

What is known about the death of languages such as Manx and Cornish and why, in your view, has the Welsh language survived and been continuously spoken by native speakers?

The definition of language death is commonly accepted to be upon the death of the last native speaker, although examples may still exist in writing and sound or video recordings.¹ This should not be confused with language extinction, which happens when there are no first-language or second-language speakers and no extant documentation. There are four types of language death.² Firstly, sudden death (also called Linguicide) which occurs when a language-speaking population is catastrophically lost, when can happen due to such events as natural disaster, disease or genocide.³ Secondly radicle death, which also happens over a relatively short timeframe but in this case, there is a deliberate migration from the language that dies to another language by native speakers, usually due to a need for survival caused by external pressures such as political oppression.⁴ Thirdly, gradual death (also known as language shift) which is when a population moves over time, from speaking one language to adopting a new language of their own volition usually via a period of bilingualism. Unlike radicle death, this is not something that has been directly imposed on the speakers, rather changes in their environment, often political, create a situation where it is more advantageous to the individual to speak a new language. This does not directly cause language death but contributes to a situation whereby the number of native speakers slowly declines as progressive generations stop passing on their native tongue to their children.⁵ Fourthly, bottom-to-top death, in which the language shrinks, usually being removed from more formal usage, matters of state, court etc and is only used informally and in conversation.⁶ There are several recognized ways in which to measure the health of a languages. The three of the most widely acknowledged are the Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale, or GIDS (Fishman 1991), the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale and the UNESCO-developed Language Vitality Assessment.⁷ The first two approaches use

¹ David, Crystal, *Language Death*, Canto classics edition. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 14.

² Chambers, J. K., and Natalie. Schilling-Estes, *The Handbook of Language Variation and Change*, Second edition. (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, is an imprint of John Wiley, 2013)

³ ditto

⁴ ditto

⁵ ditto

⁶ ditto

⁷ unesco Language Vitality and Endangerment chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/00120-EN.pdf

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a grading system to quantify the health of a language. This can highlight when a language starts to encounter difficulties giving time for language planning and supports steps to be put in place with the aim of avoiding language death. According to UNESCO's *Language Vitality and Endangerment* document, language transmission is one of several factors which impact a language's health.⁸ The other factors are absolute number of speakers; Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population; Trends in Existing Language Domains; Response to New Domains and Media; Materials for Language Education and Literacy.

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Gaelic Manx was the language of the indigenous people of the Isle of Man, located in the Irish Sea between Northern Ireland and Northwest England. The island has a long history of language shift dating back to the Iron Age when it is thought that the first Celtic tribes that lived there spoke a Brythonic language (related to Welsh, Cornish and Breton). This survived up to somewhere around the 5th century CE when Irish invaders overran the island and the language shifted to Goidelic one, Old Irish. The Irish rule was replaced in the 9th century CE by Norse rule following their settlement on the island. In 1266 CE was ceded to Scotland under the Treaty of Perth. English dominance of the island started in 1290 and continues to date, being a period of much change and in ownership and rule for the people of Man. Despite all the external influences and pressures from English speaking rule, the people of the island were able to remain their own language. The Manx language developed out of Old Irish and used the English Alphabet. Early Manx was a predominantly spoken language with there being a lack of early manuscripts and it does not appear to have been written down until the Reformation. The first examples of Manx orthography in print are from around 1707 but may originate from the previous century. The Isle of Man does not have a bardic tradition, nor a tradition of classical poets as found in Irish and Scottish Gaelic, which may explain, in part, the lack of early records. Manx is interesting to study regarding language decline and death. Its decline started about the mid to third quarter of the 19th century around the same time as the second Celtic revival when public interest in all things Celtic was at a high. This meant that, in addition to those islanders keen to preserve the language, it was also of interest to scholars from further afield resulting in some well documented studies which captured very important information about the language that may have otherwise been lost. Also, the 10-yearly Census captured vital statistic about the islanders and their

⁸ unesco Language Vitality and Endangerment chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/00120-EN.pdf

⁹ unesco Language Vitality and Endangerment chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/00120-EN.pdf

ability to speak Manx which give a very clear timeline and metrics for the decline and manner of death of the language. Some key events and other factors that contributed to the decline and subsequent death of the Cornish language were the introduction of tourism to the island in the 19th century resulting in islanders needing to speak English to benefit from the tourism revenue; the formal use of English in schools; the stigma that went with being an Manx speaker, especially in the years leading up to the death of the language; parents no longer passing the language onto the next generation as they believed their children would have better opportunities and a better future if they spoke English. When the last native speaker, Ned Maddrell, died in 1974 the Manx language was declared a dead language.

Cornish (Kernewek or Kernowek in the Cornish language) was the language of the indigenous people of Cornwall, a rural country in the south-west peninsular of England. Cornish belongs to the Brythonic branch of the Celtic language tree.¹ It is closely related to the other Brythonic languages of Welsh and Breton. For historical reasons, it is more closely related to Breton than Welsh. The use of the Cornish Language can be divided into three distinct phases, Old Cornish, Middle Cornish and Late Cornish, although some scholar would argue that there was also a primitive phase before Old Cornish. Primitive Cornish existed from between the 7th – 8th centuries but for which no written records exist. Old Cornish existed between about the 9th – 13th centuries, some evidence of written Cornish exists from towards the end of this period but very little, although this may be because it is difficult to distinguish between Old Welsh, Old Cornish and Old Breton orthography which may have caused some misclassification. Middle Cornish was probably spoken for the longest period, from the 13th century up to almost the end of the 16th century although the Cornish Rebellion against the English Monarchy in 1497 CE heralded the decline of the language. Most of the documentary evidence for Middle Cornish dates from 1200 – 1497.⁷ Late Cornish is accepted to have begun around 1575 and lasted right up to the death of the last monoglot speaker, Dolly Pentrely, who died in 1777. However, it was reported that the last person to speak traditional Cornish was John Davey, died 1891. Unlike Gaelic Manx, there are no census returns to provide any statistics regarding the number of Cornish speakers. According to research done by Ken George and published in *Cornish Studies* 14 (1986), between the 13th – 16th centuries, the number of Cornish speakers was a steady figure in the thirty thousand, despite the population almost doubling during that period. Of the people that did speak Cornish at that time, their coverage of Cornwall contracted and there was a trend for them to cover a decreasing smaller area of the county, suggesting that language usage had become less widespread and was more concentrated in localized pockets. By 1600, the number of Cornish speakers was had dropped significantly to 22,00 and in the following 100 years the rapid rate of decline continued with George giving a figure of

just 500 speakers in 1700. Some key events and other factors that contributed to the decline and subsequent death of the Cornish language were the Cornish Rebellion (mentioned above); a succession of other rebellions which saw the Cornish speakers pushed ever further to the west leaving the rest of Cornwall under English speaking rule. The Reformation saw the introduction of the Common book of Prayer in English but there was no translation into Cornish, unlike happened for Welsh. Perceptions changed and Cornish went from being the prime language of Cornwall to being seen as a backward language and one from which the gentry chose to distance themselves. Families no longer saw the value in passing the language onto the next generation; there was very little material printed in Cornish and there was little to no education in Cornish.

The survival of the Welsh language is a complete contrast to the demise of Gaelic Manx and the Cornish language. Despite needing to overcome many challenges, it persists today having originated more than 2500 years ago.¹⁰ Like Cornish, it belongs to the Brythonic branch of the Celtic language tree and like Cornish it can be divided into distinct phases of Old Welsh, Middle Welsh and Modern Welsh. The objective of this part of the essay is to look at why the Welsh language has survived and has been continuously spoken by native speakers. The writer strongly believes that a language must have a home in all parts of its society and culture if it is to thrive, not just survive, and why this is true of Welsh and how it helped keep the language alive through the most difficult of times. Some of the reasons for the survival of Welsh that will be given in this essay are specific to time and place. However, there resides within the Celtic people of Wales a spirit, a sense of national pride in their language and their culture that can't be measured but which is fundamental to the survival of the Welsh language. What follows in this essay can be broadly divided into historical events and 'modern events'. The history of the Welsh language is built on very strong foundations. The work of Aneirin and Taliesin, both late 6th century poets, allows Welsh to describe itself as the oldest attested vernacular language in Europe.¹¹ Centuries of Welsh literature that followed, both poetry and prose, grew from these early roots. A Guild of Poets or a Bardic order controlled the professional poets ensuring standards remained high. The English Reformation, which started in 1529, accidentally resulted in Welsh becoming a language equal to English for Divine Service and the translation of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer into Welsh. This was due to the rise in Protestantism and the need for monoglot Welsh speakers to personally understand the word of God. Fortunately, this coincided with the fairly new invention of the printing press which meant that high

¹⁰ Davies, Janet, *The Welsh Language: A History*, New edition. (Llanfyllte: University of Wales Press, 2014), p2

¹¹ Dafydd, Johnston, *The Literature of Wales*. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), P. 1.

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numbers of identical books, including Bibles, could be printed. All of which only served to support and strengthen the role of the Welsh language in daily life. Around about the same time the work of the Welsh Humanists started to make its mark on the language. In addition to revering the classical languages of Latin and Greek, they also wanted to see their own language lifted to the same status.¹² One part of this vision included standardizing the language which resulted in their valuable contribution to the Welsh language viz. Dictionaries and Grammars. There exists in Wales a tradition of eisteddfodau, a cultural festival with poetry and music, that is first recorded in the 12th century but fell out of favour about the time of the Anglicization of Welsh nobility. It was revived during the 18th century Celtic revival when it proved hugely popular and is cited as being of significant importance to the Welsh Language. The tradition continues today. In more recent times the Welsh language has received legislative support from the Welsh Government, including compulsory teaching of Welsh in schools for five to sixteen-year-olds. Welsh is now part of the court system and since 1967 Welsh speakers have the right to give their evidence or testify in Welsh. In 1982, S4C (Sianel Pedwar Cymru - Channel Four Wales) started broadcasting 22 hours per week of Welsh language television, the first channel of its kind in Wales. The Welsh Government project, *Cymraeg 2050*, has a vision to achieve one million Welsh speakers by 2050. In contrast to the rigid, impersonal support being delivered by legislation, there is also a need for Welsh to be a vibrant language, relevant to the modern lives of ordinary people. Echoing the tradition of the court poets who entertained people centuries ago, modern Welsh artists are now entertaining people via the medium of Welsh in literature, song and drama. With the rise of social media, Welsh language entertainment is being showcased around the world helping to raise public awareness and encourage new Welsh learners.

In summary, Gaelic Manx and Cornish did not have the important key elements to survive. They lacked well established literary roots; they lacked the support from the populus to counter threats to their language and they became the victims of language shift. However, following their death, there has been a huge interest in saving both languages and as such the two are now classified as revived languages. The Welsh language may now have more tangible support than it has ever had previously but minority languages are always vulnerable and there is no room for complacency. It is for the people of Wales to ensure that their language and related culture is cherished and preserved, not as a museum piece but as

¹² Jones, Robert Owen., and Glanmor Williams, *The Celts and the Renaissance : Tradition and Innovation / Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Celtic Studies, Held at Swansea, 19-24 July, 1987* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990)

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a living and vital language. There is an old saying in Welsh, 'Cenedl heb iaith, cenedl heb galon'. A nation without a language, a nation without a heart.

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