The Celtic Languages And Their Speech Communities In The Post-Revival Era

This paper will seek to offer a description of Irish, Welsh and Breton speech communities from the 19th to 21st century. The modern histories of these languages will be charted through four distinct periods: stability, decline, revivalism, and post-revival reality. Language vitality will be considered in terms of territorial distribution and population, but also of discourse, and of levels of proficiency amongst speakers of the languages. Attention will be given to the weakening of community and the increase of state involvement in the dynamics of language use, and to wider questions of statehood *versus* statelessness. Finally, a tentative prognosis will be made regarding the future of each of the three languages in a generation's time.

1 The distinctness of each of the Celtic languages

Viewed from a distance, the Celtic languages form a family, but, viewed from within, an awareness of the differences between them will contribute more to an understanding of them than will an awareness of the similarities between them. The term Celtic refers to the origins of Irish, Welsh and Breton, the three languages we will be discussing today, and is a term to describe features of, for example, morphology and syntax shared by them, features some of which are particular to them in a European, an Indo-European and to some extent perhaps even in a universal context.

Beyond these features however – grammaticalised initial mutation, VSO word order, and prepositional pronouns, for example – lies the individuality of each of the languages: the circumstances which brought about their evolution, their spheres of development, their cohabitation with other languages, their protracted isolation from other languages, their rich literatures, their sociolinguistic realities, and their hugely varied lexicons. While speaking of the family of Celtic languages then, we keep in mind both the historical correctness of the classification, and its limitations as a vehicle to further our appreciation of each member of the family.

2 The Shared Sociolinguistic Context of Irish, Welsh and Breton

As well as being described in terms of linguistic origin as Celtic, the Irish, Welsh and Breton languages can be described in terms of their recent histories and of their contemporary sociolinguistic status and situation. In this regard, they share much. Each occupies a place on the periphery of a given sphere. Irish is a community language is spoken on the periphery of Irish society, in the west, Welsh a language spoken on the fringes of British society, and speakers of Breton have lived for centuries on the western edges of the Parisian sphere of political influence. Existence on the fringes for each of the three languages, has been synonymous with isolation in modern times. Each language, to differing degrees, has seen its territory decrease during the modern era, and has endured a climate often hostile to its survival. As well as sharing linguistic origins therefore, Irish, Welsh and Breton share a tale of marginalisation.

3 The State

This marginalisation occured with the advent of the state, and of the nation state, a process that defines the political Europe of modern times.Thus, Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries emerges as a subcontinent divided into sovereign political units in which a linguistic group governs itself through the medium of its own language. A tendency towards monolingualism is one feature of the nation state. And the monolingual majority is a feature of the population of the nation state. Communities of speakers of the Celtic languages in the context of these often monolingual majorities may be decribed as stateless minorities. Being stateless, and spoken by a relatively small population, with limited power over their own fate, the Celtic languages, due in large part to their existence within the European nation states, passed in the nineteenth century, or in the twentieth at the latest, from a phase of linguistic normality into a phase of linguistic instability.

4 Linguistic normality

What does linguistic normality mean? It means the following: that a language is spoken by all living generations of a community; that its tranmission to the next generation is a matter of course; that the number of people speaking the language, while perhaps fluctuating to a degree, is not in sharp decline; that all aspects of the life of the community and its members are discussed thoroughly through the medium of the language; that aspects of the grammar of the language are not in a state of metamorphosis owing to the influence of an encroaching language; that the language has the resources to generate an idiom adapted to the environment in which the language is spoken. In a Europe, this linguisic normality is something enjoyed by most of the continent's languages. In a global context, it is something enjoyed only by a relatively small number of dominant languages.

5 The Minority

Languages that do not enjoy linguistic normality are often refered too as minority languages. The use of minority as a sociolinguistic term in Europe grew during the last quarter of the 20th century. Consequently, the Celtic languages are often described now as being minority languages. What does this mean? The significance of the term lies in the consequences latent in not belonging to the majority group. In the European nation-state, with it's preponderant monolingualism, members of the minority language, in the past, have had little politcal influence or juridic power. The fate of the minority therefore is often assimilation, culminating ultimately in the disappearance of the group.

A valid term, and one central to an understanding of the Celtic languages in the late 20th century, 'minority' has begun to lose some of its relevance in recent years. Since the early eighties, when 'minority' became an established socio-linguistic term, the linguistic landscape of parts of Europe has changed not insignificantly. Globalisation, short- medium- and longterm economic migration, the internationalistation of education, and the movement of people made possible by the widening of the European Union and by cheaper travel: these things have all contributed to shading of the black and white majority *versus* minority picture often painted some two decades ago.

In Ireland, for example, Polish and Portuguese, to name but two, are languages spoken by growing communities, a phenomenon foreseen by none a mere decade ago. In this context, speakers of Irish, while still a national minority, now find themselves one of several minorities, and one of several communities leading a bilingual life in Ireland. Such is the change that proposals are afoot to have road-signs erected in non-national languages. Bilingualism, indeed multilingualism has increased in Ireland, and English,

once a monolithic oppressive majority language, is now an increasingly apolitical lingua franca.

In Wales too, a shift has occurred in relations between the 'minority' Welsh-speaking community and the 'majority' English speaking one. Wales now has a national assembly, and traditional England, owing in part to its post-colonial multi-ethnic richness, is beset by a paling of identity. From different reasons, many English are choosing to move away from their homeland, and since the seventies, immigration from England has contributed to change in the composition of many communities in Welsh-speaking Wales.

However, while the primary effect of immigration may be a rise in the number and percentage of English speakers in Dyfed and Gwynedd, in the west and north of Wales respectively, the children of many immigrants have, through attending Welsh schools, contributed to an increase in the number of Welsh speakers in their adopted home areas. In Lampeter, where I lived, my neighbours are English, their children good Welsh-speakers. Thus, while the native community remains vibrant enough to assimilate new-comers, movement of people will not result in linguistic instability, and over the centuries, incomers have been learning Irish, and Welsh.

6 The Tribe

In Europe we speak of minority and majority languages. However, when speaking of languages on other continents, we sometimes refer to tribal languages. Due in part to the imperial past of the English language, the word 'tribal' may evoke, among other things, the exoticness of distant places. But to what extant may the word 'tribal' be used to describe the minority languages of Europe? And how can this description further our understanding of the social functioning of the speech-communities of these languages?

If orality is one feature of the tribal language, we will find that the classification suits Irish and Breton well. If specificity of creed or of religious doctrine is another feature of the tribal language, we will find again that Celtic languages are spoken by tribe-like groups. If association with a distinct, contained territory is a feature of the tribal language, and a way of life adapted over time to that territory, Irish, Welsh and Breton will again answer the description. Importantly, we must ask how these groups view themselves. When we do so, we will find Welsh uses the term *tylwyth hyd y nawfed ach* 'extended family to the ninth degree'; Breton, '*ma tud* 'my people'; and Irish, *clan*, a concept so potent that it has found its way into many languages, including Polish.

One difference between tribe and minority therefore, is that, viewed from without, one sees a minority, while viewed and experienced from within, one views and experiences the tribe, or clan. This analysis helps explain the exasperation experienced by language activists in the face of what they perceive as apathy among small linguistic communities regarding the future of their own language. In the Celtic countries, those involved in language activism have often been non-members of the tribe. Thus, the revivalist movement seldom took root in rural communities, and remained marginal and obscure in the eyes of the native-speaker who continued to conduct his

or her life as a member of a community whose perception of itself has remained unchanged since the pre-decline period. In Ireland, Brittany and Wales therefore, among speakers of the Celtic languages, there is on the one hand a sense of tribe or clan, and, on the other, a sense of citizenship – where minority or majority are two sides of one coin.

7 Irish 19th Cen. – pre-decline stability

At different times in its history, Irish has enjoyed various degrees of stability. The period most relevant us is the pre-decline period of stability that ended in the 19th century. What were the hallmarks of Irish linguistic stability in the 19th century? They are as follows. A population of millions whose only language was Irish. A population of millions the majority of whom were illiterate. A populaion of millions a tiny percentage of whom lived in an urban environment. A population who had no real political representation. A population dependent on limited agricultural produce produced by traditional means.

8 Breton 19th Cen. – pre-decline stability

The circumstances of pre-decline stability in Brittany is similar in ways to the circumstances we find during the corresponding period in Ireland. During the 19th century, for industrial and other reasons, the population grew rapidly in Brittany, as it did elsewhere, resulting in a peak in the numbers of speakers of the language. Due to political and economic reality however , the levels reached during this peak, well over a million speakers before the 1st World War, were largely unsustainable. Poverty amongst Breton speakers was acute, homelessness common, life-expectancy for a time close to that of today's underdeveloped countries.

The 1st World War then resulted in great loss. As many as 100,000 Bretons were killed. War memorials with long lists of names testify in most Breton villages to this tragedy. Unlike the Irish, who, despite adopting English as their language, perceived themselves to be a people apart from the British, the Bretons, in the decades after the Great War, were won over to French patriotism, and, eager to emerge from their penury, underwent a shift in identity, aided by efficient French bureaucracy that helped them cast aside the old for the new. Thus, whereas until the 1930s there existed distinct Breton language, costumes, religious history, songs, dance and music – a complete system of references that together constituted a *civilisation* – after the 2nd World War, these things quickly melted away, surviving largely as symbols to be adopted by the revivalists.

9 Welsh 19th Cen. – demographic change, industrial revolution, internal migration, rise in number of speakers

The history of Welsh, on the other hand, is more akin to events elsewhere in Europe and Britain than in Ireland and Brittany. As in the German Ruhr Gebiet, in Northern and Eastern France, and in Northern England, for example, industrialisation occured in Wales, both in the north of the country, where the slate industry remains functional, and in the south, where, like parts of Poland, a society was build around the coal industry. Industrialisation brought urbanisation, and rural depopulation. It caused demographic shifts, resulted in migration, and, in the case of Wales, brought about changes to the linguistic face of the country. Whereas the population of Wales before the modern era is estimated at about 400,000, by 1900 it had grown to over 2 million, about half of whom spoke Welsh. A large percentage of these Welsh-speakers were literate, and many read regularly, their literary diet including works religious in nature and publications with contemporary socialist leanings.

10 Irish 19th Cen. language change

In 19th century Ireland , though the language was thriving, the country was far from stable economically. After the destruction of Gaelic civilisation in the early 17th century, Ireland endured detrimental British rule, and became a country largely deprived of political and economic structure. A large peasant population was forced into an unsustainable culture of subsistence farming. As the 19th century wore on, the potato gradually replaced other foods, and became the staple food of the people. When the crop failed three years running from 1845 to 1847, a million people starved, and, according to traditional estimates, a million emigrated, very many to America, in the infamous coffin ships, while others joined the exodus to the cities of Britain. The Irish language had been in decline in parts of the country prior to the Great Famine, in the east for example, but, until the 1840s, was still the language of the majority. The second half of the 19th century was a time of language change in Ireland. A people abandoned their native tongue.

11 Breton early 20th Cen. language change, 2 wars, agrarian decline

Language change in Brittany is a process still underway today. The last generation of native Breton speakers were born in the 1950s. As this generation ages, the language is entering the period of dormancy which precedes extinction. This period of dormancy started in some places in Brittany in the 70s, and reached all parts of the territory by the 1990s. Breton is no longer the language of any community, albeit it households and certain extended families still speak it, as well as a number of scattered micro-communities.

Taking a telescopic view of the history of Breton speech communities, we might observe that, since the early centuries of the second millenium AD, the language has been abandoned class by class, first the ruling aristocracy, later the landowners, subsequently the lesser nobility and *bourgeoisie*, and finally now, as pressure to adopt the republican French way of life has become unwithstandable, the agricultural and post-agricultural population.

This analysis hides the poignancy of the drama. A simple anecdote may reveal it. In 1989, I toured central Brittany, visiting remote villages and farms. Some houses lay in ruins. One, still habitable, stood open to the world. Entering the house, I saw boots under the table, and a faded newspaper dated October 10th 1963. On this day, the house had simply been abandonned. Trégor poet Anjela Duval describes a similar scene in the making in her poem *Va C'heriadenn* (My Village): *Simudet eo ar Geriadenn, liv ar marw en he c'herch'henn, tavet eo talmoù he c'halon.* (The village has been struck dumb, its bosom a deathly colour, its heart throbs no longer.)

12 Welsh Mid 20th Cen. decline

It may be said that, whereas Irish and Breton were ovetaken by developments in the 19th century that lead to the world we inherited, Welsh was part of these developments and indeed flourished and grew as a direct result of them. The decline of Welsh, began later than that of Irish and Breton, that is, not in the industrial era, but in the age of the newspaper, the radio and the motorcar. The decline may be perceived as a second swing of the pendulum, the first swing of which was a dramatic increase in the Welsh-speaking population in the nineteenth century.

Welsh had always been spoken in the south in Glamorganshire, a remote and thinly populated area, much like the rest of Wales, until the industrial revolution. This revolution had as one of its consequences the replacement of the older social fabric in Glamorganshire, with its craftsmen, farmers and scattered dwellings, with a new society, one of shift-workers, their families and terraced houses. It may well be that, although Welsh was the language of the new industrial south for several generations, it was, being the language of worker, not of master, and of the trade-unionist, not of the share-holder, destined to succumb to Anglicising influences once such influences made themselves felt. From early in the 20th century then, Welsh gave way to English in parts of the south. Elsewhere, in west and north Wales, where the fabric of the older society remained more intact, the language continued to be spoken, and does so until this day.

13 Revival

We have described briefly above two periods in the modern history of Welsh, irish and Breton, one a period of stability, one a period of decline. A third period shared by all three langauges is the period of revivalism.

14 Welsh Revivalism

Language activism, has played a greater role in the history of Welsh since the 1960s, than is the case in any other Celtic country. The beginnings of revivalism are often associated with a lecture by Saunders Lewis, broadcast in 1962. In the lecture, *Tynged yr Iaith* (The Fate of the Language), he says:

Trown felly at y sefyllfa bresennol, argyfwng yr iaith yn ail hanner yr ugeinfed ganrif. Mae'n sefyllfa wan.....Iaith ar encil yw'r Gymraeg yng Nghymru mwyach, iaith lleiafrifol a lleiafrif sydd eto'n lleihau.....Nid llai na chwyldroad yw adfer yr iaith Gymraeg yng Nghymru. Trwy ddulliau chwyldro yn unig y mae llwyddo.

Let us turn than to the present situation, the crisis the language faces in the latter half of the 20th century. The situation is weak...Welsh in Wales today is a language retreating, a minority language and a minority still diminishing...Nothing less than a revolution will reinstate the Welsh language in Wales. Only through revolutionary means can we succeed.

Following Saunders' Lewis influential epistle to the nation, Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (The Society for the Welsh Language) was founded. The Cymdeithas pursued a policy of civil disobedience for a quarter of a century, a policy they coupled to great effect with pacifist ideology. They chose specific targets in the public sector – the monolingual postal-service, the television licencing office – and demanded a Welsh-language service. The Cymdeithas was a young people's movement. They campaigned tirelessly,

occupied government offices, removed monolingual road-signs, paid fines, were kicked, insulted and emprisoned. Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg provoked the Welsh people into taking note of imminent cultural dormancy. Without the efforts of the Cymdeithas, the Welsh language would enjoy few of the privileges it has today. The Cymdeithas, as such, is among the most successful civil rights movements to have flourished in Europe in the final third of the 20th century.

Saunders Lewis and Cymdeithas yr Iaith Cymraeg were not the first revivalists in Wales. In the 16th century, influenced by Renaissance thinking, a group of humanists in Wales – y dyneiddwyr – prepared the foundations of the modern Welsh language. One of them, Siôn Dafydd Rhys, wrote as follows in 1592:

Nyd oes nemor o iaith (hyd y gwnn i) ynn Eurôpa a'i hynysoedd, nas cafas ei hymgelêddu a'i choledd gann ei Ieithyddion a'i Gwladwyr 'ihûn o amser i gilydd ; onyd eyn hiaith ni y Cymry. Yr honn ynawr yn hwyr ac o fraidd, a ddechreuodd gaphael pêth gwrtaith gan wyrda dysgêdic o'n hamser ni.

To my knowledge, there is hardly a language in Europe and its islands that has not been upheld and cherished by its linguists and countrymen from time to time but the language of us the Welsh. Only now, and with much retard, have the gentlemen of the day begun to enrich the language.

Since the 16th century, Welsh has been coining terms, inventing and rejuvenating its word bank with indigenous resources. If, from the Welsh dictionary, all modern native neologisms were to be removed, the language would immediately cease to function. Here are some examples of the hundreds of words issue of recent centuries which Welsh speakers take for granted: *amcangyfrif* (estimate), *cofnod* (record), *arddull* (style), *dogfen* (document), *darlun* (illustration), *llyfrgell* (library), *canran* (percentage), *llwgrwobrwyo* (to bribe), *pwyllgor* (committee), *diwydiant* (industry), and *pleidleisio* (to vote).

Unlike Irish therefore, whose modern lexicon is not yet stable, and Breton, where there is a gulf between the traditional lexicon, with its massive borrowing from French, and neo-Breton, with its ingenious and abundant neologisms, Welsh has a standard lexicon, just as other modern languages do.

15 Irish Revivalism

Since the final quarter of the 19th century, Irish revivalism has been a highly organised movement composed of different associations each with a particular brief. Conradh na Gaeilge (The Gaelic League) was set up in 1893, its aim being to plan the reintroduction of Irish as the first national language. The league, founded by Douglas Hyde, Eoin Mac Néill and others, soon became a cultural force in Ireland. (Joycean Scholars will remember reference to Gaelic League night classes in Dublin in the book *The Dubliners*. Celtic influence on English writing is an immense field, one worth exploring on another occasion.)

Cumann Lúthchleas Gael (The Gaelic Athletic Association, or GAA) was established in 1884 by Michael Cusack and others. The aim of the Association is 'the strengthening of the National Identity of a 32 County Ireland through the preservation and promotion of Gaelic Games and pastimes'. Every summer, hundreds of thousands of people attend GAA hurling and football matches.

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (*Fellowship of Irish Musicians* was founded in 1951. Among the goals of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann are:

- *gach leagan den ceol Gaelach a chur chun cinn*
  to promote Irish traditional music in all its forms
- *an damhsa Gaelach a chothú*
  to promote Irish traditional dancing
- *teanga na Gaeilge a chothú agus a chur chun cinn i gcónaí*
  to foster and promote the Irish language at all times.

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann has 30,000 members in 400 branches, based in many countries throughout the world. It organises the *Fleadh Ceoil* or *Music Feast*, an ongoing programme of music events culminating in a week long festival in the summer attended by huge crowds.

The Irish language's relationship with its own past is unlike that of Welsh in a number of ways. Levels of literacy in Welsh have been high during much of its post-medieval history. On the other hand, since the 17th century, Irish has been the language of a population of whom a minority were highly literate, the vast majority unlettered. Due in part to this state of affairs, a significant rupture occurs in the use Irish from the medieval to the modern period. Swathes of the older, literary vocabulary become redundant or unintelligible by the 1800s.

This is true to a certain extant of other languages, in whose territories life-styles changed, a process which brought about lexical adaptation. Unlike other such languages however, Irish, between 1600 and 1900, benefited very little from intellectual activity. Perhaps traumatised by this, revivalists soon developed an obsession with things antiquarian. Thus, in the revivalist years, the Irish language movement, as distinct from its speech community, is an archetype of cultural nationalism: it is heavily retrospective, tends towards ideas of purity or uncorruptedness, is aware at all times of past injustices, and strives to reinstate that which is perceived to have been lost.

Taken together, the endeavours of Conradh na Gaeilge, Cumann Lúthchleas Gael, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, and others, has created and sustained a very strong national identity in Ireland. Coupled with the economic boom of the 90s, something well known to people in Poland, Ireland is, at this juncture in history, a country of exceptional material and cultural wealth.

16 Breton Revivalism

Whereas we may speak of the twilight of a Breton civilisation in the first half of the 20th century, the second is, amongst other things, a time of continuation of aspects of the old way of life, albeit increasingly as appendices to modern French living. Among the most striking features of Breton culture are the traditional songs and dances: the dance is called fest-noz, a village meeting where dancing was a central social activity. As early as the 1950s, the fest-noz became a focus for things Breton to affirm and re-affirm themselves. The fest-noz, in the years since the 1950s, has grown into an international phenomenon, with clubs dotted around Europe, including one in Poznan.

It may be said therefore, that revivalism in Brittany met with considerable cultural success. In a French context, the tangible symbols associated with the revival served to define the regional character of Brittany, much as wine and cuisine helps define other French regions and places. During the revival years however, the Breton language itself was not passed on to the younger generation. There were many reasons for this. The French state conducted its business, whether administrative or educational, solely through the medium of French. In school and in the work-place, parents deemed that Breton was, if anything, a disadvantage to their children. Language change occured within three generations: the older generation lived a monolingual Breton life, the second knew bilingualism, and the third became monolingual French speakers with varying degrees of residual understanding of the language of their grand-parents. The loss this generation felt, and the bewilderment many of them experienced as a result, helped feed the cultural revival, its symbolism, its social excitement, and its neo-Celticism, this being today a quasi-global phenomenon.

17 Post-Revival

We have seen that the history of Irish, Breton and Welsh in the 20th century are all marked by, on the one hand, erosion of their respective speech communites, and, on the other, a parallel revivalist movement with ambitious goals. The greatest of these goals was a return to the monolinguistic stability of the pre-decline period. Because of change in the world, economic and technological, for example, we now know that this goal was, from the outset, highly ambitious. Infatuation with this highly ambitious goal caused other less grandiose yet more attainable goals to be ignored. Chief among these was the consolidation of existant speech communities. Therefore, when stock is taken of the revivalist period in Ireland, we see compromised reintroduction of the language on a national scale, and compromised preservation on a regional scale.

Why talk in terms of a post-revival era, if the goals of revivalism have not been fully achieved? The reason is that, given the circumstances in which it campaigned, revivalism met with as much success as was as it was likely to meet with. In Ireland and Wales, this success is not insignificant. The Irish language Act of 2003 obliges all public bodies to publish its documents bilingually. A similar act is in place in Wales. Since 2006, Irish is an official working language of the European Union. Raidió na Gaeltachta broadcasts in Irish 18 hours a day. TG4 broadcasts Irish language television programmes for several hours a day. There is a weekly newspaper, *Foinse*, and a daily newspaper, *Lá Nua*. Many new books are published each year. In Wales, *Y Cymro* and *Golwg* are weekly newspapers, and *Y Byd,* the first Welsh-language daily, will be launched in March 2007. Since 1977, the BBC has been broadcasting in Welsh, a service now offering 18 hours of programmes a day. Road-signs in Welsh are bilingual, as they are in Ireland, and the recently formed Welsh Assembley government is responsible for education in Wales.

Today, speakers of Welsh and Irish have less reason to feel themselves second class citizens than they did in the past, and state apathy towards Irish and Welsh is no longer a greater threat to the future of the languages than civic or corporate apathy, for example.

18 Post-Revival Ireland

The Irish language today has, on the one hand, not been so stable for generations, and on the other, never been the principal language of as small a territory. How can this be? This paradox is due to the fact that Irish is the first official language of the Republic of Ireland. Whereas relatively few people choose to use it in their daily lives, the language has major symbolic value, and occupies an important place in the psyche of the nation. Enshrinement in the constitution, and feelings of sympathy towards the language, resulted, all the more as Ireland became properous, in munificent investment in the language.

Today, therefore, thousands of Irish-speakers make a handsome living in the Irish-language media, the educational system, the translation industry, and in the publication industry. Irish has a very strong web presence sustained by employing people to edit sites and produce content. Without direct state funding, almost none of these activities are sustainable. However, as state-funding has always been forthcoming, there is no reason to believe that the state-sponsorship of the language will cease. This being so, it may be said that Irish is a normalised minority language in a position of economic stability. This is a very rare if not unique phenomenon in the world.

19 Post-Revival Wales

Post-revivalist Wales is a Wales with its own devolved regional assembly. Long a region, Wales today is, perhaps for the first time in its fifteen century history, a nascent statelet. Its development is part of events in the United Kingdom of Britain and Northern Ireland, a union which, more than ever since the days of the empire, is in a state of flux. its industry is silent, its armies unconquering, its pioneering health-system creaking, its train system often dysfunctional. A minor exodus from England to the continent is underway. Talk in Scotland is of a referendum on the forming of a secession state. The North Ireland assembly has been reinstated. Meanwhile, immigrants arrive at Dover and Heathrow to clean the country, serve in its restaurants, and create the multi-ethnic, perhaps multi-lingual Britain of the 21st century.

The situation in Wales today is akin to the situation in Ireland during the generation following the founding of the Irish Free State. Government involvement in the language in Wales today is also akin to government involvement with the language in the young Irish state. There is the same good will, but the same sociolinguistic naïvety. Welsh is set to become the language of the classroom and the civil service. Many Welsh speakers turn now to the state for their salary. Welsh is therefore benefitting from a new patron, a relatively powerful sponsor. However, the primary work of the state is to run the health system, manage the infrastructure, create jobs and maintain civil order. The state can at best encourage the use of the language. It cannot and will not impose it.

20 Discourse Past and Future in Celtic Speech Communities

Along with economy, demography, and tradition in its different forms, discourse is a factor that influences the actions of members of the speech-community. The consequences of these actions in turn serve to define the community in its own eyes and in the eyes of the observer. Just as territorial and, at different times, religious specificity, contributed to the definition of Celtic speech-communities in the past, discourse-specificity too is a constituent in community identity.

To be Irish-speaking implied therefore, and continues to imply, that one sympathises with the Catholic religion and with nationalist doctrine. In Wales, discourse has tended to rotate around the axis of Britishness, the community being split into a majority for whom Britishness is fundemental, and a minority for whom a rejection of Britishness is equally fundamental. In Brittany, discourse vacuum was filled by a feeling of French republicanism, there being no viable alternative in Brittany in the second half of the 20th century.

In the Celtic countries, as in other areas removed from centres of influence, an interesting phenomenon of peripheral archaism may be observed in the context of the discourse. As we saw a earlier, Britain today is struggling through a phase of post-traditional Britishness. On the periphery however, in Wales for example, a strong sense of this tradition survives.

In Brittany, we meet with a similar example of peripheral archaism. French Republican Jacobism, with its bureaucratic hierarchy, its Napoleonic centralism, and its dogmatic monolingualism created a climate in which the French language could be adopted in Brittany in the 20th century. Today, as France struggles to outgrow its Jacobite past and find an alternative discourse, the tenets of its republicanism have found fertile ground in the neo-Breton movement. Since the 1970s, this movement has pursued

Jacobite linguistic aims in an Armorican environment: the elimination of *patois* and popular dialect; the promotion of a standard national idiom; and the creation of an awareness of a distant, noble past, not classical as in France, but Celtic, or neo-Celtic.

If different forms of nationalism – Irish, Gaelic, Breton, British, Welsh – are synonymous with the revivalist era in Ireland, Wales and Brittany, we may ask what discourse may be associated with Irish, Welsh and Breton in the post-revival era. We have seen that the minority discourse of today has often been an echo of the majority discourse of yesteryear, and that ideas reach the periphery only when they have started to stagnate at their point of origin. Thus, peripheral states emerge or mature just as long-established states are debating a reduction in national sovereignty and participation in a federal system, and citizenship in the nascent states finds itself compromised by the consumerism, corporate power and commercial lobbies that define culture today as much if not more than any sense of civic duty or national belonging.

An exploitable vein of discourse for the world's smaller languages may lie, therefore not in nationhood, statehood, or sovereignty, but in assocation with environmental issues in the broadest sense of the word. The 21st century has already been, and shall continue to be, marked by environmental issues, one aspect of which is biodiversity, a thing under threat from human activity since the nineteenth century. The languages of the world make up part of this biodiversity. The threat to biodiversity is greatest where abuse of the environment is worst. Consequently, to reduce this threat, the environment must be respected. And to reduce the threat to the linguistic biodiversity of the planet, modification of the various environments in which the languages of the world evolved must be avoided.

Celtic speech communities in the post-revival era may therefore be viewed as small communities typical of many, not only in Europe, but worldwide, a

disturbance of whose environment has undermined the stability of their languages and ended their history of linguistic normaility.

Subsequently, the aim, stated and unstated, of the Celtic revivalists in the 20th century has been to create an environment in which the Celtic languages would enjoy the same normality and the same stability as the neighbouring and encroaching majority language. The state communicates with its citizens, and so the rights of citizens to communicate with the state in their own language became a central theme amongst revivalists. No where was the need for parity with the majority greater than in the world of the media. Ensuring first a skeletal then an improved radio and television service, has occupied generations of campaigners in all the Celtic countries.

In the field of print, the absence of national publications in which the community could express itself, whether on a weekly or daily basis, has long been perceived, and rightly so, as a huge handicap, and efforts to eliminate this handicap occur in tandem in the Celtic-speaking regions with campaigns for other rights and privileges mentioned above. Roadsigns were needed in Breton, Welsh and Irish the better for the language to be seen and its presence felt. And where the state failed to provide adequate education, movements grew up to rectify this situation, or indeed to offer alternatives.

How viable is post-revival linguistic normality? Ultimately we come to this question. Can all languages achieve parity with English, Spanish and Cantonese? Writing in *Europäische Kleinsprachen, Zu Lage und Status der kleinen Sprachen an der Schwelle zum dritten Jahrtausend*, (Simek, R. and Zimmer, S., eds, 2001, Baden-Baden: Nomos), H. P. Kelz says:

'Nur in wenigen Fällen (z.B. Äthiopien, Vietnam, Myanmar) konnte eine einheimische Sprache nach der Unabhängigkeit die Funktion einer Verwaltungs- und Bildungssprache übernehmen. In allen diesen Fällen handelt es sich um Sprachen mit langer Schrift-tradition und einem in der Sprachgemeinschaft weithin akzeptierten Standard.'

'Only in a small number of instances (for example Ethiopia, Vietnam, Mynamar) has an indigenous language been able to assume administrative and educational functions after independence. In all these instances, we have to do with languages with a long written tradition, and a standard long-since accepted by the language community.'

It follows from this that Welsh and Irish, not to mention Breton, will persist in future only in a bilingual environment, English or French being used for certain civic activities, and the vernacular, so to speak, being reserved for domestic and private ones. Thus, for example, very many neo-Irish speakers read Ireland's English-language paper of reference, *The Irish Times*, and then discuss its contents in their own language. And, in the same way, Welsh-speakers will read *The Western Mail*, *The Herald*, *The Carmarthenshire Journal* or, some, *The Guardian*.

Having sought to describe briefly the post-revival reality of Irish, Welsh and Breton, let us ask now what the future holds.

21 Prognosis for Irish

In 2030, Irish will be a stable minority language, but one whose traditional idiom will have been largely assimilated into the current of neo-Irish speech. This neo-Irish differs from traditional Irish phonetically, syntactically, and lexically, having, through state-sponsored agencies and institutions, developed a post-native lexicon and syntax early the 21st century. I list here some of the morphosyntactic and phonetic features of neo-Irish compared to those of the traditional language still spoken early in early 21st century. They include: loss of the vocative case; loss of Imperative 2nd pl. and 3 pl.; decrease in the use of passive forms; decrease in the use of the partitive genitive; overuse of the past participle; non-fronting of relatve clauses containing the subject of a sentence; omission of the definite article; confusion of long and short vowels and other sounds; loss of distinction between palatal and non-palatal consonants; confusion of velar stops and fricatives; remplacement of velar [L} by alveolar [l].

Neo-Irish, examples of which are cited above, will be spoken in generation's time by a community of between 50,000 and 80,000 people, many of whom will derive their living from activities related to the progagation and upkeep of neo-Irish, whether lexicography, teaching, broadcasting, publishing, or translating. And, parallel to this, Irish will remain an extremely fertile field of research in many academic disciplines, literary, linguistic, sociolinguistic and ethnomusicological, to name but a few.

However, just as in the 19th century, when over-dependance on one monoculture – the potato – brought abought demographic upheaval and resultant language change, in the 21st century, over-dependance on a second monoculture – state-sponsorship – may, for reasons as yet unforeseeable, result in disturbance and redefinition of the neo-Irish speech community.

Finally, and conversely, one question regarding future decades is whether or to what extent a second period of revival will occur, that is, a revival of late traditional Irish, fuelled by the rich sound and print archives which the contemporary speech community has at its disposal.

22 Neo-Irish, Neo-Breton, Neo-English

It is worth noting here that Neo-Irish and Neo-Breton, as opposed to traditional Irish and traditional Breton, are concepts whose equivalent is to be found, not only in the world of other stateless, tribal, or minority languages, but, at the other end of the scale, in the world of language globalisation.

A good comparison with neo-Irish or neo-Breton can be found in neo-English, an idiom, current in many forms, that has evolved recently in the space of a decade or so. The comparison between neo-Celtic and neo-English arises in ways territorial and grammatical. Neo-English is an idiom derived from traditional English. It is an idiom spoken beyond the traditional territory of the English language. It is an idiom spoken an overwhelming number of learners, so that the substandard has begun to co-exist with the standard.

Just as neo-Irish and neo-Breton deviate from their traditional fore-runners, neo-English deviates from its mother-tradition. In neo-English, this deviation manifests itself especially in confusion of aspect in the verbal system, a degeneration of figurative speech, and general loss of nuance.

23 Prognosis for Breton

Having looked at what the future may hold for Irish, let us turn for a moment to Breton. The fate of Breton is similar to that of traditional Irish. But whereas the Irish state has created a post-traditional milieu for the language, the virtual non-existence of state benefit for Breton, and the non-existence of a Breton state, spells extinction, not neccesarily for the language, but for the traditional speech community. In 1930 natives speakers of Breton numbered a million, and over half a million in 1980. By 2030 this will have fallen to a handful, all elderly. Neo-Breton, a revivalist idiom, will be spoken by clusters of people grouped near a certain number of neo-Breton schools. Unlike neo-Irish however, a state-elect, neo-Breton, a sociolect, will remain hidden in the shadows of French-speaking Brittany.

Even this statement requires some qualification however. In recent decades, the migration of English people to Brittany and France has caused shift, albeit slight, in the linguistic balance. The English population of some parishes in central Brittany is now well over 10 %. English-speaking children in the smaller rural schools number so many that English rivals French as the language of the playground. Teachers are unable to teach a large part of their classes. It is unclear how long this situation will persist, and the phenomenon may be a shortlived one. However, if a further generation of English immigrants go to live in Brittany, it is not improbable that the educational system will be obliged adapt to accommodate all sectors of the population.

The situation in Brittany reflects linguistic reality elsewhere in Europe and further afield. A native community co-exists with communities of short-, medium- and longterm incomers who will or will not learn the local language to differing degrees of proficiency according to their situation and motivation. The irony in central Brittany is that French itself remplaced Breton as the language of the schoolyard only short decades ago.

24 Prognosis for Welsh

Ultimately, the sheer number of English speakers north and east of the rivers Dee and Severn may define the future of Welsh. For centuries, the mountains of Wales protected the language, rendering the country remote, inhospitable and difficult to occupy. This is no longer the case. Birmingham, a city just two hours by car from the Welsh heartlands, boasts a population equal to that of the entire Welsh country.

Without radical leadership, uncompromising laws governing the use of Welsh in the workplace, and a massive budget, the flow of English-speakers through Wales will wash away much of the earth in which the language has been rooted for many centuries. Just as valleys were inundated to make water resevoirs for English cities, today Welsh itself is in danger of drowning. In several ways however, Welsh is an intrinsically healthy tongue, and it is conceivable that, in a number of decades, it will have again become a normalised, stable language.

Interestingly too, if the growth and subsequent decline in the Welsh-speaking population between 1830 and 1930 be put in the broader context of the last half a millenium, we see that the number of people speaking Welsh today, 620,000, is greater than the Welsh-speaking population ever was before 1830. True, today's figures are slightly inflated by the inclusion of school-goers who may not speak Welsh at home. Nonetheless, the comparison between pre-industrial and post-industrial figures provides us with food for thought. The numbers speaking Welsh every day in 2030 may be extremely close to the numbers who spoke it before 1830, that is something short of half a million.

25 Conclusion – Views of History

The history of the Celtic languages in modern times is an integral part of Irish, British, French and European history a knowledge, or at least an appreciation, of which is essential to an understanding of the emergence of the modern Europe. The speech communities of the traditional Celtic languages share much with the speech communities of traditional pre-industrial, pre-expansionist France, Germany, and England, to name three. Gradually, from the 17th and 18th centuries on, and under differing circumstances, each these languages became standard and stable. Until that time, however, there was little difference between languages from the point of view of their status, utility, or capacity to generate wealth. Within distinct romance, germanic, slavic and celtic meta-regions, Europe was a sea of closely related dialects seperated by the natural boundaries of coast, river and mountain.

The great drama of the Celtic languages in recent centuries, as we may observe, has been the relationship of their speech communities with not one but two changing worlds: the native as it waned, and the foreign as it waxed. In the 21st century, a time of upheaval and rapid development, it is clear that much environmental modification is afoot, and that further change will occur, including a reduction in traditional biodiversity. Much less clear is exactly which species and habitats of flora, fauna and language will survive this modification. Celtic culture and language can hope to, but not without adaption to changing circumstances.

To conclude this overview of the speech communities of three languages from the 19th till the 21st centuries, Irish, Welsh and Breton, I quote from the poetry of Welshman R.S. Thomas who in 1946 wrote as follows of peasant Iago Prythherch:

Iago Prytherch his name, though, be it allowed, just an ordinary man of the bald Welsh hills, who pens a few sheep in a gap of cloud. Docking mangels, chipping the green skin from the yellow bones with a half-witted grin of satisfaction, or churning the crude earth to a stiff sea of clouds that glint in the wind – so are his days spent.....Yet this is your prototype, who, season by season against siege of rain and the wind's attrition preserves his stock, an impregnable fortress not to be stormed even in death's confusion. Remember him, then, for he, too, is a winner of wars, enduring like a tree under the curious stars.

D. Johnson, Poznan 11.07