Dialect syntax as a testbed for models of innovation and change
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Dialect syntax as a testbed for models of innovation and change

Recent years have seen a remarkable revival of interest in the syntax of dialects and nonstandard varieties in theoretical syntax. This paper considers how geographical and social distribution of syntactic variants currently undergoing change can inform our understanding of how syntactic innovations arise and diffuse. While some syntactic innovations are transparent to speakers and can be copied by adults, many others are quite abstract. Since speakers have no direct access to the internalised grammars of other speakers, a reasonable hypothesis is that such innovations spread more readily by being replicated in the newly developing grammars of children during language acquisition. This also raises the possibility that some syntactic innovations may spread by arising independently during acquisition in the grammars of many individuals. These possibilities will be examined and evaluated using data from the first phase of the Syntactic Atlas of Welsh Dialects, focusing on the following recent innovations in Welsh:

(i) creation of a new negative modal *cau* 'won't' and its integration into the negative-concord system;
(ii) the innovation of marking of long-distance *wh*-dependencies (e.g. long-distance *wh*-questions) on every verb in the dependency (e.g. *wh*-marking on both 'trying' and 'ask' in 'What are you trying to ask?');
(iii) creation of a new second person singular pronoun *chdi* 'you' and its spread to new syntactic contexts.
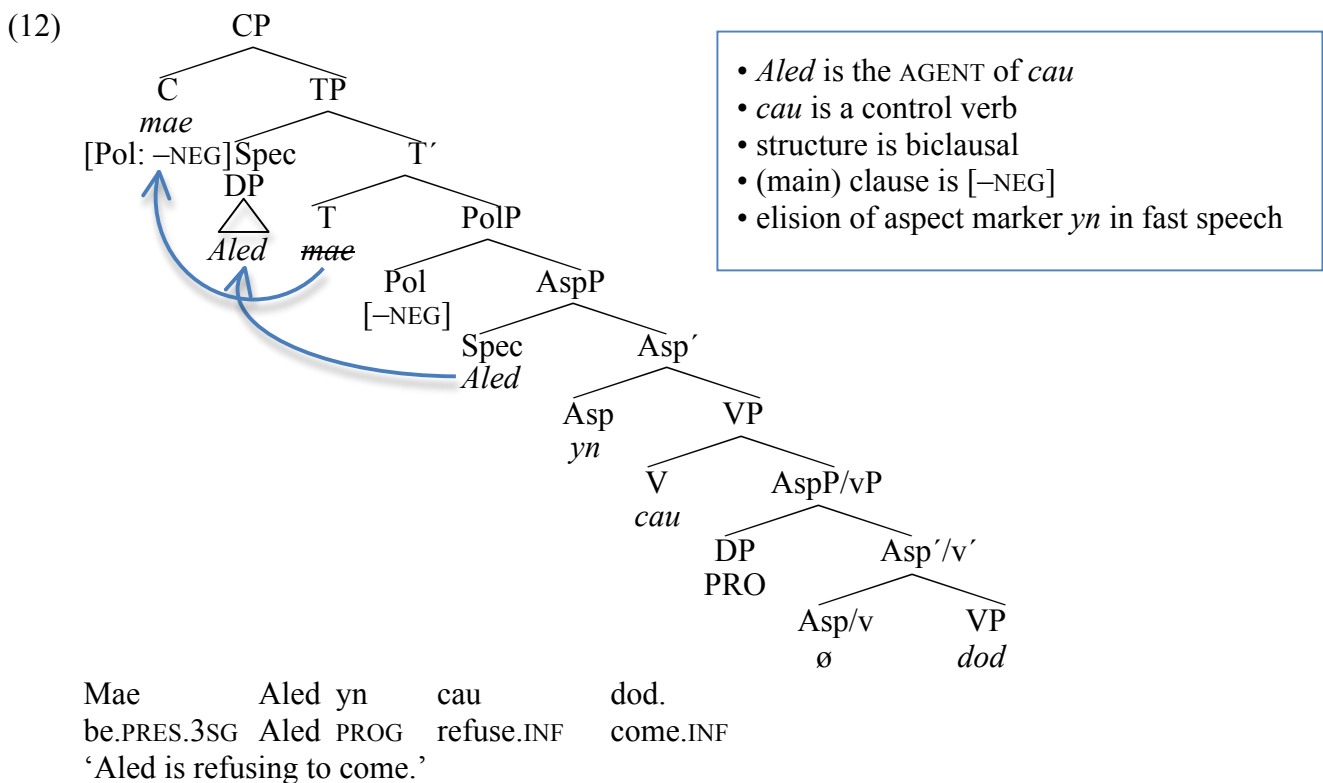
These innovations form a continuum from less to more abstract which mirrors a similar continuum in their geographical and social distribution from more to less compact, plausibly reflecting differences in the mechanisms of innovation.
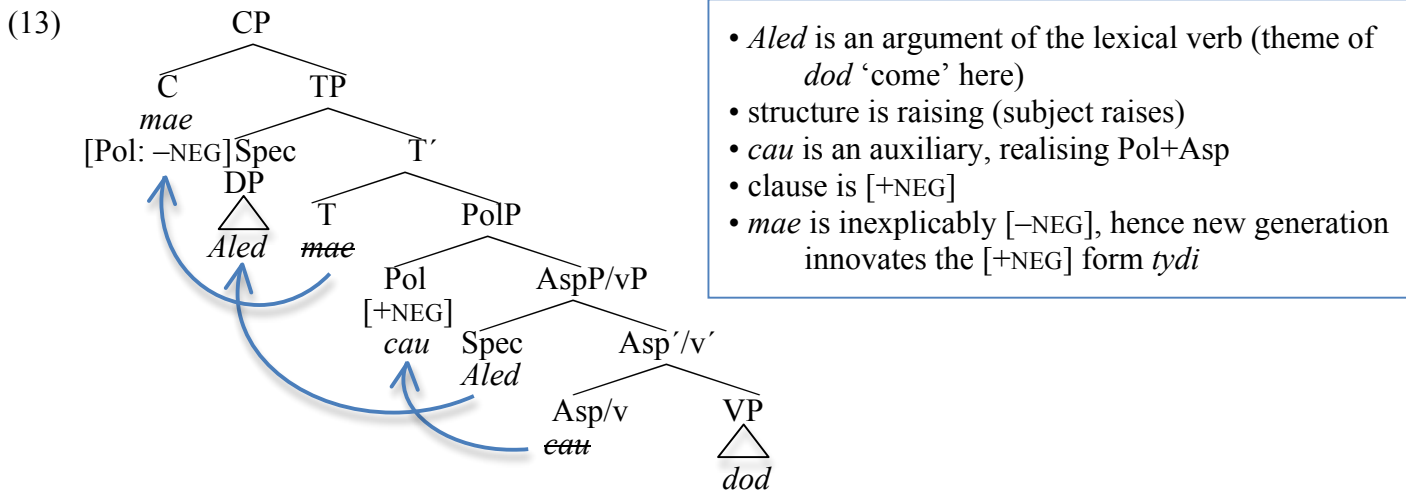
1 NEGATIVE MODAL *CAU*

1.1 Background

(1) Mae   Aled yn   cau   dod.
     be.PRES.3SG Aled PROG   refuse.INF   come.INF
     'Aled is refusing to come.'
(2) Beth os bydd   y   cathod yn   'cau dwad!
     what if be.FUT.3SG the cats   PROG   CAU   come.INF
     'What if the cats refuse to/won't come!' (Daniel Owen, *Hunangofiant Rhys Lewis* 278) (1885 edn.)
(3) Rhoi   'r adenydd mewn dŵr   berwedig   eto
     put.INF the wings   in   water boiling   again
     os   yw   'r ewinedd yn   cau dod   yn   rhydd.
     if   is.3S the nails   PROG CAU come.INF PRED free
     'Put the wings in boiling water again if the thorns won't come free.'
     (http://www.cimwch.com/bwyd/bwyd.htm)
(4) Mae   Aled yn   helpu   rhywun.
     be.PRES.3SG Aled PROG   help.INF someone
     'Aled is helping someone.'
(5) Dydi   Aled ddim yn   helpu   neb.
     NEG.be.PRES.3SG Aled NEG   PROG help.INF no.one
     'Aled is helping no one. / Aled isn't helping anyone.'

(6) **Tydi** ffon fi cau gweithio …
NEG.be.PRES.3SG phone me CAU work.INF
'My phone won't work …' (http://twitter.com/#!/SionGO/statuses/73115057822773248)
(speaker from Penygroes, 4 miles south of Caernarfon)

(7) **d**odd o **ddim** yn cau gweithio
NEG.be.IMPF.3SG it NEG PROG CAU work.INF
'it wouldn't work' (http://www.bebo.com/Profile.jsp?MemberId=2782943827) (speaker from Penygroes, just south of Caernarfon)

(8) Oddna **neb cau dod** efo fi!
was.3SG.there no.one CAU come.INF with me
'No one would come with me!' (http://www.bebo.com/Profile.jsp?MemberId=8930611124)
(speaker from Pentreuchaf, just north of Pwllheli)

(9) *(D)oedden nhw 'n gwneud dim byd.
    (NEG.)be.IMPF.3PL they PROG do.INF nothing
'They weren't doing anything.'

(10) (D)oedden nhw **ddim** yn gwneud dim byd.
(NEG.)be.IMPF.3PL they NEG PROG do.INF nothing
'They weren't doing anything.'

(11) oedden nhw **cau** neud dim byd
be.IMPF.3PL they CAU do.INF nothing
'They wouldn't do anything.' (Siarad corpus, stammers8)

(12)

```
                  CP
              /        \
            C            TP
          mae          /    \
    [Pol: −NEG] Spec         T′
                 DP        /    \
                 △       T        PolP
               Aled     mae      /    \
                              Pol        AspP
                             [−NEG]     /    \
                                      Spec        Asp′
                                      Aled       /    \
                                               Asp        VP
                                               yn        /    \
                                                       V        AspP/vP
                                                      cau      /      \
                                                             DP          Asp′/v′
                                                             PRO        /      \
                                                                     Asp/v        VP
                                                                       ø         dod
```

• *Aled* is the AGENT of *cau*
• *cau* is a control verb
• structure is biclausal
• (main) clause is [−NEG]
• elision of aspect marker *yn* in fast speech

Mae Aled yn cau dod.
be.PRES.3SG Aled PROG refuse.INF come.INF
'Aled is refusing to come.'

(13)

```
                CP
        ┌───────┴───────┐
        C               TP
       mae      ┌────────┴────────┐
   [Pol: −NEG] Spec              T′
               DP         ┌──────┴──────┐
              Aled        T            PolP
                         mae    ┌───────┴────────┐
                               Pol            AspP/vP
                             [+NEG]      ┌──────┴──────┐
                              cau       Spec         Asp′/v′
                                        Aled    ┌─────┴─────┐
                                              Asp/v        VP
                                               cau         dod
```

• *Aled* is an argument of the lexical verb (theme of *dod* 'come' here)
• structure is raising (subject raises)
• *cau* is an auxiliary, realising Pol+Asp
• clause is [+NEG]
• *mae* is inexplicably [−NEG], hence new generation innovates the [+NEG] form *tydi*

• shift of control > raising and loss of argument structure = auxiliation (Kuteva 2001, Roberts & Roussou 2003) (cf. English *will*)
• change follows the model of negative perfect particle *heb*
• implies a Minimise Structure preference in acquisition (cf. van Gelderen 2004 etc.)
• variation concerns the presence or elimination of an override/adaptive morphological rule either converting [Pol: +NEG] to [Pol:−NEG] in the context of a following *cau*, or converting *tydi* to *mae* in the context of a following *cau* [i.e. the innovation is extension]

1.2 *Cau* in the SAWD questionnaire

(14) Mae   dy   gar   chdi 'n   cau   cychwyn. (question 16)
      be.PRES.3SG 2SG car   you   PROG CAU   start.INF
      'Your car won't start.'

(15) Dydy   dy ffôn di   cau   gweithio. (question 17)
      NEG.be.PRES.3SG 2SG phone you CAU   work.INF
      'Your phone won't work.'

(16) Dydy   ein teledu   ni ddim yn   cau   gweithio. (question 41)
      NEG.be.PRES.3SG 1PL television we NEG PROG CAU work.INF
      'Our TV won't work.'

(17) Does   neb   yn cau dod   allan efo fi. (question 42)
      NEG.be.PRES.3SG no.one PROG CAU come.INF out   with me
      'No one will come out with me.'

(18) mae   na   rywun   wedi sti
      be.PRES.3SG   there someone PERF y'know
      'Someone has, y'know. / There's someone who has, y'know.' (Siarad corpus, fusser27)

(19) Ond tydi   o   dal cau. (question 34)
      but NEG.be.PRES.3SG he still CAU
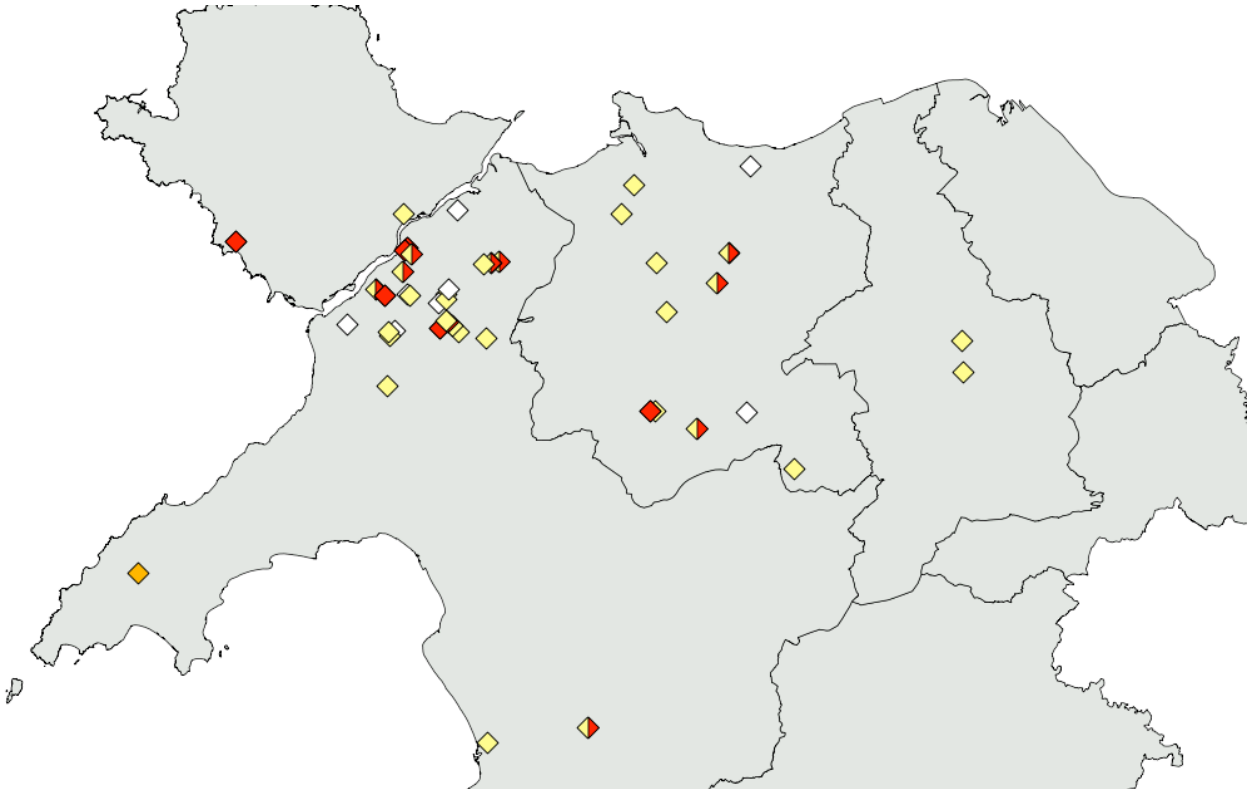   'But he still won't.'

1.3   Results

Figure 1. Negative concord with *cau* (speakers born before 1964) (red = concord; yellow = *cau* but no concord; orange = *cau*, ambiguous as to concord; white = *cau* rejected)
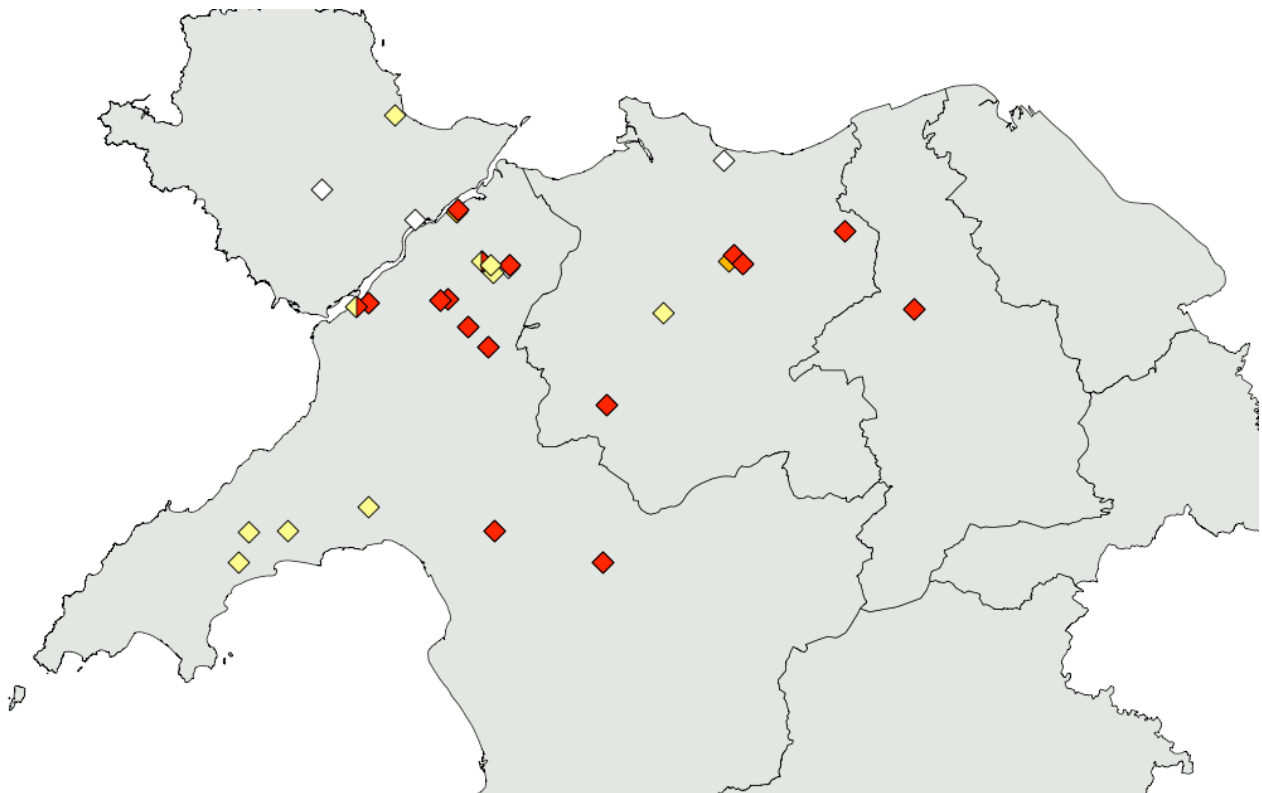

Figure 2. Negative concord with *cau* (speakers born from 1964 onwards) (red = concord; yellow = *cau* but no concord; orange = *cau*, ambiguous as to concord; white = *cau* rejected)
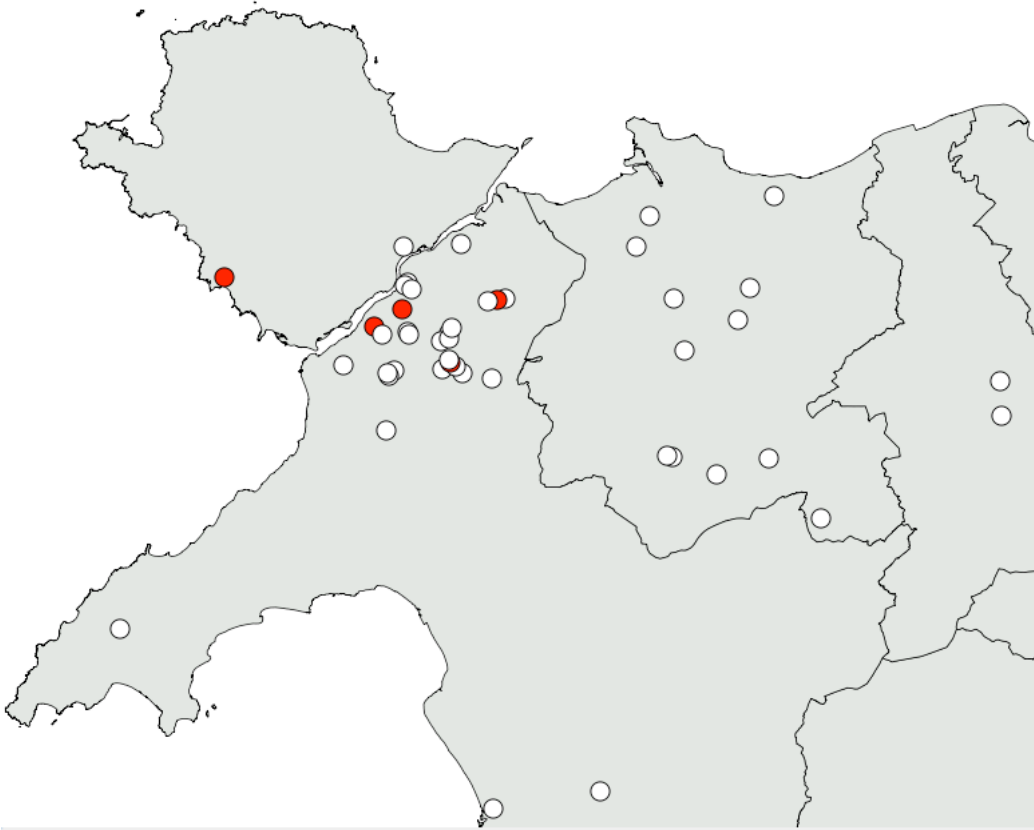
Figure 3. *Cau* with negative indefinites (speakers born before 1964) (red = *cau* permitted with a negative indefinite; white = *cau* rejected with a negative indefinite).

Figure 4. *Cau* with negative indefinites (speakers born from 1964 onwards) (red = *cau* permitted with a negative indefinite; white = *cau* rejected with a negative indefinite).

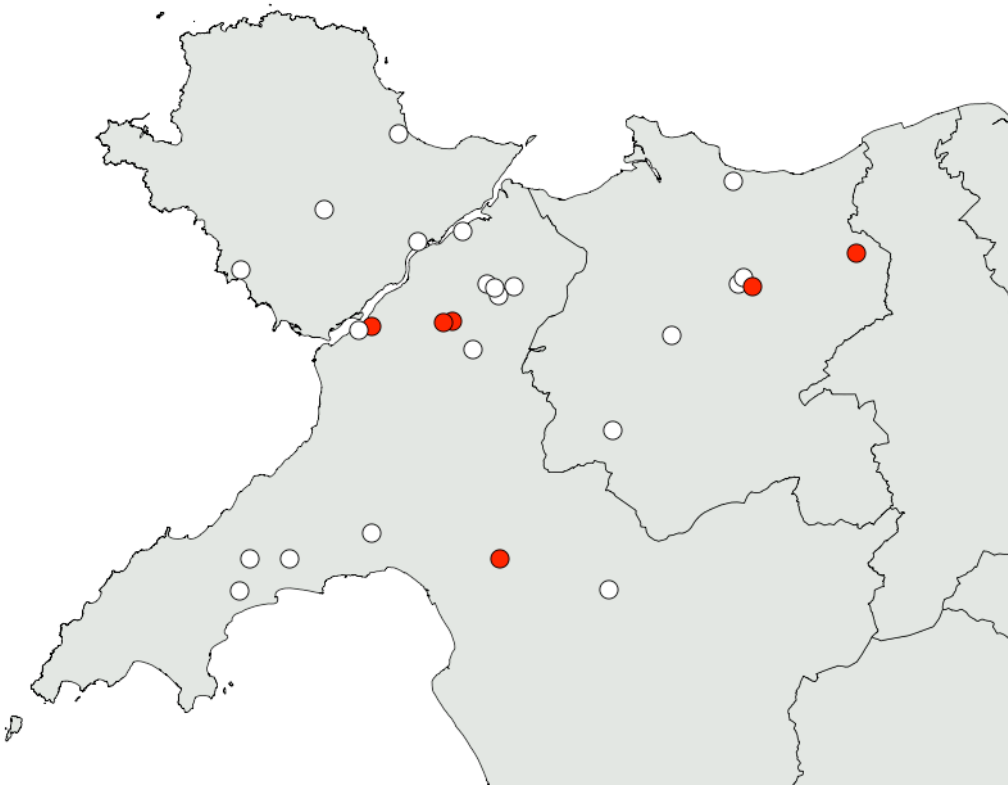**Figure 5.** *Cau* stranding (speakers born before 1964) (red = *cau* stranding permitted; white = *cau* stranding rejected).

Figure 6. *Cau* stranding (speakers born from 1964 onwards) (red = *cau* stranding permitted; white = *cau* stranding rejected).

• negative concord with *cau* is spreading
• diffuse distribution suggests (?) multiple actuation consistent with elimination of an adaptive rule
• relation between negative-concord innovations:

(20) no neg. concord > weak neg. concord   > concord with indefs > strong neg. concord
     (32 speakers)   >   (15 speakers)   (12 speakers)   (1 speaker)
                    (both: 6 speakers)

• no implicational relation between the other innovations:

(21) negative concord with indefinites > stranding
      stranding > negative concord with indefinites

Grammar
0: no *cau* (14 speakers)
1: *cau* only used without negative concord (32 speakers)
2: *cau* with optional weak negative concord (i.e. both sentences with and without negative concord repeated as such) (6 speakers)
3: *cau* with weak neg. concord (i.e. negative concord is added to sentence without it) (10 speakers)
4: *cau* with weak neg. concord and concord with negative indefinites but no stranding (8 speakers)
5: *cau* with weak neg. concord and stranding but no concord with negative indefinites (5 speakers)
6: *cau* with weak negative concord, stranding and concord with negative indefinites (4 speakers)
7: *cau* with strong negative concord, stranding and concord with negative indefinites (1 speaker)

2 MARKING OF LONG-DISTANCE *WH*-DEPENDENCIES (*WH*-QUESTIONS)

2.1 Background (Willis 2011)

(22) Beth ydych   chi 'n (ei) fwyta?
      what be.PRES.2PL you PROG (3MSG) eat.INF
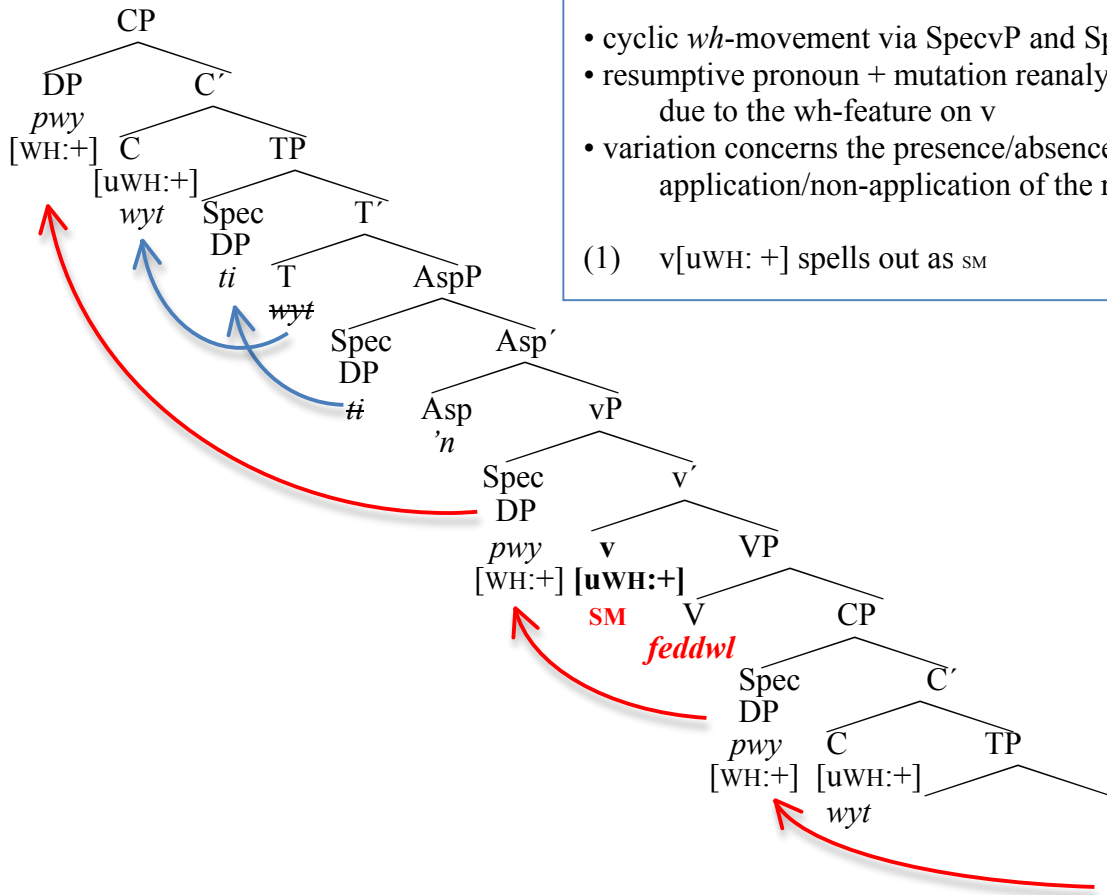   'What are you eating?'
(23) Beth wyt   ti 'n (ei) feddwl   bod   hyn   yn   (ei)   olygu?
      what be.PRES.2SG you PROG 3MS think.INF be.INF this PROG 3MSG   mean.INF
      'What do you think this means?'
(24) Pwy wyt   ti 'n (ei) feddwl   wyt   ti?
      who be.PRES.2SG you PROG 3MSG think.INF be.PRES.2SG you
      'Who do you think you are?'

(25) be   ydwch   chi 'n feddwl   ddaw   o honon ni hefo 'r ffri trad yma?
      what be.PRES.2PL you PROG think.INF come.FUT.3SG from.1PL us with the free tradethis
      'what do you think will become of us with this free trade?' (William Rees (Gwilym Hiraethog
      (born 1802), *Llythyrau 'Rhen Ffarmwr* 13.4–5, 1849)
(26) Be   mae   'r dyn yn feddwl   ydw   i, tybad?
      what be.PRES.3SG the man PROG think.INF be.PRES.1SG I suppose.INF
      'What does the man think I am, I wonder?' (Beriah Gwynfe Evans (born 1848), *Dafydd Dafis*
      6, 1898)

(27)

CP
├─ DP *pwy* [WH:+]
└─ C′
   ├─ C [uWH:+] *wyt*
   └─ TP
      ├─ Spec DP *ti* ~~wyt~~
      └─ T′
         ├─ T
         └─ AspP
            ├─ Spec DP ~~ti~~
            └─ Asp′
               ├─ Asp *'n*
               └─ vP
                  ├─ Spec DP *pwy* [WH:+]
                  └─ v′
                     ├─ v [uWH:+] SM *feddwl*
                     └─ VP
                        ├─ V
                        └─ CP
                           ├─ Spec DP *pwy* [WH:+]
                           └─ C′
                              ├─ C [uWH:+]
                              └─ TP *wyt*

- cyclic *wh*-movement via SpecvP and SpecCP
- resumptive pronoun + mutation reanalysed as being due to the wh-feature on v
- variation concerns the presence/absence or application/non-application of the rule:

(1)   v[uWH: +] spells out as SM

2.2   Long-distance *wh*-questions in the SAWD questionnaire

(28) Pryd   ø   ti   'n   **feddwl**   d̲daw   hi? (question 12)
      when   [be.PRES.2SG]you   PROG think.INF come.FUT.3SG   she
      'When you think she'll come?' (meddwl > feddwl)

(29) Lle   ø   ti   'n   **meddwl**   dylen   ni fynd? (question 14)
      where   [be.PRES.2SG]you   PROG think.INF   should.1PL we go.INF
      'Where do you think we should go?' (meddwl, no change)

(30) Beth ydach   chdi 'n   **geisio**   o̲fyn? (question 15)[1]
      what be.PRES.2PL   you PROG try.inf   ask.inf
      'What are you trying to ask?' (ceisio > geisio)

(31) Beth wyt   ti   'n   **meddwl** fyddi   di 'n   neud   yn y p'nawn?
      what be.PRES.2SG you   PROG think.INF be.FUT.2SG you PROG do.INF in the afternoon
      'What do you think you'll be doing in the afternoon?' (meddwl, no change] (question 21)

(32) Pwy wyt   ti   'n   **meddwl** dyla   hi ofyn iddo   fo?
      who be.PRES.2SG   you   PROG think.INF should.3SG she ask to.3MSG   him
      'Who do you think she should ask?' (meddwl, no change) (question 24)

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[1] Note that *ydach chdi* does not/may not actually exist in any dialect, and speakers were expected to change it either to *wyt ti* 'you are' or *o'ddach chdi* 'you were'.
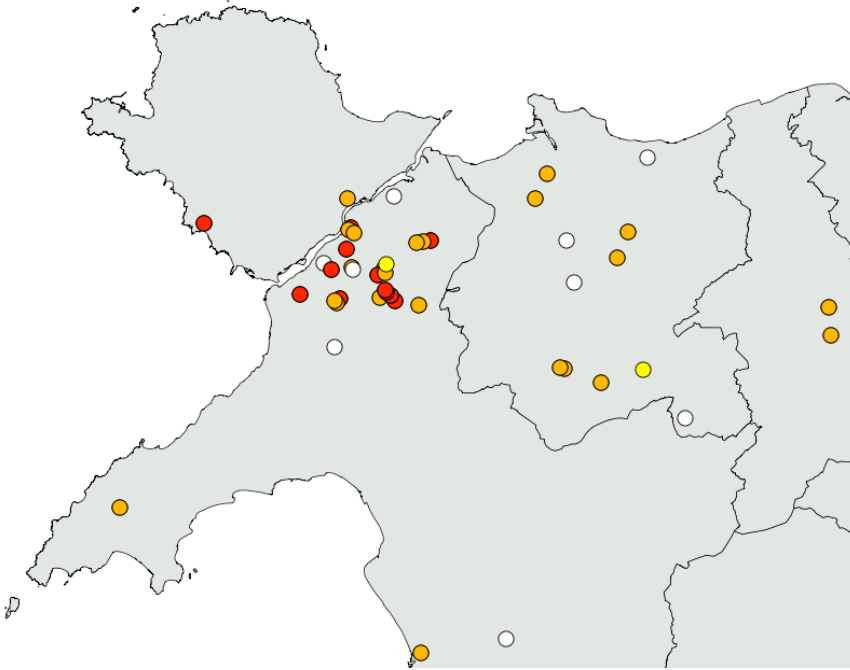
2.3   Results

Figure 7. Soft mutation in long-distance *wh*-questions (speakers born before 1964) (by speaker score: red = 6+, orange = 2–5, yellow = 1, white = 0; max. effective score = 9).
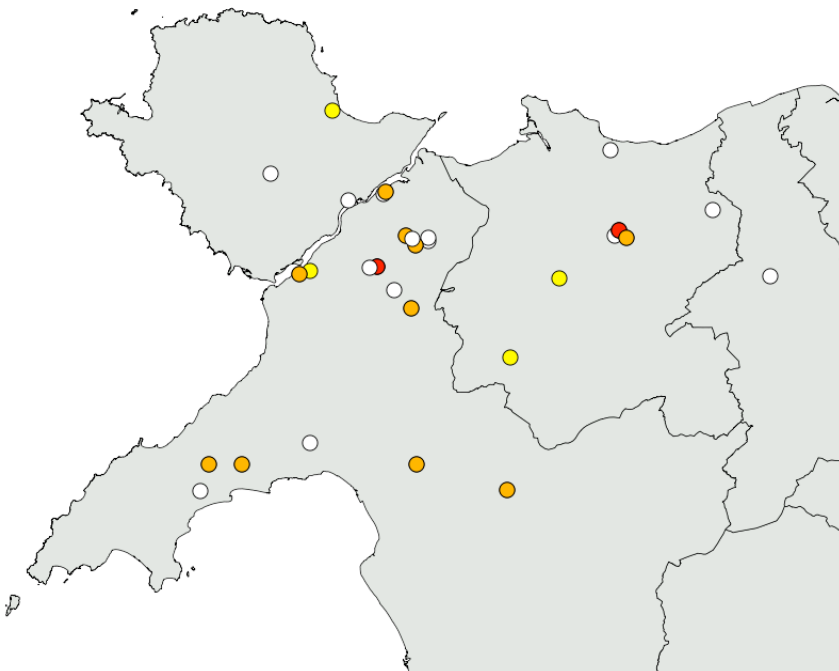

Figure 8. Soft mutation in long-distance *wh*-questions (speakers born from 1964) (by speaker score: red = 6+, orange = 2–5, yellow = 1, white = 0; max. effective score = 9).

• age variation suggests this is an innovation which is dying out
• the diffuse pattern may reflect the fact that this is loss of a spellout rule due to contact with English

3   SECOND-PERSON SINGULAR PRONOUNS

3.1   Background

Historically: *â thydi* 'with you' > *â th'di* (syncope) > *â chdi* (dissimilation)

(33) "… Gallaf   fi   gyd-ddwyn   pob   baich   hefo **'ch di**."
　　　 can.PRES.1S I   withstand.INF every   burden with you
　　 ""… I can withstand every burden with you." (Lewis William Lewis, *Huw Huws*, p. 5, 1860)

(34) … ond   os **ch'di**   geiff   y   lle …
　　　 but   if   you   get.FUT.3SG   the place
　　 '… if it's you that gets the place …' (Lewis William Lewis, *Huw Huws*, p. 15, 1860)

(35) Mae   o 'n   beth rhyfedd iawn dy fod   **chdi** 'n   priodi   rwan.
　　　 be.PRES.3S it PRED thing strange very 2S be.INF you   PROG marry.INF now
　　 'It's a very strange thing that you're getting married now.' (Kate Roberts, *Traed mewn cyffion*, p. 108, 1936)

(36) Pwy sy   'n   ffonio   chdi?
　　　 who be.REL PROG phone.INF you
　　 'Who's phoning you?' (Siarad corpus, davies9)

3.2　*Chdi* in the SAWD questionnaire

(37) Ni 'n   aros   amdanoch chdi o hyd.
　　　 we PROG wait.INF   you.2SG   you   still
　　 'We're still waiting for you.'

(38) O'n   nhw 'n   sôn   lot amdanat   ti.
　　　 be.IMPF.3PL they PROG talk.INF lot about.2SG you
　　 'They were talking a lot about you.'

Variability derives from two sources:

(39) D   >   /χdi/ *chdi*
　　　 [pro: +]   >   /ti/ *ti*
　　　 [φ: 2SG]

(40) *am*   D   >   *amdanat ti* 'about you'
　　　 [uφ: 2SG]   [φ: 2SG]
　　　 [upro: +]   [pro: +]

(41) *am*   D   >   *amdana* 'about (pron.)'
　　　 ⬚   [φ: 2SG]   + *chdi* 'you'
　　　 [upro: +]   [pro: +]

Similar pairs (or triplets) for other contexts including:

efo 'with'
focus fronting
am 'about'
oedd 'was'
sa 'would be'
gan 'with (= "have"-periphrasis)'

WDS item 572: ti (indep. form) 'you (sg.)'
● ti
● chdi
● thdi

Distribution of *chdi* (red dots) in the *Welsh Dialect Survey* (Thomas 2000) (speakers born in the 1920s)
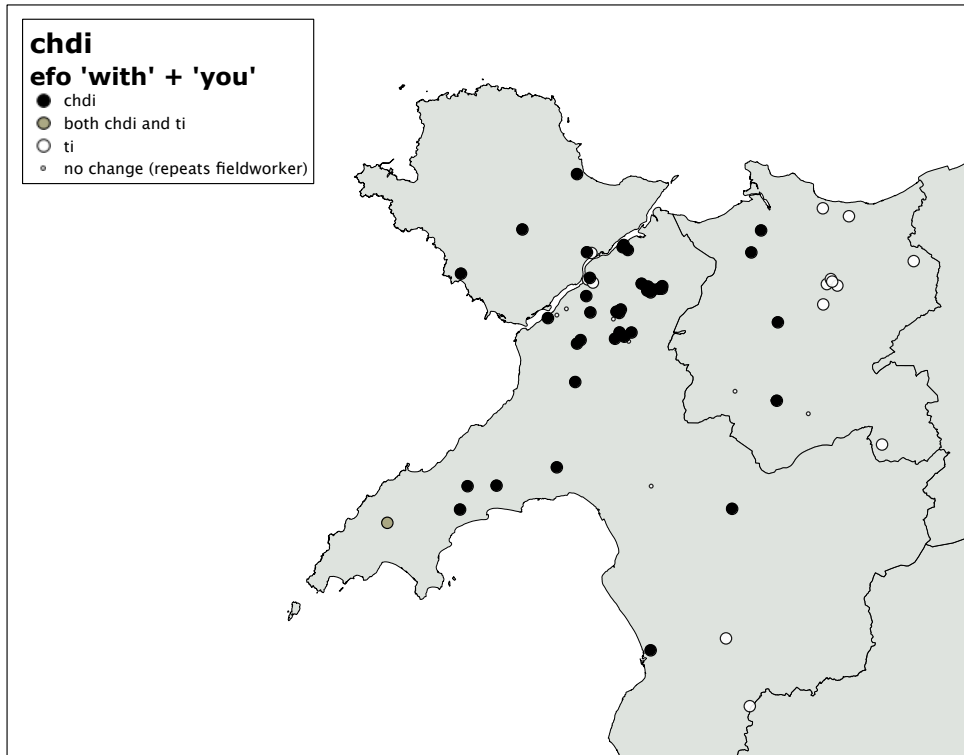
3.3 Results

Figure 9. Availability of *chdi* after *efo* 'with' (black dots) (all speakers).
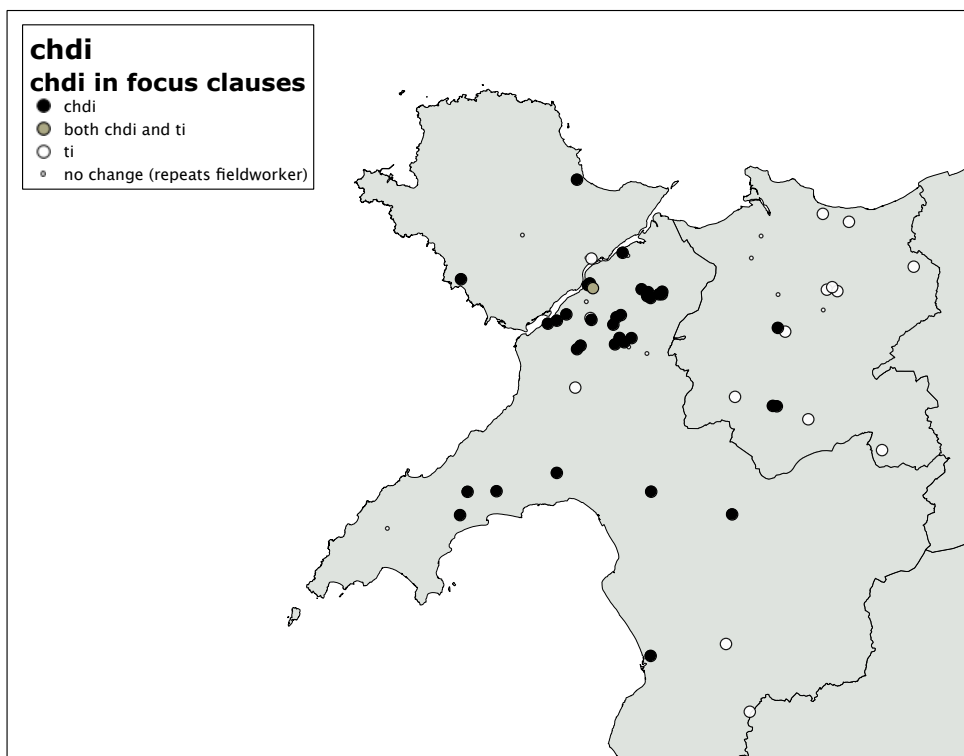

Figure 10. Availability of *chdi* in focus clauses (black dots) (all speakers).
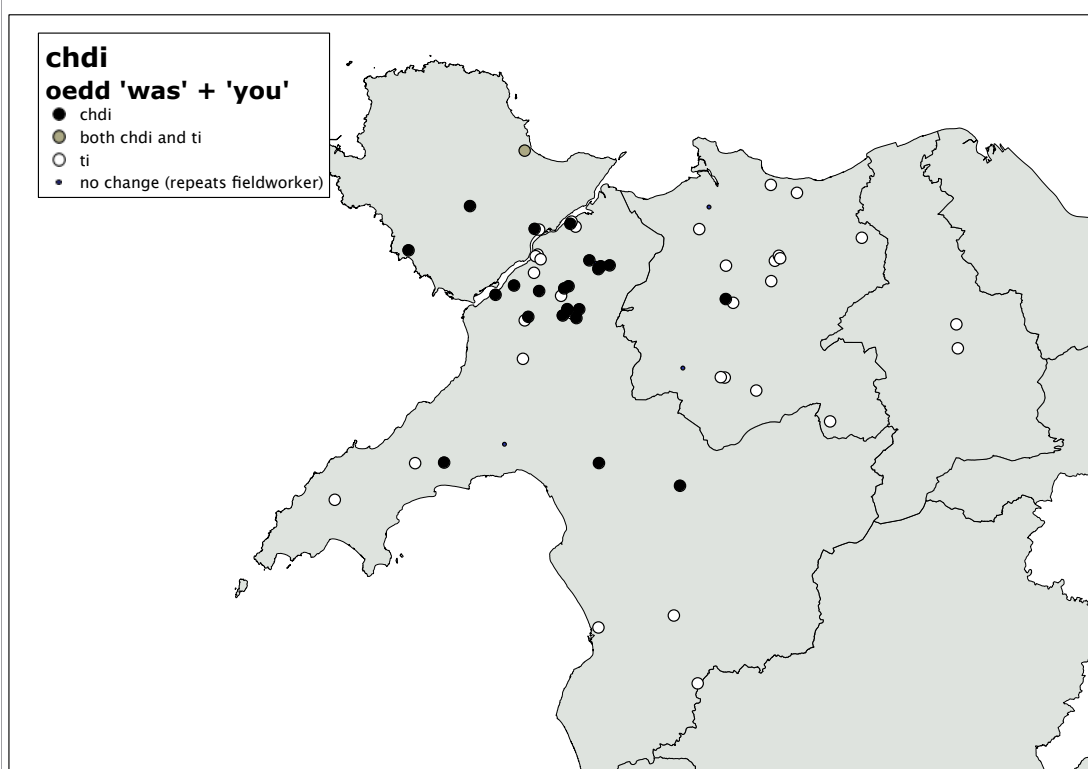
Figure 11. Availability of *chdi* after *oedd(a)* 'was' (black dots) (all speakers).
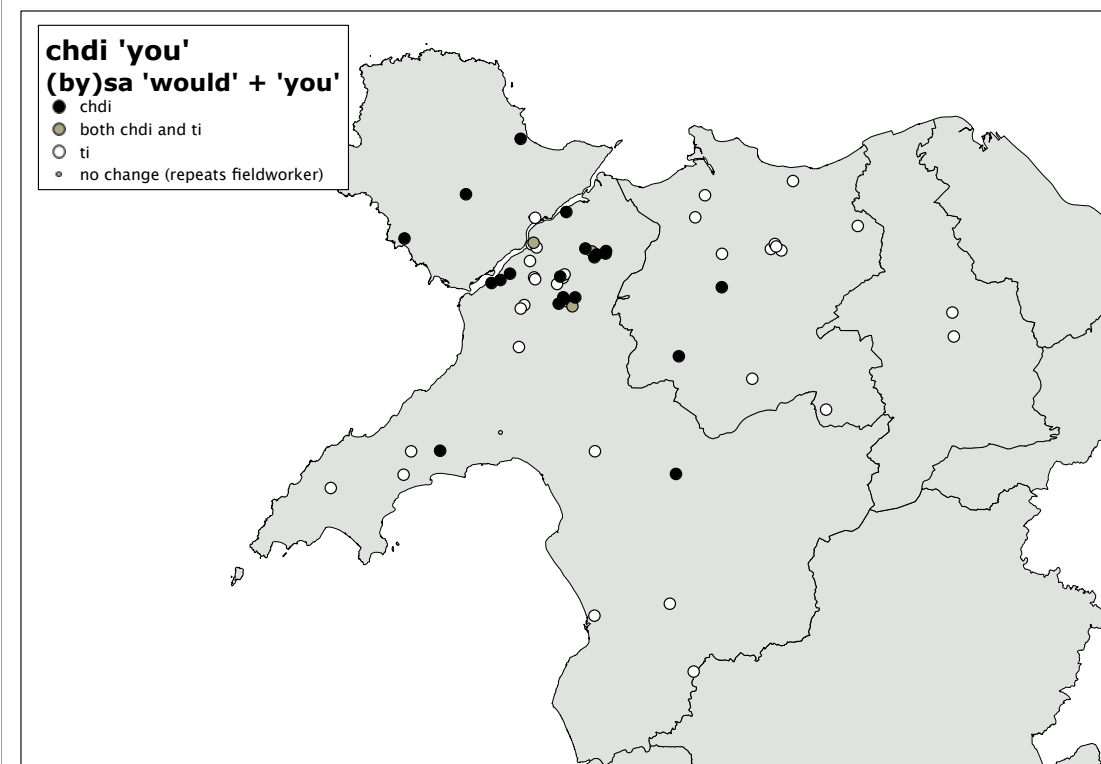

Figure 12. Availability of *chdi* after *(by)sa* 'would be' (black dots) (all speakers).
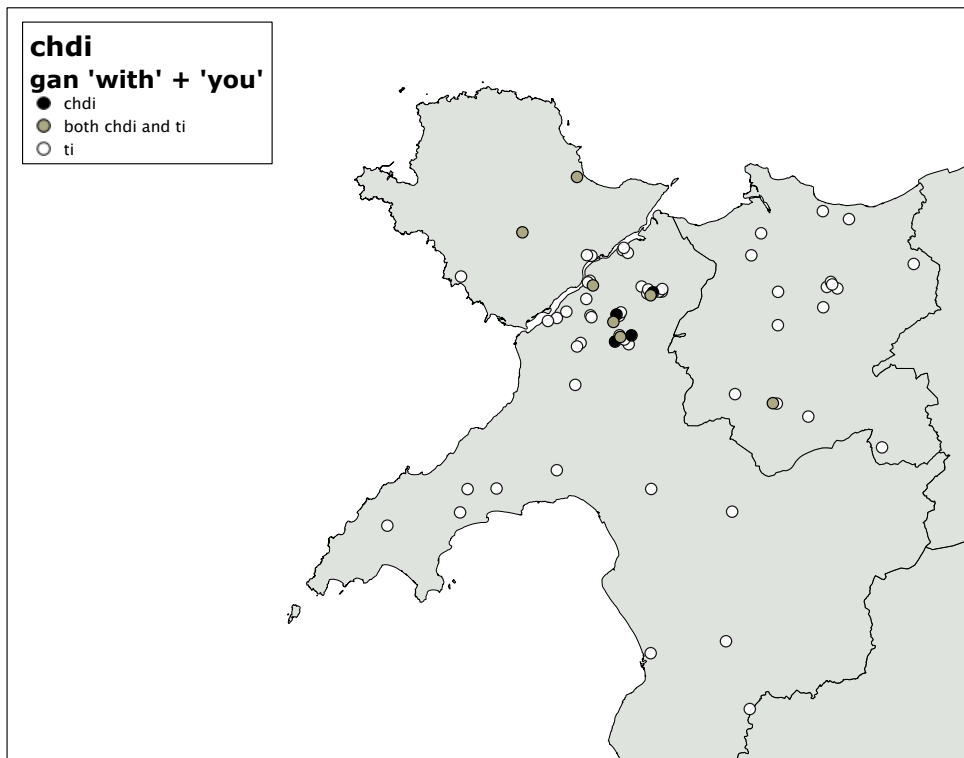
Figure 13. Availability of *chdi* after *gan* 'with (have)' (black dots) (all speakers).

• clear successive waves diffusing innovations from a core area in the north
• intuitively clearer that this is more salient than the other features
• formal implementation (as feature loss) does not clearly distinguish this from the other changes

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