

The Cornish compound verbs with 'to be'

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The compound verbs with 'to be' are one of the most characteristic features of the British Celtic languages when comparing them to their Goidelic counterpart. Even within the Brythonic languages themselves the spread and productivity of this phenomenon differs, e.g. 'to happen' is a 'to be' compound in Middle Cornish (*whar-fos*) and Middle Breton (*hoar-vout*), but not in Middle Welsh (*chwaru*). Cornish is generally undervalued in historical linguistic research because of its tendency to merge phonological differences and its somewhat obscure spelling system. For those reasons Breton is often used in its stead. This is undeserved, however, and especially so when looking at the compound verbs with 'to be', where Cornish appears to have retained certain features that Breton has not, e.g. *clewes* 'to hear' as a 'to be' compound, and the 1sg. present subjunctive *-ffif*. My paper will therefore focus specifically on the situation of this class of verbs in Cornish and how it differs from its counterparts in its sister languages, Welsh and Breton. My data has been collected from a large corpus of digitalised texts and put in a database containing more than 7600 attestations of these 'to be' compounds in the British languages.