughter’  
*bachgen* (m) ‘boy’ – *merch* (f) ‘girl’

Moreover, feminine forms of masculine nouns can be traced in Welsh as well, e.g.

- (5) *gwr* (m) ‘man, husband’ – *gwraig* (f) ‘woman, wife’  
*prynwr* (m) ‘male consumer, buyer’ – *prynwraig* (f) ‘female consumer,  
 buyer’  
*angel* (m) ‘male angel’ – *angyles* (f) ‘female angel’

There is no neutral gender in Welsh, and “naturally neuter” words like *babi* ‘baby’ and *plentynd* ‘child’ are masculine nouns.<sup>2</sup>

Another interesting phenomenon is ascribing different genders to the same word in different dialect of Welsh. Jones (1991: 279) gives the following examples:

- (6) *llygad* (m/f) ‘eye’, *clust* (m/f) ‘ear’, *troed* (m/f) ‘foot’, *cusan* (m/f) ‘kiss’

<sup>2</sup> Cf. French *bébé* (m) ‘baby’ and *enfant* (m) ‘child’, Polish *dziecko* (n) ‘child’ and *niemowlę* (n) ‘baby’.

Curiously enough, three of these nouns refer to parts of the human body. Also certain borrowings may exhibit both genders, e.g.

- (7) *busnes* (m/f) ‘business’, *parodi* (m/f) ‘parody’

The authors of the BBC coursebook (*Learn Welsh: Grammar 2002*: 3) claim that “[u]nfortunately there is no way of telling which nouns are feminine and which are masculine”. A similar opinion is expressed by Awbery (1984: 264): “All nouns are grammatically masculine or feminine, but it is not often that this is overtly marked”. However, the author of another coursebook, Jones (1991), makes an attempt at providing the learner with general rules which can be used to recognize the gender of Welsh nouns. According to Jones (1991: 278), masculine nouns include, *inter alia*, the following groups: male beings; seasons, months, days of the week, popular Christian holidays; weather phenomena; food and drink (and other liquids); liquid measures; metals, materials and fuels; and verb-nouns. Jones (1991: 279) also provides a list of groups of feminine nouns: money, linear measurement, vegetables and trees, popular musical instruments, highways and by-ways, and entertainment.<sup>3</sup>

The knowledge of the gender of the noun is important in the formation of the noun phrase because of mutations (see section 1.3 below).

### 1.1.2. Number

Welsh nouns are declined for number. The most common plural suffixes are *-au* and *-iau*, e.g.

- (8) *llyfr* ‘book’ – *llyfrau* ‘books’  
*rhanbarth* ‘region’ – *rhanbarthau* ‘regions’  
*trên* ‘train’ – *trenau* ‘trains’
- (9) *cot* ‘coat’ – *cotiau* ‘coats’  
*ffilm* ‘film’ – *ffilmiau* ‘films’  
*gwyl* ‘holiday, festival’ – *gwyliau* ‘holidays, festivals’

Apart from *-au* and *-iau*, Welsh nouns may terminate in other plural suffixes: *-i*, *-oedd* and *-ydd*, e.g.

- (10) *llestr* ‘dish’ – *llestri* ‘dishes’  
*potel* ‘bottle’ – *poteli* ‘bottles’
- (11) *teulu* ‘family’ – *teuluoedd* ‘families’  
*môr* ‘sea’ – *moroedd* ‘seas’
- (12) *afon* ‘river’ – *afonydd* ‘rivers’  
*bwyd* ‘food’ – *bwydydd* ‘foodstuffs’

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Skrzypiec (in press).

A number of nouns have irregular plurals, e.g.

- (13) *car* ‘car’ – *ceir* ‘cars’  
*ci* ‘dog’ – *cwn* ‘dogs’  
*ty* ‘house’ – *tai* ‘houses’

Some Welsh nouns occur in the plural form only,<sup>4</sup> e.g.

- (14) *llongyfarchiadau* ‘congratulations’, *nwyddau* ‘goods’

If a noun is used with a numeral, it occurs in the singular form,<sup>5</sup> e.g.

- (15) *un car* ‘one car’  
*dau gar* ‘two cars’ (a soft mutation occurs after *dau*)  
*deg car* ‘ten cars’

## 1.2. The noun phrase

### 1.2.1. The noun and the article

Welsh has one article which is the equivalent of the English definite article *the*. There are three forms of the article, namely *y*, *yr* and *'r*. Their distribution depends not only on the initial sounds of the following noun, but also on the final sound of the preceding word. Table 1 presents the distribution of *y*, *yr* and *'r*.

Table 1. The distribution of the forms of the definite article

Environment		Form
Preceding sound	Following sound	
consonant	consonant	<i>y</i>
consonant	vowel	<i>yr</i>
vowel	consonant	<i>'r</i>
vowel	vowel	<i>'r</i>

Let us now present several examples illustrating the use of the three forms of the definite article:

- (16) *y dre* ‘town’, *y ffilm* ‘the film’, *y pentre* ‘the village’  
(17) *yr avon* ‘the river’, *yr eliffant* ‘the elephant’, *yr heol* ‘the road’  
(18) *Mae Lisa yn hoffi 'r gwaith.*  
‘Lisa likes the work.’

<sup>4</sup> The English equivalents of the examples in (14) also have a plural form only (cf. the Polish noun *gratulacje* ‘congratulations’ which has no singular form either).

<sup>5</sup> At this point, we can recall the use of Russian numerals equivalent to *two*, *three* and *four* with nouns, e.g. *tri čeloveka* ‘three men’, where *čeloveka* is the singular form of *čelovek* ‘man’ in the genitive.

The presence of the article may trigger of a soft mutation in feminine nouns (see section 1.3.2).

Nouns which are not preceded by the definite article are interpreted as indefinite, e.g.

- (19) *bachgen* ‘a boy’ – *y bachgen* ‘the boy’  
*ci* ‘a dog’ – *y ci* ‘the dog’

The equivalent of the English indefinite article may be labelled a zero article ( $\emptyset$ ).

### 1.2.2. The noun and the adjective

Almost all Welsh adjectives are placed after the nouns they modify, e.g.

- (20) *car mawr* ‘a large car’  
*merch fach* ‘a little girl’ (the adjective *bach* ‘little’ undergoes a soft mutation)  
*stori fer* ‘a short story’ (the feminine form of *byr* ‘short’ is used here)

Certain Welsh adjectives have feminine forms, e.g.

- (21) *gwyn* ‘white’ – *gwen* (f)  
*melyn* ‘yellow’ – *felen* (f)  
*byr* ‘short’ – *fer* (f)

It is worth noting that these feminine forms are employed only to modify feminine nouns in the singular.

## 1.3. Nouns and mutations

### 1.3.1. Mutations

Mutations are a characteristic feature of the Celtic languages. According to Crystal (1994: 259), *mutation* is “a change in the quality of a sound because of the influence of adjacent morphemes and words”. This definition suggests that mutations are not only phonological phenomena. Welsh consonant mutations are triggered off by a number of factors, including phonological, morpho-syntactic and even semantic conditions.<sup>6</sup>

With regard to qualitative change, three types of consonant mutation can be distinguished in Welsh: soft (voiced) mutations (also referred to as lenition), nasal mutations and spirant (aspirate, fricative) mutations. Table 2 contains the patterns of Welsh mutation, accounting both for the phonological and orthographical changes.

<sup>6</sup> For details, see, *inter alia*, Buczek (1999) and Green (2003).

Table 2. Welsh mutations: Phonological and orthographical changes (based on Green 2003, Jones 1991: 281 and Thorne 1993: 23)

Initial or radical		Soft (voiced) mutation (lenition)		Nasal mutation		Spirant (aspirate, fricative) mutation	
		Phonological changes	Orthographical changes	Phonological changes	Orthographical changes	Phonological changes	Orthographical changes
[k] [p] [t]	c p t	[g] [b] [d]	g b d	[ŋ] [m̥] [n̥]	ngh mh nh	[χ] [f] [θ]	ch ph th
[g] [b] [d]	g b d	∅ [v] [ð]	– f dd	[ŋ] [m] [n]	ng m n	None	
[m] [ʃ] [r]	m ll rh	[v] [l] [r]	f l r	None		None	

With regard to the environment which triggers off a mutation, it is possible to distinguish three other types: gender mutations, contact (liason) mutations and functional (structural) mutations.

### 1.3.2. Mutations in the noun phrase

As has been stated above, one type of mutation is connected with gender. Preceded by the definite article *y*, feminine nouns in the singular undergo a soft mutation, e.g.

- (22) *y + merch > y ferth* ‘the girl’  
*y + cadair > y gadair* ‘the chair’

Feminine nouns undergo the same soft mutation when they are modified by the numeral *un* ‘one’, e.g.

- (23) *un + merch > un ferch* ‘one girl’  
*un + gardd > un ardd* ‘one garden’

The nouns beginning with *ll-* and *rh-* are an exception to the rule: preceded with *un*, they do not undergo any mutation.

Gender mutations also include cases in which feminine singular nouns mutate the adjectives which follow them; however, in this case adjectives beginning with *ll-* and *rh-* are not an exception, e.g.

- (24) *y ferch* ‘the girl’ + *mawr* ‘big’ > *y ferch fawr* ‘the big girl’  
*y ferch* ‘the girl’ + *llawen* ‘happy’ > *y ferch lawen* ‘the happy girl’

Furthermore, both masculine and feminine nouns preceded by certain numerals are subject to mutations.<sup>7</sup> These mutations are classified as contact (liason) mutations. Feminine nouns undergo a soft mutation when they are modified by the numeral *dwy* ‘two’, e.g.

- (25) *dwy* + *merch* > *dwy ferch* ‘two girls’  
*dwy* + *gardd* > *dwy ardd* ‘two gardens’

Masculine nouns also undergo a soft mutation when they are preceded by the numeral *dau* ‘two’ (which is not used with feminine nouns), e.g.

- (26) *dau* + *bachgen* > *dau fachgen* ‘two boys’  
*dau* + *plentyn* > *dau blentyn* ‘two children’

## 2. A preliminary grammar

The model we wish to propose combines devices borrowed from different models: feature analysis (Givón 1984, cf. Borsley 1987 and Skrzypiec 1991), generative (non-transformational) grammar and case grammar (cf. Cowper 1992, Fillmore 1968). The model is designed as a set of non-transformational rules which include both intentions of the speaker and resulting structures.

### 2.1. Model 1

Let us first present a model taking into account selected constituents which may be found in Welsh noun phrases.

In the set of rules to follow, the following abbreviations and symbols will be used:

Adj	Adjective
N	Noun
NP	Noun Phrase
Num	Numeral
(f)	feminine
(m)	masculine
(pl)	plural
(sg)	singular

<sup>7</sup> A generativist account of the relationships between nouns and numerals with respect to mutations is proposed by Mittendorf and Sadler (2005).

<SM>	soft mutation (lenition)
-	inherent feature of the preceding element
–	except
2	<i>dau, dwy</i> ‘two’
3	<i>tri</i> ‘three’ <sup>8</sup>

The examples presented in section 1, especially the ones referred to below, allow us to propose the following set of rules which are employed in the formation of the Welsh noun phrase:

(27) NP →	N			e.g. (18)
NP →	∅	N		e.g. (19)
NP →	∅	N-(m)	Adj	e.g. (20)
NP →	∅	N-(f)	<SM>Adj	e.g. (20)
NP →	<i>y</i>	N-(m)		e.g. (19)
NP →	<i>y</i>	<SM>N-(f)		e.g. (22)
NP →	<i>y</i>	N-(m)	Adj	
NP →	<i>y</i>	<SM>N-(f)	<SM>Adj	e.g. (24)
NP →	<i>un</i>	N-(m)		
NP →	<i>un</i>	<SM>N-(f)		e.g. (23)
NP →	<i>un</i>	N-(m)	Adj	
NP →	<i>un</i>	<SM>N-(f)	<SM>Adj	
NP →	<i>dau</i>	<SM>N-(m)(sg)		e.g. (26)
NP →	<i>dwy</i>	<SM>N-(f)(sg)		e.g. (25)
NP →	Num-(pl)[-2, -3]	N(sg)		e.g. (15)

## 2.2. Model 2

We could further elaborate the left-hand side of the arrow. The NP may be described in terms what the speaker intends to communicate and what he or she knows beforehand about the lexical items which will be used (i.e. their features), and the modifiers to accompany them. In this case, additional features will be needed to account for semanto-pragmatic information. These features are listed below:

(name)

(def) item mentioned before (old information), realized as the definite article (on the right-hand side of the arrow)

(indef) new information, realized as the zero article (∅ on the right-hand side of the arrow)

<sup>8</sup> The Welsh word for ‘three’ also requires a mutation (which is aspirate). Moreover, it also has a feminine form, *tair*. For the sake of clarity, we will not introduce these details in the preliminary model of grammar.

Apart from these features, we need more symbols to deal with expressing quantitative features:

- 1        one  
> 3     more than three

With the use of the new symbols and abbreviations, the rules presented in (27) could be modified as follows:

- (28) NP                                    →    N  
      N [(name)]
- NP                                    →    ∅    N  
      N [(indef)]
- NP                                    →    ∅    N            Adj  
      N [(indef), (m)] + Adj
- NP                                    →    ∅    N            <SM>Adj  
      N [(indef), (f)] + Adj
- NP                                    →    *y*    N  
      N [(def), (m)]
- NP                                    →    *y*    <SM>N  
      N [(def), (f)]
- NP                                    →    *y*    N            Adj  
      N [(def), (m)] + Adj
- NP                                    →    *y*    <SM>N        <SM>Adj  
      N [(def), (f)] + Adj
- NP                                    →    *un*    N  
      1 + N [(m)]
- NP                                    →    *un*    <SM>N  
      1 + N [(f)]
- NP                                    →    *un*    N            Adj  
      1 + N [(m)] + Adj

NP 1 + N [(f)] + Adj	→	<i>un</i>	<SM>N	<SM>Adj
NP 2 + N [(m)]	→	<i>dau</i>	<SM>N(sg)	
NP 2 + N [(f)]	→	<i>dwy</i>	<SM>N(sg)	
NP > 3 + N	→	Num	N(sg)	

When a noun phrase is used in a sentence, we need the specification of its role. The new features which must be added are thematic roles such as Agent and Patient (Cowper 1992: 48ff., Jackendoff 1972: 29ff.), or cases (Fillmore 1968).

### 3. A final word

It must be borne in mind that the rules presented in (27) and (28) represent a very small portion of Welsh grammar and even within this portion, they do not account for all the possible cases, but only for those which are considered the most typical. Moreover, we have concentrated mainly on the interplay of gender, numerals and mutations, leaving other important aspects aside.

The rules presented in (27) and (28) need further elaboration and extension, especially with respect to the plural number and the forms of the definite article. What may also be changed is the notation on the left-hand side of the arrow, in order to avoid repeating the same items. However, we cherish the hope that even this preliminary version seems to offer a promising device which could be employed to describe Welsh morpho-syntactic phenomena. This device accounts both for the intentions of the speaker (including the semanto-pragmatic information placed left of the arrow) and the structure of the noun phrase (the string placed right of the arrow).

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