

## Cornish Lexicography in the Twentieth Century: Standardisation and Divergence.

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### Abstract

In this century the Cornish language has been revived so that today Cornish is spoken by many Cornish people as a second language. Moreover a few people currently living in Cornwall have been raised as bilingual from birth. Texts from the Middle Cornish (1200 to 1575 AD) and Modern Cornish (1575 to 1800 AD) periods form the basis upon which Cornish has been revived in the twentieth century. Dictionaries have made an important contribution to the pedagogical basis of this revival and several lexicographers have introduced standardised spelling systems for Cornish. The WILLIAMS' (1865) dictionary and LEWIS' (1923) grammar form the basis of later twentieth century pedagogical dictionaries. Both Williams and Lewis are Welsh and have been led astray by analogy with the Welsh language on a number of issues. As a result, some subsequent dictionaries are not faithful to native Cornish practices. Analogy with Welsh and Breton has also led some revivalists to adopt Middle rather than Modern Cornish as the basis for standardising Cornish spelling and grammar. Furthermore Welsh and Breton have been used as sources for borrowing new words into twentieth century Cornish. Other writers, notably JENNER (1904) and GENDALL (1997), have shown a preference for Modern Cornish as a pedagogical basis for the revival of Cornish. Jenner chose to take up the language where it had left off and disapproved of the inclusion of Welsh and Breton borrowings for which no authority exists in Cornish (JENNER 1904: xv). Jenner also adapted Modern Cornish orthography along loosely phonetic lines in order to create a consistent spelling system. GENDALL (1997), on the other hand, has selected a single preferred spelling for each lexeme from those spellings that are attested in the historical literature. The result is that today there are three different standardised spelling systems in common usage amongst revivalists.

Cornwall is situated in the south-west peninsula of the European Archipelago. Cornish, the language of Cornwall, is a Brythonic Celtic Language. It is frequently said that Cornish died out at the end of the eighteenth century. There is, however, some evidence for the continued use of the Cornish language in the 19th-century. Although this evidence is small, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. It is possible that there was some continued usage of the Cornish vernacular during the nineteenth century. Today Cornish has been revived and is spoken by several hundred people in Cornwall.

The situation where one language is holding its own despite the influence of powerful neighbours is known as language maintenance. Minorisation refers to the opposite process in which a language is yielding to the influence of a more dominant neighbour and speakers are assimilating the dominant culture. Minorisation may be caused by a number of factors. Minorisation may occur either spontaneously or as the result of government pressure. Language planning

that favours the dominant language, contributes to minorisation. Concern about the minorisation of Cornish has been around for some time. SCAWEN (1777), writing circa 1680, gives sixteen reasons for the minorisation of Cornish. These include lack of a distinctive Cornish alphabet, loss of contact between Cornwall and Brittany, cessation of the miracle plays, loss of ancient records, apathy of the Cornish people towards the Cornish language, suppression of the Druids by Christianity, trade with foreigners who did not speak Cornish, not teaching the Lord's Prayer in Cornish, abandonment of the Cornish language by the gentry, and a lack of literature in the Cornish language. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Cornish was a low prestige language. Indeed some people such as Davies GILBERT (1826) and Henry Jenner celebrated its demise.

Jenner, however, changed his mind and later championed the idea that Cornish could be revived. From the earliest days of the Cornish language revival, ethnicity has been seen as a central issue. JENNER (1904: xii) maintains that, to a Cornishman, the Cornish language is "the outward and audible sign of his separate nationality" and writes,

"Why should Cornishmen learn Cornish? There is no money in it, it serves no practical purpose, and the literature is scanty and of no great originality or value. The question is a fair one, the answer is simple because they are Cornishmen. At the present day Cornwall, but for a few survivals of Duchy jurisdictions, is legally and practically a county of England, with a County Council, a County Police, and a Lord-Lieutenant all complete, as if it were no better than a mere Essex or Herts. But every Cornishman knows well enough ... that he is no more an Englishman than a Caithness man is, that he has as much right to a separate local patriotism to his little Motherland ... as has a Scotsman, an Irishman, a Welshman, or even a Colonial; and that he is as much a Celt and as little of an "Anglo-Saxon" as any Gael, Cymro, Manxman, or Breton."

(Jenner 1904: xi-xii)

Standardisation is a process which some minority languages are still undergoing. The SPELL project, the aim of which is to promote the development of a unifying standard for the Ladin language, is a case in point (CIOCCHETTI & PIANESI 1998). Throughout the 20th century, there have been a number of attempts to standardise the Cornish language.

During the late 19th-century, Celtic studies became respectable due to the work of continental Celtic scholars such as Hermann EBEL (1863), Kaspar ZEUSS (1871), Holger PEDERSEN (1899), Kuno MEYER (1885; 1892; 1895; 1894; 1896), and Joseph LOTH (1883-1902). In 1901 the Cowethas Kelto-Kernuack was formed with L.C. Duncombe-Jewell as its secretary, Sir W. L. Salusbury Trelawney Bart. as its president and Henry Jenner as its vice-president. One of the aims of the Kowethas Kelto-Kernuack was the revival of

the Cornish language. In 1904 Jenner published his *Handbook of the Cornish Language*. By the 1920s, interest in Cornish as a revived language was steadily growing. Language classes were extra-mural. In other words, they were not part of the school curriculum. Many people outside Cornwall wanted to learn Cornish. Correspondence courses were started, such as the one by A.S.D. SMITH (1933), or more recently that of Ray Edwards (n.d.). From the early days of the revival, there was a belief that Cornish could be revised as a spoken language. ALLIN-COLLINS (1927), who taught Cornish in the 1920s, insisted that his pupils should speak the language not merely write it. In 1931 A.S.D. SMITH published *Lessons in Spoken Cornish*. It was perceived that for pedagogical reasons a standardised spelling system was necessary. In 1929, Morton Nance published *Cornish for All* in which he outlines his Unified spelling.

The corpus of traditional Cornish on which the revival is based falls into three periods, Old Cornish, Middle Cornish and Modern Cornish. Old Cornish falls between 800 AD and 1150 AD. Middle Cornish falls between 1150 AD and 1550 AD. The Modern Cornish period falls between 1550 AD and 1800 AD. Jenner based his revived Cornish on Modern Cornish; in other words he chose to take up the language where it had left off. Henry Jenner disapproved of the inclusion of Welsh and Breton borrowings for which no authority exists in Cornish (JENNER 1904: xv). In his *A Handbook of the Cornish Language*, Jenner (1904) employs a regular and fairly closely phonemic orthography. His phonology is largely derived from Edward LHUYD (1707). Lhuyd was Welsh but spent some months in Cornwall in 1700 collecting Cornish. He devised his own phonetic system of transcription. LHUYD's (1707) *Archaeologia Britannica* is, therefore, of great interest to anyone who is interested in how Cornish was pronounced.

Analogy with Welsh and Breton has also led some revivalists to adopt Middle rather than Modern Cornish as the basis for standardising Cornish spelling and grammar. The shift to Middle Cornish as a basis for the revival was instigated by Robert Morton Nance and A. S. D. Smith a Sussex schoolteacher. Their sources were mainly Robert WILLIAMS' (1865) *Lexicon Cornu Britannicum* and Henry LEWIS' (1923) *Llawlyfr Cernyweg Canol* (Handbook of Middle Cornish). Smith in fact initially learned his Cornish from Lewis' *Llawlyfr*. This would explain why Smith favoured Middle Cornish. Smith didn't understand that Modern Cornish has its own grammar and orthography and saw any deviation from Middle Cornish as evidence of corruption and decay. Both Williams and

Lewis were Welsh. The celticist, Whitley STOKES (1869) criticised Williams' *Lexicon* saying that Williams had been led astray by analogy with Welsh. In the *Lexicon*, WILLIAMS (1865) respells many Cornish items. For example, he distinguishes between voiced and unvoiced dental fricatives by spelling them <DH> and <TH> respectively. As Stokes points out, this separation is not borne out by the Middle Cornish texts. Instead Williams bases the distinction on analogy with Welsh. Williams might have been better to use Lhuyd and to distinguish these phonemes as, in fact, Jenner did. The grammars of BROWN (1993) and GEORGE's (1993) dictionary perpetuate and add to the errors of Williams, Lewis, Smith and Morton Nance.

The major dictionaries of Cornish begin in 1865 with WILLIAMS' *Lexicon Cornu Britannicum*. In 1887, JAGO published an *English Cornish Dictionary* which reverses the dictionary of Williams. In 1934 MORTON NANCE and SMITH published *An English - Cornish Dictionary* in which the Cornish equivalents of the English headwords are given in Unified Cornish. This was followed in 1938 by Morton Nance's *A New Cornish - English Dictionary*. Two further dictionaries of Unified Cornish were published by Morton Nance, his 1952 *An English Cornish Dictionary* and his 1955 *A Cornish English Dictionary*. In 1991, Richard GENDALL published his *A Student's Dictionary of Modern Cornish*. This dictionary gives the Cornish equivalents in all of their Modern Cornish variant spellings for each English headword. In 1993, Ken GEORGE published his *Gerlyver Kernewek Kemmyn*. This dictionary introduces George's new orthography based on his putative reconstruction of Middle Cornish phonology. In 1997 GENDALL published *A Practical Dictionary of Modern Cornish: Part One*. This is a Cornish - English Dictionary, in which standardisation is achieved by selecting one preferred spelling from the variants attested in the corpus of Modern Cornish. This was followed in 1998 by *Part Two: English - Cornish*. Thus we see two approaches to the standardisation of Cornish orthography. The phonemic principle respells Cornish words according to some conjectural reconstruction of Cornish phonology. This approach is exemplified in MORTON NANCE's dictionaries of Unified Cornish published in the 1930s and 1950s, and also in GEORGE's (1993) dictionary. The other approach is to select one preferred form for each lexeme from those attested in the corpus. This is exemplified in GENDALL's (1997) dictionary.

In the early stages of the Cornish Language revival, learners were experiencing difficulty not only with finding new words to express modern concepts, but with the many discrepancies of spelling. Robert MORTON NANCE

(1929) devised a standardised spelling system which became known as Unified Spelling. Morton Nance's dictionaries that followed were based on his new spelling and are not so much descriptive as reconstructive. Prior to Morton Nance, lemmalists had included variant spellings and mutated forms. In Morton Nance's dictionaries the canonical forms that constitute the lemmalists are first properly established. MORTON NANCE and SMITH's 1934 dictionary contains approximately 12,000 lemmata. It aimed to fill in the vocabulary with neologisms including words created by analogy with Breton and Welsh as well as words borrowed from Cornish - English dialect which were not considered to be part of general West-country English dialect but genuinely Celtic. Furthermore it was aimed to check by reference to the original sources, as far as possible, words and meanings from previously printed dictionaries. Morton Nance's 1938 dictionary aimed to include every known word of the Cornish Language. According to MORTON NANCE (1938), it was "... primarily intended for people of Cornish nationality who wish to make use of their own Celtic language or to interpret its surviving relics in place-names and dialect word...." It also aimed to include many words that were presumed to have formed part of the language.

The existing corpus of Cornish texts provided the main source for the 1938 dictionary. However, placenames, as spelt in medieval documents especially, and dialect English supplied many more. In addition, gaps in the lexicon were filled in by respelling Welsh and Breton cognates to allow for phonological differences. Occasionally borrowings were taken from Middle English. Borrowings are marked in the dictionary with an asterisk. Middle Cornish words, however respelled, have no distinction mark. Those respelled from Old Cornish (older than 1300) are marked with a dagger symbol and those respelled from Late Cornish (later than 1600) are marked with a double dagger symbol. Reconstructions of the many missing genders, plural forms, infinitive endings and verb paradigms were made by Morton Nance by analogy with Breton or Welsh. In this matter Breton was felt to be closer to Cornish.

Figure 1 shows the microstructure in the 1938 dictionary. We see the three homographs of the word <crys>. The second of these is marked with a dagger to show that it is respelled from Old Cornish. The compounds **crys-hok** and **crispows** are listed as separate entries. **Crispows** is marked with an asterisk to indicate that it is adapted from Welsh or Breton. The bar diacritics over the letter <y> indicates a long vowel (like 'ee' in English 'seen'). Apart from English equivalents, Morton Nance's dictionary occasionally includes sources, examples

of usage and idioms for many of the words. Paradigms of verbs and pronominal propositions are confined to appendices. Actual spellings and variants are added in brackets, although LHUYD's (1707) phonetic notation is represented in ordinary type. Quotations are given in Unified spelling either to illustrate idiomatic usages or to amend old translations. The Modern Cornish and contracted Middle Cornish forms are given, with reference to which Morton Nance states, "... the form first given being usually preferable, even when it differs from that most usual." Word combinations that are translated by one word in English are hyphenated. Text references are restricted to less common words. Until the 1990s, this remained the most modern work on Cornish in existence.

**crÿs**, *m.*, vigour, vehemency, force, speed :  
in phrase *gans mur-grys, mur a grys*,  
forcibly, hastily, etc.  
†**crÿs** (C. Voc. *kreis*) *m., pl. -yow*, shirt,  
shift, chemise.  
**crÿs**, *m., pl. -yow*, shake, shiver, quake :  
see *dorgrÿs*.  
**crÿs-hök** (*kryssat* Lh.), *m., pl. -ya*, kestrel,  
"crest-hawk" (E.D.).  
\***crÿspows**, *f.*, waistcoat : *c. oferyas*, cassock  
(W.).

Figure 1

John TREGGAR's (n.d.) Cornish translations of the BONNER's (1555) homilies, *A Profitable and Necessary Doctrine* were discovered in April 1949 by John Mackechnie amongst some papers of the Puleston family of Wales, in the British Museum. The following year, MORTON NANCE (1950) published "Cornish Words Occurring in Tregear MS." this glossary contains 50 entries, which included not only fresh words but confirmed or corrected some conjectural genders, plurals and infinitive endings. In 1952, Morton Nance published his *English - Cornish Dictionary*. Richard Gendall prepared the first draft for Morton Nance's editing. MORTON NANCE and SMITH's 1934 *English - Cornish Dictionary* formed the basis, but in addition Richard Gendall put into reverse order MORTON NANCE's 1938 *Cornish - English Dictionary*. All previous dictionaries had relied on the printed editions of the texts. The 1952 dictionary profited by MORTON NANCE's consultation of photostats and of the original manuscripts. An additional source were Tregear's Cornish translations of Bonner's homilies, which were unknown in 1938. The judicious development of neologisms replaced borrowing from Breton and Welsh. In 1955, MORTON NANCE published another *Cornish - English Dictionary*. This included a few

adaptations of neologisms from the 1952 dictionary and admits the vast majority of comparative and historical material to be found in the 1938 version.

The growing popularity of revived Cornish created a need for new words relating to aspects of everyday life in the twentieth century. Since these words neither existed in the historic vocabulary nor in the limited range of neologisms to be found in Morton Nance's dictionaries, SNELL and MORRIS (1981 and 1984) compiled *Cornish Dictionary Supplements* handling *Kitchen Things*, *on the Roads* and *Home and Office* in order to meet this demand. In MORTON NANCE and SMITH's (1934) dictionary we find the neologism **margh horn** given as an equivalent for English 'bicycle'. This is borrowed from the Breton 'marc'h-houarn', literally 'an iron horse'. This neologism never really caught on. In SNELL and MORRIS' 1981 dictionary of neologisms, we find for English 'bicycle', the Cornish neologism, **dywros**, literally a pair of wheels. There are also some perhaps unnecessary neologisms. For example, traditional Cornish has the word **universite** for English 'university', which is attested in the miracle play *Beunans Meriasek* (Ton 1504). However revived Cornish speakers have a tendency to avoid Cornish words which resemble their English equivalents. So in GEORGE's 1993 dictionary we find that the neologism **pennskol** was created as the Cornish equivalent of English 'university'.

Ghost words are also found. **Ylow** is first found in MORTON NANCE and SMITH's 1934 dictionary. This word is not attested in the corpus of traditional Cornish. It was created in the 1920s, when a recorder of the St. Ives Old Cornwall Society noted the dialect word LEW as meaning *music*. LEW and MUSIC/MUZZICK are noted in MORTON NANCE's (1963) *Glossary of Cornish Sea Words* as dialect words for different kinds of mist. MUZZICK, therefore, has nothing to do with *music*. In an attempt to find a Welsh cognate of LEW (*music*), YLOW was constructed by analogy with Welsh EILIO (to compose). MORTON NANCE (1938) cites two other Welsh words, EILON and ALAW, of somewhat doubtful etymology. YLOW has established itself amongst twentieth century speakers of Cornish as the Cornish word for *music*.

Morton Nance's unified spelling has received some criticism. THOMAS (1972) complains that Unified spelling has never been explained, in other words there was never any real discussion of the principles on which it was based. THOMAS (1972) regards "the dictionaries with their high proportion of words invented by the comparative method and suspect, because they don't give dated forms....". Thomas is also critical of the phonological basis of Morton Nance's unified spelling.

In 1984, Ken GEORGE completed a doctoral thesis on the *Phonological History of Cornish* at the University of Western Brittany. This was followed by the publication of *The Pronunciation and Spelling of Revived Cornish*, in which he recommends that the Middle Cornish period of around 1500 AD should serve as the phonological basis for revived Cornish, and that the spelling system be adapted to provide a phonemic representation of this (GEORGE 1986: 4). In July 1988, the Cornish Language Board adopted the orthography known as Kernewek Kemmyn. Kernewek Kemmyn employs a phonemic orthography that is based on a hypothetical reconstruction of Middle Cornish phonology. This shift in orthography brought about a need for new pedagogical materials including a new dictionary. In 1993, the Cornish Language Board published the *Gerlyver Kernewek Kemmyn*. This dictionary contains approximately 9000 entries and incorporates most of the words from the dictionary supplements of SNELL and MORRIS (1981, 1984). GEORGE's 1993 dictionary is aimed at the speakers the learners of revived Cornish; in other words, it is not primarily intended for the interpretation of the corpus of old texts. Sources include the dictionaries of MORTON NANCE (1938, 1952, 1955) , SNELL and MORRIS' (1981, 1984) supplements of neologisms, PADEL's (1985) *Cornish Place Name Elements*, and the monthly Cornish language magazine, *An Gannas*. Figure 2 shows the entries for the homograph, *krys*, in the *Gerlyver Kernewek Kemmyn*.

**krys**<quake> MN  
 shaking, quivering, quaking [C: Brit  
 (Fl.)] {OldB *crit*; W *cryd*}  
**krys**<shirt> {1:OML:3} MN shirt,  
 shift, chemise [C: CC \**krid-su* (gpc)  
 < IE \**qr̥d(h)-su* (Fl.)] {B *krez*;  
 W *crus*}

Figure 2

Since the publication of the *Gerlyver Kernewek Kemmyn*, several writers have condemned the new orthography (PENGLASE 1994; WILLIAMS 1996; MILLS 1999). Some people might argue that, on the one hand, Kernewek Kemmyn is to be preferred since its phonemic nature makes it pedagogical advantageous; and that, on the other hand, the reconstructed phonology on which Kernewek Kemmyn is based has a sound scholarly foundation grounded in the study of the traditional historic corpus of Cornish literature. However it is clear that neither of these claims stands up to scrutiny. Several writers (PENGLASE 1994; WILLIAMS 1996; MILLS 1999) have demonstrated George's reconstructed phonology to be academically unsound. PENGLASE (1994) berates the lack of



authenticity in Kernewek Kemmyn resulting out of George's purely conjectural reconstruction of Middle Cornish phonology. WILLIAMS (1996) lists some 25 ways in which the phonology and spelling of Kernewek Kemmyn are erroneous. MILLS (1999) gives examples of numerous inaccuracies in George's data and shows how the English translation equivalents and neologisms given in the *Gerlyver Kernewek Kemmyn* entail a contrastive lexicology that is at odds with traditional practice as attested in the historical corpus of Cornish. Furthermore the phonemic nature of Kernewek Kemmyn together with the respelling of placenames according to their putative etymologies actually entails certain disadvantages. For most Cornish placenames, conflicting etymologies exist. This of course leads to considerable problems if one wishes to respell placenames to conform with Kernewek Kemmyn. Moreover it is quite unnecessary to respell a placename in order that some putative etymology is transparent. It is unreasonable for one group of Cornish speakers to insist that Cornish placenames are respelled according to their spelling system and their putative etymologies, and that these respellings must be accepted by the rest of the Cornish speaking community. It is thus clear that the prescribed canon included in the *Gerlyver Kernewek Kemmyn* is linguistically naive and is, therefore, not a suitable pedagogical basis for Revived Cornish.

In 1991, Richard GENDALL published *A Students Dictionary of Modern Cornish - Part 1, English - Cornish*. This dictionary covers the Modern Cornish period, and contains approximately 9000 English headwords. This dictionary contains every word, in every found variety of spelling, that could be gleaned from all available sources from sixteenth century onwards, and all words from the rich characteristic dialect of West Cornwall that might have a bearing upon a study of its Cornish language. Gendall acknowledges his sources for each Cornish word form. His earliest sources overlap with the Middle Cornish period to include, Andrew BOORDE (1542), TREGEAR (c. 1560) and GWREANS AN BYS (1604). His most recent sources include items taken from English dialect. GENDALL (1991: iii) asserts that many English dialect words found in West Penwith "are descended directly from the Cornish vernacular, sometimes in the form little if at all different from that in which they may have occurred in the living language, but at other times much altered". To illustrate this, he cites dialect words which do not appear within the corpus of written Cornish, yet have cognates in Breton and Welsh. Figure 3 shows the entry for the English headword, **world**.

world, (n.) beaze(R),beas(JB),bees(HB),beaz(B),  
 bež(TT),nor vez(L),noer veys(1041),bys(503),  
 byes(955),belaē(1078),byeae(2373),beyae(109,  
 1975),byse(2536),bays(2321),anything in the w.,  
 tra war an byes(B5),not for the w.,n tra en  
 bys( CW),nothing in the w.,tra yar an nôr vez  
 (L)

Figure 3

In 1997, Richard Gendall published *A Practical Dictionary of Modern Cornish: Part One Cornish English*. This was followed in 1998 by *Part Two English - Cornish*. In these dictionaries, GENDALL (1997, 1998) has selected one preferred spelling for each lexeme from among those attested in the traditional Modern Cornish literature. Occasionally alternative spellings are given in the entries, but there is always one preferred form. Figure 4 shows the entry for the English headword, **world**.

**WORLD** *n.* beaz *m.*: (the earth) noar. an 'oar. an norveaz  
*m.*: In the w., war an beaz: In the middle of the w., an  
 creaz an beaz: nothing/anything in the w., tra war an  
 noarveaz: not for the w., gosabeed, was nebtra. a tra en  
 beaz: w.-wide, dras an beaz: he thinks the w. of her, ma e  
 wor e gweel per vraz: It will do you the w. of good, a  
 vedn gweel theze mear a daa

Figure 4

## Conclusion

As the 20th century draws to a close, three different Cornish language orthographies compete for acceptance. Lack of consensus concerning which orthography to use entails difficulties for language maintenance. For example the Cornish County Council has difficulty with providing road signs in Cornish when there is no consensus regarding which of the competing orthographies the signs should be written in. Learners are discouraged and bewildered to discover that there are a number of competing orthographies on offer. Dictionaries and pedagogical materials have to be prepared in all three orthographies, thus duplicating effort which might otherwise be more usefully spent. Currently there is no consensus regarding which orthography should become the single standard for the Cornish language. Each of the competing orthographies has its disciples and discussion on the topic of standardisation tends to become rather heated. Broadly speaking there are two main approaches. The first involves respelling according to phonemic principles. This has obvious pedagogical advantages.

However it is possible to many differing phonologies of Cornish and it would seem unlikely that any one phonology of Cornish will enjoy sufficient support that it can be used for an orthography that is acceptable to all speakers of Cornish. The second approach involves the selection of one spelling for each lexical item from among those attested in the corpus of traditional literature. This has the advantage of authenticity though the resulting orthography is likely to be less regular.

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