

HEGRE + ‘as long as’ (subordinating conjunction)

Its status within Revived Cornish

Stress

The word should be stressed on the second syllable, on the ground that the *final* vowel is always spelled ‘e’ in the Corpus (rather than, say, ‘a’ which would be suggestive of reduction to schwa in unstressed auslaut). In today’s revived Cornish the *first* vowel is also usually written as ‘e’. This too reflects every Corpus spelling. Speakers of traditional Cornish who reduce the unstressed first vowel to schwa sometimes respell the word *hadre*; this spelling is *not* found in the Corpus. Nicholas Williams spells it *hadre* in his translation of *The Hobbit* (2014). The current KS and SWF spellings are both **hedre**.

CORPUS

36 instances in the Corpus (here respelled in KS)

PA 33 hedre vôn, OM 243 hedre vywy, OM 276 hedre vy, OM 1464 hedre vo, OM 1503 hedre vôn, OM 2035 hedre ven, OM 2349 hedre vowgh, PC 115 hedre ven, PC 730 hedre vy, PC 847 hedre viv, PC 1013 hedre vyma, PC 1020 hedre viv, PC 2930 hedre vywhy, RD 1048 hedre ven, RD 1865 hedre vo, RD 1915 hedre ve, RD 1950 hedre vowgh, RD 2225 hedre vo, BK 622 hedre ve’ny, BK 639 hedre vy, BK 820 hedre vy, BK 932 hedre ven, BK 986 hedre vo, BK 1086 hedre vy, BK 1088 hedre ven, BK 1182 hedre vyma, BK 1472 hedre vo, BK 1536 hedre vo, BK 1544 hedre vo, BK 1967 hedre vo, BK 2586 hedre ven, BK 3172 hedre vo, BM 55 hedre ven, BM 352 hedre ven, BM 1137 hedre ven, BM 2816 hedre vewhen

*33 of these are subjunctive forms of the verb **bos**, 3 are subjunctive forms of the verb **bêwa***

There is no instance of **hedre** in any part of the Corpus later than BM (i.e. end of 15th century).

In Revived Cornish, starting with Nance’s Unified Cornish, a ‘mechanical’ rule has been taught that **hedre** is only employed with forms of **bos** and **bêwa** that begin with the letter b, which lenites (Second State) to v.

I would argue this is an ‘over-interpretation’ of the Corpus evidence. It is certainly fair to say that the use of **hedre** is apparently confined to just two verbs, **bos** and **bêwa**, for no particular reason that we can reconstruct. But since we find a subjunctive verb in every Corpus example, numbering more than thirty across every surviving text to the end of the fifteenth century, we are really only justified in saying that the meaning of **hedre** is not merely ‘as long as’ but ‘as long as’ *with future reference* (relative to the timeframe of the main clause) – hence the ubiquitous subjunctive verb, because in Middle Cornish this is the proper way to express such future reference (on account of its innate uncertainty).

In *An Hobys* we find **hedre** used with **veu** (misspelled **ve**, a hangover from Unified Cornish spelling, but it is clear from the context that Williams intends the preterite indicative) and **vedha** (habitual imperfect indicative). While this fits Nance’s mechanical rule, it distorts not only the semantics of **hedre** but also the meaning of these tenses. It is poor Cornish as to **hedre** because it wrongly equates the conjunction with English ‘while’ (which may be used indifferently with past, present or future reference). It is poor Cornish as to the tense forms **veu** and **vedha** because the aspectually perfective sense of **veu** contradicts the aspectually imperfective sense of ‘while’, and because the semantics of **vedha** are explicitly habitual-past (or future-in-the-past) – **vedha** cannot legitimately be made to stand in for **o** or **esa** simply on the ground that its initial b (> v) is required by an imagined mechanical rule.