

Like drunks lurching between lamp posts: The development of post-modifying adjectives in the Celtic Languages

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Synchronic implicational universals such as those proposed by Greenberg (1966) and later modified by Lehmann (1973) and Vennemann (1974) have often been used in a diachronic context, to describe and explain language change. Typically, diachronic approaches have tended to be based on the assumption that a violation of one or more of these universals occurs, causing a chain shift in the remaining features until the violation has been corrected. However, it is also possible to assume that languages remain consistent with synchronic implicational universals even during change and it is this alternative approach which will inform the direction of this paper. A particularly interesting universal when considering the Celtic languages is Greenberg's Universal 19 which states that "when the general rule is that the descriptive adjective follows [the noun], there may be a minority of adjectives which usually precede, but when the general rule is that descriptive adjectives precede, there are no exceptions". Proto-Indo-European is generally accepted to have had preposed adjectives, while in the modern Celtic languages the majority of adjectives are postposed with a minority being preposed. In light of this difference, this paper will address two questions: firstly, in the development of the Celtic languages, how did PIE change from being pre-modifying to post-modifying, crucially, without violating Universal 19, and secondly why were certain adjectives resistant to this change.

Using Hawkins' (1979) Universal Consistency Hypothesis (UCH) which proposes that "at each stage of their historical evolution, languages remain consistent with synchronic universal implications", I intend to demonstrate how the development of postposed adjectives in the Celtic languages may have occurred. In addition to this, explanations for the retention of certain adjectives in pre-modifying position will be discussed, considering such issues as the semantic agreement of these adjectives across the Celtic languages as well as parallels with the Romance languages and the productivity of this marked structure in the modern Celtic languages.