A Study of *b/m* Consonant Variation

3.1. Initial *b/m* Confusions in Cornish[1]

A sporadic confusion between the phonemes /b/ and /m/ appears to have developed in Middle and Late Cornish.[2] This *b/m* variation is typically found in initial position and entails the replacement of [m] by [b] in a small number of common nouns such as LC. *belin* < OC.&LC. *melin* "mill" L. *molīna*,[3] MlC. *bōs* < *mōs* < OC. *muis* "table" < L. *mēnsa*[4] and LC. *beneûas*, *beneûez* "awl" W. *mynawyd* B. *minauoed*.[5] It is seen most often in occasional words from Late Cornish and in late forms of place-names like *Bolingey* < **melin+jy* "mill-house".[6] However, a few irregular instances in other parts of speech suggest that the phenomenon was already developing by the time that the Middle Cornish plays were written. The unusual features of these have important consequences and are discussed below. In addition, there are some occasional confusions of medial /b/ and /m/ that need to be assessed.

It seems clear enough that this change was not directly related to pre-occlusion described above, even though the nasal continuant [m] and the equivalent voiced labial stop [b] is at issue in both cases. Although pre-occlusion eventually resulted in the sound change [m] > [^{b}m] > [b] in polysyllables, the intermediate stages are well attested and, moreover, it is

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[1] This investigation came about as a result of some related research on a defective Middle Cornish verb that I undertook in 1999 and comments made upon it by Dr. O.J. Padel, 1/1/1999. I am grateful for a number of examples that he suggested, which are hereafter marked OJP in square brackets.

[2] Since consonant length is not at issue here, it is left unmarked to avoid confusion. However, the question of whether initial /mm/ was preserved after lenition is addressed at § 3.2 below.

[3] *melin*, *belin* Lhuyd, AB 92c "mill" [OJP], *melin* Voc. Corn. 913 (Ælfric *miln*).

[4] *war ow bos* PC 813 "upon my table" [OJP] translating Luke xxii.30, cf. *war en foys* PC 45a [OJP] and *muis* Voc. Corn. 843. See NCED, p. 112, *mos* "table".

[5] *beneûas* Lhuyd, AB 23a "an awl" [OJP], *beneûez* 157b; GPC, p. 2534; GIB, p. 2239. GPC cites the Welsh dialect forms *bin(i)ewid*, *binawid*, *binawad* etc. for *mynawyd* in the standard language.

[6] CPNE, pp. 79, 160-1, 246 (St. Mawgan-in-Pyder, Perranzabuloe) [OJP], *Barbolingey*, pp. 17, 161, 244 (St. Austell). The equivalent OC. **melindi* is not attested [see *melin*].

a feature limited to non-initial position.[7] In contrast to pre-occlusion, which was a regular sound change, the confusion of initial /m/ with /b/ was a far less regular and predictable phenomenon.

It should be pointed out that the extant words containing unexpected /m/ > /b/ are relatively rare and that most items are attested only once with /b/ in the entire corpus of recorded Cornish. On the one hand, this is only to be expected, since even mundane words are sometimes known from only a few examples. However, it is significant that the vast majority of lexemes were left apparently unaffected in Middle Cornish, which is a much better documented period.[8] There are no attested instances in extant Old Cornish, so no categorical statement can be made about whether *b*/*m* variation occurred. The intention of this study is to deduce when and how such confusions came about and whether this constituted a significant sound change. I have been unable to find any evidence for confusions of initial /m/ with /b/ in Old Breton and Old Welsh, even though the potential confusion of original /m/ and /b/ under lenition arose from the fact that the lenition products of these sounds fell together in neo-Brittonic. The falling together of $m > \mu > v$ with $b > \beta > v$ under lenition is discussed fully by Jackson.[9]

It is obvious at least that lenition of these sounds in initial position could explain the confusion of /b/ and /m/ in some words, but this alone does not show why it is nearly always words with /m/, not /b/, that are seen with an unetymological consonant. Despite the small total sample of all of the examples under discussion, it nonetheless seems unlikely to be mere coincidence. Moreover, masculine words such as *beneûas* "awl"

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[7] For further discussion of pre-occlusion in both monosyllables and polysyllables, see chapter § 2.
[8] Place-names with /b/ for /m/ are also frequent, but my use of this material is limited because of the ongoing research by O.J. Padel. For the most part, reference is made hereafter to his CPNE.
[9] LHEB, § 94-101, pp. 480-495.

(W. *mynawyd*) might be expected perhaps to occur most frequently without lenition, since the article would not mutate them.

Initial lenition after the article is by far the most productive marker by which speakers differentiate between masculine and feminine words in all of the extant Celtic languages.[10] Of course, both masculine and feminine nouns would equally be affected after leniting prepositions, for example, but the perceived default value of the initial consonant would be likely to be the unlenited form. It might be supposed that this would then be unlikely to cause confusion. By contrast, feminine nouns would appear after the article so frequently that the lenited initial might be taken as the default value.[11] Since initial /b/ and /m/ have the same lenition product, the potential for confusion is clear. Even so, lenition is not by any means the only conceivable factor that could frequently lead to such confusions of the two initials. It is not immediately obvious, for instance, how confusions of initial /b/ and /m/ in masculine words can be satisfactorily explained on this model. As a result, incorrect de-lenition could be only a partial explanation of the observed facts.

The fact that the evidence for confusions of initial /b/ and /m/ is derived from a variety of manuscripts of the Middle and Late Cornish periods, as well as from place-name evidence, tends to indicate that such phonetic variations were probably widespread amongst all speakers. That is not to say necessarily that any given speaker would frequently make either de-lenition errors or any related confusion. Instances of these confusions are slightly more common in Late Cornish, but this could be based upon the fact that the Late Cornish examples are quoted as isolated words. The majority of instances occur in place-names. When comparing these to the few instances that occur in Middle Cornish texts, it should be

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[10] Although lenition in Goidelic consists of spirantisation, while in Brythonic it involves the voicing of some consonants and the spirantisation of others, its value as a marker of gender is no different.

borne in mind that the latter necessarily do not occur in pausa. It is not easy to judge what effects these evidential differences might have on the relative frequency of forms, so caution should perhaps be exercised. The paucity of Middle Cornish evidence might allow for various speculative explanations: for instance, the ability to write might be given as evidence that Middle Cornish scribes' greater education could be a factor, or their access to written materials in Cornish as a conservative influence. The greater strength of the community of Middle Cornish speakers than those of the Late period might also help preserve older forms. However, none of these suggestions amount to any more than plausible speculation.

Firm conclusions should not therefore be drawn about the relative frequency of examples in these two periods, in particular because there are far too few instances *overall* to attempt any sort of statistical analysis or exact dating. But it seems to be a reasonable hypothesis that initial /m/ was sometimes mistakenly realised as [b] in a very few words, and was occasionally liable to become /b/ in individual words. It is possible that this might occur on a local basis as well as within the wider linguistic community. Presumably the initial consonants of less familiar words would be relatively more likely to be confused, since there might be less pressure to correct them. It is also reasonable to imagine that such confusions might have become more frequent in Late Cornish, since the declining use of the language might make increasing scope for confusion of the initials of unfamiliar words. There is no reason to suppose from the limited evidence, however, that this was ever any more than sporadic.

It is not easy to understand why cases of initial /b/ > /m/, the reverse change to that described above, are virtually absent, since confusion could theoretically have arisen about the lenition product of /b/ just as it could about that of /m/. Nor is it clear why masculine nouns

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[11] The numeral *un* "one" lenited exactly like the article and does not need to be dealt with separately.

show /m/ > /b/ just as often as feminine nouns. It is therefore necessary to examine the origins of the affected phonemes as well as to investigate the various mechanisms that could potentially have caused these initial consonant changes on a case by case basis.

3.2. The Sources of /b/ and /mm/ in neo-Brittonic[12]

Original Brittonic /b/ and /m/ would only have remained unchanged in initial position in Cornish, since lenition would everywhere else have resulted in /β/ and /μ/ in neo-Brittonic. In both Cornish and Welsh these eventually fell together as /v/, since /μ/ was eventually de-nasalised; in Breton the nasal quality was normally transferred to the preceding vowel.[13] After the definite article, the initial consonant was left without lenition in some cases but lenited in others.[14] Two contrasting examples of this are Brit. *sindos monijos* "the mountain" and Brit. *sindā molīna* "the mill", which would have respectively become CBr. *in moniδ* > C. *an meneth* and CBr. *in μolīn* > C. *an velin*. In both, /m/ was now effectively in internal lenition position; but the former became reinforced by sandhi and was not lenited while the latter remained at first unchanged. The precise nature of this reinforcement was considered to be gemination by Harvey and increased tenseness by Greene, but in either case original /m/ was not reinforced in the feminine example and was subsequently spirantised at the time of lenition.[15] For the sake of completeness it should be added that original geminate /mm/ (or tense /M/ according to Greene) would also have remained unlenited, but since it did not occur in initial position it is largely irrelevant here.

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[12] The length of initial consonants is marked for the purposes of this section.
[13] LHEB, § 95-97, p. 481-486.
[14] A. Harvey, "Aspects of Lenition and Spirantisation", CMCS 8 (Winter 1984), pp.87-100.
[15] Harvey, *ibid.*, p. 93; D. Greene, "Gemination and the Spirant Mutation", *Celtica* 7 (1966), pp. 116-19. The question of gemination or tenseness is discussed more fully at § 2.6.

Likewise, masculine words beginning with /b/ (or any other initial consonant) would have avoided lenition through a similar reinforcement of the phoneme while feminine words would not. The process may not have actually been this simple, but it was later generalised regardless of the original phonetic environment, so it may be treated as reasonably accurate here. In lenition position, voiced consonants were spirantised while previously unvoiced consonants were voiced in Brittonic. This meant that /b/ became the spirant /ß/, but /p/ generally fell together with unlenited /b/ of whatever origin. This could include original /bb/ in internal position. However, original /mm/ could not fall together with the lenition product of a previously unvoiced counterpart, since no such phoneme existed. Like the resonants /nn/, /ll/, /rr/, original /mm/ probably remained unchanged, as I have argued elsewhere.[16]

The fact that /b/ seems to have been generalised internally, while /mm/ was probably still possible, is not relevant to the treatment of *initial* consonants in Cornish, but the confusion of /m/ and /b/ seems to occur in one example in internal position.[17] The exceptional variant *duyow hamlos* "Maundy Thursday" appears in the Ordinalia for the expected *deyow hablys* < L. *capitilavium*.[18] The recent discovery of BK adds the example *camblys* < *cablys* "inculpated", which would be a homophone of **ca(m)blys* "Capitilavium".[19] The latter would correspond to MlB. *Dez Yaou Hamblit* V. *ieu Hamblid* OB. *caplit*, *ceplit* W. *cablyd*.[20] This example shows that the change is not /b/ > /m/ here, but epenthesis of a nasal element /–Vbl–/ > /–Vmbl–/ and subsequent assimilation of the

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[16] See § 2.2 above.

[17] cf. MlC. *hombronkyas* PA 76c, *hembronk* OM 1873, *hembronko* BK 193d (W. *hebrwng* MlB. *hambrouc* ModB. *ambroug*), but these never occur without epenthesis /–mb–/ < /–b–/.

[18] *duyow hamlos* PC 654, *deyow hablys* PA 41c. Initial spirantisation is fossilised in this phrase in CB. because L. *dies Iovis Capitilavi* contained /s/ before the affected consonant, which caused spirantisation in the same way as *esjās* "her". See HPB § 438, p. 320.

[19] *camblys* BK 153d, *cablys* PC 2434. Nance reconstructed the verb-noun as **cably*, later **cabla* on the basis of the 3.s. imperfect indicative, i.e. *ascable* PA 35d. See NCED, pp. 17-8, 189 (corrigenda).

[20] HPB § 438, pp. 319-20 & n. 4, § 692, p. 482.

plosive to give /–Vml–/. Although the phoneme /b/ ultimately gave /m/, this is clearly an unrelated sound change. Firstly, it does not occur in initial position and presumably cannot therefore be a hypercorrection of any sort. Moreover, /b/ was not immediately lost but acquired a nasal prefix /m/ before the etymologically single /b/ (< original /p/).

The isolated form *nampith* < *neppyth* "something" in the Tregear Homilies appears to show a related, but not identical change.[21] This compound contained /b+p/ > /pp/ *neb+pyth* (compared with /b/ in the previous example), in which the first portion of long /pp/ became pre-nasalised to give /mp/.[22] The vowel in both cases may have been uniquely nasalised. In the case of *cablys > camblys* this allowed an epenthetic nasal prefix to arise /b/ > /mb/ but in *neppyth > nampith* the nasal element did not arise from epenthesis. These are rare changes that have equally rare parallels in Breton.[23] It is apparent that neither of these two examples is related to the sound change at issue here and that no further discussion of internal [b] and [m] is necessary.

3.3. Incorrect De-lenition in Feminine Nouns[24]

It has been suggested that hypercorrection of initial /m/ > /b/ in feminine nouns is most easily explained as the result of de-lenition.[25] The example MlC. *war ow bōs* for *war ow mōs "on my table" has already been cited, in which the feminine noun after the article *an vōs would normally have been lenited.[26] In this instance, however, it was instead de-lenited because neither /b/ nor /m/ could participate in the spirant

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[21] *nampith* TH (JT) 1a.18.
[22] For the term "pre-nasalisation", see R.L. Trask, *A Dictionary of Phonetics and Phonology*.
[23] HPB, § 692, p. 482.
[24] The length of initial consonants is left unmarked hereafter, except where relevant to one paragraph.
[25] See § 3.1 above.
[26] The example *war en foys* [OJP] cited at § 3.1 has graphemic initial <f> for /v/.

mutation after *ow* "my". For whatever reason, /b/ was more obvious as the unlenited counterpart of /v/ in the mind of the Middle Cornish scribe than the correct /m/ in this instance. Consequently /m/ was realised as [b], giving the appearance of a sound change /m/ > /b/. Without any other evidence from the Middle Cornish texts, it is difficult to be sure whether this was merely realisational /m/ [m] > [b] or whether it was a permanent change /m/ > /b/ in this word. This might possibly vary between different localities or even between different speakers.

Considering that feminine words with initial /m/ and initial /b/ are numerous, it might be expected that incorrect de-lenition would be fairly common in the Middle Cornish texts. However, this single example is apparently the only instance in the entire corpus in which the mistake was made. Although the change might not be expected to be especially frequent, such a statistic is surprisingly. The potential problem may be illustrated with the example *an vynk* "the seat, bench" W. *bainc*, *mainc* B. *menk*, which appears regularly with lenition after the article, but whose unlenited initial happens not to occur in any other example.[27] This is given by Borlase as *benk* in his vocabulary.[28]

On the other hand, it cannot be argued from the sparse evidence of the same initial consonant variation in Late Cornish that the confusion in feminine nouns was subsequently any more frequent. As well as *belin* "mill" (< *melin*) cited above, the only other feminine noun that occurs with an unetymological initial /b/ in Late Cornish is Lhuyd's *bezlen* "mussel", the same word as OC. *mesclen*.[29] This is also given as *besl* by both Tonkin and Borlase, although they take this to be the singular rather

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[27] *an vynk* PC 2868.

[28] W. Borlase, *Antiquities, Historical and Monumental, of the County of Cornwall*.

[29] *bezlen* Lhuyd, AB 241c; *mesclen* Voc. Corn. 554. Tonkin's *mesilen* is probably a misreading of this example, since his vocabulary draws on Voc. Corn., Pryce, ACB, sigs. K1r-Bb4v.

than the collective noun.[30] The unusual loss of /k/ seems to have been followed by voicing, which would account for the graph <z>.[31] It is remarkable that these two words represent the entire attested extent of *b*/*m* variation in feminine words in Late Cornish. It may be that the known examples indeed represent a relatively rare phenomenon in the wider spoken language, although this must remain speculation.

A similar confusion is found in LC. *beisdar*, *beisder* "window", evidently a development from OC. *fenester* W. *ffenest(r)* ModB. *prenestr* V. *fenestr*.[32] This also appears in Lhuyd's *dre an veistir* "through the window", of which Tonkin's variant is *dre an veister*.[33] The loss of /n/ is unusual, but initial *v* > *b* is clearly an instance of de-lenition. The word was no doubt feminine as it is in Welsh and was formerly in Breton.[34] For the confusion to arise, etymological /f/ must have been voiced to /v/ after the article, which is evidence for "New Lenition" in Cornish.[35] Although this is not an instance of *b*/*m* variation, the process of de-lenition is identical. It may be significant that **meisdar* does not occur.

A similar instance of de-lenition, which is not a *b*/*m* confusion either, occurs in the newly discovered manuscript *Bewnans Ke*. It is not, however, a feminine word − nor is it strictly a Cornish word at all: the personal name *Mortygernus* is obviously de-lenited from **Vortygernus*, which does not occur.[36] This exceptional de-lenition /v/ > /m/ probably came about as a hypercorrection of a perceived error, namely that /v/ did not occur in initial position except under lenition. That **Vortygernus* was

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[30] *besl* Pryce, ACB, sigs. K1r-Bb4v; W. Borlase, *Antiquities, Historical and Monumental, of the County of Cornwall*.

[31] This must be "New Lenition", despite Jackson's comment, HPB § 506, p. 365, n. 2 and § 520, p. 375. See *beisdar* below.

[32] *beisdar* "window" Lhuyd, AB 59a, *beisder* 12c, 21c; *fenester* Voc. Corn. 765. Borlase also gives *beisder* [probably copied form Lhuyd], *Antiquities, Historical and Monumental, of the County of Cornwall*. Tonkin gives *besidar* [probably a copying mistake], Pryce, ACB, sigs. K1r-Bb4v.

[33] *dre an veistir* Lhuyd, AB 249b; *dre an veister* Pryce, ACB, sigs. K1r-Bb4v. Tonkin's attempt to connect this with *bysterden*, *mysterden*, *vysterden* is by mistaken etymology, see § 3.4 below.

[34] On the Breton change /f/ > /p/, see CCCG § 81 (3), p. 60.

[35] PHC § 13.3.2, pp. 308-9, § 15.2.2, p. 358.

a latinised form of Brit. *Wortigernos W. Gwrtheyrn "Vortigern" was unknown to the Cornish scribe. Perhaps **Bortygernus seemed like an unlikely name, especially if the scribe had heard names such as Mortimer, but in any case this was evidently a highly unusual dilemma. It should perhaps not be taken as evidence that speakers were as likely to select /m/ as /b/ in de-lenition, since unlenited initial /v/ did not occur.

The evidence for incorrect de-lenition tends to mitigate against any idea that the mutation system was in terminal decline, at least at the moment when the error was made and the word committed to writing. It reveals an awareness of the morphophonemic role of lenited versus unlenited consonants that is inherent to the mutation system. If the lenited forms had become fixed, we would expect to see lenited feminine nouns written sporadically in non-lenition positions. It seems unlikely that unlenited forms would become fixed, at least in feminine nouns, since the default value of the initial consonant would presumably be lenited.

Although the variation /m/ > /b/ does not occur in MlC. mygenow LC. miginaû, meginou "bellows", it does occur in W. megin, begin B. megin, begin.[37] The opposite change occurs in W. men, ben "waggon" Gaul. benna.[38] The most common feminine noun with both /m/ and /b/ in Welsh is benyw, menyw < CC. *běnā "woman" (both y fenyw with the article), but this may represent the older variation of forms seen in OIr. ben < CC. *benā, OIr. gen. sing. mnā < CC *mnās < CC. *bnās.[39] It is an uncertain example because no examples show whether the zero-grade was *bn– or *mn– in Old Welsh. Consequently, either menyw or benyw (or even both) might have the original value of the initial consonant.[40]

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[36] *Mortygernus* BK 429f. The name also occurs in the caption immediately above the stanza.

[37] CCCG, § 224 (5), p. 129; *mygenow* PC 2713 *miginaû* Lhuyd, AB 13c, *meginou* 243b. The plural was apparently used as a singular in Cornish, the original singular *megyn being unattested.

[38] CCCG, *ibid.*

[39] The form *menyw* is found predominantly in the counties of the former Dyfed.

[40] It is possible that *bn– and *mn– forms (like Ir. *ben and mnā*) were remnants of former inflections.

Although there are no examples of feminine words in Cornish with initial /b/ > /m/, W. *ben* > *men* shows that it might at least be theoretically possible. It might be wise not to compare Cornish and Welsh examples too closely, however, since Welsh has a nasal mutation that never developed in Cornish and Breton. This might very well affect the dynamics of the variation between /b/ and /m/, especially after the possessive pronoun *fy* "my". For instance, *fy men* "my waggon" could be analysed as either *fy+n+men* or *fy+n+ben*, so incorrect de-nasalisation could be a further factor based on the grammatical nasal mutation, which of course was impossible in Cornish.[41] This could of course affect masculine and feminine nouns equally.

Especially familiar or commonplace feminine words such as *myrgh* "daughter, girl" might be expected to be relatively safe from de-lenition, so that presumably **byrgh* could not occur, for instance.[42] Similarly, common phrases such as **ow mam* "my mother" would tend to set the default value as the unlenited initial in a speaker's mind. After all, **an vam* "the mother" might reasonably be expected to be a rarer phrase. This does not explain why *an venen* "the woman" would not theoretically have been incorrectly de-lenited as **menen*. The question of whether historic forms existed in **mn–* does not arise in Cornish as it does in Welsh, since there is no counterpart of W. *menyw* with initial /m/.

For the moment setting aside the consideration that *myrgh* and *mam* might have been inherently protected from de-lenition errors due to the familiarity of the words in everyday speech, it seems that the only factor that could make the equally familiar *benen* less susceptible to such errors is the fundamental asymmetry of the consonant system. The unlenited phoneme /mm/ had two sources: (1) original internal /mm/,

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[41] See further § 3.8 below.
[42] *myrgh* BM 185.

(together with original /mb/ > /mm/); and (2) initial /mm/ that arose from sandhi, as described at § 3.2 above, notably in masculine nouns after the article. Since /mm/ had no voiceless counterpart, it did not fall together with a lenited sound in the same way as /bb/ with /b/ < /p/. The treatment of these two sounds in internal position is not at issue here, but in word initial position there was no reason for the continuant /mm/ to be realised as a short sound, especially as there was no /m/ in that position with which to fall together after lenition. However, being a plosive sound, /bb/ would be inherently more unstable in initial position from an articulatory point of view, added to the fact that it could fall together here with new /b/ < /p/.[43] I deduce then the oppositions of unlenited–lenited initial consonants were respectively /mm/–/v/ and /b/–/v/.

Supposing that /rr/–/r/ and /ll/–/l/ had been lost after the Old Cornish period, initial /mm/ would be the only double consonant remaining in opposition to a single consonant in initial lenition.[44] Although there might well have arisen a tendency to shorten initial /mm/ to correct this, a second asymmetry is the fact that lenition /b/–/v/ stands in opposition to the spirant mutation /p/–/f/ whereas /mm/–/v/ has no counterpart. These two factors in combination meant that the entire series /b/–/v/–/p/–/f/ had more functional load than /mm/–/v/–/f/ within the mutation system.[45] To these might be compared another regular series such as /d/–/ð/–/t/–/θ/. I suggest that it was these asymmetries that favoured the variation /m/ > /b/ over /b/ > /m/.

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[43] Harvey rejects Falc'hun's evidence of initial fortes as an original feature, *op. cit.*, p. 97, contradicting Jackson, HPB § 132, pp. 85-6. George follows Jackson in this belief, PHC § 11.4.3, pp. 269-70. The evidence of B. *he ber* "her spit" versus B. *e ber* "his pear" etc. is not convincing because the phonemes effectively occur in internal position, where morphophonemic /bb/ could be restored by analogy in the latter case. There is no reason to believe that B. *ber* had /bb/ otherwise. Even if original initial [bb] had survived phonetically, which is doubtful, it is not necessarily a phonemic distinction in absolute pausa.

[44] See PHC § 18.2.2, p. 423 on the reduction of initial /ll/ and § 18.4.1, pp. 431-3 on the reduction of initial /rr/ in OC. Lhuyd's evidence for *Rhag* /r^h/ is suspect, since his Cornish contained much Welsh.

[45] The mutation /m/ > /f/ arose through lenition and provection, the "mixed" mutation of CB.

3.4. Initial /m/ > /b/ in Masculine Nouns

The Late Cornish word *beneûas*, *beneûez* "awl" has already been cited as an example of *b/m* variation in masculine nouns.[46] It is interesting that Lhuyd adds a footnote citing *binewid* (W. *mynawyd*) as an expected form of the word in the Demetian dialect of Welsh.[47] It is seen in the place-name *Porthbinawid* in Pembrokeshire, now officially restored to the standard spelling *Porth Mynawyd*.[48] Since W. *mynawyd* B. *minaoued* is a masculine word, it is unlikely that the Cornish word was feminine. It should therefore not have been mutated after the article, so incorrect de-lenition may seem to be problematic. Unless it could be shown that the grammatical gender of the word were variable, it seems that another explanation needs to be found for /m/ > /b/ in this word.

Lhuyd also gives the word *belender* "miller" < *melin+–or*, which is masculine unlike *belin* "mill" given above.[49] It is not especially important here whether the graph <nd> occurs as a result of pre-occlusion and metathesis or else simple epenthesis, but either is possible. More importantly, the word would probably have been affected by the associated word *belin* < *melin*, which was feminine. It is therefore difficult to draw any conclusions from this example about the treatment of masculine nouns that show initial /b/ for expected /m/.

Borlase and Lhuyd both quoted a late proverb containing the word *best* "moss".[50] If Nance's reconstruction **mūsk* is correct, which seems open to doubt, this would correspond to Welsh *mwswgl*, *mwsogl* (he cites

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[46] See § 3.1 above.

[47] *binewid* Lhuyd, AB 157b.

[48] B.G. Charles, *The Place-Names of Pembrokeshire*, vol. 1, p. 202; see also CPNE, p. 162.

[49] *belender* Lhuyd AB, 14a, 93a, 240c; also cited by Pryce, ACB, sigs. K1r-Bb4v; and W. Borlase, *Antiquities, Historical and Monumental, of the County of Cornwall*.

[50] *ne vedn nevra kuntl best* Pryce, ACB, sig. Ff1r. [OJP]. Lhuyd only gave the first part, *A mêan ez a rhyllio*. See W.C. Borlase, JRIC 2/1 (1866), p. 10. Thus Nance's note, NCED, p. 11; see also p. 143, although he gives Lhuyd's verb as *rhullio* "to roll". Since I can find this nowhere, the reference made by W.C. Borlase to the Lhuyd MS. must mean Lhuyd's unedited notebook, see § 1.2.3.3 (3) above.

the colloquial *mwswg*) and would also be masculine. The reconstruction relies upon irregular /sk/ > /st/, which is a plausible corruption, but there is unfortunately no way to be sure that it is the same word and therefore whether or not it is a masculine word with /m/ > /b/.

There is a curious compound *mysterden* (MlE. *mystirman*) "craftsman, guildsman", plural *mysterdy[n]s*, cited by Tonkin, for which he also gives the alternatives *vysterden*, *bysterden*.[51] His attempt to link the word with *beisdar* given above is clearly wrong, which accounts for the suggested meanings "architect", "mason" and "man of windows". If C. **myster* was not a separate loanword, as is Breton *mister* "mystery, mystery play" (< MedL. *misterium*), C. *mysterden* may show a macaronic substitution of C. *den* "man" for the English equivalent.[52] Following the frequent practice of Late Cornish, the English plural ending *–s* is used rather than a Cornish plural. The loss of the nasal in his plural *mysterdys* may be compared with LC. *boûnaz* "life" for MlC. *bevnans*.[53] Whatever the immediate source of the loanword, the incorporation of a Cornish element shows that the compound was apparently fully integrated into the language, so it is as good an example as a word of entirely native origin.

The form with initial /v/ shows that lenition was involved in the confusion, although it cannot be due to the gender identity of the word following the article. The word may be compared with MlC. *an mystery* "the mystery", which does not show mutation after the article.[54] The Breton word is also masculine, as in French.[55] Since there is no prospect that *mysterden* or any of its elements could ever have been feminine, *mysterden* (and its precursor **mysterman*) would not have been lenited

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[51] Pryce, ACB, sigs. K1r-Bb4v; see also NCED, p. 115.
[52] J.R.F. Piette, *French Loanwords in Middle Breton*, p. 145. The latter suggests C. **mysterman*.
[53] *boûnaz* Lhuyd, AB 13c; *bevnans* BM 117.
[54] *an mystery* CW 2119.
[55] Piette, *op. cit.*

after the article. Evidently the phonemes /b/ and /m/ could occasionally be confused irrespective of lenition conditions.

Apart from the evidence of Late Cornish, the survival of Cornish words in the English dialect of Cornwall also provides a number of examples of *b*/*m* variations. Nance made a collection of maritime vocabulary from dialect words, which includes some confusions of *b* and *m* in initial position.[56] All of the words in question apparently referred to the smooth blenny, *Blennius pholis*, although a few instances show that the meaning occasionally drifted, possibly due in part to a lack of zoological or fishing knowledge on the part of Nance's informants:-

mulgranack	Lizard Coves
mulgronock	Ray, 1662.
mulligranoc	Couch
mylgronak	Lhuyd (with Welsh *y* /ə/)
bulgroneck	Newlyn, Mousehole, Nance's "Western Coves" (Penberth, Sennen, Porthgwarra)
buldranak	Porthleven (also *buldrans,* plural, 1950)
bulgranit	(no place given by Nance)
bulgrannack	English Dialect Dictionary, but given the meaning "a bull toad", apparently in error.
bulcard	Ray, 1662.
bully-cod	Iago
pull-cronack	Courtney, after Bottrell.

It should be pointed out that initial *b* occurs rather more frequently than *m*, that there are no forms with lenited initial *v* on the list, and that a

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[56] R.M. Nance, *A Glossary of Cornish Sea-words* [headwords].

few of the forms have become rather corrupt. As Nance points out, the last example seems suspicious because Bottrell explains "pull-cronack, a small toad-like fish, found in pulans." Evidently it had been reinterpreted as containing C. *pŏl* "pool".[57] Several of the examples do not show lenition of the second element in the compound, but this is likely to be due to de-voicing of the middle segment of the cluster /–lgr–/ > /–lkr–/ in the English dialect rather than a change in Cornish. Likewise, one form shows /–lgr–/ > /–ldr–/ and *mulligranoc* has an epenthetic vowel.

It is fairly certain that this word is **mōr+cronek* "sea-toad", where the second element is from *croghen+–og* "skin" and found in Old Cornish as *croinoc* "toad" (Aelfric *tâdje*).[58] This explains the reinterpretation as "bull-toad" in one example, with the first element *bul–* < C. *mōr* "sea" (probably with a shortened vowel). The gender of this word is shown to be masculine by the Middle Cornish examples *cronek du* "a black toad" and *then cronek* "to the toad".[59] If the cognates W. *croenog* "with a skin" and B. *kroc'hennek* "thick-skinned" had been used as nouns as well as adjectives, the suffix W. *–og* B. *–ek* would be expected to form a masculine noun. No initial lenition would be expected after the article.

In summary, despite the scarcity of evidence and the uncertainty over the example *best* "moss", the evidence of masculine nouns with initial *b* for etymological /m/ demonstrates that /m/ > /b/ did occasionally happen in these words. In particular, the fact that well over half of the forms of *mulgranack* show initial /b/ point to the change being more than a purely sporadic, realisational change. In the light of the other evidence for *m > b* in Cornish, this is unlikely to have been a change that occurred in English dialect after the death of Cornish in their communities. It

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[57] *pol* Voc. Corn. 744.

[58] *croinoc* Voc. Corn. 617, glossing L. *Rupeta*.

[59] *cronek du* OM 1778; *then cronek* PC 2732; The example *gweth agis cronek* PA 47.4b "worse than a toad" does not provide evidence of grammatical gender.

seems too great a coincidence that no words of either gender with etymological /b/ are found with initial /m/ when the reverse occurs sporadically in both the Middle and Late Cornish periods.

3.5. Initial /m/ > /b/ in Cornish Place-names

The word *beneûas*, *beneûez* "awl" given by Lhuyd also occurs with /m/ > /b/ in the Cornish placename *Rosebenault*, but with /m/ in the very similar *Rosemanowas*.[60] Both contain the elements **ros+menawes* "promontory, hill-spur, moor"+"awl". These have etymological /s/ (which could have been voiced to /z/) before the affected consonant. Like the place-name *Porthbinawid* in Pembrokeshire, which has /θ/ in the same position, provection might be expected in these circumstances. There was no unvoiced counterpart of /m/ in the system, however; it should also be noted that subsequent /b/ > /p/ does not occur to give **Rosepenault*. The same second element occurs in *Kilmanant* and *Kilminorth*, which contain **kyl+menawes* "nook, back"+"awl", and probably likewise the field name *Callymynaws*.[61] All of these have etymological /m/, which occurs after a liquid consonant that would not be expected to cause provection. Another related toponym may be *Minmanueth* with /n/ preceding /m/.[62]

It is certainly possible that provection after /θ/ or /s/ (or perhaps /z/) could have played a part in the loss of the nasal quality of /m/ in cases like *Porthbeer Cove, Rosebenault* and W. *Porthbinawid*. It is worth pointing out on general grounds that Pembrokeshire Welsh might be expected to have much in common with Cornish from purely geographical considerations, especially in the past when sea-faring trade was an everyday reality and both places relied upon it heavily in their

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[60] CPNE, pp. 163, 203, 303 (Davidstow, Stithians) [OJP].
[61] CPNE, pp. 59, 163, 249, 274 (Braddock, Talland).

economies.[63] However, it might be straining credibility too far to suggest that linguistic exchange was especially great, since the languages were already dissimilar. However, *Porthbinawid* could possibily be recognised by a Cornishman as **porth b/menawes* and equally *Rosemanowas* could perhaps be recognised by a Welshman as **rhos b/mynawyd*. The only phonological difference of much significance is final assibilation in Cornish. An item of nautical vocabulary might be especially likely to be in common currency in coastal areas and in their toponyms. All the same, it may be best not to rely on a highly speculative nautical connection.

The place-name *Crowsmennegus* "cross"+?? may be compared with these examples: if it contains *benyges* "blessed" then it shows the change /b/ > /m/, the opposite to that seen above; if it contains **menawes* then it shows no change.[64] This is, however, a doubtful example.[65] The examples *Polborder* and *Polmorder* may be "pool of filthy water" and, if the second element is cognate with W. *baw* "dirt", may show /b/ > /m/.[66]

The examples *Porthbeer Cove* and *Porthbeor Beach* < **Porth Meur* "Big Harbour" also show /m/ > /b/ in a position where provection might be possible.[67] The word *porth* is masculine in Cornish and Breton, but in Welsh it may be feminine in place-names. It is remarkable that the change /m/ > /b/ is observed in an adjective following a masculine noun in these instances.[68] The place called *Porthbeer Cove* is contrasted to one nearby called *Perprean Cove*; and the place-names *Porthbean Beach*, *Porth Pean*, *Perbean Beach*, *Perprean Cove* and *Porthpyghan* leave little doubt that these are all from C. **porth byghan* "little harbour" W. *porth*

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[62] CPNE, pp.163, 282 (Scilly). Padel gives *men* "stone" here, not *myn* "edge" as might be presumed.

[63] See the comments on C. *bounder* W. *meid(i)r, moydir* "lane" at § 3.6 below.

[64] CPNE, pp. 20, 72, 162, 259 (Perranarworthal); *benyges* BM 560.

[65] The exx. *Calamansak* (Constantine) and *Kilmansak* (St. Pinnock) contain *kyl* "nook, back" and perhaps *myns* "size" BM 140 + *–ek*, hence "large" (B. *mentek*), see CPNE, pp. 59, 249, 274.

[66] CPNE, pp. 26, 187-9, 295, 297 (Pillaton, St. Austell 1731).

[67] CPNE, pp. 166, 191, 299 (St. Keverne, St. Anthony-in-Roseland) [OJP].

[68] To these may also be compared *Porth Mear* (St, Eval) and *Porth Meor* (St. Ives, Zennor) without the initial consonant change, see CPNE, pp. 166, 191, 300.

bychan B. *porzh bihan*, showing loss of the medial spirant.[69] In these cases /b/ is affected rather than /m/, sometimes showing apparent provection to /p/. The preceding /θ/ is sporadically lost in cases both with and without apparent provection.

There are a few more toponyms like *Bolingey* cited at § 1.1 above, which show /b/ in absolute initial position for etymological /m/. The place-name *Bydaldur* "blind water's edge" may contain **myn+dall+dour* "edge"+"blind"+"water".[70] *Ballaminers* "mill (of the) hill" apparently contains **melin+meneth*.[71] The name *Barrimaylor* contains **merther* "saint, martyr" and a personal name.[72]

There is also a contrast between *Park Belender* "the miller's field" and *Craufft an Melender* "the miller's paddock", which may be compared to *belender* cited above.[73] The former shows /m/ > /b/. The latter demonstrates that many of the examples cited here, at least those that have a noun as the second element, could at times have occurred in forms either with or without the intervening article *an*, which of course had final /n/.[74] As a consequence, initial /b/ in the following element might be assimilated to /m/, or conversely initial /m/ might be incorrectly restored to /b/ if the article was later dropped.[75] (This would not of course apply, except perhaps in error, to place-names whose second element is an adjective.) The article also occurs in *Park an Munkyer* "the cooper's field" (cf. Lhuyd's *bŷnkiar* "cooper") with /n+b/ > /m/.[76] There is apparently a change in the direction /b/ > /m/ in the form *Menallack* as a spelling for *Benallack*, which contains *banathel* "broom", which might be explained

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[69] CPNE pp. 22-1, 166, 191, 294-300 (St Keverne, Gerrans, St. Austell, St Michael Caerhays, St. Keverne, Talland (AD 1399) [OJP].
[70] CPNE, pp. 80, 167, 249 (St. Neot).
[71] CPNE, pp. 160, 163-4, 244 (Little Petherick).
[72] CPNE, pp. 164, 244 (St. Martin in Meneage). The sense is sometimes "martyr's grave".
[73] CPNE, pp. 71, 161, 175-6, 258, 287 (Mullion 1696, Madron 1670)
[74] CPNE, pp. 5-7. The presence or omission of the article in place-names is extremely fluid.
[75] See further § 3.8 below.
[76] CPNE, pp. 22, 175-6, 286-7 (Constantine 1649), cf. *Park Banker* (Paul); *bŷnkiar* Lhuyd Ab 174a.

by the former occurrence of the article.[77] It is interesting to note that forms with a de-voiced initial occur, e.g. *Penadlake* and similar spellings.[78] This seems to be because the syllable is unstressed, but it is difficult to see exactly how this might relate to *b/m* variation. The article could presumably not occur in the occasional *Mededland* for *Bohelland*, but only one element is certain.[79]

The assimilation of the initial consonant in *Park-Nevas* "field of the sheep", which seems to contain the plural *deves* "sheep", probably shows that the article has been dropped following assimilation /n+d/ > /n/.[80] A better known example is perhaps *Porth Navas* "sheep cove", which probably contains the singular or else a plural with lost i-affection through lowering of the vowel.[81] This is clearly a parallel effect to that seem in *Park an Munkyer*, although initial *d/n* variation is far less common in Cornish than its labial counterpart.[82] De-nasalisation may have occurred in *Carn Moyle* versus *Carn Boel* "bare rock-pile" and *Pen Bejuffin* "top of the ridge" (cf. Lhuyd's *mŷdzhovan* "ridge").[83]

Another curious place-name seems to show the change /b/ > /m/ rather than the more frequent /m/ > /b/, if *Zawn Buzz & Gen* means "gully (or cleft) of food and song".[84] It appears in the Tithe Apportionment (c.1840) as *Zawn Mug & Can*; if the second word is *bos* "food" then the second variant shows assimilation /n+b/ > /m/. The most likely possible derivations of *Buzz* appear to be *bōs* "food" (masc.), *mōs* "table" (fem.), *bōs* "dwelling-place" (masc.) or *bŏs* "bush" (masc.); and the most likely

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[77] CPNE, pp. 90, 16-7 (Mabe) [OJP: personal communication, 1/1/1999], *banathel* Voc. Corn. 697.
[78] I am grateful to O.J. Padel for providing some unpublished data illustrating this.
[79] Personal communication, Padel. The element **lann* is present, perhaps **bow-lann*, CPNE, p. 145.
[80] CPNE, pp. 81, 175-6, 288 (St. Keverne); *deves* BM 3578.
[81] CPNE, pp. 81, 190-2, 300 (Constantine); *daves* OM 127.
[82] See further at § 3.8 below.
[83] CPNE, pp. 38-40, 166-7, 177-80, 251-2 (St. Levan, Zennor, field name); *mŷdzhovan* Lhuyd AB, 74a.
[84] CPNE, pp. 205 [ex. not cited] (St. Just-in-Penwith) [OJP: personal communication, 1/1/1999].

derivations of *Gen* or *Can* seem to be *cān* "song" (fem.), *căn* "fluor-spar" (masc.), *gēn* "chin" (fem.) and *gĕn/gedn* "chisel" (masc.).[85]

It should be noted that pre-occlusion does not occur in the final consonant of the third word in this toponym, although that does not necessarily rule out elements containing short vowels. Place-names tend to be conservative and can be archaic, even when in current use, so the lack of such a diagnostic sound change may not be significant. The form given in the Tithe Apportionment does seem to show the late Middle Cornish change /z/ > /dʒ/ in final position; both forms show voicing of the initial consonant in **sawn > Zawn* (Jackson's "New Lenition"). The variation between *Gen* and *Can* may allow various interpretations.

It seems, however, that most permutations of the possible elements listed above are quite meaningless either as place-names or even as mere phrases. Since C. **sawn* means "gully, gully" B. *saon* W. *safn*, it does not appear that anything but "gully (or cleft) of food and song" makes a coherent phrase. Whatever the origin of such a whimsical name might be, it does at least make adequate sense. If that is indeed the derivation, the name **Sawn Bōs ha Cān* would appear to have been cited at least once with assimilation /n+b/ > /m/ in the form *Zawn Mug & Can*. If this derivation is rejected, either /b/ or /m/ could be the original initial of the second element and the direction of the change is unclear.

In very few of the above place-names is the affected element clearly identifiable as feminine. These include only *Ballaminers* with the feminine element *melin* "mill" and perhaps *Pen Bejuffin* if *mŷdzhovan* contains the feminine suffix *–en*. The cognates of this word are unknown.[86] The field name *Park-Nevas* probably contains the plural, while *Porth Navas* may perhaps contain the feminine singular MlC.

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[85] NCED [headwords]; see also CPNE [headwords].
[86] CPNE, p. 166. Padel suggests B. *moudenn* "mound of earth" as a possibility.

dauas (W. *dafad* B. *dañvad*).[87] The apparent i-affection in *Park-Nevas* and the generally poor sense of "the sheep's [singular] field/cove" tend to mitigate against the singular. Adjectives are apparently treated no differently from nouns in the above toponyms, the sandhi effects upon the initial consonant of affected element being naturally dependent on the phonetic character of the preceding sound.

In summary, several different phonetic effects can be identified that could cause confusion of initial /b/ and /m/. In the case of the toponyms associated with *belender < *melinor* "mill", *beneûas < *menawes* "awl" and theoretically other common words of both genders that show *b*/*m* variation, these words could obviously affect the place-names. In the case of *belender*, the associated *belin < melin* "mill" (a feminine noun) could be included by extension. In addition, initial /m/ would probably tend to lose its nasal quality under provection, since it has no unvoiced counterpart, which could be at least a contributory factor. The general identity of initial consonants under lenition, coupled with the asymmetry in the consonantal system described at § 3.2-3 above, would be likely to lead to more instances of de-lenition /m/ > /b/ than the reverse change, but could theoretically cause either. This has already been described in depth at § 3.3-4. The presence of final /n/ in the element preceding the affected consonant, whether this involved the article or a word like *pen* "head, top" or **Zawn* "gully, cleft" in a place-name, could result in assimilation /n+b/ > /m/. Presumably, this could be reversed by de-nasalisation in exactly the same way as de-lenition, which would apply equally to original initial /m/ and /m/ < /b+n/. I suggest that the combined effect of these factors created a situation in which the identity of initial /b/ and /m/, but especially the latter, tended to be variable.

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[87] *dauas* OM 127.

3.6 Initial *b/m* confusions in Breton and Welsh

3.6.1 Unetymological /m/ and /b/ in Breton

Similar confusions of initial *b* and *m* are attested in MlB, most of which arise from French loanwords with original /v/. Examples include *benell*, *banel* < Fr. *venelle* "passage, lane", *becc* < Fr. *vesce* "vetch", *benin*, *velim*, *venim* < Fr. *venin* "venom", *bergiez* < Fr. *vergier* "orchard" (with *–ez* in place of suffix), *beronic* < Fr. *Véronique* "vernicle, Veronica", *bilen* < Fr. *vil(l)ain* "villein", *bisaig*, *visa(i)g* < Fr. *visage* "face", *bitaill* < Fr. *vitaille* "victuals", *beag*, *ueag* pl. *beachou* < Fr. *voyage* "journey". Many of these remain in ModB., e.g. *bisaj* "face", *beaj* "journey". To these may be added *barlenn* "lap", *b/violoñs* "violin" and *mandoz*, *véntoz* "ventouse".[88] Of the words above, ModB. *binim* "venom" is masculine, but *banell*, "passage", *bisaj* "face", *beaj* "journey", *barlenn* "lap" are feminine, for example. Others may vary in gender, e.g. *violoñs* is masculine with initial /v/, but has probably been understood as feminine with /b/ in the dialects. Further examples are ModB. *beskont* < Fr. *viscompte* "viscount" and ModB. *bolontez* < Fr. *volonté* (f.) "will".[89] The variation in the f. word *gwerje*, *berje* "orchard" is interesting. The opposite de-lenition is rarer, e.g. MlB. *moez* ModB. *mouezh* V. *boéh* < Fr. *voix* "voice". It is not immediately obvious which initial is original in the native ModB. *mougev*, *bougeo*, which is cognate with C. **vooga* "fogou" (the Eng. initial is hypercorrect), apparently with C. *mouge* "smoke" (although it looks as if **gwo+*cou* "small cavity" might be confusable with it).[90]

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[88] These examples are from J.R.F. Piette, *French Loanwords in Middle Breton*, § 48, p. 54.

[89] HPB § 915, pp. 641-2.

[90] J. Loth, RC 27 (1906), 138ff; see CPNE, p. 238. mooge CW 1012. The C. **vooga* and *googoo* are distinct in Cornish place-names, although they and C. *fow* (W. *ffau*) may have influenced each other. I note further that ModB. *moged* means "smoke", while ModB. *moug* is an adj. "stifling".

It is fairly clear from the above examples that Breton does not normally tolerate initial /v/, although it may do so on occasion. All the same, there is a strong tendency to de-lenite to either /b/, or else /gw/ or /m/ in the examples seen here. There is considerable variation in the gender, but note that -*ell* and –*enn* are treated like the identical native Breton endings, which are always feminine. The words ModB. *gwernis* (m.) < Fr. *vernis* "varnish" and ModB. *gwetur* < Fr. *voiture* "car" show a third treatment (seen above in *gwerje*), both of which are common words in the modern language. However, the vast bulk of the words seen here were borrowed with /b/. As Jackson comments, de-lenition to /m/ occurs "much more rarely".[91] In fact, it probably occurs in fewer words than /gw/, if the examples here are generally representative.

Similarly, *b* and *m* are confused in the loanwords *mangounell*, *bangounell* (f.) < Fr. *mangonnel* "?", *mataras*, *bataras* (f.) < Fr. *materas* "mattress", *méndt*, *bendt* (and *mentenn*) < Fr. *menthe* "mint".[92] In each case the confusion is in the direction /m/ > /b/, not vice versa. The same is true of *megium*, *meghin* > *begin* "bellows", but the opposite is seen in the native *balauenn* > *balafen, malaven* "papillion" V. *maleu* B. *baelec* < **baglog* "priest", *bel* > *mell* "ball".[93]

3.6.2 Unetymological /m/ > /b/ in Welsh

The Welsh word *bawd* "thumb" < OW. *maut* is a good example of a masculine lexeme showing unetymological /m/ > /b/.[94] It frequently occurs in the phrase *bys bawd* with the same meaning. Although initial /m/ and /b/ are known to vary in some Welsh words, as has already been

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[91] *ibid.*, p. 641.
[92] Piette, *ibid.*, p. 55.
[93] É. Ernault, *Dictionaire étymologique du breton moyen*, printed in his ed. of *Le mystère de Sainte Barbe* [headwords].
[94] CCCG § 224 (5), p. 129.

seen in the case of W. *megin*, *begin* "bellows" and so forth, it is likely that an exceptional alliterative effect is found in *bys mawd > bys bawd*. The words W. *modrwy* "ring" (OC. *moderuy*) and W. *modfedd* "inch" show the original consonant.[95] The probable Cornish word *misue* (MS. *misne*) "inch" seems to be a cognate of *modfedd* with unexpected raising of the vowel where perhaps a spelling **mesva* might be expected.[96]

The phrase *in bateyl barthusek* "wondrous in battle" for **in bateyl marthusek* shows the same alliterative effect in Middle Cornish.[97] Even though it is presumably not caused by mistaken de-lenition of the adjective, it is nonetheless relevant to the processes described above in the sense that *any* example of /m/ > /b/, no matter what the cause, would reinforce the general tendency towards such confusions. The loss of nasal quality could perhaps equally be ascribed to assimilation of the consonant to the oral quality of the preceding /l/ instead. This may have been a factor in addition to the alliteration, but it was probably secondary.

No change /m/ > /b/ equivalent to OW. *maut > ModW. bawd* is found in Cornish. The phrase *beez meas* "thumb" occurs in a gloss from the seventeenth century, clearly written and almost certainly not a mistake for *mear* "big".[98] The Bodmin Manumissions give the name *argant moet* "silver thumb", which is cognate with ModB. *meud* < MlB. *meut*.[99] Had the change occurred in Cornish, the resulting **be(a)s* would be so similar to *bys* "finger" that the two masculine lexemes would probably fall together. That this would be increasingly likely in later MlC. and LC. is

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[95] *moderuy* Voc. Corn. 328.

[96] As noted by Hawke, this was printed in "On the Antiquity of , Variety, and Etimology of Measuring Land in Cornwayl", anonymous, in Thomas Hearne, *Collection of Curious Discourses*, 2nd ed., 1773, vol i., pp. 195-7 from BL Cott. Faustina e.v., see ref. in R. Carew, *Survey of Cornwall*", p. 323. See NCED, p. 110 [headword: *mesva*].

[97] *in bateyl barthusek* RD 1178.

[98] NLW Bodewryd MS. 5E (2r.a33), ed. A. Hawke, "A rediscovered Cornish-English vocabulary", *Cornish Studies* 9 (2001), series 2, pp. 83-104. I am grateful to A. Hawke for bringing this example to my attention long before he gave the original lecture in Aberystwyth (see bibliography).

[99] H. Jenner, "The Manumissions in the Bodmin Gospels", JRIC 21/2 (1923), pp. 235-60, esp. p. 259.

shown by Lhuyd's form *bēz* "finger".[100] It seems certain that /i:/ was lowered to /e:/ in this word, something that could probably happen sporadically at any time in Middle Cornish.[101] It is impossible to be sure whether the two words indeed fell together, but if so an alternative collocation such as **bys bras* "big finger" might be expected to arise in order to make a distinction. This is in fact cited by Nance but he gives no evidence, while the Breton meaning of *biz-bras* is "middle finger".[102] However C. *beez creese* is given with this meaning in the same glosses as *beez meas* "thumb"; it seems probable that usages could vary locally, as in Welsh and Breton. Unless a form C. **bys bēs* were found glossing "thumb", it would not be possible to say whether or not the sound change had occurred in this word.

It is technically plausible, but unlikely, that the type of sandhi and de-nasalisation described above in W. *Porthbinawid* and C. *Rosebenault* contributed to the change in W. *bys bawd < *bys mawd*. It is also possible that the Welsh nasal mutation contributed to the confusion. Higher numerals such as *saith* "seven" and *naw* "nine" would not normally be used to count thumbs even in Middle Welsh, when the mutation affected a wider range of words than at present (cf. *saith muwch* "seven cows" in Genesis xli. 27).[103] Similarly, *yn* "in" would be irrelevant to this word, leaving only the possessive *fy* "my" as a potential cause of nasal mutation.[104] This might plausibly result in *fy mawd* "my thumb" being interpreted as a nasal mutation *fy+n+bawd* and the mutation being

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[100] *bez* Lhuyd, AB 54c.

[101] The argument about whether CB. retained a distinction between /i:/ and /ɪ:/ is not relevant to a study of consonants, but I tend to follow Jackson, LHEB, § 7 (1), p. 284 rather than George, PHC § 7.2.1-2, pp. 119-20 and Williams, *Cornish Today*, § 3.6-7, p. 23-4. George's orthographic frequency tables show <e> type spellings for his /i:/ as much as for his /ɪ:/, pp. 114-7, 121-123. Nance clearly assumed that the vowels fell together. My loose notation should not be taken as a judgement of this case.

[102] NCED, p. 17 [*bys*], p. 109 [*mēs*].

[103] S.J. Williams, *A Welsh Grammar*, § 62, p. 44; CCCG § 196, p. 119.

[104] Presumably exclamations such as *myn Dewi* "By St. David", *myn diain i* "my devil" are linked with the rare variant *my* (B. *ma, va* V. *me, men d–, mem b–*) referred to by Jackson, HPB, § 427, p. 312.

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reversed. Although the related *modfedd* "inches" certainly *could* be used with higher numerals causing nasal mutation, this is probably irrelevant because **bys mawd > bys bawd* was likely to have been the additional factor that contributed most to the permanent change of initial in this word. What this demonstrates is that several factors could probably add up to create a strong tendency for a change of initial consonant, which is exactly what has been shown in Cornish at § 3.5 above.

Since Cornish and Breton did not develop a nasal mutation, this could obviously not add to any tendency towards hypercorrect de-nasalisation of initial /m/ to /b/ in Cornish words. The so-called "nasal mutation" in these two languages arose much later and was not a mutation in the usual sense.[105] In fact, it was a reasonably frequent but sporadic sandhi effect. The initial consonant changes caused by assimilation after final /n/ of the article are discussed further at § 3.8 below.

Precisely the same confusions of initial /b/ and /m/ occurs in Welsh toponyms after the word *yn* "in", where the nasal mutation is expected in standard Welsh.[106] Melville Richards gives *Bach'heleth* 1326 (Machelych, Whitechurch), *Bahenbeech* 1296 and *Bachymbyd* 1524 (Machynbyd, Bachymbyd), eight variants of *Bathavarne* (Mathafarn, Bathafarn) between 1291-2 and 1524 and *Bechles* (possibly Mechlas or Mechlais) ca. 1700.[107] All of these apparently contain **ma-* "field" < Brit. **magos*. He also gives the toponym *Machynys*, *Bachynys* in various spellings dating to between 1499 and 1830.[108] This seems to contain *bach+ynys* "little isle" and may show the opposite change /b/ > /m/. He comments that "It should be noted that as Welsh *m* and *b* both lenite to *f*, there is frequent confusion between initial *m-* and *b-*, with the result that

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[105] LHEB § 186-9, pp. 639-43; HPB § 491-8, pp. 356-60; CCCG §197-8, p. 119-20.
[106] CCCG §196, p. 119.
[107] M. Richards, "Welsh Place-Names Found in Continental Celtic", ÉC 13 (1972-3), pp. 389-404 [OJP].
[108] M. Richards, "Machynys", BBCS 25 (1972-4), pp. 420-1 [OJP].

Mathafarn and *Machynbyd* become *Bathafarn* and *Bachynbyd…*"
Although this is a perfectly sound explanation, for example in a phrase
like *i Fathafarn* "to Mathafarn", he does not mention the additional effect
of the nasal mutation, which would have been an important contributory
factor that could have affected the same range of place-names.

Ifor Williams give *Maesaleg*, *Basaleg* and clearly considers that
the nasal mutation after *yn* "in" is the explanation of such forms,
considering that *ym Mangor* "in Bangor" and *ym Merthyr* "in Merthyr" do
not show whether /b/ or /m/ was the original consonant.[109] He gives *bath*,
math "sort", *bawd*, *modrwy* "thumb, ring", *bicar*, *micar* "vicar" and
bigwrn, *migwrn* as comparisons, all of which are masculine words.[110] He
does not mention de-lenition, but the word *bicar*, *micar* is standard Welsh
ficer "vicar" and incorrect de-lenition to both /b/ and /m/ is seen in these
forms, presumably because radical *f* /v/ is not found in initial position in
native words (except apocopated forms like *fory* for *yfory* "tomorrow"
and words such as *fel* "like" that have a fossilised mutation). The word
vicer, *vicar* must have sounded like a mistake to a monoglot Welsh
speaker who did not perhaps know that *vicar* was a loan from English,
especially after the article where only feminine nouns should have been
lenited. It might be observed that, although *bicar* and *micar* still occur in
the dictionary, they are apparently defunct in modern bilingual Wales.

An interesting word *meid(i)r*, *moydir* occurs in the Pembrokeshire
dialect of Welsh that appears to be cognate with OC. *bounder* and Ir.
bóthar "a road".[111] The meaning is usually "lane", although the meaning
given in Voc. Corn. is AS. *læswe* "pasture". Although the etymology is
uncertain (perhaps linked to W. *beu*– "cow" in *beudy* "cowshed"), the

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[109] I. Williams, "Maesaleg, Basaleg", BBCS 7 (1933-5), p. 277 [OJP].

[110] The word *math* is an old neuter and in some phrases appears lenited like a feminine noun. To this may be compared *dau funud* "two minutes" but *y funud hon* "this (very) moment".

[111] M. Richards, "Welsh Meid(i)r, Moydir, Irish Bóthar 'Lane, Road' ", *Lochlann* 2 (1962), pp. 128-34; CPNE, pp. 27-8; Voc. Corn. 727. On the early intrusive /n/, cf. *hembronk* OM 873 (W. *hebrwng*).

words are too similar for it to be likely that they are unrelated. There are no examples of *b–* forms in Welsh, but in both languages the word is feminine and largely occurs lenited in place-names. The initial /m/ is certainly a Welsh change to an original WC. *boudr*, with which may be compared *menyw* for *benyw* "woman" in the same dialect area.

It seems that both lenition *and* the nasal mutation are likely explanations for the confusion of initial /b/ and /m/ in these examples and no doubt reinforced each other. Since the locative sense of *yn* "in" is particularly relevant to the nasal mutation in Welsh place-names, it is likely that mistaken de-nasalisation is one of the most important effects in the initial consonant variation in Welsh. This has no doubt been reinforced by the confusion of /b/ and /m/ under lenition, which may be an equally significant factor, especially after the prepositions *o* "from" and *i* "to" with respect to toponyms. In words other than place-names, the nasal mutation occurs under limited conditions, i.e. after *fy* "my" and *yn* "in", although these too have a high functional load in the language. The lenition of feminine nouns after the adjective, of all nouns after certain prepositions, of adjectives after feminine nouns, as well as any other sundry conditions for initial lenition, would all contribute to the general tendency towards confusion of the initial consonants /b/ and /m/.

The discussions at § 3.2-3 above about asymmetry in the mutation system apply equally well to Welsh as to Cornish, and indeed Breton. In the case of Welsh, which does not have provection, the series of oppositions /mm/–/v/ is shorter than the series /mm/–/v/–/f/ found in Cornish and in many dialects of Breton.[112] Consequently this may add to the tendency to prefer initial /m/ > /b/ over /b/ > /m/. In addition, the nasal mutation of /p/ provides a de-voiced phoneme /m$^\text{h}$/ as a counterpart to

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[112] The standard language has /v/, not /f/ for the results of the mixed mutation of /m/ and /b/, although the results can include /f/ and /$^\text{h}$w/, see HPB § 465-79, pp. 337-349.

/mm/, which probably reduces the asymmetry further. The circumstances of these confusions are slightly different in Welsh from the situation that existed in Cornish and exists in Breton, so it may be wise to be cautious in making direct comparisons, especially because the Welsh nasal mutation may be a factor in the confusion of these initial sounds.

3.7. Further Confusions of /b/ and /m/ in Cornish

If the confusion of initial /b/ and /m/ was indeed frequent, parts of the verbs *bos*, *bones* "to be", **betha* "to dare" (or perhaps **bedhes*, **medhes* "to dare"), and **methes* "quoth" could theoretically appear with an unetymological consonant in initial position, possibly as a result of confusion with each other.[113] Since a leniting verbal particle would normally be expected to precede the verb, the circumstances of non-lenition would seem to be very limited in their potential application. This possibility may, however, provide an explanation for the curious example in *Origo Mundi* (*Ordinalia* I) which may contain either the verb-noun "to dare" or else perhaps "quoth":-

Eua ny allaf methes, rag ovn ty tho'm kuhuthe[114]

Eve, I cannot … (?), for fear that thou accuse me.

If this were the verb "to dare" then *methes* might be either an incorrectly de-lenited form of **bethes*, or it might just possibly have the original initial /m/, and Nance's revivalist reconstruction of UC. *bedha* is

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[113] W. Owen Pughe gives a verb-noun W. *meddyd*, but this may be spurious, *Geiriadur Cymmraeg a Saesoneg: Welsh English Dictionary*, vol. ii, p. 335.
[114] OM 159-60.

incorrect. Indeed, neither the ending of the verb-noun nor the initial is otherwise not certainly attested anywhere, as far as I know.[115]

The doubt about the meaning of this sentence originates with Norris, who gave it as "I cannot speak". This explanation fits well with the sense of the auxiliary verb *ny allaf* "I cannot".[116] It would then correspond to C. *yn meth* W. *medd(ai)* B. *eme*, which are parts of a defective verb used only to quote speech.[117] In Welsh, the word has gradually displaced *ebe, ebr(a)* (MlW. *heby(r)*, *heb*) in this function and it seems that *medd(ai)* originally expressed opinion rather than mere quotation and may originally have had the sense "judge, think, have an opinion".[118] It has been suggested that the cognates of *ebe* and *medd(ai)* have become fused in the Breton verb *eme*.[119]

I suggest that the meaning "I cannot dare" is rather unwieldy, since elsewhere *ny vethaf* "I dare not" occurs in this sense and the lost disyllable could easily be made up in another way in order to keep the rhythm and syllable count. To this end, a reinforcing noun or verb-noun might be inserted, perhaps **ny vethaf kevsel* "I dare not speak" or **ny vethaf cammen* "I dare not at all". On the other hand, if the sense "I cannot speak" is correct, it is equally difficult to see why **ny allaf kevsel* would not be appropriate, since this is the normal verb "to speak". I know of no example of an infinite of *medd(ai)* or *eme* being used in this way.

The two verbs are also potentially difficult to distinguish in their inflected forms. Fortunately, context serves to distinguish most examples, particularly the verb "to be", which has different syntax to most other

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[115] Nance may have reconstructed **bedha* [not asterisked in NCED] from W. *beiddio, meiddio* on the basis that the inflected forms do not show /j/ in the suffix, perhaps comparing this with the loss of /j/ in some South Welsh dialects.
[116] Norris, OM, vol. i, pp. 12-13.
[117] *yn meth* PA 16c; S.J. Williams, *A Welsh Grammar*, § 165-6, pp. 107-8; R. Hémon, *A Historical Morphology and Syntax of Breton*, § 152, pp. 243-4.
[118] D.S. Evans, *A Grammar of Middle Welsh*, § 170-2, pp. 154; J. Morris-Jones, *A Welsh Grammar*, p. 378; see also CCCG § 590, p. 382, n.
[119] É. Ernault, RC 2 (1890), p. 465, 476-7.

verbs. However, inflected parts of the verb *betha* (or *m/bedhes*) "to dare" are common.[120] In CW, the lines spoken by Cain on his exile may contain this verb showing unetymological /m/ < /b/, but alternatively they may show an inflected part of the possible verb *methes* "quoth":-

Aga holon ew terrys Rag cavow, methaf y dy[121]

Their heart[s] are broken with sorrow, ……(?)

The phrase *methaf y dy* clearly contains a present indicative form of a verb in the first person singular. The verbal particle has been dropped, an occasional feature used in verse for the sake of rhythm; in such cases the initial consonant is typically de-lenited.[122]

Supposing first that the inflected verb here corresponds to the defective verb *yn meth* in the third person singular and *yn methens* in the plural, the first difference is that the unique particle *yn* that appears before these forms is missing.[123] Whatever the etymology of these forms, this unusual particle almost always accompanies the verb, which is only ever found as a tag attached to the quoted words of an individual.[124] The most obvious explanation for this particle is that it consists of the normal pre-verbal particle *y* fused with a fossilised masculine infixed pronoun *n* "it". Apart from the possible exception *methaf* above, only the unique example *ym meʒens* shows assimilation of the particle.[125]

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[120] The verb is nearly always *beiddio* in ModW., rarely *meiddio*. It is not certain which initial is original but it seems likely that it is /b/, cf. *menyw* < *benyw*. See Loth, RC 23, pp. 244, 268.

[121] CW 1351-2.

[122] To be more precise, the mutation after the pre-verbal particle *y* is lenition and provection.

[123] *yn meth* PA 16, *yn methens* 155. Compare *Nena myth an serpent then venan* "Then the serpent said to the woman" TH 3a.5, where the particle is completely absorbed.

[124] Due to the lack of modern punctuation in MlC, it is not always clear if this is intended as a genuine quotation of speech or as reported speech, but both are possible after W. *medd(ai)* B. *eme*.

[125] *ym meʒens* PA 32. Both Stokes and Hawke give this spelling with apparent assimilation, although it may also be a scribal error with an extra minim. Nance corrected it to <n> [unpublished papers, JRIC].

If the same verb occurs in *methaf y dy*, the second part could either be the noun "oath" or the verb-noun "to swear" with the masculine possessive pronoun. In the latter case, this type of construction occurs commonly with modal verbs, i.e. C. **me a yll y derry* W. *gallaf ei dorri* B. *me a c'hall e derriñ* "I can break it". Whether **methaf* "quoth" could be classed as a modal verb is perhaps open to doubt, which may be the best argument for **m/bethes* "to dare". However, it could mean "I say it on oath" (literally "I say its swearing", cf. "I can its breaking" above). It may have been a fossilised phrase from when **methes* "to say" was a more productive verb, to which should be compared C.**eb* (W. *ebe*) found in MlC. *gorthyp* "to answer".[126] The lack of infixed particle *n* as a direct object, as seen in *yn meth* (perhaps literally "he says it") may account in part for the loss of the particle, although this has evidently been done with the syllable count in mind, whichever explanation is preferred. The alternative explanation with **m/bethes* "to dare" requires the plausible meaning "I dare swear it" (literally "I dare its swearing").[127]

Had the pre-verbal particle been required by the metre in this line, the expected form would be **y fethaf* with lenition and provection, whether **m/bethes* "to dare" or **methes* "to say" was the verb. Although there are numerous instances of **bethaf* meaning both "I will be" and "I dare" (see below), the latter all in fact occur in the negative, lenited. The phrase *me a veth y leferel* "I dare say it" bears a close resemblance to the syntax, however, as do some similar phrases.[128] The example *my ny fethaf sur rak meth* "I dare not for shame" might perhaps show the possibility of *meth* "shame" infecting the verb, but the de-lenited initial could hardly make semantic sense in such a phrase, so the influence would be

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[126] *gorthyp* RD 494.

[127] P. Neuss gives this translation in her edition, CW 1349-50, 110-1.

[128] *my ny fethaf sur rak meth* "I dare not for shame", *nag a feth mos* "nor who dares to go" RD 592, *ma na veath y avowe* "so that he dare not admit it" PC 1783. Quoted in NCED, p. 10.

indirect.[129] In fact there is no instance with initial /b/, comparable to *methaf y dy* above, in which the pre-verbal particle is omitted before *m/bethaf* for the sake of verse and initial /b/ is restored.[130] The example *methaf y dy*, if taken to be this verb, would tend to confirm the initial /m/ in this word. In terms of general probability, however, it has been shown that de-lenition to /b/ is far more frequent than it is to /m/ because of the nature of the consonant system.

If, on the contrary, *medhaf y dy* has original /m/, the example *me a levar heb y dye* "I say without oath", i.e. "I say without further ado, in plain language" would appears to a likely opposite to this idiom.[131] This would rely upon a phrase such as **me a levar y dye* being syntactically allowable, as seems possible, with an alternative verb substituted. Since **lavaraf y dy* would not fit the syllable count, as does *methaf y dy*, it my be that an older verb, possibly less idiomatic, was used for the sake of verse. The semantic and syntactic considerations are by no means insurmountable, if the verb *methes* is considered a genuine verb. On balance, this can only be seen as a highly problematic and irregular verbal form, of which the etymology can probably never be satisfactorily resolved. It may be a relevant example of incorrect de-lenition /b/ > /m/ in the verb **bethes* "to dare", possibly also a form of **methes* "to dare", or equally of **methes* "to say". Unless Nance's expected **betha* (or indeed **metha*) is attested, it will remain difficult to prove the point. However, the discussion is useful in illustrating the uncertainties of de-lenition.

The word *mes* "but" (B. *met* V. *mes*, *met*) is a frequent word in Middle Cornish.[132] This may be a reduced form of *marnas* "only, except",

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[129] *my ny fethaf sur rak meth* PC 1429-30.

[130] cf. *prest heb danger bethaf parys* "readily, without hesitation, I'll be ready" OM 1909-10, *rof dhys ov thour hel ha chammbour bethaf the wour* "I'll give you my tower, hall and chamber, I'll be thy husband" 2110-11; *me ve vethaf confethes* "I dare not understand" CW 533, *der henna my ny vethaf doos in mysk pobel* "because of that I dare not go among people" 1517-8.

[131] *me a levar heb y dye* CW 1629. See NCED, p. 173.

[132] *mes* BK 287d.

a borrowing from F. *mais*, or most likely a mixture of the two.[133] The standard Breton *met* is a reduced form of *nemet*, but a form *mes* borrowed from French occurs frequently in written Vannetais and in spoken Breton more widely.[134] In Cornish, the forms apparently fell together, which provides evidence of /s/ > /z/ falling together with /d/ > /z/, voicing which is usually known as "New Lenition".[135] The word occurs for the first time with initial /b/ as *bus* in TH (SA), a variant form which mostly replaces *mes*.[136] This occurs in Late Cornish as *bes*, *bez* as well as *mas, mez* and similar spellings.[137] There would be no reason to lenite the word in any conceivable circumstances and forms with /b/ are so common that they cannot represent an error. However, the influence of the English "but" was probably the greatest factor here, coupled with the general tendency towards substitution of /b/ for /m/ that arose from the wide variety of factors described above. Owing to the influence of the English word, this example does not necessarily imply that other words that would never normally be lenited were susceptible to incorrect de-lenition /m/ > /b/. It is not negative evidence, however.

Lhuyd gives two further words with unexpected /b/ > /m/, both of which may have been de-lenited. Firstly, he cites *mal* "like, as", which is evidently MlC. *avel* W. *fel* MlW. *val, mal* B. *evel*.[138] It seems that the first vowel was lost, partly because the word must have had unusual stress on the second syllable, as in Breton.[139] This may be compared to the treatment of *Mortygernus* discussed at § 3.3 above; it is certainly unusual that /m/ is selected rather than /b/ in the light of *mes > bes* "but". The

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[133] *marnas* OM 948.

[134] R. Hémon, *A Historical Morphology and Syntax of Breton*, § 195, p. 294.

[135] Such words may have formed part of the motivation for New Lenition in the first place.

[136] *bus* TH 60.18 [SA], *mes* 59.25 [SA]. I can find no examples of either in JT.

[137] *bes*, *mas* W. Borlase, *Antiquities, Historical and Monumental, of the County of Cornwall*; *bez*, *mez*, *maz* Pryce, ACB, sigs. K1r-Bb4v. Similar forms occur widely elsewhere in Late Cornish.

[138] *mal* Lhuyd AB 178b; *avel* PC 804.

[139] It is pure coincidence that MlW. *mal* resembles this form, see D.S. Evans, *A Grammar of Middle Welsh*, § 270, p. 239.

same is true of his form *mìkan* "ever, forever" < MlC. *vycken*.[140] A further river-name *Valency*, with apparent fixed lenition despite being masculine, may be derived from the place-name *Bolingey* "mill-house".[141] The word *vooga* "cave" given by Tonkin is cognate with B. *mougev*, *bougeo*, the second element of which may be B. *kev* with the same meaning.[142]

3.8. The irregular nasal "mutation"

As was remarked at § 3.6 above, assimilation of initial /b/ (and /d/) to a preceding /n/ is a comparatively late feature in CB. and consequently it was not strictly a mutation at all in the usual sense. Although it probably became extremely frequent in both languages, it was never generalised as a genuine morphophonemic sound substitution based upon lexical or grammatical triggers: simply put, it was never a mutation in the same way as lenition or spirantisation.[143] As discussed at § 3.5 above, in toponyms the motivation for nasalisation of these sounds could be any preceding word ending in /n/, not only the article.

The place-names *Pen Bejuffin < *Pen Mydzhovan* "top of the ridge" and *Carn Boel < *Carn Moel* "bare rock-pile" already cited show de-nasalisation that was probably the result of hypercorrection, although initial /m/ in these cases was not apparently the result of a nasal assimilation of this sort. One possible example with genuine nasalisation is *Zawn Mug & Can*, as discussed above. More commonly, nasal assimilation of /b/ was caused by the article, e.g. *Park-an-Munkyer < *park an bynkiar* "cooper's field" and nasal assimilation of /d/ likewise in

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[140] *mìkan* CWBF, p. 19, 46.3; *vycken* OM 1239. Unlenited MlC. **bycken* does not occur.
[141] CPNE, 79, 161, 318 (river), see § 3.1 above.
[142] CPNE, p. 238; Pryce, ACB, sigs. K1r-Bb4v. This may represent **g(w)o-+kev*, which would have frequently occurred in lenited form. I suspect that de-lenition accounts for B. *mougev*, *bougeo*. On the confusions in Cornish with the elements *googoo* and *fow*, see also CPNE, pp. 100, 107-8.
[143] HPB, § 491-6, pp. 356-60.

Porth [an] Navas "the sheep's cove". The latter example shows that the article was later lost, but its effects show its former presence.

By comparison, the evidence for assimilation /n+b/ > /m/ and its dental counterpart /n+d/ > /n/ in Middle and Late Cornish is strikingly scarce. The only example of the assimilation of /b/ that is known to me occurs in LC. *en mann* for MlC. *yn ban* "up, upwards", in the biblical translations of William Rowe.[144] This occurs after an adverbial particle, not the definite article.[145] There are no examples of /n+b/ > /m/ after the definite article in Cornish, setting aside the place-names discussed. This may suggest that the change was especially rare and sporadic, or perhaps that it was generally not represented in writing, or alternatively that the change was later reversed. However, for the latter to be true, it would be necessary for nasal assimilation to have developed before the Old Cornish period and to have been largely reversed before the Middle Cornish texts were written. Large-scale de-nasalisation of etymological initial /m/ is not found, however, which shows that this could not have happened.

The corresponding assimilation of the dental /d/ after the article did not occur in many words, but it is striking that it occurred entirely regularly in two related words. Middle Cornish still had *an nor < *an dor* "the world, the earth" (W. *daear* B. *douar*) and the compound *an norvys < *an dor+bys* (identical meaning), but it had apparently eliminated all other examples or else failed to develop any.[146] Interestingly, *an dor* still occurred, but this apparently always meant "the ground".[147] Effectively the lexeme *nor* "world" had become separate from *dor* "ground", which indicates that nasalisation was probably no longer a productive sound substitution. It seems as though this word was a relic of a formerly more

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[144] J. Loth, "Textes Inédits en Cornique Moderne", ÉC 29 (1902), p. 188.
[145] NCED, p. 184, cf. MlC. *yn mes*"out" (OM 83) B. er-maez W. i maes.
[146] *yn nor* "in the world" BM 152, *yn norvysma* "in this world" 4202.
[147] *an dor* OM 96. This is not absolute in CW, but it still holds true in most cases.

widespread phenomenon, yet it is not clear when and how widely it had occurred in Cornish. There is no evidence of widespread de-nasalisation /n/ > /d/ that might be seen as a phonetic manifestation of a response to the perception of assimilation as a colloquial "corruption", or in some way as the marker of a socially inferior register of speech.

In the absence of further evidence this must remain uncertain, but the comparison with Modern and Middle Breton is instructive, since a similar sound change of /d/ > /n/ is well attested. There are no known words in either Middle or Modern Breton that show initial /n+b/ > /m/, but the dental assimilation /n+d/ > /n/ is fairly frequent after the article and various prepositions elided with it. For example, MlB. *an nou < *an dou* "the two", *en noar < *en doar* "in the earth", *an (n)or < *an dor* "the door", *an niuquell < *an diuquell* "the (two) testicles" and *en ha parres < *en da parres* "in thy parish" represent a relatively wide range of lexical items including singular and dual nouns, numerals and even the second personal singular possessive pronoun.[148] This indicates that it was merely a matter of the phonetic environment of an initial dental that determined if it was likely to be nasalised, irrespective of whether that tendency was in fact realised or not. The example *en ha parres* shows that B. *en* "in" could itself cause the change, because it is not elided with the article in this instance. Presumably situations could theoretically arise in which any word with final /n/ might cause the same effect. The lack of examples must be taken to mean that this was, if it happened, vanishingly rare.

In standard Modern Breton and apparently in the majority of the modern dialects, this is still allowed regularly in a single word *an nor* "the door" and more widely in the Vannetais dialect. The words *en neñved < an deñved* "the sheep", *en erùen < an derwen* "the oak" and even *en eu, en iù < an daou, an div* "the two" are regular variants of the standard

forms.[149] Considering the wide application of /n+d/ > /n/ in Middle Breton, the fact that this did not extend similarly to /n+b/ > /m/ strongly supports the hypothesis that this would not frequently have been the case in Cornish either. This question may be no more complicated in essence than the simple fact that /n/ and /d/ are homorganic sounds whereas /n/ and /b/ are not, making assimilation of the former much more likely.

In Vannetais the standard Breton *ma breur* "my brother" is often *mem breur*, in which a nasal is clearly pronounced. By contrast to the comparatively late assimilations discussed so far, this is an original feature of Breton that dates back to Brittonic.[150] It is apparently a relic of the same nasal element which developed into a full nasal mutation in such cases as W. *fy mrawd* < Brit. **mene brātir*. However, it is worth noting that only the nasal element itself has been assimilated in *mem* < **men* "my", according to the quality of the following /b/ in *breur*. If a secondary sound change /n+b/ > /m/ had occurred widely in later Breton, this might be expected to have subsequently developed into a full nasal mutation of /b/ after *me(n)* "my" in Vannetais, giving ***me(m) mreur* < *mem breur*. Since this did not happen even in Vannetais, where at least the assimilation /n+d/ > /n/ was relatively common, this provides good supporting evidence about the overall frequency of assimilations to a preceding nasal sound. On the other hand, since /n+d/ > /n/ certainly did occur in cases such as *en neñved*, it is curious that V. *men dañvad* could not become ***men nañvad* when /n+d/ > /d/ occurred in other words. One reason may again be concerned with the symmetry of the mutation system, but the study of Breton phonology need not detain us here.

The important point is that assimilation /n+b/ > /m/ and /n+d/ > /n/ did not universally occur in Breton when /n/ stood before /b/ or /d/. The

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[148] CCCG § 198, p. 120.
[149] HPB § 492, pp. 357-8.

same processes occurred sporadically in both Breton and Cornish because of the inherited phonetic environments in which the affected sounds occurred, even though they arose separately in the two languages. It is not even certain, for instance, that they were contemporary. They may have operated sporadically in one or both languages over an extended period of time without ever developing as uniform sound changes. If they were occasional at best in Breton, where the evidence for assimilation is better, this tends to guard against the idea that the evidence simply failed to survive in Cornish. In particular, sporadic cases of /b/ > /m/ like *en mann* "up" may safely be taken to be purely isolated, irregular sound changes.

A unique example occurs in Middle and Late Cornish, ultimately from *an gabm thavas* in CW.[151] The earlier form is seen in OC. *camnivet* (ModB. *kanevedenn* with assimilation /mn/ > /nn/).[152] The form in CW apparently shows an unusual reflex of hypercorrect de-nasalisation in internal position. The pre-occlusion in *cabm* indicates that at least the first element is a Late Cornish revision or addition, as is perhaps the entire phrase. The word seems to have been copied first by either Lhuyd or Gwavas, who respectively give *kabmdhavas* and *cabmthavas* simply as "rainbow", while Borlase obviously copied the item from Lhuyd, since he did not alter Lhuyd's distinctive orthography.[153] Tonkin understood the meaning of *cabm thavus* "rainbow" as being derived from "a crooked tongue, or token; bow as a sign".[154] This indicates that he misunderstood the second element as MlC. *taves* "tongue" OC. *tauot*.[155]

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[150] HPB § 492, pp. 357-8, § 1134, pp. 795-6.

[151] *an gabm dhavas* CW 2501.

[152] *camnivet* Voc. Corn. 438.

[153] *kabmdhavas* Lhuyd AB 73a; *kabmdhavas*, W. Borlase, *Antiquities, Historical and Monumental, of the County of Cornwall*; *cabmthavas*, W. Gwavas, BL Add. MS. 28554 [also printed by Borlase]. The graph <dh> means /ð/ in Lhuyd's orthography.

[154] Pryce, ACB, sigs. K1r-Bb4v.

[155] *taves* OM 767; Voc. Corn. 47.

Medial /n/ must have been mistakenly de-nasalised in this word because *neves* < OC. *nivet* < Brit. *nemeton* "sacred place" (W. *nyfed*) was perceived to have been a "corruption" of *davas*, once it had been forgotten as a meaningful element in its own right.[156] Evidently the true meaning was *cam* "crooked, bent" + *neves* "heaven" = "rainbow".

The strange thing about *cabmthavas* is not that it should have been de-nasalised, which seems a quite natural process in an attempt to recover its meaning, but that it should have taken its present form. It seems that it first lost its i-affection through lowering of the vowels and acquired pre-occlusion, giving *cabmnavas*. Since this could not directly become the form with /ð/, as I deduce from the spellings, it must have been de-nasalised first as *cabmdavas*. It was taken to be (1) *cabm + davas* "sheep-step", as Nance assumed;[157] or (2) *cabm + tavas* "crooked tongue" with lenition /t/ > /d/. Tonkin may have understood it in the latter way, with a secondary "mistaken" lenition that gave *cabmdhavas*.[158] Since the meaning "rainbow" was never lost sight of, the entire process was obviously a vain attempt to deduce the word's etymology. Despite all appearances to the contrary, the word was an entirely regular instance of hypercorrect de-nasalisation /n/ > /d/.

3.9. De-lenition and De-nasalisation

In summary, the inherited mutation system in Cornish tended to create phonetic environments where initial /b/ and /m/ could be confused and the asymmetry of the mutation series /b/–/v/–/p/–/f/ and /m/–/v/–/f/ apparently led to a tendency for these confusions to occur more

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[156] LHEB, § 6 (2), p. 279; CPNE, p, 172.
[157] NCED, p. 19.
[158] This may in fact be because an article was sporadically present, i.e. *cabm an dhavas*, cf. *Porth* [*an*] Navas where nasalisation resists the expected lenition, cf. B. *an dañvad*. See further § 3.5 above. A further influence is that the word is feminine and *davas* was seen as qualifying a feminine noun.

frequently in the direction /m/ > /b/ than the reverse. Many different factors potentially contributed to these confusions, from those limited to one particular lexeme like *mes > bes* "but" to the larger trends such as hypercorrect de-lenition and hypercorrect de-nasalisation. For instance, nasalisation of /b/ (and /d/) after /n/ in the article were fairly unproductive in Cornish, although it was far more so in toponyms where an element with final /n/ preceded initial /b/ (and /d/). Provection may also have tended to have a de-nasalising effect in place-names such as *Rosebenault*, since voiced /m/ had no unvoiced nasal counterpart, as well as simply the assimilation of /m/ to an oral consonant in cases like *Polborder*.

None of these factors ever constituted a uniform or far-reaching sound change and the effects of each sub-type of *b*/*m* variation would probably have been negligible individually. It is interesting, for example, that so few words occur with nasalisation of /b/ after the article, or otherwise after /n/, except in the place-name *Park-an-Munkyer* (and possibly *Menallack*). The comparable variation between /d/ and /n/ was probably far more likely to occur after final /n/ of the article, since it was homorganic with /d/, but otherwise *d*/*n* variation was essentially non-existent. This is more or less exactly the same state of affairs that is observed in Breton. The *d*/*n* assimilations may have been perceived as a parallel to all of the various *b*/*m* confusions of whatever source, so that *an nor < *an dor* might have been seen as part of the same set of changes as *melin > belin*. On the other hand, the general failure of the article to nasalise /b/ may contradict this.

Initial *b*/*m* variation is apparently more frequent than *d*/*n* variation because of the fact that both /b/ and /m/ are lenitable and give the same lenition product, whereas /n/ is invariable under lenition conditions. In contrast to what might be expected considering the identity of lenited initial consonants of feminine nouns after the article, the frequency of

hypercorrect de-lenition of feminine words like *melin > belin* and *mesclen > bezlen* does not seem to be much greater than that of masculine nouns like **menawes > beneûas* and *mulgranack > bulgrannack*, although the examples are too few too make any statistical judgements. It seems highly likely that lenition conditions in general, including after leniting prepositions, contributed greatly to the variations. The rare instances of de-lenition in the personal name *Mortygernus*, in *vycken > mìkan* and in the word *fenester > beisdar* further add to the conclusion that, in contrary to expectations, speakers were motivated far more by resolving perceived anomalies in the overall consonantal system than by the gender identity of a particular noun. It seems that initial /v/ was not tolerated and could equally be restored either /b/ or /m/. In fact, it is strange that while /m/ tends to become /b/, anomalous initial /v/ was restored to /m/ in all instances except *an veistir > beisdar*, which happens to be the only affected example following the article. It is difficult to assess whether this is merely the result of coincidence, since the examples are so few.

The comparison with Welsh shows a more or less comparable set of *b*/*m* variations, although the significantly different mutation system means that comparisons should not perhaps be made too directly, especially because of the effects of the nasal mutation. The balance between /m/ > /b/ and /b/ > /m/ seems to be more equal in Welsh, but this is perhaps not surprising given the central role of the preposition *yn* "in" and the possessive pronoun *fy* "my" in the nasal mutation. It may also be relevant that the Welsh consonantal system is more symmetrical than the Cornish one because the Welsh nasal mutation of /p/ provides an unvoiced counterpart to initial /m/ that is lacking in Cornish.

Although the confusion of initial /m/ and /b/ was sporadic in the periods in which it is attested in Cornish, it seems to have been a systemic tendency for the phonemes to be confused as a result of the structure of

the sound system. The variety of motivating factors only tended to reinforce this tendency. However, there was no apparent development towards eliminating initial /m/ in favour of /b/ in order to create more symmetry in the system. It may be that languages do not necessarily tend towards greater consistency over time. Especially in the Late Cornish period, there were still rare de-lenitions to /m/, even though the majority had previously been real or perceived anomalous initial /v/.

It is likely that speakers were not necessarily sure exactly why and how /b/ and /m/ were confused, or else a more systematic sound change would perhaps have been expected. The involvement of the sounds [b] and [m] in epenthesis in a few words and systematically in pre-occlusion, despite not being involved with *initial* consonants, might still have contributed to a general awareness of a certain amount of flux between these sounds. Although elements in place-names may have been unlikely to appear in lenited form, if they were not the first element whether or not their initial consonants participated in *b*/*m* variation seems to be mostly a matter of the precise phonetic environment. Overall, it may be fair to conclude that hypercorrect de-lenition and de-nasalisation were the most important of a range of processes contributing to *b*/*m* variation.