

[Working Papers 21

[Cornish: Language and Legislation

Dr. Davyth A. Hicks

2005

An lavar coth yu lavar guir,

The old saying is a true saying,

Bedh darn never, dhan tavaz re hir,

Too long a tongue,
too short a hand,

Mes den heb dawaz a gollaz i dir.

But the man without
a tongue lost his
land.

Cornish traditional proverb

'I hate the Cornish. I hate their poxy language which they make such a fuss about. I hate their fancy foreign food - like clotted cream- which makes the place stink, and I hate their fatuous demands to be treated as a nation'.

Giles Coren, journalist, The (English) Times, August 13th 1999.



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Publisher

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ISSN 1133-3930

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Eurolang Editor-in-Chief

2005

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1. Introduction

Kernewek (Cornish) is a P- Celtic language in the same sub-group as Breton and Welsh. It is spoken in Cornwall where there are an estimated 3,500 semi-speakers but only around 400 completely fluent speakers. After flourishing in the middle ages it went into a quite sharp decline in the early modern period following a series of unsuccessful uprisings against the centralising English state under whose rule Cornwall had come under.

During the 19th century Cornish appears to have fallen out of use as a spoken language by any community in Cornwall, and inter-generational transmission also appears to have broken down. However, this is counterbalanced by evidence of individual speakers such as John Davey of Zennor, who died in 1890. Earlier, scholars in the 17th and 18th century noticed the decline in usage and the language began to be studied and data collected. In the late 19th century and early 20th century the language was revived and by the 1950s some inter-generational transmission was re-introduced.

Cornish received official recognition from the UK state in 2002 with inclusion onto the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages at the Part II level. In 2005 Cornish was given funds from the British government for further development to be matched with Objective 1 funding from Europe. It is hoped that steps will now be taken to put the language on a firm footing, to increase the number of speakers, to increase the rate of inter generational transmission, to create Cornish-medium education and to see its increased usage in all linguistic domains.

This paper will examine the history of the language its relationship with the emerging English then British state, its decline and revival and the effect of legislation on its regeneration.

2. The Cornish language, history and the UK

Kernewek (Cornish) is one of the P-Celtic language group including Breton and Welsh, Cornish evolved from the earlier Brittonic which was

spoken throughout the island except for the northernmost part where Pictish was spoken.

In the early middle ages, following the seizure of south-east Britain by Anglo-Saxons, the British kingdom of Dumnonia emerged controlling all of south west Britain. For nearly 300 years Dumnonia remained relatively intact with a border roughly coterminous with the eastern borders of Dorset and Somerset. However, in the 800s the English kingdom of Wessex expanded further westwards after a series of battles, some won by the British some by the English, but eventually reducing the independent British state to the territory of Cornwall by 936, when they were expelled from Exeter (possibly the old British capital) and the rest of Devon to Cornwall. The border of Cornwall and England was fixed as the River Tamar, where it has remained ever since.

Judging by place-name evidence the English settled quite densely in the area which became Devon. Place-names indicate, however, a long established and distinct toponymic boundary between the English and the Cornish running along the Tamar, the present day border between Cornwall and England; except for that part of Cornwall between the River Ottery and Tamar where there is also a concentration of English place-names. There is also a cluster of Brittonic names in north Devon, suggesting that Cornish speech may have survived for longer in this area.

Cornish and Welsh gradually evolved as separate languages, however, it is likely that Cornish remained mutually intelligible with Welsh until the 1100s. While with Breton, directly descended from Cornish, it remained mutually intelligible well into the 1500s. The vast majority of settlers in Brittany came from Cornwall and Dumnonia as evidenced by Breton place-names and the closeness of the language.

The advance of Wessex may have also resulted in some population movement from the Dorset and Devon areas overseas into Brittany, however, this had already commenced before there was any threat from Saxon territorial expansion. This is reflected by the planned way, evidenced in the onomastic record, in which Brittany was settled by Britons. In Brittany, British speech survives as Breton to the present day. Place and area names literally

mirror those of Cornwall¹ and the languages remained mutually intelligible until the sixteenth century much like British English and American English are today. Trading links and exchange of population of related speech continued between Cornwall and Brittany from the fifth century until the sixteenth - and in some form even up to recent times.

The annexation of Cornwall into the emerging kingdom of England was a drawn out, and still today, controversial process. There are two schools of thought, one arguing that Cornwall was completely absorbed into England and the other arguing that Cornwall has never been part of England and that laws made by the English state in the middle ages, and reconfirmed more recently,² support the case that Cornwall is an autonomous country.

During the middle ages Cornwall was recognised as a separate province, named as West Wales on some maps, with its own subordinate status and title under the English crown, and with its own diocese.

The designation of Cornwall as a Duchy with the Dukedom going to the English kings first son and heir, which continues today, mirrored the way that the English crown treated Wales later after the Welsh king, Llewellyn Olaf, was murdered by English forces. In Wales' case it became a Principality with the English kings first son becoming the Prince of Wales. Hence the English monarch's first born son being entitled Prince of Wales and Duke of Cornwall. Today supporters of Stannary Law argue that the Duke of Cornwall is head of state.

There were constitutional provisions under the Stannary Parliament, which had its origins in provisions of 1198 and 1201 separating the Cornish and Devon tin interests and developing into a separate parliament for Cornwall maintaining Cornish customary law. From 1337 the Duchy Charters

1 E.g. Kerne (Breton), Kernow (Cornish)

2 For example, the 1856 court case in which Sir George Harrison successfully argued that the Duchy enjoyed the rights and prerogatives of a County Palatine and that the Duke has rights over the whole territory of Cornwall befitting a King. During the dispute the Attorney General to the Duchy of Cornwall stated, "A careful examination of the 3rd Charter [of 1338] shows that all remaining Crown rights were transferred to the Duke. The Crown of England therefore has entirely denuded itself of any remnant of sovereign authority and territorial dominion which it once enjoyed in Cornwall".

In addition, in 1971 the Kilbrandon Report into the British constitution recommended that, when referring to Cornwall official sources should cite the Duchy not the 'County'. This was suggested in recognition of its constitutional position.

meant that Cornwall was a 'quasi-sovereign' royal Duchy in the later medieval period.

Furthermore, if one accepts the argument that there was English royal overlordship in Cornwall in the middle ages it was only for a brief period. The advent of Norman kingship meant that the English language at the highest official levels was removed to be replaced by Norman French. In Cornwall the linguistic effect was to confine English usage, the majority speaking Cornish and a distant government speaking Norman French, and writing in Latin.

Cornish flourished during the middle ages and this is witnessed by the extant literature such as the miracle plays and saints lives. The miracle plays performed at *plenys an gwary* (playing place) were attended by thousands. They utilised Biblical themes and were often used to comment on current politics. These processes acted to ensure that the Cornish language flourished in a vibrant speech community. The language functioned throughout the Middle Ages as the majority speech for all economic and social purposes in the life and society of Cornwall. This was certainly the case throughout its early and middle periods up to the end of the Middle Ages. At the same time it was renewed and strengthened by intensive trade and commerce with a still independent Brittany, and the settlement in Cornwall of Bretons, making up some 10% of the population, speaking essentially the same language and assimilating into the Cornish community.³

The situation changed rapidly with the far-reaching political and economic changes from the end of the medieval period onwards. Place-name evidence suggests that language-shift from Cornish to English progressed through Cornwall roughly from east to west from this period onwards, notwithstanding the language surviving in pockets in east and mid-Cornwall. The numbers of Cornish speakers during this period have been estimated by Dr Ken George from various sources.⁴ He regards the numbers of speakers as coincident with a total population more or less between the Domesday enumeration of 1086 and the early thirteenth century, with numbers estimated between 15,000-20,000. Growth continued with some divergence from total population to a likely peak of 38,000 in 1300 (some 73% of the total population of Cornwall at that time), before the

³ See L. Fleuriot, 'Breton et Cornique à la fin du moyen age'

⁴ See Kenneth J. George (1986)

demographic reversal of the Black Death in the 1340s. Dr George estimates that numbers of Cornish speakers were maintained at around 33,000 between mid-fourteenth to mid-sixteenth centuries against a background of substantial increase of the total Cornish population.⁵

Cornwall's wealth especially her tin strengthened her political autonomy. Tin was regulated by the Stannary Parliament which had a far-reaching and independent legislative role in Cornwall. This engendered some stability for Cornwall, and for its language. There may be some evidence that the language re-established itself to some extent eastwards one again. Throughout this time Cornwall and England were regarded by most of Europe as separate nations evidenced by the name Cornwall being in most European languages and comments from various ambassadors and emissaries. Also, maps of the time showed the two countries as distinct, for example, the Mappa Mundi in Hereford Cathedral.

However, there was a major rising in 1497 on the issues of central control of the tin trade, confiscation of the Stannary charters and suspension of Stannary government, this set against a general background of Tudor centralisation in England and expansion abroad. The 1497 rising saw a march to London led by Mighal An Gof from St Keverne and Thomas Flamank from Bodmin. However, the Cornish army was defeated and the leaders hung, drawn and quartered.

The 1508 Charter of Pardon constituted a treaty offered to the Cornish after the 1497 indicating that England's rulers sought to accommodate the Cornish. The Charter states, "No [Westminster] Act or Statute shall have effect in the Stannaries without the assent and consent of the twenty-four stannators." The Charter therefore expanded the power of the Cornish Stannary Parliament by granting it the authority to block royal acts from coming into force in Cornwall. This gave it the power to veto any laws from the Parliament at Westminster and ensured that Westminster was unable to dissolve the Cornish Parliament.

2.1. Decline

⁵ See map and graphs of Dr George's estimated language decline <http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=8541>

The Reformation signalled the beginning of decline for Cornish. The overall effects of the Reformation has been seen as the prime cause of the decline of Cornish and marking the end of an era, an era in which Cornish had been thriving. Six main factors have been identified as initiating decline :

1. The Prayer Book War, and the subsequent 'white terror', was one the main causes for the decline in Cornish as some 6,000 Cornishmen died, a third of the Cornish-speaking male population. Cornish became stigmatised as a 'backward' language, and the language of Catholics potentially loyal to enemies of England.

2. Breton Relations. Traditional ties with Brittany were severely reduced after the 1549 Prayer Book War and in 1532 Brittany herself was annexed by France.

3. The college of Glasney, and other monastery based seats of learning such as Crantock, were the main source of literature in Cornish, these were suppressed in 1545.

4. English was introduced into religious services in 1549.

5. The Bible was not translated into Cornish.

6. The growth of towns and commerce sees English expand into mid and west Cornwall and usage extend beyond the gentry class.

2.1.1. The Prayer Book War

The 1549 'Prayer Book Rebellion' or war had disastrous consequences for the Cornish language and as MacKinnon (2000) notes the uprising had an 'explicit language dimension'. The writer J. Cornwall suggests that they 'fought for what they believed in - religion and racial identity'. There was to be no accommodation for Cornish as there had been after the 1497 rising, evidence indicates that state sponsored political violence led to a severe decline in the numbers of Cornish speakers and a later unwillingness or fear by surviving Cornish speakers to pass on the language to the younger generation. The risings are echoed by the later the 1715 and 1745 Jacobite Rebellions in Scotland where Gaelic speaking Highlanders rallied on behalf of the Stewart dynasty, that rising also had a bloody aftermath with severe measures taken against the Gaelic language and culture.

Cornwall with its separate language, institutions and adherence to Catholicism, refused to accept the new prayer book in English. Mass

previously held in Latin was now to be in English, but many of the Cornish did not understand English. One statement addressed to the king read "We will not receive the new service, because it is but a Christmas game. We will have our old service of Matins, Mass, Evensong and Procession as it was before; and we the Cornish, whereof certain of us understand no English, do utterly refuse the new service".

After Government officials had robbed churches in Cornwall the uprising started. Led by Arundell the army marched and besieged Exeter, in the subsequent battles that followed, some 5,000 to 6,000 Cornish were massacred many after having been taken prisoner. It would be the first time that the English state would use foreign mercenaries (Italian, German and Welsh) in a supposedly 'internal' matter. It has been estimated that the population of Cornwall at this time was about 40-50,000, and that most of the fighters came from mid and west Cornwall, the Cornish-speaking area. To lose up to 6,000 of the menfolk of a male population of c. 22,000 is over a third of the entire male population - a whole generation. It is likely that it dealt a heavy blow to the language. Within Cornwall government repression continued. Cornwall was placed under English martial law, called the 'white terror', some prisoners were taken and publicly dismembered. Cornish dissenters were hunted down, Cornish priests were hung from belltowers or buried alive accompanied by looting and land confiscation.

2.1.2. Breton relations

Brittany herself had lost her independence in 1532. However, through the Middle Ages there had been large numbers of Bretons living in Cornwall, many being attracted by higher wages. From the taxation records of 1522-4 they constituted a sizeable minority within Cornwall, 10% in some areas. Fleuriot estimated that Bretons were a sixth of the population in Penwith.⁶ Furthermore, trading figures show an enormous economic interaction with Brittany. Brittany was also only a day's sailing away; London, 300 miles away, took a week to ride to. Breton traders accounted for 47% of shipping at Fowey, 47% at St. Ives, 54% at Penzance, 63% at Padstow, 94% at Mounts Bay, in the period 1498-99. By comparison Breton trade with Plymouth in Devon only accounted for 10%. Such figures suggest that trade would have been conducted in what was then a mutually intelligible Cornish and Breton.

⁶ Fleuriot L.

Such a high figure must have had some impact on the Cornish language and may explain partly why Cornish survived for as long as it did and that it was with communities who thrived on fishing who had a tradition of economic relations with Brittany. Bretons today, harking back to this period, refer to Cornwall as their 6th diocese. The other sizeable minority living in Cornwall were the Irish, again reflecting the importance and speed of sea routes for economic and cultural interaction. In the 1530s John Leland commented that Padstow was full of Irish and Breton people.

With Brittany's loss of independence Bretons as Catholic and 'French' subjects were potential enemies of the new English Protestant state and to be discouraged.

2.1.3. Closure of seats of learning

Glasney college near Penryn, Falmouth, was one the engine houses of Cornish literature. With its forced closure after the dissolution of the monasteries during the rule of Henry VIII, the production of literature such as the mystery plays and saints lives was curtailed. Other colleges and monasteries were also closed and stripped of their moveable wealth. It is likely that much extant Cornish literature was destroyed at this time.

2.1.4. English was introduced into religious services in 1549

2.1.5. 1560, Bible not translated into Cornish

The newly independent Church of England recommends that the teaching of the catechism in Welsh and Cornish be made lawful. However, this was only implemented for Welsh, and is seen as a key factor in the survival of Welsh. The Bible was not translated into Cornish. performed. From 1560 catechisms and sermons were allowed in Cornish where English was not understood, but these measures were insufficient to give a literary and religious base for the language. Cornish versions of the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Apostle's Creed date from these provisions. However, without the mainstays of a Cornish Bible and Prayer Book, standardisation of the language did not occur and thus a full literary corpus of Cornish of this period was not transmitted. Without a stabilising or conserving standard, the language in its latter phases continued to develop increasing disparity from its pre-Reformation manifestations in miracle play and religious literature. The miracle plays however continued to be performed.

2.1.6. Growth of towns and commerce reinforces English speaking in west Cornwall

It has also been suggested that the growth in the importance of mining in west Cornwall and the growth of towns, led to the language of commerce becoming English and that English speakers from east Cornwall migrated west to become miners. However, evidence of Cornish in the town environment is illustrated by Cornish street names. It suggests that an urban English versus rural Cornish model may not be the most appropriate way to describe the division of language usage.

2.2. The War of the Peoples of Britain 1640s

Nearly a hundred years later in the War of the Five Nations Cornish troops excelled against the Parliamentarians remaining unbeaten until the end, and although Cornwall fought on the royalist side no Crown troops were permitted into Cornwall. The Cornish leader, Grenville was imprisoned for attempting to secure a separate Cornish state. Cornish was used as a 'secret' language during the war.

The besieged Parliamentarians of Plymouth were heard to complain, in 1644, that they were "eager to be avenged on the cursed Cornish who are as very heathen as the ignorant Welsh that know no religion or God, but the King is more God in that country and Wales. "

2.3. 1650-1750 The Newlyn School

A group of educated men, in particular the Boson family, living in and around Newlyn saw Cornish declining and worked to record its last stages. They collected songs and stories, wrote poems, translated portions of scripture and corresponded with one another in Cornish. Edward Lhuyd, the renowned Celtic scholar, visited for four months in 1701, collected as much as he could and published some of his findings in 1707 (e.g. the folk story 'Dzhuan Tshei an Hwr', John of Chyannor). Cornish had a social stigma attached to it, one of the writers, Nicholas Boson, commented that his mother had forbidden the servants to talk to him in Cornish. Such social stratification of Cornish is reflected later by Lhuyd who observed that Cornish was not used by the gentry except when speaking to servants.

Despite there having been no translations into Cornish of the Prayer Book and the Bible with the sixteenth century Reformation, Cornish was used in church services for the Lord's Prayer, Creed and sermon. In the late seventeenth century these uses ceased. The last places using Cornish were at Landewednack on the Lizard until 1667, and at Towednack in West Penwith until 1678. In the seventeenth century George estimates that the numbers of Cornish-speakers dropping to 14,000 by mid-century and to about 5,000 by its end.

2.4. The Modern Age

Economically tin and copper became the most important products as Cornwall came into the modern age. The Industrial Revolution started in Cornwall as production methods, such as the move from streaming tin to deep hard rock mining, developed to meet the demands of neighbouring England's new empire. Steam engines were invented in Cornwall originally to pump water from mines and then for transportation. The Cornish language came to contribute greatly to the terminology of metal and hard-rock mining, as this was the leading world area for their development. 'Fish, tin and copper' was the Cornish motto.

2.5. 1750 - early 1800's

Cornish speakers were so few in number that Borlase wrote in 1758 that the language had 'altogether ceased, so as not to be used anywhere in conversation'. However, if he had ventured just six miles from his home in Ludgvan, he could have heard Cornish still in use. This was left to an English antiquary, Daines Barrington, who 'discovered' a number of Cornish speakers at Mousehole, notably Dolly Pentreath, (d. 1777), who has been mistakenly labelled as the last traditional native speaker. She was outlived by a number of speakers, for example, William Bodinar who wrote in 1776, "Nag es moye vel pager po pemp en dreau nye ell clapia Cornoack leben, poble coath pager egance blouth, Cornoack ewe all neceaves gen poble younk. " (There are no more than 4 or 5 in our village who can speak Cornish now, old folk of four score years, Cornish is forgotten by young people'). Bodinar died in 1789. Throughout the 19th century evidence was collected from speakers and people who knew some Cornish words or phrases. For example, John Davey, also acclaimed as the last native speaker of Cornish, who died in 1890. By the 19th century it was not the normal everyday language used in and outside the home by people who had learned the language from their parents, as a mother tongue. But as Murdoch has commented (1993) : "At the time it was falling out of use, scholars and antiquaries were already beginning to take an interest, and preserved of it what scraps they could. The knowledge of the language never died out."

The domains in which Cornish was used during this period included reciting the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, and for counting, especially for fish in places like Mousehole, Newlyn and St Ives, with examples being attested well into the twentieth century.

Mackinnon (2000) has commented that "Sociologically the language can be seen as retaining significance in spiritual life - and instrumentally in keeping control of a transaction within the indigenous sphere. The early collectors and revivalists have communicated the names and locations of persons who were able to produce examples of traditionally communicated Cornish - some may even have been 'semi-speakers' who had been able to understand the language in their youth at the turn of the eighteenth-nineteenth century. " Regarding the survival of Cornish MacKinnon (2000) comments : "Knowledge of Cornish did not cease with the passing of the last native speakers. Its knowledge and cultivation were, however, maintained for over a century by other means. Cornish words, phrases and formularies were passed on orally by ordinary Cornish working folk, and Cornish language studies were progressed by a number of academic scholars. "

As the language faded so Cornwall economically and politically began to falter. Despite the industrial revolution igniting in Cornwall, increasing centralisation and the instability of copper and tin prices resulted in impoverishment for Cornwall. The Stannaries had lost their pre-eminence and the Stannary Parliament was suspended in 1752 by Thomas Pitt of Boconnoc, Lord Warden of the Stanneries of Cornwall. In 1888 the 'County' Council was set up; Cornwall was made a county of England, there had been no consultation and no Act of Union. The Stannaries and the 44 MPs which had previously represented England's accommodation of Cornwall's distinct status had been cast aside. Through the late 1800s and into the 20th century the Cornish economy declined. Cornish people emigrated throughout the world, to America, to South Africa and Australia. There was a Great Emigration of 1860, where more people left Cornwall than England and Wales put together. There were so many Cornish mining abroad that it was said you could find a 'Cousin Jack' down any hole in the world. Many would send their earnings back to Cornwall to help their families. Many Australians, for example, can trace their roots to Cornwall , where there are today thriving Cornish societies.

2.6. Twentieth century Revival and Regeneration

As Cornish came into the twentieth century Nance, a key figure in the language revival, commented how it was an 'apostolic succession'. Key to future Cornish language planning was that the work of Lhuyd, the Newlyn school, Gwavas and Tonkin, to the work of Henry Jenner and Nance in the early twentieth century, meant that stage 8 in Fishman's Graded Intergenerational

Disruption Scale -GIDS (1991:88) was completed. The language corpus had been largely reassembled, in some cases from speakers themselves as well as from the early modern texts.⁷

The twentieth century saw a steady growth in the language but this growth was far less than the original revivalists would have hoped for. One reason is because of the institutionalised monolingualism of the British state which through most of the twentieth century has made the teaching of any Celtic language difficult with Cornish teaching being dependent on voluntary evening classes. Welsh, already with a strong language community, made strides forward in the 1960s and saw its first increase in speakers in the 1990s, however, this is well beneath a high in 1900 where most of Wales spoke Welsh. Similarly, Scottish Gaelic while making some progress with Gaelic medium education has seen its numbers greatly reduced from that in 1900, with the most recent 2001 census only indicating a stabilisation in decline.

Cornish language teaching up until now was confined to voluntary evening classes. Most often the language teacher has to supply all course materials, teach from their own home as well as hold down a job and support a family. In conversation several teachers have expressed their exasperation with the failure by the state to offer any integration into the public education infrastructure. Language planners are clear that in an education-led regeneration strategy it is essential to have an infrastructure. It requires teaching materials, teacher training, courses in Cornish as a second language, and Cornish-medium classes and schools. This remains wholly absent. Indeed considering the complete lack of resources and the covert hostility of the state to the language it is remarkable that Cornish is doing as well as it is.

The way that Cornish has grown up from the grass roots and from civil society is its strength and underlines the forbearance of activists, teachers and speakers, however, even a little state support during the latter half of the twentieth century would have resulted in an exponential increase in speakers.

In addition to hostility from the outside, the Cornish movement faced its own dilemmas with the 1980s tripartite split over orthography.⁸

⁷ Stage 8 on the GIDS scale where, to paraphrase Fishman (1991), most vestigial users of Cornish were socially isolated old people and Cornish needs to be reassembled from their mouths and memories and taught to adults.

While there is not the space to discuss this here, and this can be examined fully from other sources, a key strategic error was the over-emphasis on orthography at the expense of regeneration and creating new speakers. Ideally the orthography debate should have been conducted alongside, and given pre-eminence to, regeneration efforts, as with other languages. Recent meetings in 2005 appear to be bringing such a strategy to fruition. Such agreement, coupled with a call for a working standard in July 2005, is working to produce an agreed standard based on consensus, which will be required in order to produce teaching materials and courses while any remaining arguments on orthography are hammered out. In contrast, according to MacKinnon's research, language groups see the orthography debate as being useful simply because it has engendered detailed research. Mackinnon (2000) comments that : "The varieties of present-day revived Cornish may be likened to dialects, interestingly formed not on geographical or social bases, but upon learners' preferences, needs and loyalties." Adding that: "The way forward lies with the speakers, learners and users of Cornish themselves."

With the advent of specific funding for language projects in 2005 substantive steps for language regeneration can now be undertaken.

⁸ The orthography debate has featured in various editions of *Cornish Studies*. For example, Williams (1996), George (1995), Mills (1999), Kennedy (2002), Deacon (1996).

3. Language status and legislation in the UK

The UK does not as such have an official language, English is de facto the official language but not de jure. English came to be the predominant language at the same time as the English state expanded by conquest over the Celtic countries of Britain including Dumnonia, later to become Cornwall, over Wales and later over Scotland. After the Norman period it resulted in English being used in every administrative domain. In the 18th century the British state was established called the Kingdom of Great Britain. The Act of Union in 1800 annexed Ireland to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

While England has never made English official it was no stranger to taking severe discriminatory language planning measures, firstly against Welsh in the so called acts of union, or more accurately the laws of annexation and colonization, and then against Scottish Gaelic and Irish.

3.1. The acts and the Welsh language

An often quoted example of the Act to annex Wales is a clause in the 1536 Act (27 Henry VIII c. 26) to outlaw the Welsh language from official use, replacing it with English. It refers in the act to the Welsh language in these terms: "the people of the same dominion have and do daily use a speche nothing like ne consonant to the naturall mother tonge used within this Realme, " and then declares the intention "utterly to extirpe alle and singular sinister usages and customs" belonging to Wales. English was made the only language of the law courts and that those who used Welsh would not be appointed to any public office in Wales. An effect of the language clause was to lay the foundation for creating a thoroughly Anglicised ruling class of landed gentry in Wales which would have many consequences for the future.

The parts of the 1536 Act relating to language were only formally repealed in 1993 by the Welsh Language Act. Wales had been administratively swallowed whole into England and been reduced to being a Principality, just as Cornwall had been subsumed and made into a Duchy.

3.2. Scottish Gaelic

Similarly pro-English and anti-Gaelic language planning occurred in Scotland. The opposition to Gaelic has been described as falling into successive phases of persecution, beginning, after the opposition to and forfeiture of the Lordship of the Isles in the medieval period, with the Reformation in 1560 and a long period of sectarian attack, particularly evident in the Statutes of Iona of 1609 where Highland lairds were forced to sign. The Statutes of Iona in 1609 decreed that parents must send their eldest children to school in the Lowlands that "thay may be found able sufficientlie to speik, reid, and wryte Inglishe". The more explicit 1616 Act went further, mandating that "the vulgar Inglishe tounge be universallie plantit, and the Irishe [i.e. Gaelic] language, whilk is one of the cheif and principall causis of the continewance of barbaritie and incivilitie amongis the inhabitantis of the His and Heylandis, may be abolisheit and removit".

The Scottish Parliament's Education Acts of 1616, 1646 and 1696 followed, by which English was explicitly to be the medium of instruction for Highlanders, interpreted as a policy to make the Highlands English-speaking and Protestant, and finally the founding of the SSPCK schools in 1709 with its declared intention of eradicating the Gaelic language. Its evident enthusiasm for this task of what has been described by recent Scottish historians as 'cultural genocide' was warmed and sharpened politically by the exploitation by the Jacobite Movement of the Gaels and their support for the exiled Stewarts, culminating in the defeat of Prince Charles Stewart's army on Culloden Moor outside Inverness on 16 April 1746. This sectarian phase which encouraged the outlawing, if not always explicitly of the language, then certainly of the culture, was followed by a more liberal attitude in the late eighteenth century; this can be seen as initially a 'utilitarian' phase, from about 1760 until 1872 when Gaelic benefited from the neglect of the European Enlightenment, succeeded by a phase of bureaucratic opposition from 1872 and the Scottish Education Act, in which 'education', and by implication advancement, was synonymous with the English language.

In 2005, following the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament, the Gaelic Language Act was passed in order to give legislative backing to Gaelic regeneration.

3.3. Cornish and legislation

ECRML

Notwithstanding any recognition or status that Cornish had under Stannary Law, the only current legislation giving Cornish any status in the UK state to date is the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML). Cornish was added to the ECRML at the Part II level by the UK state in 2003. The Council of Europe Charter is an internationally binding Treaty requiring substantive measures to be taken by a host state in order to protect and promote European regional, minoritised and stateless languages. Inclusion on the ECRML means that Cornish is recognised by the UK state as a regional language, it does not however confer on the language official status.

The subject of language status in the UK is discussed above regarding Welsh and Scottish Gaelic, both of which are beneficiaries of respective language acts which confer equality of status with English in Wales to Welsh and secure status to Gaelic in Scotland. The modern language acts for Welsh and Gaelic have reversed earlier hostile legislation. In contrast, Cornish was not specifically legislated against.⁹ It is not known if Stannary Law conferred any status on Cornish, or what precisely its status was during the period of semi independence such as the Earldom and the Duchy in the middle ages and early modern era.

It is with the inclusion of Cornish on the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages that the question of the officiality of Cornish arises. Concerning the legal position of Cornish under the Charter, Mr. Rob Dunbar, Lecturer in Law and Celtic at University of Aberdeen, and an international specialist in the law of language and civil rights observed in a personal communication to Ken MacKinnon (27.10.03) that :

"The UK made a declaration by letter from the Permanent Representative of the UK to the Council of Europe, dated 11 March, 2003, and registered at the Secretariat General on 18 March, 2003 that the UK recognises that Cornish meets the Charter's definition of a regional or minority language for the purposes of Part II. The declaration is effective as of 18 March, 2003. This would not constitute either a further act of signature or ratification. Strictly

⁹ However, it may be added that actions undertaken by the English state during and since the Reformation may count as action taken indirectly taken against Cornish simply because it was not given any protection.

speaking, I am of the view that this declaration has no real legal effect. While the Charter requires States to designate which regional or minority languages are to benefit from Part III, it does not require States to indicate their views on which languages are "regional or minority languages" for the purposes of the treaty. I have taken the view that on ratification, the Part II provisions of the Charter--the general commitments in Article 7 which apply to all "regional or minority languages" as well as "non-territorial languages"--automatically applied to all of the UK's regional or minority languages, as that term is defined under Article 1 of the Charter itself.

"As the Charter does not require States to take any views on what are its regional or minority languages, and as it defines how these languages are based on objective principles, I am of the view that the Charter applied in respect of Cornish from the date that the UK's original ratification became effective. The subsequent declaration of 11 March, 2003 by the UK government is helpful in that it indicates that the UK accepts this obligation, but I am of the view that the obligation pre-existed and, indeed, existed independently of the UK's declaration, which has unclear legal value in any case.

"I don't see how the mere signing of the European Charter could confer "official" status on the language. This is because the definition of "regional or minority languages" in the Charter excludes official languages (generally--although article 3(1) allows a state to designate a less widely used official language for the purposes of Part III). If mere ratification made all a state's minority languages into "official languages", then none of them could, by definition, be "regional or minority languages" under the Charter. This would be a very strange result, and makes claims that mere ratification confer official status ridiculous. "

Clearly, as regeneration continues Cornish will need its own language act part of which should confer official status on Cornish, presumably something like the Welsh act where Cornish has equality of status with English in the territory of Cornwall.

Looking to the future, in Europe an emerging criteria for a language to be a working language or to be officially used is that it is official within the territory, or part of the territory, of a state. This stems from legislation passed by Spain conferring official status for Basque, Catalan and Galician within their

respective autonomous communities. In 2005 this recognition was elevated to the European level whereby Catalan, Basque and Galician, because they are official within Spain, are now defined as Spain's co-official languages. It means that they have now gained a level of officiality similar to the previous status of Irish as a Treaty language. In practical terms it means that certain documents will be translated into these co-official languages and that they can be used at EU institution meetings. The Spanish model may be the best way forward for the UK's minoritised indigenous languages, whereby they are all defined as co-official within certain areas, Cornish in Cornwall, Gaelic in Scotland, thus allowing them to be have a status similar to Treaty language at the European level.

Large discrepancies exist in Europe, the most outstanding example is that of Catalan with over 8 million speakers. It is far larger than Maltese and Estonian; these last are fully official working languages while Catalan has only recently gained co-official status in Spain and is only now, November 2005, allowed to be used in the European Council.

4. Implementation of legislation

4.1. ECRML

Under the Charter the UK state is required to apply the provisions of Part II to Cornish. Since signing, however, progress in each linguistic domain has been slow and judging by the UK's reports to the Council of Europe the UK's reading of the Charter is at times minimalistic. However, it is anticipated that developments will speed up now that funding (June 2005) is in place.

Analysis, the ECRML in action

Developments outlined below are measured using the format of the Part II requirements for the ECRML,¹⁰ the UK's most recent report

¹⁰ See the ECRML, Part II, http://www.coe.int/T/E/Legal_Affairs/Local_and_regional_Democracy/Regional_or_Minority_languages/1_The_Charter/List_Charter_versions.asp#TopOfPage

(June 2005) to the Council of Europe,¹¹ the findings published in the MacKinnon Report from 2000,¹² and the Strategy for Cornish (2005).¹³

4.1.1. ECRML, Part 1

Today Cornwall is administered by a two-tier local government, with Cornwall Council, and six district councils (these based on the old shires of Cornwall). The Isles of Scilly are administered separately with a unitary authority. Cornwall (including the Isles of Scilly) has a population of 513,500. Cornwall is currently designated a European Objective 1 funding area in recognition of its economy being behind the EU average when measured by GDP per head.

The UK reports mistakenly that there are no statutory bodies for protection and development of Cornish. While listing several Scots NGOs under the Scots heading, it makes no mention of long running Cornish NGOs such as Kowethas An Yeth or the Kesva officially established as charities. It only mentions the Cornish committee of EBLUL UK.

The situation underlines the need for a Cornish Language Board with statutory powers, as has been afforded to Welsh and Gaelic. When the Report was compiled only Cornwall Council was informed, not the NGOs (UK Report : p18).

Article 6. Regarding Article 6, information on the rights and duties, the UK report refers to the public consultation process which has been undertaken since entry onto the ECRML. This process initiated by Cornwall Council has been fairly comprehensive to date, seeking to involve all actors in the negotiations before detailed language planning is undertaken. An Advisory group was set up which after consultations resulted in the Cornish language Strategy. The strategy is now at the next stage of implementation and it is too early to comment on its outcome. The UK report focuses on the Strategy.

¹¹ See the UK Report, http://www.coe.int/T/E/Legal_Affairs/Local_and_regional_Democracy/Regional_or_Minority_languages/2_Monitoring/2.2_States_Reports/UK_report2.pdf

¹² See MacKinnon Report 2000 <http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=8473>

¹³ The Strategy for Cornish, <http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=6080>

4.1.2. Part II, Article 7

Article 7.1.a. Recognition of Cornish as an expression of cultural wealth. The UK lists a series of statements and press releases which the UK terms as 'recognition'. For example, the Minister for Local Government and the Regions, in 2002, referred to the "symbolic importance of the language for Cornish identity and heritage" and in 2005 the Minister for Local Government , "Languages are part of our history, our culture, and our identity. It is right that we should nurture the Cornish language". While such statements of good faith are welcome, they remain statements and not the proactive language policy that Cornish needs.

Cornwall Council and the districts have adopted a policy statement of support for the language which is more substantive. Meanwhile, according to the UK Report, Cornish language is seen as rooted in cultural and symbolic 'Sense of Place' projects and not in teaching the language to a new generation so as to regenerate the language.

Article 7.1.b. Respect for the geographical area. The UK report does not mention the controversial creation of unelected south west quangos that are currently usurping areas of responsibility from Cornish local government (as well as from the counties in south west England). Despite calls for political autonomy by a broad church of Cornish opinion the British government persists in its plans to create an artificial south west region. Such a region may seriously undermine the Cornish regeneration effort and on this point, with its support of including Cornwall in south west region thereby creating new administrative divisions, the UK is in breach of the Charter. Furthermore, new plans emanating from the south west seek to undermine Cornwall's territorial integrity by linking Cornish governance more closely with Devon. In addition, Cornwall has been included in a vast south west euro constituency. It means that even if all of Cornwall voted for one candidate they would not win. Politically it makes it impossible to put Cornish language on the political agenda in elections. Previously Cornwall had her own Euro constituency, with part of west Plymouth, allowing for an MEP in Brussels to represent Cornish interests.

Article 7.1.c. Resolute action. The UK report outlines the steps undertaken since signing with the advent of the Strategy group, it is too early to comment on any progress made.

Art 7.1.d. Facilitation/encouragement of public use of Cornish. This section refers to media and signage. There is gradually more Cornish language signage appearing, but a clear policy is needed. In media there is a gradual improvement but, as with signage, progress is haphazard and lacking a clear policy. Funding opportunities lack a clear reference to Cornish it being lumped in with other 'cultural funding'. There is once a week a news summary broadcast in the language on Radio Cornwall; however, the bare minimum would be for the establishment of a dedicated Cornish language service, perhaps in partnership with the BBC.

Of concern is the extension of south west quangos' remit and how this will impact on public usage. It is in the south west quangos interest for Cornish cultural identity to be minimised and borders blurred in order to create the image of a culturally homogenous south west. However, the UK report states that in implementing vision 3 of the strategy for Cornish it will "include actions to encourage the wider use of the language in public life, including through signage and promotional materials of public bodies, cultural initiatives, promotion of language products and identifying opportunities for widening and increasing the use of the language in the media. All levels of Government will be involved in developing and supporting these actions."¹⁴

The UK government comments that there are general measures in the UK taken in the domain of broadcasting for matters of local interest but makes no specific mention of any provision for Cornish.

Art 7.1.e. Developing links. The UK notes that the Cornish are in the UK member state committee of the NGO the European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages (EBLUL), which establishes proactive links with the other language groups in the UK and Europe. In addition, the Cornish Gorsedh is represented at the Welsh Eisteddfod ceremonies. It is anticipated that UK EBLUL will become more proactive in linking language communities regarding the setting up and running of joint projects.

Art 7.1.f. Provision for teaching and study. The Strategy is still to reach its implementation stage so cannot yet be assessed. The UK report talks very broadly about the national curriculum which makes no specific provision

¹⁴ See Language Strategy <http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=6080>

for Cornish. The current provision of Cornish in schools is minimal. The 2000 MacKinnon report noted one class per week in 12 primary schools and six secondary schools. There is some teaching about Cornish in 70 primary schools as part of the 'Sense of Place' project. It is possible to take Cornish exams with the Cornish language board.

It will require the implementation of Visions 1 and 2 of the strategy before assessment can be made which begins the work of establishing an infrastructure for Cornish language education. Immediate steps that could be taken include the introduction of peripatetic teachers into the existing infrastructure at primary and secondary level and the creation of funded intensive immersion courses aimed at adults. In the meantime Cornish language teaching, production of teaching materials and teacher training remain haphazard, or in the last case, non-existent. It cannot be emphasised enough that the failure to establish a Cornish language learning infrastructure is potentially losing the Cornish regeneration effort thousands of speakers per year. Speaking to parents, the demand is present but there is no provision.

Art 7.1.g. Provision of facilities for learners. This category is used to discuss the provision of adult education. In 2000, 36 formal evening classes were noted with an enrolment of 365. Plus another 80 learners in informal and self help groups. The UK report says that both central and local government will be involved in development but will rest on the implementation of Vision 1 of the Strategy. As with school education, adult education will be a crucial sector of Cornish regeneration. So far it has been run on an entirely voluntary basis and is often unable to keep up with demand meaning the loss of potential speakers. Besides professionalising the entire sector it is anticipated that intensive immersion courses using the successful Ulpan method will be set up.

Art 7.1.h. Promotion of Cornish at University level. While the UK report mentions that The Institute for Cornish Studies as providing some Cornish language study, it should be remembered that like Scottish Studies in Edinburgh, the Institute researches into the necessary studies about the Cornish and Cornwall in the broadest sense. The study of Cornish and other Celtic languages would be better provided by a distinct, specialised language department of Cornish and/ or Celtic within the University of Cornwall. Such a research base would provide for detailed linguistic analysis, and create postgraduate researchers needed for further language planning and development. It is welcome that the UK

government supports the Vision 1 target of conducting research programmes to inform the resource base and the language planning process.

Art 7.1.i. Transnational exchanges. Vision 5 of the Strategy is backed by the UK, it recommends the development of links with other language communities. There are links with Brittany and Wales but this could be considerably expanded.

Art 7.2. Eliminating discrimination. The UK points to recent legislation such as the Human Rights act of 1998 and the European Convention of Human Rights, however, this remains a grey area. Cornish schoolchildren were punished recently simply for saying that they were Cornish and not English. No redress has yet been found. Cornish language rights are on a daily basis covertly denied. In order to curtail this activity a language act will be needed giving Cornish official status within Cornwall.

Art 7.3. Promoting mutual understanding. In the UK report the Cornish are mentioned as one of the 'range of cultures' of Britain but in reality nothing is taught in English schools about the Cornish, their language or their history. It would be advisable that if there is demand that children could learn Cornish (or any other Celtic language) in England, especially those children of Cornish emigrants who have had to leave Cornwall to find work in England.

Art 7.4. Encouragement to establish bodies. The UK has stated in a report that it has agreed to recognise the public and voluntary sector advisory group that drafted the strategy. This may be a good first step towards setting up a statutory Cornish Language Board that would oversee the regeneration process. The board, functioning like the Welsh Language Board, would eventually require a Cornish language act in order to ensure that language development measures were being implemented.

With the successful implementation of the strategy Cornish will be able to progress onto Part III of the Charter where specific measures are required. Both the UK government and Cornwall Council are expressing strong support for development which is highly encouraging.

4.2. Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

Activists in Cornwall have been campaigning for Cornish inclusion on the UK's ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.¹⁵ It is hoped that inclusion will be made soon, partly because for the Cornish language the FCNM acts to augment the ECRML, but also because of various incidents of anti-Cornish discrimination such as schoolchildren being punished for saying that they are Cornish not English.

Current sociolinguistic situation

It is difficult to determine the exact numbers of speakers and level of inter-generational transmission because despite requests over a number of years the UK 2001 Census chose not to provide a question to determine the number of Cornish speakers. It is estimated by the MacKinnon report (2000) that there are 3,500 semi-speakers with approximately 300 fluent speakers.¹⁶ This is partly assessed by counting those who have passed the highest level exams and attendance at classes. Fluency is judged as being able to hold a conversation on everyday matters. Following the survey in 2000 Professor MacKinnon estimates 459 adults learning the language, 126 learners under 16, 171 persons using the language in family life, 20 children acquiring the language as 'native speakers', and 85 acquiring knowledge of the language otherwise within their families.

Current speakers come from all age ranges and all socio-economic sectors.

MacKinnon has usefully linked Cornish development to Fishmans' GIDS scale :

GIDS Stage 7: 'Most users... are a socially integrated and ethnolinguistically active population but they are beyond childbearing age.' Probably most of the early revivalists in the early twentieth century were, but one at least was teaching his child Cornish.

GIDS Stage 6: '...the attainment of intergenerational informal oracy and its demographic concentration and institutional reinforcement.' By 1939 there was an active group of young people and students who had learned the language. After the war marriage and family formation began to produce another generation who knew the language from their infancy. The group

¹⁵ See the Cornish National Minority Report, <http://www.geecee.co.uk/CNMR/>

¹⁶ See the MacKinnon Report (2000) <http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=8492>

comprised a network in touch through informal contacts, the creation of Cornish language organisations and regular events.

GIDS Stage 5: '...literacy in home, school and community, but without taking on extra-communal reinforcement of such literacy.' This is where the language movement very largely stands today. The language is being used as a home language, children are taught to read and write as well as speak it. A developing Cornish-language press produces learning and resource materials for children. Without exception respondents did not distinguish between speaking, reading and writing abilities in Cornish. These were all felt to be pretty much the same, which is understandably the case since Cornish is predominantly acquired through classes, books and written materials. There has been some development of the language in school education Cornish is seen above as getting into community use in various ways - even beyond the network of speakers, and it is being institutionalised in Cornish life in entertainments, language events, public signage and official uses.

The further stages of the GIDS outline the progress of a reviving language through the stages of lower grade education, the lower work sphere, lower governmental services and mass-media, and to higher level educational, occupational, governmental and media domains. These stages represent the agenda before Cornish today. (MacKinnon, 2000)

Readers are referred to the MacKinnon Report for recent statistics.

4.3. Funding

Up until 2005 funding for Cornish language projects has been non-existent except for 5,000 per year from Cornwall Council (this was only set up in the 1990s). While some European funding has been available for lesser-used languages, partners were needed on large budgets for which co-funding was needed. The Cornish movement being voluntary based simply did not have the resources to compete for such funding. Post 2006 European programmes have been opened out to the smaller European language communities following the principle of encouraging linguistic diversity. While this may look good on paper the obstacles remain for small language projects to find partners and co-funding for

projects at that will start at the one million euro mark. Time will tell if these criteria will continue to exclude the small language communities, favouring those with more speakers and more resources. Various organisations (EBLUL, Eurolang) have repeated their call for the return of ring fenced budgets for lesser used language projects following the pre 2000 B-line budget model, but have so far met only with refusal from the EU institutions.

5. Conclusions

Cornish is currently a minoritised, stateless language. Vibrant through the middle ages it underwent decline as Cornwall lost her autonomy and became integrated into the expanding British state, Cornish became minoritised and marginalised. By the 19th century the available evidence indicates that it had ceased to be a community language leaving only a few individuals with traditional spoken knowledge. However, because of the work of scholars from the 17th century onwards the language was able to be revived in the twentieth century to the extent that the speech community re-established itself. The language now waits on the threshold having established a firm grass roots base and, following official recognition, funding. Future language projects will seek to regenerate the language.

What will be needed in an education led strategy is: clear language planning with funding and timelines for development, Cornish medium and second language education that is inserted (and advertised clearly) into the existing education system in Cornwall, and that the language regeneration effort is backed by legislation to ensure that Cornish again builds a thriving language community and never again faces demise.

Language activists aim to reintroduce Cornish as the normal everyday language of Cornwall.

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