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Mills, Jon (2015) *Etymology and the relexification of Cornish in the 20th Century.* In: Etymological Thinking in the 19th and 20th Centuries, 6-7 November 2015, Taylor Institution, University of Oxford. (Unpublished)

Etymology and the relexification of Cornish in the 20th Century

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Abstract

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the Cornish language has been undergoing a revival. Revived Cornish is based on a corpus of mainly Middle Cornish and Late Cornish texts ranging from the 14th century to the 18th century. Like English, following the Norman conquest, Cornish adopted a large number of Old Norman French loan words. Many if not most revivalists, including various lexicographers of revived Cornish, avoid words of Old Norman French origin that resemble Present Day English words. These revivalists view any semblance to English in the lexicon as a corruption of the Cornish language and adhere to an ideology of a purely Celtic Cornish lexicon. Consequently Revived Cornish has undergone a relexification in which neologisms based on Celtic roots have replaced Old Norman French loan words. Such neologisms have often been created by respelling Welsh and Breton words to allow for phonological differences with Cornish. Perversely, the avoidance of words that resemble English words is itself an example of the influence of the English language upon Cornish and is at odds with the Middle Cornish and Late Cornish corpus upon which Revived Cornish is based. This paper examines the corpus of revived Cornish, including its dictionaries and shows that present day lexical preferences are conditioned by an etymologically based ideology that eschews items that bear any resemblance to Present Day English.

Follow this link for a video of the conference presentation: https://youtu.be/p0iwUqQHeWE