

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 focus of this essay is to discuss three of the languages from the Celtic family - Manx, Cornish and Welsh as well as their death or survival and the reasons behind it. Whilst neither Manx nor Cornish are as well recorded or known as Welsh, the accounts of their death and attempts of revival are still documented. One of the most important accounts of this, whilst only being a first-hand account for the decline and approaching death of Manx, was Reverend Lach-Szyrma, whose statement recorded in *Journal of British Archaeological Journal* is a prominent source for this essay and subsequently the basis for understanding the phenomena of the language disappearance.

Manx, a language used on the Isle of Man, predominantly on a day-to-day basis up until the 20th century was a Gaelic language that has its origin in a form of primitive Irish. After dying out in 1974 a revival movement was formed based on written records of the language, such as the Bible and Book of Common Prayer. Due to the time the language was still in use by native speakers, there are recordings of pronunciations that will allow for the revival to be more successful than it otherwise would be. Manx is not currently recognised as an official language by any governing body, but it is treated as a language of a minority by the European Council. (Lach-Szyrma, W., 1888. Manx and Cornish. *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*)

Rev. Lach-Szyrma states that around his time Manx was approaching extinction, although he described it as more likely to survive than Cornish, which at that time was already dead. The reasons for his apt diagnosis were mostly literary, there was no Manx newspaper at that time he spoke of, it was very hard to find a Bible or Prayer-book written in Manx outside of London and only a few copies existed on the Isle of Man itself. Another reason was a lack of language education provided for the children, whilst their parents spoke little to none Manx and therefore were unable to pass the knowledge to their children. This was, unfortunately, one of the predominant reasons for Manx's continuous decline, as less and less people spoke it as their native tongue, whilst the lack of education prevented people from learning it as their second language. Wladyslaw Lach-Szyrma feared that with the older generations dying out, the language would die with them, remaining only in literary sources, which, whilst not causing the language to be forgotten or completely "dead", was sufficient for the language to fall utterly out of use until such a time that the revival was successful and proceeded to increase the number of native and second-language speakers. Unfortunately, there is not much information about Manx in the literature compared to other languages such as Welsh or Irish, as the earliest written record of the language comes from 1610 in the shape of the Book of Common Prayer, which was translated from English with the usage of the English orthography, as the author of the translation was a Welsh bishop (Brittanica, T., 2013. Manx language), this creates a discrepancy, as the orthography of Irish, which Manx stems from is different to that of English. This, in turn, unfortunately, means that the original form of Manx is lost to history and we can only speculate how the language initially shaped and changed over time.

Cornish is a Brythonic language that originally derived from Welsh and was closely related to Breton, sharing many similarities. Cornish remains well recorded with scholars being able to distinguish between Old, Middle and Modern Cornish. The last known, officially recorded native speaker was Dolly Pentreath, who passed away in 1777, whilst there are records of the language being spoken later on as well, up until the 19th century and through it, with the last speaker, John

Nancarrow dying in 1914 (Omniglot.com. n.d. Cornish language, alphabet and pronunciation.), it is the passing away of Dolly Pentreath that is considered the official death of the language.

To understand the dying process of Cornish we have to look as early as the 16th century and focus on the Prayer Book Rebellion, which happened due to the English Crown enforcing religious services to be conducted only in English. This understandably made Cornish people upset and caused them to rebel against, what they considered, an oppressive force. The rebellion was then harshly stopped by the English and the language of the service remained that of the Crown (Wakeling, A., 2021. *The Death and Revival of Cornish*). During those times Churches were cultural centres of the villages and by ensuring that the service is provided only in English The Crown ensured the start of the slow but definite process of the language decline. By the end of the 17th century, the language was in such a poor condition that there was only one person, Chesten Marchant, who solely spoke Cornish, and after her death in 1676 the process continued at a much higher speed. Taking into consideration the fact that back in the day people used language solely as their ability to communicate on a day-to-day basis, their focus shifted towards English, which was a direct result of the religious changes imposed on the communities. People pray in the language they speak and they speak in the language they pray, therefore it was easier for younger generations to focus on learning English than to learn two languages, something, that in their times, was not as easy and materials for learning other languages, especially in places like Cornwall, were not easily accessible for the general population. The year 1776 marks the time that Daines Barrington an English lawyer, antiquary and naturalist, received a letter written in English and Cornish, making him aware of few speakers of the language. He then ventured to Cornwall to confirm this and met with Dolly Pentreath, who convinced him that there still are native Cornish speakers, something, which was considered a myth during his time, as people believed the language was already dead (Wakeling, A., 2021. *The Death and Revival of Cornish*).

The revival of the language was started by Henry Jenner, who, interested in an old Cornish play decided to begin the process of bringing the language back to life and later on wrote a handbook on the language which was used to teach the language in schools.

The Welsh language is another member of Brythonic languages, one that is very well documented and its history can be traced back many centuries with a prominent written record of the language development. The use of Welsh remained steady throughout the majority of history. Despite many attempts made by the oppressing forces of the Crown, the influence of Marcher Lords, who guarded the borders of Wales and imposed their rule. The biggest deterioration for the language came in the shape of King Henry VIII and his laws, which forbade the use of Welsh throughout the country, this caused far-reaching changes that would impact people from the earliest age, by enforcing English upon the population of Wales, Henry VIII ensured that it would replace Welsh, actively influencing and changing the upbringing of children as well as reshaping lives of adults. People were unable to use their mother tongue in everyday life, whether it was at work or home, children were learning in English, making it their first language, which from the linguistic point of view negatively affected the language preventing its growth and development. Luckily, the Church came to the rescue. Similar to Irish, the Church ensured the survival of the language in written form, by creating many manuscripts, as well as translating the Bible. The 18th century was no less traumatic for the language than the previous oppression. The constant suppression of the Welsh language led to the perception that Welsh is the language of the peasantry and uneducated people, whilst elevating English to the level of sophisticated means of communications, this, in turn, was a cause for “Welsh not”, a form of punishment, oftentimes corporeal done to diminish the

nationalistic attitudes among Welsh children, psychologically associating speaking the language with unpleasant, painful consequences. From a sociological and psychological point of view, this caused the shift of perception, further pushing the language towards the spiral of deterioration. The Welsh language was further affected in the 19th century by industrialisation and English immigration. (Brain, n.d). With many people speaking English it became convenient to do so for the Welsh, who were already treated as a minority and not as a country and nation of its own. It was not until the late 20th century that things began to change with the steps being taken to rectify the decline with Welsh Court Act being the first one and Plaid Cymru the second. This showed a change in attitude among people, who wished to use their mother tongue rather than the language imported from another country. This showed a change in attitude among people and marked an important milestone on the path to rebuilding the language.

When we look at the facts surrounding Welsh history and the brave fight Welshmen put against their oppressors, it can be easily seen that identity and in turn, the language was always important for them. Oftentimes when people are pressured and restricted they reevaluate their priorities and values and that simple fact could be another reason why the Welsh fought so bravely to keep the language alive. During the times, when people find themselves under oppression and outside forces attempt to convert them, people find strength in things that are close to their hearts, whilst there may be many things that could fall under this category, there is nothing more intimate and personal than the language, the way people communicate, express themselves and relay their thoughts. Their conscious actions together with the strong sense of self helped the language brave the storms and keep strong, even during the times when Welshmen lost faith in the validity of their tongue. Nowadays we are on the path to ensure that many more people speak Welsh and that neither the knowledge nor the history will ever be forgotten. With many of the government's initiatives and the Eisteddfod people become interested in their heritage and their language, are more willing to learn, which increases the number of second-language speakers, as well as native speakers of Welsh, which numbers began to increase in recent years, ensuring the survival of the language.

As stated above, there were many reasons for the death and subsequent revival of Cornish and Manx, the same issues appeared in Wales as well, but what made the difference was the spirit among the people. Their strong feelings of identity and brave fight, as well as understanding that following the "easy path" is not always for the best, is what ultimately made the difference. We can only hope, that the future will follow the pattern started in recent years and people will always stay faithful to themselves and their mother-tongue.

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