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## **The Syntax of Modern Breton**

Mélanie Jouitteau (IKER, UMR 5478, CNRS) and Francesc Torres-Tamarit (CLT)  
Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour, Université Autònoma de Barcelona  
Université Bordeaux Montaigne

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### **Abstract:**

In this chapter, we provide an overview of the current state of research on Modern Breton syntax, highlighting its main characteristics and formal analyses. Additionally, this paper is a replication study that seeks to address the criticism that has been directed at theoretical linguists and descriptivists that they have been working with an idealized but inauthentic version of the language. To do so, we conducted a series of elicitations with a native speaker who had high proficiency in Standard Breton and was also able to make contrastive judgments relative to her native dialect. The topics covered in this article include the canonical word order of the Breton sentence, the case system, the main pronominal paradigms, and the agreement system. The article concludes with a summary of areas within Breton syntax that require further research and investigation.

### **Index words:**

Breton syntax, Standard Breton, verb-second, negation, agreement, syntax

### *0.1 Introduction*

The present article offers an examination of the current state of research regarding the syntax of Breton. It outlines the main syntactic patterns of Modern Standard Breton as set out in the scientific literature, along with their respective proposed analyses. Dialectal variations pertaining to traditional varieties will be overlooked.

This paper constitutes a replication study that portrays the main features of Standard Breton by presenting data from a single informant, Huguette Gaudart, a native speaker of the East-Kerne variety, spoken in localities such as Skaer, and Banaleg. She possesses second-language proficiency in Standard Breton, which she acquired in her thirties (a detailed speaker profile of her can be found in Jouitteau, this volume). A published author under the name of Mai Ewen, Gaudart has extensive experience with meeting the standardization requirements of her editors. The literary corpus authored by her serves as the primary source of data for this paper, with additional information obtained from nine hours of elicitation sessions with her. The raw transcripts and protocols of these sessions, along with a French translation, are available online in Jouitteau (2009–2023). During the elicitation process, she produced data in and about both Standard Breton and her native variety; the two sets were documented in parallel, which will facilitate future exploration of the differences between Standard Breton and a specific geolect (a dialectal variety associated with a particular geographic distribution). To ensure clarity of exposition, the standardized Breton orthography will be employed here.<sup>1</sup>

This article serves as both a map of known areas of inquiry and an appeal for additional research. Due to space constraints, it will not provide a comprehensive overview of the early

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<sup>1</sup> We wish here to thank our speaker Huguette Gaudart for her patience and generosity, and for her willingness to share her judgments over the years. Such input is invaluable to scientific research. Thanks also to the editorial board for useful suggestions.

stages of this field. We are, however, careful to cite other research where those pioneering works are duly referenced.

The chapter is organised as follows. Section 0.2 presents the canonical word order of the Breton sentence, with special attention to the forms of the verb ‘to be’ that interact with basic word order, and to embedded domains. Section 0.3 presents the case system and the main pronominal paradigms. Section 0.4 presents the agreement system with special attention to the verb ‘to have’. The chapter continues with a study of the nominal domain in Section 0.5, and closes with the conclusions in section 0.6.

## 0.2 Word order

### 0.2.1 Breton is verb-second

Breton canonical word order is verb-second, henceforth V2 (Holmberg 2015). The canonical placement for focalised or topicalised elements is the initial position (Anderson & Chung 1977; Borsley 1990). Focus or topic readings of the subject, for example, have SVO word order (Borsley & Stephens 1989: 421; Timm 1989, 1991). Sentences (1) to (3) illustrate focalisation of a subject, an object, and an infinitival verbal structure (V+O), respectively. The focalisation of the infinitival verbal structure becomes possible through the use of the auxiliary verb ‘to do’.<sup>2</sup>

- (1) *Nina a droc'ho ar wastell.*  
 Nina PTCL<sup>1</sup> cut.3SG.FUT DEF <sup>1</sup>cake  
 ‘NINA will cut the cake.’
- (2) *Ar wastell a droc'ho Nina.*  
 DEF <sup>1</sup>cake PTCL<sup>4</sup> cut.3SG.FUT Nina  
 ‘Nina will cut THE CAKE.’
- (3) *Troc'hañ ar wastell a raio Nina.*  
 cut.INF DEF <sup>1</sup>cake PTCL<sup>1</sup> do.3SG.FUT Nina  
 ‘Nina will CUT THE CAKE.’

The above examples have the structure shown in (4). The particle before the tensed element, glossed PTCL, is either *a* or *e*. It appears only before an inflected verb. In Breton terminology, it is called *rannig-verb*, or *rannig*, literally ‘little piece of a verb’. This particle is realised by an unaccented vowel (pronounced [a] or [e]). It is often conflated with other complementizers and can be dropped depending on speech rate. Its syntactic presence is revealed by the consonant mutation it triggers in the tensed element: *a*<sup>1</sup> triggers lenition, while *e*<sup>4</sup> triggers mixed mutations. In an articulated left-periphery, the *rannig a* or *e* is identified as an overt Fin(itude) head, the lowest complementizer of the complementizer phrase (CP). The selection of either *a* or *e* depends on the preceding element: the particle *a* is selected after nominal elements, including infinitives, whereas *e* is selected in all other contexts. The term *verb-second* implies that the *rannig* is cliticised on the verb. Analogous

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<sup>2</sup>Superscript numbers in the glosses signal a consonant mutation. 1 stands for lenition, 2 for spirantization, 3 for provection, 4 for the set of mixed mutations and 5 for the reduced mutation /k/ > /x/. They immediately follow the element triggering mutation, and precede the element whose features determine the type of mutation (number, gender).

particles exist in Welsh. In contrast with the preverbal particles found in the Goidelic languages,  $a^1$  and  $e^4$  in Breton are never found in non-tensed domains.

- (4)  $[_{CP} XP [_{FinP} \{ PTCL a^1/e^4 \} [_{TP} \text{tensed element} [\dots \cancel{XP} \dots ]_{TP}]_{FinP}]_{CP}$

V2, independently of information structure, is a result of avoidance of initial position for those particles.<sup>3</sup> All the sentences in (5–8) only present new information. They lack any focus or topic effect in the initial element. This initial element, in such informationally flat structures, can be the expletive form *bez'* (5), derived from the infinitive *bezañ* of the verb ‘to be’, an infinitive, a participial head (7), and an object (8).<sup>4</sup>

In elicitation, (5–7) were checked to answer a broad question like ‘Is everything ready for breakfast?’.<sup>5</sup> Obtaining a fronted object in this context is more challenging. As a result, the flat information structure is demonstrated in (8) by object fronting in a verbal idiom, in this case *kaout an aer* (‘to have the appearance’), which is not compatible with either focalisation or topicalisation.

- (5) *Bez' e vo troc'het ar wastell gant Nina.*  
 EXPL PTCL<sup>4</sup> be.3SG.FUT cut.PTCP DEF <sup>1</sup>cake with Nina  
 ‘The cake will be cut by Nina.’
- (6) *Troc'hañ a raio Nina ar wastell.*  
 cut.INF PTCL<sup>1</sup>do.3SG.FUT Nina DEF <sup>1</sup>cake  
 ‘Nina will cut the cake.’
- (7) *Troc'het he deus Nina ar wastell.*  
 cut.PTCP 3SG.F has Nina DEF <sup>1</sup>cake  
 ‘Nina has cut the cake.’
- (8) *An aer he deus Nina da vezañ graet pep tra, ya.*  
 DEF look 3SG.F has Nina to<sup>1</sup> be.INF do.PTCP each thing yes  
 ‘Yes, it looks like Nina has done everything.’

The example in (9) shows that Breton V2 can be better described as “at least V2” since multiple syntactic blocks are allowed before the tensed element, resulting in V3 and V4 orders (Timm 1989; Schapansky 2000; Jouisseau 2005, 2010). This generalization is not surprising, given that Breton has evolved in close proximity to Old French, and the “at least V2” pattern is evident in many old Romance languages. In (9), the sentence begins with a conditional clause, followed by the participle of the matrix clause, and then finally the *en doa* matrix auxiliary in third position. Additionally, example (9) shows that, in conjunction with (6–7) above, Breton is specifically “linear V2”. This is because syntactic heads like the past-participle *livet* are considered first elements for the V2 constraint (Stephens 1982; Borsley, Rivero & Stephens 1996; Schapansky 2002; Borsley & Kathol 2000). The conditional clause in (9) is another instance of this head-first word order, as it features an initial complementizer (C-VSO order), *M'* (abbreviated form of *ma*, ‘if’). Negated sentences, which will be

<sup>3</sup>For a critical summary of the V2 generalisations, see Jouisseau 2020b. Breton is not the only Brittonic language with V2 orders, SVO and OVS neutral orders. For Middle Welsh, see Willis this volume, Rezac 2020: section 5.5, fn35, 38, and references therein.

<sup>4</sup>SVO in (1) was also a possible answer to a question like “What will happen?”, which induces a broad focus declarative sentence. SVO orders do not obligatorily impose focus on the subject.

<sup>5</sup>This context was also given in order to reduce the chances that the speaker would answer using a progressive form with *emañ* ‘is.3SG.PRES’ because this verb triggers a special verb-first word order.

discussed later, also follow a C-VSO pattern since the negation head *ne* acts as a complementizer.<sup>6</sup>

- (9) *M'en                    doa   livet            Van Gogh   bleunioù   e-leizh,*  
 If PTCL.3SG.M   had   paint.PTCP   Van Gogh   flower.PL   a-lot  
*livet            en                    doa   ivez   un   daol*  
 paint.PTCP   PTCL.3SG.Mhad   too   a   'table  
*a-dreuz   e-barzh   ur   gambr.*  
 wobbly   inside   a   'bedroom  
 'Though Van Gogh painted many flowers, he also painted a wobbly table in a bedroom.'

The head-first orders (6, 7) and the participle fronting in the main clause in (9) are a last resort strategy for V2, meaning that they never occur if V2 is otherwise realised.

Verbal heads can have complex syntactic structures such as coordination, as confirmed by (10) (Rivero 1999: 73). Additionally, they can accommodate certain short adverbs cliticised to them (*fall* 'badly' in 10). Moreover, Kathol and Borsley 2000 observed that the postverbal perfective particle *bet* (11a) seems invisible when the participle raises as if it was not on its path, but it has to be visible for the structure because it can itself raise (11c). This observation by Kathol and Borsley 2000 was derived from Treger Breton and replicated for both Leon (Jouitteau 2009-2022: 'bet') and Standard Breton.

- (10) *Troc'het   fall            ha   drailhet   he            deus   Nina   ar   wastell.*  
 cut.INF   badly   and   destroyed   PTCL.3SG.F has   Nina   DEF   cake  
 'Nina has cut the cake badly and destroyed it.'

- (11) a. *Bez'            en                    deus   bet   livet            bleunioù.*  
 EXPL            PTCL.3SG.Mhas   been   paint.PTCP   flower.PL

- b. *Livet<sub>i</sub>            en                    deus   bet   \_\_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>   bleunioù.*  
 paint.PTCP   PTCL.3SG.Mhas   been            flower.PL

- c. *Bet<sub>i</sub>            en                    deus   \_\_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>   livet            bleunioù.*  
 been            PTCL.3SG.Mhas            paint.PTCP   flower.PL  
 'He has painted flowers.'

We finish this section by offering an exploration of several properties that have the potential to shed light on the phenomena occurring within the initial region of V2 examples. These properties, which are susceptible to dialectal variations, have received insufficient attention in the literature.

S-Neg-VO orders can have flat information structures (Varin 1979; Timm 1989; Kennard 2023:311, [Kennard] Winterton 2016). The motivation for subject fronting remains unexplained, as negation satisfies the V2 requirement. Dialects that use an impersonal construction like *an den*, which literally means 'the person', can provide a means to test for subject backgrounding before negation. Our informant hesitated when judging the

<sup>6</sup>One argument in favor of viewing the negation *ne* as a complementizer is that moving a subject across negation results in *that*-trace effects (Jouitteau 2010: 411), which necessitates resumption. For example, a plural subject is accompanied by a plural verbal inflection (S-Neg-V<sub>AGR...</sub>, Schafer 1995). Furthermore, the verb forms that are used based on the presence of a preverbal subject (S-V...) do not surface when the subject is above negation (S-Neg-V...).

acceptability of sentence (12), which is considered grammatical but not clearly associated with Standard.

- (12) *An den ne oar ket james. Standard (or Church Breton)*  
 IMP NEG<sup>1</sup> knows NEG never  
 ‘One never knows.’

Another aspect of dialectal variation is demonstrated in (13), where verbal structures in the progressive tense are resistant to VP-fronting in certain dialects, as noted by Kennard (2013: 179, 203), for reasons that remain unidentified. This is not the case in Standard usage, as shown in (13b).

- (13) a. *Emañ Nina o troc'hañ ar wastell. Spoken Standard*  
 is.3SG.PRES Nina at<sup>4</sup> cut.INF DEF <sup>1</sup>cake
- b. *O troc'hañ ar wastell<sub>i</sub> emañ Nina \_\_\_\_\_i.*  
 at<sup>4</sup> cut.INF DEF <sup>1</sup>cake is.3SG.PRES Nina  
 ‘Nina is cutting the cake.’

In order to test the initial area of a sentence, some studies employ clefting strategies. Press 1986 notes that the availability of clefting can differentiate between fronting an entire verbal structure containing the object and fronting just the verbal head, with the latter being ungrammatical in clefts. Clefts are focusing sentences consisting of a matrix clause and an embedded clause which contains a gap bound by the clefted constituent (e.g., ‘It is Alfred who is baking’). Press 1986 reports that, in non-standard varieties, fronting just the verbal head is ungrammatical with the copula *eo* signalling clefting, as shown in (14). This copula *eo* is available for VP fronting (*Gwelout e vignonez eo a ra Yann*). Interestingly, the verbal head in (14) can still be focalized using the focus particle *'ni*, indicating that the problem with clefting is related to the syntactic nature of the verb as a head rather than the information structure. The focus particle *'ni* in (14) is a grammaticalisation of *an hini eo*, which literally means ‘the one is’. The grammaticality contrast between *'ni* and *eo* is predictable if the focus particle *'ni* cliticises onto the verb prior to head movement. These data should be replicable in the central dialects where *'ni* is documented.

- (14) *Gwelout ('ni / \*eo) ra Yann e vignonez.*  
 see.INF FOC is.3SG.PRES do.3SG.PRES Yann his<sup>1</sup> friend.F  
 ‘Yann SEES his girlfriend.’

Non-standard, Press (1986: 189)

### 0.2.2 Word order and the five forms of the verb ‘to be’

Breton has five forms of the verb ‘to be’ (see also Kennard, this volume). The distribution of these forms is dependent on both word order and semantics.

Within Standard Breton, the form *emañ* is limited to progressive structures and situational structures containing a definite subject. This particular verb, *emañ*, shares similarities with Welsh verbs in that it is allowed to appear at the beginning of a sentence in its inflected form. Additionally, *emañ*, like Welsh verbs, must be directly followed by its subject (Hewitt 1988). In (15), there is no emphasis felt on the verb and it can serve as a

response to the question *What is this noise?*, which introduces a flat information structure with all elements bringing new information.

- (15) *Emañ Nina o troc'hañ ar wastell.*  
 is.3SG.PRES Nina at<sup>4</sup> cut.INF DEF <sup>1</sup>cake  
 'Nina is cutting the cake.'

All other forms of the verb 'to be' are prohibited in the initial position of a sentence. When a subject appears directly before the verb, it triggers *a zo*, which is accompanied by the particle *a*, indicating a nominal immediately preceding element (16). This applies to existential structures as well (16b).

- (16) a. *Arzhur a zo brav.*  
 Arthur PTCL<sup>1</sup> is.3SG.PRES handsome  
 'Arthur is handsome.'
- b. *Kafe a zo.*  
 coffee PTCL<sup>1</sup> is.3SG.PRES  
 'There is coffee.'

When an indefinite subject appears after the verb in Breton, it triggers the form *ez eus* (17). The particle *e* indicates a non-nominal preceding element, while *-z* is inserted as an epenthetic consonant as a way to improve the syllabic structure of the sequence. The initial element can vary, as shown in (17b) with the expletive and in (17c) with the negation particle *ne*.

- (17) a. *Amañ ez eus kafe.*  
 here PTCL is.3SG.PRES coffee  
 'There is coffee here.'
- b. *Bez' ez eus kafe.*  
 EXPL PTCL is.3SG.PRES coffee  
 'There is coffee here.'
- c. *N' eus ket kafe.*  
 NEG<sup>1</sup> is.3SG.PRES NEG coffee  
 'There is no coffee.'

In Breton, when a definite subject appears after the verb in an equative copular construction, it triggers the *eo* form of the copula (18a). The sentence structure in this case comprises a predicate, the copula *eo*, and a subject, which can be null in Breton. The null subject can serve as the head of a relative clause, as shown in (18b), which is a cleft structure.

- (18) a. *Kafe eo.*  
 coffee is.3SG.PRES  
 'It is coffee.'
- b. *Kafe eo a garan.*  
 coffee is.3SG.PRES R<sup>1</sup> like.1SG  
 'It is coffee that I like.'

Habitual readings require the use of the *vez* form of the copula, regardless of word order or the definiteness of the subject.

- (19) a. *Arzhur a vez brav.*  
 Arthur PTCL<sup>1</sup> is.3SG.PRES handsome  
 ‘Arthur is usually handsome.’
- b. *Kafe a vez.*  
 coffee PTCL<sup>1</sup> is.3SG.PRES  
 ‘There is usually coffee.’
- c. *Bez’ e vez kafe.*  
 EXPL PTCL<sup>4</sup> is.3SG.PRES coffee  
 ‘There is usually coffee.’
- d. *Ne vez ket kafe.*  
 NEG<sup>1</sup> is.3SG.PRES NEG coffee  
 ‘There is usually no coffee.’

### 0.2.3 Derivations, embedded domains and resumptivity

In derivational models of syntax, it is assumed that non-finite domains, that is, domains without tense, illustrate the basic word order of the language, as the projection of tense can result in changes in word order. In Breton, non-finite domains follow the SVO word order (Stephens 1990). This is illustrated in (20), where the infinitival temporal clause is introduced by *araok* ‘before’. In this sentence, an inflected preposition *dezhañ*, derived from *da* ‘to’, provides morphological support for the incorporated overt subject (see Tallerman 1997; Jouitteau 2012).

- (20) *Petra ac’h eus poazhet*  
 what PTCL has.3SG.PRES cook.PTCP  
*araok dezhañ bezañ sal?*  
 [before to.3SG.M be.INF salted]  
 ‘What did you cook before it was salted?’

When tense is present in a sentence, it triggers the movement of the verb into the head of the Tense projection TP (see the structure in 4). This movement causes the verb to be pronounced before the subject, as illustrated in (21), where subjects are underlined and appear after the tensed element of their clause. In the example, two matrix clauses are coordinated, with the first clause and its complement clause both being tensed. Both show the subject after the tensed element. In the second matrix sentence, no element is morphologically tensed, and the semantic tense of this small clause is calculated as directly consecutive to the tense of the first conjunct.<sup>7</sup> Here, the subject precedes the participial predicate.

- (21) *Klevet en deus ur bugel e live ar vugale all*  
 hear.PTCP PTCL.M has.3 a child PTCL<sup>4</sup> paint.PAST DEF <sup>1</sup>child.PL other  
*gwelloc’h evitañ, hag eñ aet e fulor.*  
 better for.3SG.M and he go.PTCP in rage.INF

<sup>7</sup>For non-finite independent clauses, see Stephens 1990.



‘A child heard that the other children painted better than him, and became angry.’

Similar to matrix domains, embedded domains can be categorized as “linear V2”, implying that a complementizer head can function as the initial element. This C-VSO order is exemplified in a subject relative (22) or an object relative (23). In the written form of Standard, the C head *hag*, which is phonetically identical to a coordination marker, is used. However, in spoken forms of Standard, the C head is omitted, resulting in seemingly verb-initial domains.

(22) *don evel puns Yann e voned ruz hag a zo o*  
 deep like well Yann his<sup>1</sup> cap red that PTCL is.3SG.PRES at<sup>4</sup>  
*vevañ ennañ*  
 live.INF in.3SG.M  
 ‘deep like the well of Yann of the red cap who lives in it’

(23) a. *e di brav **hag** a welan.* written Standard  
 b. *e di brav a welan.* spoken Standard  
 his house beautiful that PTCL<sup>1</sup> see.1SG.PRES  
 ‘his beautiful house that I see’

Resumptivity also informs derivational models of syntax. Resumptivity refers to the use of a pronoun to repeat a phrase that has already been mentioned in a sentence, and involves coreferent nominals (highlighted in bold in 24–25). In example (24), the structural subject PRO of the infinitive *mont* ‘to go’, which is marked between brackets in the glosses, binds the pronoun incorporated in the preposition. There is still much to explore in resumptivity domains, such as reconstruction (but see Guilliot 2006), or the licensing of parasitic gaps, an empty category that is interpreted as an antecedent for a gap that appears elsewhere in the sentence, which are illustrated in (25).

(24) *Me, neuze, o klevout anezhañ, a zo tost din*  
 Me then at<sup>4</sup> hear.INF of.him PTCL<sup>1</sup> is close to.me  
       *mont droug ennon.*  
 [PRO go.INF anger in.me]  
 ‘Hearing him, I am about to get angry.’

(25) *Petra ac’h eus poazhet*  
 what PTCL.2.SG has cooked  
       *araok bezañ salet (anezhañ)?*  
 what before be.INF salted of.him  
 ‘What did you cook before you salted it?’

To conclude this section, we present a derivation for a complex sentence that has been selected because it illustrates several key characteristics of Breton. The causative sentence in written Standard Breton which is presented in (26) has a structure that can be described by (27), featuring a VSO order in the matrix clause. The subject is *targazh Soaz* ‘the tomcat of Soaz’. The participial clause that modifies the subject, *azezet divergont war e gaboù* ‘shamelessly seated on his bottom’ appears as the initial element in this V2 order. It has been separated from the subject. The object is a small clause.

(26) ... *azezet divergent war e gaboù, e herz*

seated shamelessly on his<sup>1</sup> extremities PTCL<sup>4</sup> prevents  
*targazh Soaz anezhi da baseal.*  
 tomcat Soaz of.her to<sup>1</sup> pass.INF  
 ‘Soaz’s tomcat, shamelessly seated on his bottom, prevents her from passing.’

(27) [<sub>CP</sub> subject modifier [<sub>FinP</sub> PTCL *e*<sup>4</sup> [<sub>TP</sub> tensed element [ [ S possessor ] V [<sub>SC</sub> S to V.INF ] ] ] ] ]

In this sentence, the initial constituent functions as a scene-setting adverbial clause that modifies the postverbal subject, placing the Fin head in the second position structurally. The matrix subject, *targazh Soaz* meaning ‘Soaz’s tomcat’, shows the direct genitive construction that is typical of Celtic languages. This structure is signaled by the absence of the definite article before the possessed noun, as *\*an targazh Soaz* would be ungrammatical.

The tensed element in the sentence is a causative exceptional case-marking verb (ECM), which assigns the prototypical case of an object, that is, accusative case, to the subject of its infinitival object (the small clause SC), which has the semantic role of an agent. Note that in the English translation, the subject of the infinitival small clause is actually a third-person singular pronoun in the accusative case: *her* instead of *she*. The pronominal subject of the infinitive, *anezhi*, shows the preposition *a-* meaning ‘of, from’. The gloss provides ‘of.her’ because the same preposition would appear in the partitive. However, it is semantically empty in this context and only provides morphological support for the incorporated feminine pronoun. This *a-* form differs from both the independent pronoun *he* meaning ‘she’ and the possessive determiner *he* meaning ‘her’, which triggers spirantisation. In section 0.3.3, we will see that these *a-* forms, in different constructions, can realize either subjects or objects.

### 0.3 Arguments, pronouns and the case system

Breton lacks morphological case marking on nouns. There is evidence for a case system, but it can mainly be observed in the syntactic distribution of nouns. Subjects are in a lower position compared to other Celtic languages, except for the verb *emañ* ‘be.3SG.PRES’ in Standard Breton, whose subject must directly follow. Other verbs tolerate different interveners (Jouitteau 2005). The licensing mechanism of post-verbal subjects in inflected domains is explored in Tallerman 1997 and Rezac 2004. The rest of the evidence pertains to the pronominal systems.

#### 0.3.1 Subjects, null subjects, meteorological subjects and impersonals

Breton has phonologically null subjects (*pro-drop*). The meteorological expletive can be overt (28) but cannot be focalized (29). Example (28) demonstrates that the meteorological expletive can receive case because the causative verb *lezel* heads an Exceptional Case Marking structure that assigns case to the subject of the infinitive, *anezhi*. Example (30) shows that the meteorological expletive cannot receive a thematic role. The control verb assigns one to it, which leads to ungrammaticality (Stephens 1990: 161). An alternative masculine form of this expletive is documented for Treger and Gwenedeg Breton, but it was rejected by our informant (28).

(28) *Fall an amzer! Netra d’ober nemet lezel (anezhi/\*anezhañ)*  
 bad the weather nothing to do.INF only let of.her/of.him

*d'ober glav!*  
 to do rain  
 'The weather is bad but what can you do?'

(29) *Emañ(\*/?-hi) o vont d'ober erc'h (\*anezhi).*  
 is.3SG.PRES(3SGF.FOC) at<sup>4</sup> go to do.INF snow of.her  
 'It is going to snow.'

(30) *Goulennet ' zo bet (\*ganti) d'ober glav.*  
 asked PTCL is been of.her to do.INF rain  
 '#It has been asked for it to rain.'

In Leon Breton, passive impersonals suggest a phonologically null expletive indefinite postverbal subject because it triggers the *ez eus* form of 'to be' (see section 0.2.2 above). The status of this form in the Standard judgments of our informant is unclear.

(31) *Nag a voeson ez eus evet!*  
 what of<sup>1</sup> beverage PTCL is drank  
 'There was a lot of drinking.' = 'We drank a lot.' *Leon (Plougerne) Breton*

Standard Breton has an impersonal null subject that triggers impersonal agreement, which is typical of the Celtic languages (32). Several Breton dialects have also developed an impersonal DP *an den, an nen* ['the man'] (Rezac & Jouitteau 2015), which is replicated in (33).

(32) *Ne ouier ket james.* *Standard Breton*  
 NEG<sup>1</sup> knows.IMP not never  
 'One never knows.'

(33) *Ne oar ket james an den.*  
 NEG<sup>1</sup> knows not never the person  
 'One never knows.'

### 0.3.2 Subjects and subject bound forms (which were once analysed as subjects)

There is only one subject per clause (cf. Borsley & Stephens 1989), but a full range of pronouns can double it: echo pronouns, resumptives of the subject, dislocated subjects, or hanging topics.

Echo pronouns mostly serve focalisation. They form an independent paradigm, available for doubling other pronouns. The subject *me* 'I' in (34) differs from its echo (*-me*) in that the absence of the former triggers rich agreement (i.e., agreement of person and number), *welan*, like in the second clause. If an echo pronoun is dropped, only the information structure is altered. Only if a subject pronoun is dropped is agreement affected.

(34) a. *Me a wel ac'hanoc'h met*  
 I PTCL<sup>1</sup> see.3SG of.you but  
*ne welan ket ho preur.*  
 NEG<sup>1</sup> see.1SG not your<sup>3</sup> brother  
 'I see you but I don't see your brother.'

- b. *Me a wel-me ac'hanoc'h-c'hwi met*  
 I PTCL<sup>1</sup> see.3SG-1SG of.you-you but  
*ne welan-me ket ho preur-c'hwi.*  
 NEG<sup>1</sup> see.1SG-1SG not your<sup>3</sup> brother-you  
 'I see you but I don't see your brother.'

In (35), the subject can be doubled by an echo pronoun right after the inflected verb, or by an independent pronoun standing in the right periphery. The effect is the same, that of a contrastive focus. Having both forms in (35) would be ungrammatical. In (36), the first pronoun co-referent with the subject is in a hanging topic position, the second is the subject. We know this because it triggers the *zo* form of the verb 'to be'. The last one in the right periphery is compatible with the other two.

- (35) *Petra a larit-(c'hwi) deus an dra-se (, c'hwi)?*  
 what PTCL<sup>1</sup> say.you of the 'thing-here you  
 'What do YOU think about it?'
- (36) *Me, me ' zo ur plac'h fin, me.*  
 I.FOC I PTCL is a girl smart I.FOC  
 'As for me, I'm a smart girl.'

Overt subjects can also appear as the incorporated object of a prepositional *a*- form (Timm 1995), what we traditionally refer to as inflected prepositions, as in predicative equatives (37). However, this *a*-form is illicit as the predicate in answer fragments (Stephens 1982: 82).

- (37) *Me a zo ur vaouez kozh ac'hanon.*  
 me PTCL<sup>1</sup> is a 'woman old of.me  
 'I am an old woman.'
- (38) a. – *Piv ' zo deuet? – Me.*  
 who PTCL is come me  
 '– Who came?' '– It's me.'
- b. – *Piv ' zo deuet? – \* Ac'hanon.*  
 who PTCL is come me  
 '– Who came?' '– It's me.'

The construction below involves a resumptive pronoun of the subject. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was restricted to Southern dialects of Breton. It now seems to have penetrated Standard (in our informant's view). However, it is usually found under forms like (39) with a restriction to negation and to third person pronouns (40).

- (39) *Hi ne ev ket kafe anezhi.*  
 She NEG<sup>1</sup> drinks not coffee of.her  
 'She doesn't drink coffee.'
- (40) *\*Me ne evan ket kafe ac'hanon.*  
 I NEG<sup>1</sup> drink.1SG not coffee of.me

‘I don’t drink coffee.’

Finally, Breton has a structure of the type /**me** is great **my** sister/ meaning ‘My sister is great’. This structure is called “double subject construction” because the first element is not the thematic subject but seems to behave like one syntactically. In (41), *Gaidig* superficially looks like the subject but is not even an argument of the matrix verb. It is co-referent with the possessive of the object of the infinitive.<sup>8</sup> Such structures are common in the written register, and corpus studies show their flexible information structure. However, these structures are persistently difficult to obtain in elicitation and should be robustly documented in corpora to check for their vitality in spoken varieties. Example (42) shows a double subject in an infinitive in the dialect of West-Kerne.

(41) *Gaidig a santan he gwazhiennou o virviñ. Standard*  
 Gaidig PTCL<sup>1</sup> feel.I her<sup>2</sup> veins at<sup>4</sup> boil.INF  
 ‘I feel Gaidig’s veins boiling.’

(42) ... *daoust dezhañ bezañ hir e ziouskouarn! West-Kerne, Standard*  
 despite of.him be.INF long his<sup>1</sup> two.ear  
 ‘... despite his long ears!’

### 0.3.3 Objects, accusative and verbo-nominal properties

Pronominal objects come in different paradigms. The following examples illustrate pronominal objects used with a participle. The generalisations are valid for pronominal objects used with tensed verbs or infinitives. The morphological paradigms of proclitic objects and possessors are broadly similar (43).

(43) *Me ‘ meus e ziskouezet em levr. Standard*  
 I PTCL 1SG.has 3SGM<sup>1</sup> shown in.my book  
 ‘I have described him in my book.’

While proclitic objects and possessors are sometimes considered identical (e.g., *en e levr* ‘in his book’), their paradigms are actually different. In Written Standard Breton, there is an inanimate proclitic object *hen(n)* that does not have an equivalent in the possessive paradigm (44). Moreover, their paradigms differ in all modern dialects (Rezac 2021: 362).

(44) *Me ‘ meus (henn) diskouezet (an dra-se) em levr.*  
 I PTCL 1SG.has it shown the <sup>1</sup>thing-here in.my book  
 ‘I have shown it/\*him in my book.’ *Written Standard*

In Modern Standard, the proclitic forms are often considered archaic and have been replaced by a new paradigm, the *a-* forms (45). These longer forms incorporate the pronoun inside a semantically empty preposition *a-* and are not clitics. They can appear in the middle field (45a), but they still resist being placed in the initial position (45b). In that position, they are replaced by the paradigm of pronominal independent forms, which are prototypical of subjects (45c).

<sup>8</sup>In these structures, the high structural nominal element is not thematically related to the verb but instead binds a TP internal element from the initial non-thematic A position (Rezac 2004, 2011, 2013).

- (45) a. *Me ‘ meus diskouezet anezhañ em levr.*  
 I PTCL 1SG.has shown of.him in.mybook  
 ‘I have described him in my book.’
- b. *\*Anezhañ em eus diskouezet em levr.*  
 of.him PTCL.1SG has shown in.mybook  
 ‘I have described him in my book.’
- c. *Eñ em eus diskouezet em levr.*  
 he PTCL.1SG has shown in.mybook  
 ‘I have described him in my book.’

Pronominal objects of verbs receive accusative case, whereas possessive proclitics receive genitive case. None of the contemporary Breton dialects conflate these two paradigms. This is true for both tensed verbs and infinitives, which challenges the Celtic terminological tradition that sometimes refers to infinitives as ‘verb-noun/verbal noun’ (Breton *anv-verb*) (see Kennard, this volume).

According to Press 1986: 76, a transitive infinitive can be nominalized with its internal argument by means of a preceding article (46). However, there are differences between infinitives and deverbal nouns. The presence of an article (*an debriñ* ‘an action of eating’) does not allow for the use of any determiner (*\*pep debriñ* ‘each action of eating’). Stephens 1982:122 notes that the deverbal nouns derived from infinitives can be modified (*un dornañ berr* ‘a short harvest’, *ur studiañ hir* ‘a long formation’), but that the temporal adverb *alies* ‘often’ is not allowed (*\*ar gwelout alies* ‘the usual view’, *\*ar pesketa alies* ‘the usual fishing’). Moreover, not all verbs can be nominalised by simply adding an article before the infinitive form. For instance, Stephens 1982: 124 gives the example of *plijout* ‘to please’, *\*ar plijout*, but *ar plijadur* ‘the pleasure’. She argues that the possibility of nominalisation must be a lexical property that is set in the lexicon for each verb. This is supported by (47), where the verb *mont* ‘to go’ can be nominalised, whereas the verb *dont* ‘to come’ resists nominalisation (47b).

- (46) *An debriñ avaloù* Press 1986: 76  
 the eat.INF apples  
 ‘the eating of the apples’

- (47) *Bez’ e vez paiet d’ul lizher frejoù e zistro/\*zont,*  
 EXPL PTCL<sup>4</sup>is.HAB paid to a letter costs his<sup>1</sup> return  
*kement e vez paiet evit e vont.*  
 as.much PTCL<sup>4</sup>is.HAB paid for his<sup>1</sup> go.INF  
 ‘One pays by letter the cost of both delivery and return.’

The nominal properties of verbal structures appear to be closely linked to larger syntactic units. Infinitival domains require case themselves (Jouitteau 2012), and a preposition *da* can be inserted as a last resort strategy to assign case.<sup>9</sup> A large verbal projection in the syntactic structure bears 3SG features that are interpretable for Agree, as explained in the next section.

<sup>9</sup>This analysis correctly predicts that in (26) above, the preposition *da* is inserted as a last resort case assignment strategy for the infinitive.

#### 0.4 Pronominal incorporation and agreement

##### 0.4.1 Pronominal incorporation and agreement are different

The literature on Celtic often refers to the paradigms of prepositions as inflected prepositions (Kennard, this volume). This term implies that prepositions agree with their objects in a manner similar to the way verbs agree with their subjects, resulting in complete paradigms. However, this suggestion is syntactically inaccurate in Breton, where syntactic agreement is only observed on verbs. The examples in (48) illustrate this point by replicating the findings of Jouitteau & Rezac 2006.

In sentence (48a), neither the subject of the verb nor the object of the preposition can be incorporated. The verb appears with 3SG agreement, also known as “poor agreement”. The preposition *gant* meaning ‘with’ lacks a feature for its object (as compared to *gantañ* meaning ‘with him’, or *ganeomp* meaning ‘with us’). This indicates that the preposition paradigm does not include agreement. What is spelled out on a preposition is simply the result of pronominal incorporation, without any syntactic agreement taking place.

In sentence (48b), incorporation of the left conjunct highlights a contrast between verb and preposition arguments. Incorporation of the left conjunct is ungrammatical for the subject of the verb but is grammatical for the object of a preposition. Verbs must agree with their entire subject.

Sentence (48c) attempts to replicate the first conjunct agreement observed in Welsh verbs (Borsley & Tallerman, this volume) but is ungrammatical. Standard Breton shows rich 3PL agreement on verbs, which is incompatible with postverbal subjects. The only post-verbal pronouns in Standard Breton that are co-referent with the subject and agreement morphemes are echo pronouns, which are added for emphasis as in (34). These pronouns are not subjects, and the verb cannot agree with them, nor can they be coordinated.

- (48) a. *Ar bloaz-mañ e lenno ar vugale ha c’hwi ar*  
the year-here PTCL<sup>4</sup>read.FUT.3SG the <sup>1</sup>children and you the  
*Barzaz Breizh gant Gaid ha me.*  
Barzaz Breizh with Gaid and me  
‘This year, you and the children will read the Barzaz Breizh with Gaid and me.’
- b. *Ar bloaz-mañ e lennint (\*\_ha c’hwi) ar Barzaz*  
the year-here PTCL<sup>4</sup>read.FUT.3PL and you the Barzaz  
*Breizh ganin ha Gaid.*  
Breizh with.me and Gaid
- c. *\*Ar bloaz-mañ e lennint int ha c’hwi ar Barzaz*  
the year-here PTCL<sup>4</sup>read.FUT.3PL 3PL and you.PL the Barzaz  
*Breizh gant Gaid ha me.*  
Breizh with Gaid and me

##### 0.4.2 The complementarity effect

In sentence (49), when a pronominal form of the subject incorporates into the verb, agreement features are realised on the verb, resulting in rich agreement, as seen in *welan* meaning ‘I see’. However, when the subject does not incorporate, such as with the independent pronoun *me* in *me a wel* meaning ‘I see’, or any lexical subject, the verbal

agreement morpheme is fixed to 3SG features, independent of the features of the subject. This 3SG form is an example of frozen agreement, where the agreement morpheme remains constant despite variations in the subject's features. This is known as the 'complementarity effect' because the features of the subject are found either on the agreement morpheme or on the subject itself. It is important to note that, as shown in sentence (49b), echoed pronouns enclosed in brackets are not subjects and do not affect agreement. Although they can cliticise onto agreement morphemes, they are not syntactically relevant to agreement features; they are syntactically invisible and syntactically optional.

- (49) a. *Me a wel ac'hanoc'h met ne welan ket ho preur*  
 I PTCL<sup>1</sup> see.3SG of.you but NEG<sup>1</sup> see.1SG not your<sup>3</sup> brother  
 'I see you but I don't see your brother.'
- b. *Me a wel(-me) ac'hanoc'h(-c'hwi)*  
 I PTCL<sup>1</sup> see.3SG(-1SG) of.you(-you)  
*met ne welan(-me) ket ho preur(-c'hwi)*  
 but NEG<sup>1</sup> see.1SG(-1SG) not your<sup>3</sup> brother(-you)  
 'I see you but I don't see your brother.'

In Standard Breton, the distribution of rich and frozen agreement, which determines the possibility for verbal agreement to reflect subject's features, is determined solely by subject incorporation. However, the verb *kaout*, which means 'to have', behaves differently and also agrees with lexical subjects. This syntactic behaviour is unique to this verb, and the analysis of agreement below will account for this exception, explored in section 0.4.3.

As discussed in section 0.3.3, the traditional view that Breton verbs are nominal may not be accurate. According to Jouisseau & Rezac's 2006 proposal, the nominal properties that are often associated with verbal structures are inherent not to the verbal heads, but rather to a larger verbal projection. This is important because they propose that whenever we observe so-called "poor agreement" for 3SG, we are in fact observing agreement with this syntactic projection. In technical terms, this functional projection, which lies below TP, contains interpretable 3SG features and constitutes a closer goal for Agree than the low derived subject. As such, verbal agreement in Breton is governed by these 3SG features unless a subject incorporates and becomes the closest goal for Agree. This hypothesis not only accounts for the agreement patterns observed in Breton, but also accurately predicts its exceptions. Jouisseau 2009–2023 further investigated agreement co-occurring with a subject in various dialects and found that it is only present in cases of resumption, dislocated subjects, or echo pronouns. The exception to this is the Plougerne dialect in Leon, which tends to have higher subjects that occupy a position above the verbal projection bearing 3SG features, which confirms Jouisseau & Rezac's 2006 proposal. Finally, the last exception to the agreement pattern in Breton is the verb *kaout* 'to have' in Standard Breton, which agrees with all of its subjects. Jouisseau & Rezac's 2006 proposal accounts for this exception by predicting that this verb always brings the possessor or subject to a higher position in the structure than the intervening 3SG projection, resulting in a double occurrence of the possessor or subject.

#### 0.4.3 A unique agreeing verb *kaout* 'to have'

The verb *kaout* 'to have' is irregular in more than one respect. It is written as two separate words, with the agreement morpheme appearing on the left. In sentence (50), the form *o deus*



begins with the 3PL pronoun *o*, followed by an initial *d-* that also codes for agreement, here third person, and the root *-eus* of the verb, which recalls the *eus* form of the verb ‘to be’ or the preposition *eus* ‘from’. The first and second person singular exhibit an *a/e* alternation (1SG *am eus* vs. *em eus*, 2SG *ac’h eus* vs. *ec’h eus*). This suggests that in the rest of the paradigm, the left element, like *o* in (50), is hosted by the *rannig* and is obscured by it.

The following sentence illustrates the distinction between possession (... *o deus*), accompaniment (... *a zo gante*) and attribution (... *a zo din-me*). The lexical verb of possession also serves as an auxiliary (see ex. 10, 11). Contrary to the agreement pattern of other verbs, *kaout* fully agrees with its possessor/subject, be it lexical or pronominal. This is shown in (50), where the plural features of the subject are realised on *kaout* independently of the optional presence of the lexical subject between brackets.

- (50) *Daouילו o deus (ar merc’hed) met ar bilo*  
 two<sup>1</sup> bike 3PL 3.has DEF girls but DEF bike  
*a zo gante aze, hennezh a zo din-me.*  
 PTCL<sup>1</sup> be.1SG.PRES with.3PL there this.one.M PTCL<sup>1</sup> be.3SG.PRES to.me-me  
 ‘The girls possess two bikes but the one here with them is mine.’

Jouitteau & Rezac 2006 postulate an applicative projection internally to this verb derived from ‘to be at’. The applicative brings any subject above the verbal 3SG intervening projection. Jouitteau & Rezac 2008 check the predictions that this hypothesis makes against the different geolcts, where different degrees of grammaticalisation of ‘have’ lead to varying agreement patterns across dialects (see Jouitteau 2009–2022: ‘kaout’ for a synchronic view of variation, and Rezac 2021: 366–371 for a diachronic view).

## 0.5 Nominal domain

### 0.5.1 DP structure

The nominal domain resembles that of other Celtic languages, with a prototypical /determiner-noun-modifier(s)/ order. Determiners can be articles, possessives or independent determiners like quantifiers.

Stephens 1993 proposes a structure where the article or the possessor realizes an agreement head in a projection above the D head responsible for [+definiteness] licensing (51). Independent determiners like the quantifiers *kement* ‘as much, as many’ or *pep* ‘every, each’ can realize this D head. The locative adverb of analytic demonstratives *-se* ‘here’, *-mañ* ‘there’ or *-hont* ‘over there’, or an echo pronoun cliticises onto the right of an internal frontier (CL) of the nominal groups. This frontier excludes prepositional modifiers (Urien 1992) and relatives (Stephens 1993) as in (52).

- (51) AGR [ D [ Noun , Adjectives ] ]<sup>CL</sup> other modifiers ]  
*possessive kement, pep prepositional modifiers*  
*article relatives*

- (52) *an ti bihan brav(-mañ) a welan (\*-mañ)*  
 DEF house small beautiful-here PTCL<sup>1</sup> see.1SG.PRES -here  
 ‘this beautiful small house that I see’ Stephens 1993

The constituent formed by the noun and its following adjectives can be directly followed by a clitic like *-mañ* as in (52), or by a dependent direct possessor (*ti ar gward-koad* [house the guard-forest], ‘the house of the ranger’), but not both. Both structures are definite, but the former requires an initial definite article, whereas the latter requires its absence. In both cases, prepositional modifiers (53) and relatives follow.

- (53) *ti bihanbrav(\*-mañ) ar paotr war ar maez*  
 house small beautiful-here DEF man on the countryside  
 ‘the /\*this beautiful small house of the man’

Stephens 1993 further illustrates the cliticisation site with echo pronouns (*e di bihan-eñ* [his house small-3SGM]), which prepositional modifiers and relatives can follow (54a, 55a) but not precede (54b, 55b).

- (54) a. *e di bihan-eñ war ar maez*  
 his<sup>1</sup> housesmall echo.3SGM on the country  
 ‘his beautiful house in the countryside’
- b. *e di (\*war ar maez) bihan(\*war ar maez) -eñ*  
 his<sup>1</sup> houseon the country small on the country echo.3SGM  
 ‘his beautiful house (in the countryside)’
- (55) a. *e di bihan-eñ a welan*  
 his<sup>1</sup> housesmall echo.3SGM PTCL<sup>1</sup> see.1SG  
 ‘his beautiful house that I see’
- b. *e di (\* a welan) bihan (\* a welan) -eñ*  
 his<sup>1</sup> house PTCL<sup>1</sup> see.1SG small PTCL<sup>1</sup> see.1SG echo.3SGM  
 ‘his beautiful house (that I see)’

In the direct genitive construction, the noun of the possessed argument before its possessor can be modified by an adjective, several adjectives<sub>5</sub> or coordinate adjectives, but not by a prepositional phrase or a relative, as shown in (56) replicating Stephens 1993.

- (56) a. *ti bihanbrav ar paotr ( war ar maez / a welan)*  
 house small beautiful the man on the country / PTCL<sup>1</sup> see.1SG  
 ‘the beautiful small house of the man (in the countryside / that I see)’
- b. *ti bihanbrav (\* war ar maez / \* a welan) ar paotr*  
 house small beautiful on the country / PTCL<sup>1</sup> see.1SG the man  
 ‘the beautiful small house of the man (in the countryside / that I see)’

Following Stephens 1993, the direct genitive dependent structure results from the movement of the possessed argument in D. This movement triggers definiteness.

Much remains to be done on noun modifiers in Breton and their dialectal variation. For example, there are rare but sporadic cases across dialects where the article does appear before the direct genitive dependent (Jouitteau 2009–2023: ‘CSN’). The partitive prepositional structure (57) is identified as correct in written Standard Breton, but would be ungrammatical in spoken East-Kerne Breton, where a non-prepositional alternative is used (*ur werennad vat gwin*).

- (57) *ur werennad vat a win*  
 a<sup>1</sup> glass <sup>1</sup>good of<sup>1</sup> wine  
 ‘a good glass of wine’

## 0.6 Conclusion

Breton shares a number of typological properties with other Celtic and VSO languages. Among them are X(P)-VSO word order, embedded C-VSO orders, verbo-nominal affinities, a direct nominal genitive dependent, a tendency to incorporate pronouns that creates prepositional paradigms, and is tied to complementarity effects in agreement, etc.

Typologically, all the features just listed tend to cluster together. Early translators of the Bible noticed that they also cluster together in Hebrew, leading to various contact speculations. These must be evaluated in light of the fact that they also all cluster together in Arabic dialects, as well as in Chalcatongo Mixtec, a Mixtecan language of the Oto-Manguean group that was attested before the first contacts with Indo-European languages (Jouitteau 2005: 45).

Breton exhibits Brittonic features, also observed in Welsh, as well as some unique innovations resulting from its contact with several Romance languages over the past one to two millennia, rather than with English. These innovations include a verb for ‘to have’ and a verb-second order, with some limited SVO neutral word orders.

There are still many syntactic domains in Breton that require systematic analysis, such as embedded domains, aspectual structures, nominal domains, and tense semantics. Additionally, there is a need for further study of alternations in auxiliary selection (but see Schapansky 1995), optional detransitives of the experiencer or patient (but see Jouitteau 2009 for detransitives), adnominal modification, and the distribution and ordering of adjectives (but see Evenou 1987).

Further research is also needed on recursive copula constructions and on ellipsis, answers responding to a previously stated utterance (responsives) and tag-questions. Discourse studies (see Dressler 1972 and Schapansky’s work) and syntactically informed translation studies (like Rottet & Morris 2018 for Welsh) could contribute to the study of contact phenomena. To test the replicability of the formal descriptions of Breton, we have considered the judgments of a traditional native speaker of the East-Kerne variety, which exemplifies the core syntactic properties of Breton, with some exceptions. At the same time, our informant was a highly proficient user of Standard Breton.

Finally, the data given above replicates the Standard Breton data cited in the literature. Our findings have mostly confirmed previous generalisations, and we have identified Breton varieties that could serve as testing grounds for confirming what we have not. Checking for the full reproducibility of these generalisations in the various geolects of Breton could uncover divergent systems.

## 0.7 Abbreviations

The Fin head called *rannig* in Breton terminology is glossed PTCL. The numbered superscripts refer to consonantic mutations. They read as follows: 1 = lenition, 2 = spirantization, 3 = hard mutations (provection), 4 = mixed mutations, 5 = reduced mutation.

## 0.8 References

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