

a-affection and i-affection in Middle Welsh

43-410 A.D.	400-450	550 ca.	600 ca.	650 ca.	7th or 8th century
Roman period: adoption of Latin loanwords into British lexicon Lat. <i>captivitas</i> > Br. * <i>caŷtūtās</i> (> MW. <i>ceithued</i> 'captivity')	a-affection	beginning of i-affection	new vowel-quantity system	loss of final syllables	conclusion of i-affection

When:

(Simplified chronological chart of a-affection and i-affection developments during the Early and Old Welsh timeframe)

The most important phonetic-phonological changes due to a-affection and i-affection are attested in a particularly rich set of texts belonging to the Middle Welsh period, even though the Middle Welsh language itself (firstly testified by the oldest Arthurian tale, *Culhwch ac Olwen*) is dated between 12th and 14th century, and such linguistic phenomena seem to have apparently risen not after the Old Welsh period (7th-11th century).

Final a-affection:

- Br. *Sabrina* > MW. *Havren*

Adjectival morphology: since vowel alternation helps to identify the adjectival gender, it is worth knowing that the Brythonic feminine ending *-ā* used to cause a-affection, provoking a change between adjectival root vowels /i/ and /u/, respectively replaced by /e/ and /o/ in their feminine form.

- Br. **bīccā*- > MW. *fech* 'small'

British feminine ending *-jā* does not cause vowel alternations, because it behaves just like the masculine counterpart *-jo*.

- Br. **let'tīrjā* > MW. *llethir* 'slope' ≠ **llether*

"Short a-affection" should be a better definition in this case, however:

- Br. **bīrrā* > MW. *berr* 'leg'
- Lat. *tristitia* > MW. *tristyd* 'sadness' ≠ **tristed*

Could it be that even a-affection had an influence on the vocalization of *χ*?

- Br. **briχtā* > **breχtā* > MW. *breith* 'speckled' (feminine), but Br. **briχt-o-s* > MW. *brith* (masculine)

a-affection in Cornish and Breton:

- *ī* > *e* in Middle Cornish and Middle Breton
- *ū* > *o* in Middle Cornish and Middle Breton
- *e* > *a* in Middle Cornish and Middle Breton

The results are obscured: *e* (< Br. *ī*) was followed by an ending in *-ā*, therefore it could be assumed that a-affection had already occurred.

Final i-affection:

- /a/ yields /ei/ when it precedes a final syllable containing /j/:
Br. **par-jo*- > MW. *peir* > W. *pair* 'cauldron' (≠ Br. **parī*- > MW. *peir* > W. *pair* 'chieftain, lord')
- /a/ yields /i/ or /ei/ when it precedes a final syllable containing /i:/:
Br. **alarkī*- > MW. *elyrch* 'swan'
Br. **rīatrī*- > MW. *ryeidr* > W. *rhaeadr* 'waterfall'
- /o/ yields /i/ or /ei/ when it precedes a final syllable containing /j/:
Br. **būcoljo*- > MW. *bugeil* > W. *bugail* 'shepherd'
Br. **cofin* (Lat. *confinium*) > MW. *cyffin* 'border'
- /e/ becomes /i/: Br. **prestjo*- > MW. *prys* 'copse'
- /u/ becomes /i/: Br. **brunnjā*- > MW. *brynn* > W. *bryn* 'hill'

Internal i-affection influences vowels in every possible syllable.

- /a/ and /o/ yield /e/ when they precede a syllable containing /i/ or /i:/:
Br. **caldī*- > MW. *celli* 'grove'
Br. **molin* > MW. *mellin* '(corn-)mill'
- /a/, /o/ and even /e/ yield /ei/ when they precede a syllable containing /j/:
Br. **cal-jāco* > MW. *ceiliog* 'cockerel'
Br. **odjon* > MW. *eidon* 'ox'
Br. **pencerdjēd* > MW. *penceirdieid* > W. *penceirdiaeth* 'office of the master bard(?)'

Double affection:

- Br. **castellī* (> **castīll*) > MW. *cestyll* 'castles'

i-affection with vocalization of *χ*:

British final *-oxtū* and *-ognī* give the same results as *-uχtū* and *-ugnī*, becoming MW. *wyth* 'eight' (C. *eath*, B. *eiz* < Br. **oxtū*) and *wyn* 'lambs' (≠ lenited form of MW. *gwyn* 'white' < Br. **ujndo*-) due to i-affection.

Nominal morphology: i-affection triggers vowel alternations caused by the addition of some of the main plural suffixes, namely *-(y)eu*, *-(y)on*, *-(y)eit*, *-i*, *-yd*, *-oed*, *-ed*, *-et*, *-ot*. The triggering may occur in two ways:

1. The first way is the more discontinuous one: /j/ in the last syllable causes internal i-affection towards the stem vowel of the plural form. It often happens with endings like *-i*, *-(y)on*, *-yd* or *-(y)eit*.

MW. *gwas* 'youth' > *gweissyon* 'youths'

2. The second plausible triggering regards the stem vowel of the singular form instead: i-affection occurs because of an original singular ending containing /i:/. This vowel alternation is also known as reversion.

MW. *riein* 'maiden' > *rianed* 'maidens'

Adjectival morphology: vowel alternations are mostly influenced by i-affection, and they are decisive to create plural adjectives that match with the main plural noun.

- MW. *bydar* (singular) 'deaf' > *bydeir* (plural).

In addition to this, the plural suffix *-(y)on*, often required to form the plural of many adjectives and nouns, may undergo the changes of internal i-affection:

- MW. *claf* (singular) 'sick' > *cleifyon* (plural).

Verbal morphology: i-affection triggers vowels of many verbal stems containing a low or mid vowel. A productive vowel alternation undergoes an analogical levelling.

- MW. *cadw-af* 'keep' alternates with *keidw* when the context is fitting for i-affection to act.

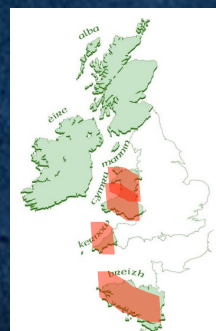
Furthermore, i-affection triggers vowel alternations that have introduced significant innovations with respect to the 3rd person singular of the present indicative tense. This is a development that originally derives from old *ī*-stems.

- MW. *gward* 'deliver', 3sg. *gweryt* 'delivers'

i-affection in Cornish and Breton:

- final:
Br. **marcī* > C. *mergh*, MW. *meirch* 'horses'
Br. **uracō* > B. *grek*, MW. *gwreic* 'wife'
- internal:
Br. **clamito*- > MC. *cleves*, MW. *clefyd* 'sword'
Br. **noujjo* > MB. *nevez*, MW. *newydd* 'new'
- vocalization of *χ*:
Br. **maxtrīn*- > OC. *meidrin*, MW. *meithrin* 'fostering'
Br. **noxtjēr* > OB. *neyzor*, MW. *neithior* 'wedding-feast'

A bunch of vowel alternations arise in Middle Welsh (and in other Brythonic languages), because the most frequent class of Brythonic nouns (o-stems) used to form their plural in /i:/, which triggered i-affection towards the root vowel.



Where:

Middle Welsh vowel sound system
(written in Modern Welsh orthography)

Front		Back	
i / y	/i, I/	u / i/	w / u/
e / e, ε/	y / a/	o / o, o/	
a			

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- Online resources:
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