

**Breton Orthographies and Dialects: The Twentieth Century Orthography War in Brittany, by Iwan Wmffre.**

**Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007. xxvii + 784 pages. Volume 1, 495 pages, \$131.95, ISBN 9783039113644; Volume 2, 283 pages, \$85.95, ISBN 9783039113651.**

Born to a Breton mother and a Welsh father, Iwan Wmffre is in the unusual position of being a native speaker of both Welsh and Breton, a status which has culminated in his extensive research on both languages as well as on Cornish. His new monumental two-volume work on Breton orthographies at first glance seems impossibly long and arcane. In fact it is a fascinating study containing such a wealth of information that the reader is left wanting to reread it in order to fully absorb the material covered.

The orthography wars are a well-known part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Breton language landscape and bear much responsibility for the often irreconcilable differences among Breton activists. In this masterful work Wmffre unpacks the complex political and personal events of these wars and the even more complex linguistic issues behind them, tapping an extensive collection of personal letters and diaries written by the chief actors of the drama. Wmffre sees the three main lines of the work as: the historical development of the orthographic debate; its ideological underpinnings; and the linguistic bones of contention. The third area makes up the bulk of the second

volume, in which an appendix also supplies the text of many original documents and a 26-page bibliography.

As Wmffre notes, much research remains to be done on 19<sup>th</sup> century Breton orthographies. The two-volume work reviewed here treats only the four major spelling systems of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The KLT orthography of 1907, promoted by François Vallée and Emile Ernault, is named for Kerne, Leon, and Tregor, the three dioceses whose dialects it sought to represent. A fourth dialect, known in Breton as Gwenedeg and in French as Vannetais, was considered too divergent to include. Although KLT as such is no longer in use, it formed the basis of those spelling systems which were to follow.

The first major revision of KLT was the ZH orthography of 1941, often called *zedachbeg* from the French names of the letters Z and H because of the prominent, even iconic role that the digraph <zh> plays in this system. ZH is also known as *peurunvan* ('superunified') or KLTG, as it attempted to merge KLT with a 1902 orthography for Gwenedeg. ZH was principally promoted by Roparz Hemon, an English teacher from Brest and editor of the literary magazine *Gwalarn*, and his main disciple, Per Denez. The story of ZH is heavily colored by political intrigue and the persistent association with Nazism during WWII, all of which is meticulously documented in Wmffre's book. Indeed, Hemon claimed that the German authorities of the Occupation, and especially the German linguist Leo Weisgerber, had pressured him to unify written Breton. Hemon's claim has been called into question (Wmffre sees the *Parti National Breton* [PNB] as the more likely source of

such pressure), but it is clear that Weisgerber, an Indo-Europeanist at Marburg, was given the responsibility by the Germans to liaise with Breton militants, whence his contacts with Hemon. In October 1940, Hemon was made the manager of radio broadcasts by Radio Rennes-Bretagne whose mission was to disseminate German propaganda in Brittany, thus earning Hemon his reputation as a collaborator. Wmffre's close reading of original documents leads him to conclude that "the accusation that the ZH orthography was imposed by the Germans on Breton writers does not stand", but that clearly "the proponents of the ZH orthography used their privileged relationship with the German occupiers to introduce and establish the new orthography" (117). Noting the Vichy government's refusal to open schools using Breton because speakers could not agree on an orthography, Wmffre explains Hemon's originally reluctant endorsement of ZH as motivated by the anticipated advancement of the Breton cause in education. Unfortunately for the language movement, "it becomes difficult to disentangle Hemon's actions from the policies of the fascist PNB and its German handlers working for the occupation authorities" (173). Regardless of the exact role of the Germans in the establishment of ZH, the fact that some Breton militants including Hemon had conspicuously collaborated led to a post-war backlash against all Breton cultural movements.

The third orthography, called H or *skolveurieg* ("university orthography"), was a rather slight modification of KLT promoted in 1955 by François Falc'hun, a priest from Léon who became a professor of Celtic linguistics in

Rennes. It would be embraced by the organization Emgleo Breiz as well as by the University of Brest and noted writers like Fañch Broudic. H was created in part as a reaction to the discredit associated with ZH after WWII. So named because one of its major innovations was to use <h> where both KLT and ZH had used <c'h>, e.g. *sab* 'bag', *merb* 'girl, daughter' for *sac'h*, *merc'h*, the H orthography was codified in the *Dictionnaire breton-français/français-breton* (Garnier, 1986) by Per-Jakez Hélias. After the creation of this third 20<sup>th</sup> century orthography, "the partisans of the ZH and H orthographies calumniated, denounced and ignored each other" (253) for the next fifteen years.

But there was to be one more major orthographic proposal. The SS or *etreannyezhel* ("interdialectal") orthography of 1975 is associated with Fañch Morvannou, a Latin lecturer at the University of Brest, and his ASSIMIL textbook *Le breton sans peine*. SS emerged out of the Carhaix talks, a series of 21 meetings held between 1971–1975 which attempted to forge a compromise between ZH and H but ended up creating a new orthography. SS is so named because it introduced the digraph <ss> for intervocalic [s] (e.g. *passéal* 'to pass') as part of its series <ss / s / z / zh> to distinguish these as four separate phonemes, which the previous orthographies had failed to do. The motivation for the series is partly etymological, as <zh> is used where Welsh has <th> (e.g. *gwerzhañ* 'to sell', cf. Welsh *gwerthu*), <z> for Welsh <dd> (*newez* 'new', cf. Welsh *newydd*), and <s> for Welsh <s> (*isel* 'low', *nos* 'night', both spelled as in Welsh). The iconic <ss> occurs mostly in French borrowings. Although adopted as the official orthography of Skol

Vreizh, the SS orthography failed to gain a strong foothold, Wmffre notes, partly because nearly 17 years went by until it got its own dictionary, Frañsez Favereau's *Dictionnaire du breton contemporain* (Skol Vreizh, 1992). Even then, variant spellings were given in ZH and H, implying that SS was not really necessary, and all of Favereau's subsequent dictionaries have been in ZH alone. Albert Deshayes' recent *Dictionnaire étymologique du breton* (2003) used a slightly modified version of SS. He is one of the few holdouts for what is clearly becoming an obsolete orthography.

In fact, ZH has been the predominant orthography since the 1970s. Wmffre traces this development in part to the departure of François Falc'hun, an opponent of ZH, from the University of Rennes in 1967, followed two years later by the appointment of Per Denez, a disciple of Hemon's. This reshuffling of academic personnel resulted in ZH becoming Rennes' orthography of choice. Additionally, Denez' *Brezhoneg Buan hag Aes* (1972), long the most widely used introductory Breton coursebook, was written in ZH, and the Diwan immersion schools selected ZH as their official orthography. But the fact that ZH is more or less the winner of the orthography wars does not necessarily mean that it was the best choice, and clearly in Wmffre's judgment, it was not. Of the four orthographies launched in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he sees ZH as the least adequate for representing the reality of the language. His own preference goes for SS: "There were some difficulties with the SS orthography, but on the whole it constituted an improved version of the ZH orthography, and it went further in trying to improve the correlation between the written word and all the spoken

dialects." (293)

Wmffre sees the orthography wars as part of a larger debate on the relationship that written Breton should bear to the spoken language. Consequently much of the first volume focuses on 20<sup>th</sup> century attempts to create a literary Breton standard, and the ways the architects of this standard—notably Hemon—more or less ignored the spoken Breton of the remaining rural native speakers, considering it to be too corrupted by French influence and too unsophisticated to serve as a literary standard. We learn that some of "the 'friends' of Breton have been anticipating its demise for most of the twentieth century" in order that, once the traditional, purportedly corrupt speech of the peasants was out of the way, they could proceed with a linguistic reclamation of Brittany unimpeded. It seems impossible that rational people could seriously have held such a view, but Wmffre documents this extensively with quotes from original sources.

It really isn't until the conclusion of volume one that Wmffre suggests what some readers will have been thinking all along, namely that the differences between the orthographies are really rather trivial, and a fluent reader of Breton should have little or no trouble reading any of them. In fact, Wmffre claims that people may not even notice in which orthography a given text is written. This reveals what a waste of time and energy the orthographic wars have been, and one can only wonder what the current fortunes of the Breton language would be like had militants spent less time battling one another and deployed their energies in more fruitful directions. Wmffre attributes the failure to achieve

an orthographic consensus largely to Hemon's and others' complete refusal to accommodate the other orthographies by agreeing to even the smallest changes in their own. But a good share of the blame for the massive decline of Breton goes to France's restrictive policies towards its linguistic minorities. Wmffre notes that if France had been more supportive of Breton in its universities, even at the fairly modest levels of neighboring countries such as the UK and Ireland, "it is likely that Hemon would have gained an academic post and would perhaps not have developed such a visceral hatred for the French language" (474-475).

Wmffre has done Breton and Celtic scholars a great service in bringing together so much data in a single place and presenting such dense material in a highly readable format—though the reader will need some background in linguistics in order to make it through the work, especially the second volume. Knowledge of Breton might not be strictly necessary, and Wmffre states in his preface that he sees this book as relevant for scholars working on standardization and orthographic issues in other languages. For the most part the volumes are well edited, despite numerous typos in some sections (ironically including section 1.2.18 "Other proposed orthographic systems since 1975"). Published quotes are generally given in the Breton original and an English translation. However, quotes in French are frequently left untranslated, so readers should expect to need fairly fluent reading knowledge of academic French. Overall, this is a marvelous piece of scholarship and an invaluable contribution to Breton studies.

***An Tumoldeachas in Éirinn, Immersion Education in Ireland*, by Dónal Ó hAiniféin. Balle Átha Cllath: Colscéim agus Conradh na Gaeilge, 2008. ISBN 9780955909719.**

***Ar thóir an dea-chleachtais: The Quest for Best Practice in Irish-medium Primary Schools in Belfast*, by Seán Mac Corraidh. Béal Feirste: Belfast Studies in Language, Culture and Politics, Cló Ollscoil na Banríona, 2008. ISBN 9780853898986.**

Colin Baker, speaking at the annual NAACLT conference in 2005 (Bangor, Wales), outlined various misconceptions frequently used to undermine language revitalization movements. He argued that it is incumbent upon language activists to familiarize themselves with these misconceptions and their counterarguments. Only in this way can they be challenged on the public and private stage.

A position often taken by opponents of language revival is that "immersion education disadvantages children by preventing them from adequately learning English". This position has in fact been adopted by the Department of Education and Science in Ireland in issuing Circular 0044/2007, which would effectively eliminate early immersion education in the Irish language in the Republic<sup>1,2</sup>.

Two books have recently been published which will provide Celtic language teachers, and language activists, with

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<sup>1</sup> Medium and late immersion would continue to be possible.

some well-honed tools in promoting immersion education.

The first of these books is *Immersion Education in Ireland* by Dr Dónal Ó hAiniféin, jointly issued by Coiscéim and Conradh na Gaeilge. This book is the publication of lecture notes from a talk given by Ó hAiniféin to the Royal Irish Academy in April 2008 in response to Circular 004/2007. It is issued in bilingual format, the Irish title being *An Tu-moideachas in Éirinn*, and discusses the political background, and achievements of *Gaelscoileanna*<sup>3</sup> in Ireland. The author is uncommonly well qualified to present his subject. He is past president of Gaelscoileanna Teoranta, and current principal of Gaelscoil Mhíchíl Cíosóg. He is intimately familiar with the history of the development of *Gaelscoileanna* in Ireland, and the government personalities involved.

The book is brief (55 pages) and to the point. While offering an extensive bibliography of research in immersion education, Ó hAiniféin does not bog down in the details of the studies themselves. Instead, he quotes their primary conclusions, in order to make his points, and leaves the reader to consult the references for further detail. His primary thesis in the book is that immersion education is not only the best way to revitalize the Irish language in Ireland, but is in fact the only way. Early immersion, he further argues, is vastly superior to other immersion models.

As an educator himself, Ó hAiniféin desires that his read-

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<sup>2</sup> A similar government-led campaign against early French language immersion was launched in the Canadian province of New Brunswick in 2008, however it was abandoned in response to public outcry.

<sup>3</sup> Irish medium educational institutions.

ers and the Irish public in general, make educated judgments. He quotes the well known international expert on immersion education, Dr. Jim Cummins<sup>4</sup>:

[Concerning the opinion] that Irish medium instruction is going to have some kind of adverse effect on childrens' English... people are entitled to their opinion, but it would be nice if their opinion was informed by some research that is out there, and there's tons of research out there.

Ó hAiniféin discusses the survey of immersion research conducted by Muiris Ó Laoire in 2005 (150 research projects over 35 years), demonstrating that immersion education provides benefits from the point of view of general education, disposition, use and extension of the language in the society, and the learning of other languages. In the words of Cummins, "... there is no contrary data".

Ó hAiniféin also presents research findings from the Department of Education and Science itself (1988), that show that grade 5 students attending *Gaelscoileanna* performed better on average in English reading tests than students attending English medium schools. He quotes the 1991 statement of the Department:

"The results of the 1988 survey demonstrated that children in fifth class in *Scoileanna Lán-*

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<sup>4</sup> James Cummins is Professor and Canada Research Chair in the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning department at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto. He is a native of Ireland.

*Ghaeilge*<sup>5</sup> were significantly better on the D88 test than their counterparts in ordinary schools. The reasons why pupils who are taught through the medium of Irish perform better on a test of English Reading than pupils who are taught through English are not readily apparent.”

By virtue of his position in the education sector, Ó hAiniféin has ready access to current English reading results, and has conducted his own research. Again, he finds that students in Irish immersion education quickly acquire superior English language skills.

He performs comparisons based upon national average results in standard tests. He finds that, among grade 5 students, only 19.7% of *Gaelscoil* students are in the bottom 1/3, while 46% are in the top 1/3.

Having shown that Irish immersion education actually benefits students in developing English language skills, he investigates whether English medium schools are equally effective in teaching Irish. He presents results from a study of Irish language reading ability by Harris (1991). This study shows that Irish reading competence levels in *gaelscoileanna* is about 85%, while that emerging from “ordinary” schools is about 39%. Ó hAiniféin argues that the Department of Education and Science should be intervening to address deficiencies in Irish language acquisition in English medium schools, rather than English language acquisition in Irish medium schools.

Ó hAiniféin’s book is a good read, and a good resource

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<sup>5</sup> That is “full-immersion Irish schools”.

for anyone involved in language revitalization, Celtic or otherwise.

The second book that is recommended for your reading is *Ar thóir an dea-chleachtais, The Quest for Best Practice in Irish-medium Primary Schools in Belfast*, by Dr Sean Mac Corraidh. This book, written in English<sup>6</sup>, is a readable summary of the PhD thesis work of the author. Mac Corraidh has extensive personal experience as an immersion educator and as the regional adviser on Irish-medium education at nursery, primary and post-primary levels for the Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards.

Mac Corraidh’s work is far more detailed and scholarly than that of Ó hAiniféin, as would be expected from the relative contexts in which the books were written. Mac Corraidh provides an extensive discussion of immersion education in general, which is referenced meticulously. Almost a complete chapter is devoted to immersion education in Canada, a topic of particular interest to North American readers.

Anyone familiar with the renaissance of the Irish language in Ireland will understand that the language revitalization in the north of Ireland, beginning in the 1960s, is nothing short of miraculous. Much of the success of the movement is a result of immersion education. Mac Corraidh’s work is a very valuable asset for extending the lessons learned to other locations in Ireland and abroad. His work is perhaps best understood as a response to an as-

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<sup>6</sup> Research interviews were conducted in Irish. Excerpts from those interviews appearing in the book are presented in Irish, with English translations.

sersion by Eagleson (2002):

The fact that Irish Medium education in Northern Ireland is a relatively new phenomenon has led to the fact that practitioners are so occupied with the deliverance of a high standard immersion and bilingual Irish Medium programme that they have little time to record a body of knowledge supporting their theories of how the system works.

Mac Corraidh has studied the system, and his book tells us how it works. His approach is very direct, pragmatic, and objective. He discusses weaknesses as well as strengths. His aim is not to convince anyone of the benefits of this educational model, but to provide advice to those already committed to it.

The independent research component of his work involves case studies, strongly founded in current theories of sociolinguistics, applied linguistics and psycholinguistics. Investigation methods include focus group interviews, in-depth interviews, lesson-video recordings, and stimulated recall procedures. Included in the scope of investigation are: integration of language and culture, creating a rich Irish language learning environment, the use of English in teaching and learning, ensuring pupil comprehension, testing, learning styles, and correction strategies. Research findings are presented in a very readable, anecdotal, and even entertaining manner.

Following the presentation of research findings, Mac Corraidh undertakes a brief, but very insightful critical

discussion. This discussion analyses the findings in the light of the scholarly literature on immersion education. The book concludes with 30 pages of appendices, which in themselves are worth the price of the book. These appendices are examples of some "best practices", including lesson plans in science, geography, grammar, vocabulary building, listening, and oral interaction.

Mac Corraidh's book is a very interesting, satisfying, and fruitful read. If widely studied it will assist the next generation in replicating the outstanding Irish language achievements currently to be witnessed in Belfast.

**Reviewed by Aralt Mac Giolla Chainnigh**  
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***Dialects of English: Northern and Insular Scots*, by Robert McColl Millar.**

**Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007. 178 pages. ISBN 9780748623174.**

This book is one of a series of handbooks describing varieties of English around the world. All the books in the series have a common structure, offering descriptions at the traditional linguistic levels of phonetics and phonology, morpho-syntax, and lexis, prefaced by an introduction and followed by a history of the dialect in question. One wonders why this particular structure was chosen, since, for the non-specialist reader, for whom the series is supposed to provide a starting point for further research, the section on history might well have been placed first, giving a sociolinguistic context for what follows. However, this is to criticise the series, not the author of the volume under review.

Millar has a lot of interesting material to deal with. As he says, the dialects of the North East of Scotland, together with those of the Northern island groups of Orkney and Shetland, are among the most conservative and the most resilient of those still spoken in Scotland. They also have a long history of contact with other languages, notably Scots Gaelic, which used to be widely spoken in the area, the Norse language of Scandinavian invaders, and other forms of Scots and Scottish English.

The introduction gives a brief, but generally useful, survey of what is to come. The accompanying maps are clear, but could have given more geographical information for those not familiar with this part of the world. Key places

could have been indicated on the first map—even this reviewer, as a resident Scot, was struggling with terms like ‘the Laigh...the low-lying part of Moray’ (p.7) or ‘the Ord of Caithness’ (p.10), when nowhere are we shown where Moray or Caithness actually is. Likewise, the reader unfamiliar with Scots dialectology might welcome definitions of terms such as ‘mid-Scots’ and ‘central Scots’, which are taken as given. The series as a whole makes a virtue of brevity, but in places this is at the expense of clarity.

Chapter 2, Phonetics and Phonology, is by far the most detailed in the book. It benefits both from the fieldwork done by the author and others, and from the fact that this is the linguistic level at which difference is best preserved. Using a version of the lexical set methodology developed by John Wells (Wells 1982), adapted to Scottish conditions, distinctive features of each of the designated dialect areas are meticulously examined and patterns of use established. For those willing to engage with this level of detail, these analyses will form a useful reference point for comparison with other dialects or further research into the ones discussed here. A recurrent theme of the book is the fragility of the dialects in question, with many historic features being preserved only in the speech of older people. More research, and especially more recording, is needed before it is too late. A small but interesting sample of texts, transcribed both orthographically and phonemically, is given at the end of the book. Sound versions are available on the Edinburgh University Press website.

About morphosyntax, discussed in Chapter 3, there is less to say, both because this level of language is more stable



and because many of the dialectal features, such as the tripartite deictic system of *this*, *that* and *yon/thon* ('yonder') and the preference for *that* over *which*, are common to many varieties of Scots. Indeed, an interesting theme to emerge is the number of such features which are shared with dialects elsewhere in the British Isles.

As the author admits, Chapter 4, on vocabulary, is the least developed in the book, relying for data mainly on two major projects, *The Linguistic Atlas of Scotland* and *The Scottish National Dictionary*, supported by local dictionaries and glossaries where these are available and a small amount of field-work. The importance of key activities such as Farming and Fishing in preserving dialect features is especially clear in this chapter. There are also brief but interesting treatments of less well-known topics, such as the taboo words used in fishing communities to avoid direct reference to things considered unlucky (93ff). These communities also developed the use of by-names, descriptive nicknames used to get round the problem of many people sharing a surname. This practice has died out in the North-East but still flourishes in the Western Isles of Scotland (Bramwell 2007). Chapter 4 also discusses the relatively meagre influence of Gaelic in the North-East, indicating the increasingly low status of that language as Scots expanded into formerly Gaelic-speaking areas (95 ff). A parallel in the Northern Isles is the decline of Norn, the language descended from Old Norse.

Overall the book is well-written and nicely produced. It concludes with a comprehensive bibliography and a survey of previous work, which turns into a plea for more work. Compared with many small nations marked by linguistic

diversity, Scotland has had to struggle hard to build its linguistic resources. A new Linguistic Survey is badly needed, as are additional resources for dictionaries and grammars. In the author's words: 'There is much to do, not much time and too few scholars' (p. 141). It is to be hoped that books such as this one will stimulate future work as well as preserving dialect features from the past.

**Reviewed by Christian Kay**

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***Sengoidelc: Old Irish for Beginners*, by  
David Stifter.**

**Syracuse University Press, 2006. xii+389 pages.**

**ISBN: 9780815630722. Paper, \$45**

The audience for learning an ancient language like Old Irish (OI) is obviously different than the one trying to master a modern spoken language: unlike students learning languages like French, Spanish, or the modern Celtic languages, the student of OI doesn't expect to learn how to go into a bar and order a pint of beer. The student of OI typically comes from one of two specific subgroups. There are those who are students of linguistics and are interested in either studying a language with a complicated structure or are interested in learning an ancient language for comparative and historical purposes. And there are those—often students of Celtic Studies—who are interested in learning the language as a window into the history, laws and literature of the mediaeval Gael. Despite having these unique and specialized student bodies, when one is teaching OI one expects to be able to benefit from modern understandings of language teaching and language acquisition as they are appropriate to learning a dead tongue. Until recently, the materials for learning Old Irish have had a noticeable lack of modern sophistication. The most commonly used materials for learning Old Irish date from the 1970s (Lehmann and Lehmann 1975 and Quin 1975, usually paired with Strachan 1949, which itself requires a knowledge of Latin), and consist largely of translation exercises from OI into English accompanied by a few brief grammatical notes. The

most recent edition of the standard grammar of the language dates from the 1940s (Thurneysen 1946) and contains much information that is no longer considered accurate by scholars of the language. David Stifter's (henceforth DS) new textbook *Sengoidelc: Old Irish for Beginners* (henceforth S) goes a long way to filling this gap. It is the new standard for the teaching of OI. While the material continues to be largely thick grammatical detail and translation exercises, this book goes a long way to making it more accessible to an audience of modern students. Surprising in a textbook, it is also an excellent piece of scholarship and provides a very useful description of the grammar of the language.

This is a long book, at nearly 400 pages, so I cannot get into deep technical discussion of the details of the grammatical description. Instead, I'll provide an overall summary of the structure and methodologies used in the book and hit on a few points of excellence and a few points of weakness.

The book has a total of 58 lessons and a number of appendices. The first lesson gives a history of Irish relative to its near neighbors. Lessons 2 through 4 cover some of the basics of OI orthography, phonology, and mutations. Chapter 3, on phonology, is a daunting experience I think for a novice, particularly one without any experience in linguistics. Nevertheless it is an excellent reference. It's the kind of chapter that I might have students skim over and then return to when they have more facility with the language.

Thirteen chapters distributed throughout the book are devoted to the incredibly complex declensional system of OI nouns and articles. These chapters are not only remarkable for the clarity with which the patterns are articulated,

but for the depth of knowledge presented in each short lesson. All the lessons on noun declension and verbal inflection contain charts that have not only the synchronic OI forms, but also various forms (both attested and reconstructed) from earlier versions of the language (including variously Primitive Irish, Proto-Celtic, Pre-Celtic, and Proto-Indo-European, depending upon the table). For a linguist like myself, these are incredible resources not available anywhere else. I think they also add a deeper layer of explanation for the more sophisticated student, in that they show how the synchronic patterns of OI arose. For students who are only interested in OI itself and not in diachronic matters, this material is easily ignored.

Most of the rest of the book is devoted to the equally complex system of verbal morphology in the language. There is clear and accessible discussion of the conjunct/absolute distinction, the prototonic and deuterotonic distinction, the *ro-* augment, infixed pronouns and preverbs, and the various tenses, aspects and moods that make up the verbal inflectional system. While it is clear that DS has tried hard to make various grammatical terminological points accessible to the reader, the text sometimes assumes a depth of grammatical knowledge that North American students simply won't have. For example, it assumes that students know what a 'preterite' is, and what the difference between 'tense' and 'aspect' is. Similarly earlier in the book, the distinction between phonemes and allophones is explained, but I'm suspicious that the discussion will go right over the heads of students without a linguistics background. While we might blame the lack of such knowledge on deficiencies in the way

traditional grammar is taught in North America, it means that an instructor using this book will have to be careful to explain these things to his or her students, or they are likely to become frustrated in a sea of technical vocabulary.

The book also contains chapters on the inflection of prepositions, numbers, relative clauses, the copula and metrics. Every three or four chapters there is a review chapter that contains "test" exercises for the students to review their knowledge. These review lessons typically also contain a short list of minor grammatical points and perhaps a poem or short text in OI. At the end of the book there are a number of appendices, including a source list, a lexicon (OI to English only), and 10 pages of reference charts. These charts alone are worth the price of the book.

The treatment of the syntax of OI is relatively sparse. Apart from a brief description of VSO order early in the book and description of the copula and clefts in lesson 24, the discussion of the syntax is largely limited to Lesson 52, where there is discussion of left dislocation, heavy subject shift, small (verbless) clauses, tmesis and the verb final archaic forms. This is to be expected, given the great emphasis on morphology and diachronic phonology found in the grammatical literature on OI and the great complexity of its inflectional system, but I would have hoped for perhaps a little more discussion where appropriate.

Most, but not all, chapters contain exercises to accompany the text. These are mostly translation exercises, using vocabulary and forms taught in the lesson. There are a couple of important features of these exercises that are worth mentioning. One thing that might alarm purists is the fact

that DS has, where appropriate, simplified sentences taken from Old Irish texts, and in some cases made up entirely new ones. He's very careful to mark these forms so the student is aware what is attested and what is not. I think including such forms is a very wise move. On one hand it avoids unnecessarily exposing students to complex material that they'll learn about later in the book, and on the other hand it exposes them to a wide set of exemplars for pattern learning.

All the exercises have solutions at the end of the book. This is a mixed blessing. It means that students have immediate feedback on their work and it makes the book useful for individuals doing self-study. On the downside, it makes the book less useful for a North American university audience. In the European tradition, exercises are meant as practice for exams. In North America, of course, we are more used to the tradition of assigning grades to homework assignments. Since the answers are given at the end of the book, the exercises can't be used as graded homework assignments. Perhaps in future editions, the author and publishers will remove the answers and put them in a separate instructor's manual, or include only selected answers for the North American market.

The organization of the book and the order of presentation of the material is excellent. S never contains situations where students are expected to know material that is detailed later. I do have one minor complaint about presentation in the early part of the book: up to chapter 13 almost all the book is grammatical description or historical background. Apart from the exercises, there is almost no expo-

sure to the language in its natural milieu or form in the early part of the book. It isn't until chapter 13, on page 70, that we're exposed to our first real example of the language: a short poem. Although such poems and other real language texts become more frequent towards the end of the book, I really wish there was more of this early in the book as a reward to the student so they can feel like they are really achieving an understanding of the language and not just memorizing paradigms and translating sentences out of context. In this regard, I'd be tempted to continue using Lehmann and Lehmann (1975) along with S. In Lehmann and Lehman the student is taken through a story written in OI right from the first chapter, and the reader feels like they are really "cracking the code" of the language right from the beginning. The two books, although inconsistent in phonological transcription and order of presentation are perhaps best used together for this reason.

I have one major complaint about the book, which is likely to be of concern only to linguists and not to language teachers. I'm not terribly happy with the phonological transcriptional system used in the book. The transcriptions used for the lenited series of sounds seem very confusing to me and deviate significantly from the International Phonetic Alphabet. The lenited (lenis) sonorants /n, r, l/ are transcribed using the Greek letters <ν, ρ, λ>, and the unlenited (fortis) sounds, more typically transcribed /N, R, L/ are transcribed <n, r, l>. This mismatch is very distracting and confusing. Two of these are not only confusing because they don't match the IPA values, but also by their resemblance to letters in English orthography: The similarity be-

tween Greek rho <ρ> (/r/) and English pee <p>, and between Greek nu <ν> (/n/) and English vee <v> compounds the confusion arising from the deviance from IPA. Other non-IPA transcriptions, all in the lenited series, include <μ> for /ṽ/, <δ> for /ð/, <β> for /v/, <γ'> for /j/, <φ> for /f/ (although only for orthographic intervocalic and lenited <p>), and <χ'> for /ç/. S is upfront about these variations and explains them in the book. I can certainly see the value in representing all lenited sounds with Greek letters for consistency, but I found this aspect of the book very difficult when I was working through the transcriptions of texts. On more than one occasion, I actually had to look at the notoriously unphonetic OI spelling to figure out what the transcription was supposed to be. I'm sure that those students who are already familiar with IPA will share my frustrations here and I suspect that students of history and literature are likely to ignore the transcriptions entirely. I laud DS in transcribing all of the texts in the book, but in the long run I think it might actually be more effective to have sound recordings of the texts read by the author or another OI expert. On my wish list for any future editions, then, is a CD/DVD or website with sound files for all the transcribed material. I suspect that most students, whether they are linguists or not, will find auditory input more helpful than the transcriptions as they are given in this text. It should be a relatively trivial and cheap matter to distribute this kind of media, so I hope the author and publisher will give it serious consideration.

A review of S would not be complete without a comment on the extremely cute and frequently cheeky sheep cartoons

that pepper the text. While not typical of dry scholarly works on OI, they remind me of the marginalia found in real OI manuscripts. They add a level of levity that breaks up the complicated and heavy material.

S is a fantastic addition to the resources available to Celtic language teachers and scholars. I only get to teach Old Irish every four or five years, but it will definitely be my text of choice the next time I teach it. In the meantime, I'm pleased to have it at hand as a first class reference work. The depth of detail in the grammatical descriptions in many ways makes it as valuable a reference tool as Thurneysen—at least for the major patterns in the language—and perhaps a more accessible one. It is definitely a book that any teacher of Old Irish or historical linguistics should invest in.

**Reviewed by Andrew Carnie**

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## **Seachd: The Inaccessible Pinnacle** **Film Review**

The buzz in the Scottish Gaelic world over the film *Seachd: The Inaccessible Pinnacle* started years before its actual release. Having a feature film in Gaelic seemed too good to be true. I visited the film's website regularly, hoping for news of a release date, new trailer, or soundtrack teaser. I suppose that it was inevitable that there would be a sense of disappointment when I actually saw the film after that much build-up.

The film has many strengths. The cinematography is very strong, and it's hard to beat the scenery of Skye. The music is wonderful, and Aonghas Pàdraig Caimbeul portrays the lead character ably. My friends Peggie MacKinnon from the Isle of Barra and Peggie Smith from the Isle of Skye both saw it and declared the spoken dialogue to be flawless, idiomatic Gaelic.

The main character, the grandfather (Aonghas Pàdraig Caimbeul) and grandmother (Dolina MacLeannan) have become the guardians of their three grandchildren after a climbing accident on Skye claims the lives of the children's parents. The kids, though native Gaelic speakers, appear to be unfamiliar with traditional culture, which creates conflict with the grandparents. The grandfather works to bridge the generation gap by telling fantastic stories all of which carry a message for the kids. There is an engaging sideline about who is responsible for the climbing accident and a cèilidh scene that presented homemade music unapologetically. I really enjoyed that part.

The stories the grandfather tells move through centuries

and include many elements of traditional narratives such as the Water Horse, oppression by lairds and the dangers of dabbling in magic. Some are dramatic and some are comical and the transitions feel abrupt from time to time; however, the overall effect is pleasing.

The supporting cast is the first of my two quibbles with the work. The young actors playing grandchildren at the time of their parent's deaths do a fine job, allowing that not a great deal is being asked of them. Kids are pretty good at acting like kids. Coll Dòmhnallach portraying one of the grandsons at age 20 might have been doing as the director wished, but whoever was responsible, the portrayal came across to me as wooden and two dimensional. Watching the film I was hoping that the older grandson would show us that the grandfather had succeeded in reaching them all those years ago, but the opposite appears to be true. The grandfather is as much a mystery to his grandchildren at the end of the film as he was in the first frame.

Having said that, I have a bigger complaint about the writing and directing. Writers Joanne Cockwell and Iain Finlay MacLeod came up with a great outline for a movie with two very strong storylines. From my perspective, however, neither was given the treatment it deserved. We could have seen the power of traditional culture to help the grandchildren deal with the loss of their parents, or we could have seen a story about the redemption of a man stretched thin with grief and secrets. We didn't, though.

The film's story does have a wonderful twist, and it deserves to be seen by every Gaelic speaker. I'm not sure,

however, that I would recommend it very strongly even to my most ardent foreign film buff friends.

**Reviewed by Seumas Gagne**

*Slighe nan Gàidheal*

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*Journal of Celtic Language Learning* (ISSN: 1078-3911) is an international review for those involved with teaching or researching modern Celtic Languages. The official publication of the North American Association for Celtic Language Teachers, *JCLL* includes papers presented at the association's annual conference as well as manuscripts submitted by Celtic teachers and scholars from around the world. It is also a forum in which modern Celtic language teachers can share insights into methodology with their peers, and read reviews of recent books, software, music and film relevant to Celtic languages.

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