

WHICH LINGUISTIC MODEL FOR BRITTANY?

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1. Introduction

UNESCO has classified Breton, the Celtic language spoken in the West of Brittany in northwestern France, among the ‘seriously endangered’ languages of the world.² As such, Breton is one of the thousands of minority languages and dialects which may disappear by the end of the 21st century (cf. *infra*).

In the first part of this article, I identify some of the major socio-economic, historical and sociolinguistic causes for the rapid decline in the use of Breton over the past 150 years. I then present some of the technical and practical problems hindering communication between speakers of the naturally transmitted, basilectal varieties of Breton³ and the normalized variety currently taught in the schools.

Finally, one of the major objectives of this paper is to outline a project for creating pedagogical tools targeting native and passive speakers who make up, by far, the largest pool of speakers and potential speakers of the language today.

The goal of this article is thus as social as it is linguistic, namely to assist those who want to better understand the function of the varieties language they still speak and, in the case of passive speakers, to provide educational

1. The author lives in the parish of Saint Yvi, southern Cornouaille (Finistère) and has been exposed to the Breton of this region since childhood. The subject of his 1984 thesis was the *Phonology and morphology of southern Cornouaillais Breton within the context of Pierre Le Roux’s Atlas Linguistique du la Basse-Bretagne*, unpublished, University of Western Brittany.

2. <http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/index.php>

3. In this article, the terms “vernacular Breton”, “dialect speakers”, “traditional speakers” are used interchangeably with the general meaning of “basilectal speakers”. The term “badume” adds an extra dimension to the concept of “basilectal”. First coined by Le Berre and Le Dù (1996), it refers to the purely oral, naturally transmitted, highly stigmatized and fragmented regional and social varieties of Breton used, often with covert prestige and with a strong affective sentiments, in socially stigmatized speech communities. These days, Breton speakers tend to restrict their use the language to people they know intimately. Fañch Broudic (1999) describes it as “la langue de la convivialité”. Jean Le D (pc.) compares it to “tutoiement”, i.e. one only speaks Breton to people with whom one has strong bonds (family, neighbours, etc.). This has also been my own experience.

resources which would enable them to (re)learn the varieties they heard during their childhood. Currently, virtually none exist to assist them.

At another level, the project might also prove useful for those seeking to build bridges and consolidate ties between the surviving linguistic networks and clusters of traditional Breton speakers as well as potentially interested learners of the language who wish to communicate with the dialect speakers in their areas.

If only in a small way, I also hope that some of the points presented in this paper may be of use to those working on other minority languages and dialect communities elsewhere in the world.

2. Numbers of speakers

As mentioned in the introduction, the future of Breton is bleak and the numbers of speakers have been in constant decline since the end of the 19th century. In 1900, Breton was the first language of 90% of the inhabitants of Western Brittany, 50–60% of whom were monolingual (Broudic 1999). By 1950, there were still an estimated 1,100,000 speakers of whom 700,000 used the language as their primary medium of communication. 100,000 of these were monolinguals (Gourvil 1952). By the 1980s, nearly all of the latter had passed away (Favereau 1991).⁴

The good news, however, is that it has been estimated that there are still around 120,000–150,000 native speakers of Breton today, more than in any other Celtic-speaking nation except Wales.⁵ Broudic (2007) put this figure at 240,000 in 1997 (297,000 including Breton speakers living in other regions of France) while, two years later, an INSEE study estimated this number to be slightly higher, 257,000 (two-thirds of whom were over 50 years of age at the time, *ibid.*)

On the down side, the decline in the number of speakers is accelerating at a very rapid pace. By 2007 this number had dropped to 172,000, 103,000 of whom were over 60 years of age (Broudic 2009). In this same study, Broudic

4. Marie-France Kerjos, a secretary at the town hall of Saint Yvi, Finistère, informed me that the last monolingual speakers in the parish died in the mid-1980s.

5. It must be kept in mind that the French government has always refused to take into account the number of minority language speakers in France in the national census. For this reason, no official statistics exist regarding the number of minority language speakers in France, only estimates. Furthermore, given that the language has been so stigmatized, many older people I have known, who have an excellent working knowledge of the language, claim they have “never spoken” it or “have forgotten it”. This fact could considerably affect the statistics and must be taken into account.

predicted that these figures would drop to 122,000 by 2017 and to around 100,000 by 2020 (*ibid.*).⁶

The number of speakers who actually use Breton on a daily basis is another matter with numbers estimated at 70,000 in 1999 and only 35,000 in 2007 (*ibid.*), a figure that strikes me as excessively low, but which certainly must not be dismissed.

As a rule of thumb, most fluent speakers of the traditional varieties today are a) over 70 years old, b) live in the poorer areas of rural Western Brittany, c) are less formally educated than the average citizen and d) tend to be confined to lower-paying jobs.

This cocktail is well-known to sociolinguists around the world and it is important to highlight that negative attitudes towards Breton often have far more to do with condescending attitudes on the part of French-speaking urbanites towards older, economically deprived members of the surrounding rural communities (i.e. *les sans dents* ‘the toothless ones’ as President Holland was quoted to have said in recent years) than with any inherent shortcomings in the varieties they speak. The position adopted in this article is the same as for most linguists: the vernacular Breton varieties are clearly coherent linguistic systems in and of themselves (and standard Breton is merely another variety that has been added to the mix).

3. The social and historical background for the language shift

Although the speed of the language shift has mystified observers, the reasons which motivated it are relatively straightforward and, as we have just seen, are intimately linked to the social history of the Breton people and their language. I shall now attempt to outline some of the major stages of the passage towards French.

The key event which triggered the decline steady in the use of Breton probably results from the gallicization of the Breton aristocracy during the 11th and 12th centuries. Unlike Wales, Brittany never developed an elevated, secular, Breton-medium literature (written or oral) comparable to the poetry produced by the *Beirdd y Tywysogion* (Poets of the Welsh Princes, 12th–13th centuries). Vernacular Breton remained the language of an impoverished peasantry concentrated in the western areas of the peninsula⁷ while Latin and French, on the other hand, retained a high status. In this regard, the

6. For more on this subject, see Broudic 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003 [2004], 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010.

7. Having said this, the petty nobility of Western Brittany continued to speak Breton, mainly for practical interactions with the peasantry, but also for religious purposes, until well into the 20th century.

history of Breton is similar in many ways to that of Early Middle English.⁸ As Jean Le Dù and Yves Le Berre (1996) have demonstrated, vernacular Breton has always evolved within the context of an extensive web of orally transmitted basilects or *badumes*.⁹

Although two major regional standard forms of Breton were developed by the Catholic clergy, based on the Léonais and Vannetais varieties, the Church only ever considered these ecclesiastical standards as tools for teaching and promoting Christianity to monolinguals (from the Middle Ages down to the mid-20th century), not for any other functional or educational purposes (Le Pipec fc.).

After François I signed the *Villers-Cotterêt Ordonnance* in 1539, French became the official language of the kingdom of France, and Latin was gradually occulted from the secular sphere. Le Pipec (*ibid.*) clearly demonstrates that Breton was rarely ever used for any official purposes in written documents or public inscriptions, even in the heart of Breton-speaking Brittany. French has long been used for such purposes, proving that it has served as the societal norm in Brittany for centuries. Breton has thus never benefited from any public or official recognition whatsoever.

Unlike Protestant Wales, where three-quarters of the population could read the Welsh Bible by the end of the 18th century (Clement 1971), aside from a small ecclesiastical and administrative elite, Bretons remained illiterate in both Breton and French until the end of the 19th century. In 1869, French military authorities estimated that the percentage of conscripts from Finistère who were illiterate in French to be about 70% overall (including the cities). These statistics were far higher in rural towns where the majority of the population resided: Scaer 92%, Chateauneuf 85%, Fouesnant 80%, Rosporden 87%, Arzano 93%, Bannalec 80% . . .¹⁰ In the countryside, these statistics reach nearly 100%.

On account of similarly high illiteracy rates in other regions of France, the *Loi Jules Ferry* was passed in 1881 the outcome of which was the establishment of free, French-medium public schools throughout France. One of the

8. Indeed, a parallel can be drawn with England following the Norman Conquest, a period during which Early Middle English was viewed as the language of a conquered nation, with French and Latin the language of the elites. This situation persisted in England well into the 14th century and, in this respect, at least for a few centuries, both English and Breton speakers shared a similar sociolinguistic fate.

9. See footnote 3 for a definition of “badume”.

10. I thank Fañch Postic for having provided the source for these statistics: *Situation des conscrits sous le rapport de l'instruction*, Tableau de 1869, Finistère, pp 56-58, Archives départementales du Finistère.

government's main goals in founding a public school system was to teach standard French as a means of providing basic education to all children with a view to elevating the intellectual level of the population as a whole.

Because minority languages and French dialects (*patois*) were seen to be a hindrance to learning by educators, it was felt that they had to be erased from the linguistic landscape. The mindset at the time was that French was the sole language of culture and refinement. Eleven years after the Franco-Prussian War, in a climate of fervent nationalist resurgence, it goes without saying that teaching the Breton language, history and culture were utterly irrelevant in the context of the national French curriculum and, in this regard, little has changed. Consequently, most Bretons remained (and have remained) ignorant of their own history and culture and never received the slightest formal instruction in their language.

In much the same way that parents round the world today encourage their children to master English, suffice it to say that most Bretons felt it was necessary, for the future well-being of their children, to learn French ... and to learn it well. For this reason, the mass of the population enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to enroll their children in a free public school. This was not at all because they did not appreciate or enjoy their own language or culture, but simply because they saw learning French as an economic and social necessity and as the sole path out of the dire poverty in which most people lived (see Déguignet 1999).¹¹

Ironically, among the harshest critics of those individuals who did not learn French properly were socially ambitious Bretons themselves. Laggards were viewed with utter contempt (*ibid.*) and were mocked for speaking poor French (called *galleg saout*, lit. 'the French of cows'). As in many societies (Chambers & Trudgill 1980, Guillou 1998, Broudic 2007), women tended to be in the forefront of this shift to French (which they often viewed in terms of their own emancipation) the consequence being that, during the course of the 20th century, younger monolingual farmers found it increasingly difficult to find wives.¹²

11. An 80-year-old neighbour in Saint Yvi confided that, for him, the Breton language and culture was an anchor around one's neck that dragged everyone downward. He stressed that, as a socialist, he owed everything to the French Republic which provided him with a free education, and allowed him to master the French language (which he could not speak until he went to grade school) and, through French, an understanding of the world which he would never have had otherwise. For him Breton was an "intellectual ghetto"! In my experience, this is a viewpoint that is almost unanimously shared by people of his age, whether on the political right or left.

12. Cf. the popular song *Ar pôtr yaouank koz* (literally, "the young-old lad", i.e. the bachelor)

In public and private schools throughout France and the colonies, public humiliation through the use of the *symbole*¹³ was a highly efficient incentive for learning French and, in the case of Brittany, the majority of Breton speakers passed from total illiteracy in their native language to literacy in French in a remarkably short time (Broudic 2005). It should be added, that the use of the *symbole* should not downplay the efforts and dedication with which the pupils learnt French or the diligence with which the school masters taught it.¹⁴

As we have already noted, in 1900, French was a foreign language for 90% of the population of Western Brittany with 50 to 60% of these being monolinguals (Broudic 1999).¹⁵ Today, the vast majority of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of these very same people often know only a few basic words (if any) in Breton.¹⁶ Because of the pressure traditionally placed on children to succeed academically, it is a well-known fact that Brittany is today one of the best educated regions of France.¹⁷

The two World Wars, which resulted in the mobilization of virtually every able-bodied young man for service in the French army (many of them monolinguals when they were conscripted), clearly acted as a further

about a poor farmer who cannot find a wife because the women are only interested in marrying French-speaking men (Loeiz Roparz pc., 1980).

13. Children were encouraged to inform on one another other in the schoolyard and denounce whoever was speaking Breton. The child who was caught was given the *symbole* (often a wooden shoe, piece of slate, etc.) which was worn round his/her neck. The child who ended up with the *symbole* at the end of the day remained after school for punishment. The *bonnet d'âne* (a hat with ass's ears) was the *symbole* used in Elliant.

14. An example is that of my main informant, Léontine Manchec, who spoke no French before going to school. When she left school at the age of 13, she was able to read, write and speak French at a respectable level.

15. My principle informants in Saint Yvi, old enough to remember, told me during the late 1970s that the first time they heard French (spoken by native speakers) was in 1914 when Belgian refugees were housed in their village.

16. In my classes at the University of Brest, I often ask the students to give me the meanings of basic words like bread (*bara*), meat (*kig*), people/family (*tud*), etc. Only a handful of students ever know the answers, even those from the rural areas.

17. Jean-Louis Duchet, former Dean of the School of Arts and Humanities, University of Poitiers (pc.) informed me in 2015 that teachers assigned to the *Académie de Rennes* are considered privileged. Indeed, Finistère, has the highest percentage of PhDs in all of France. The national competitive exams also show that the Bretons have among the best academic results in the country. In 2016, for instance, the *Télégramme* daily newspaper reported that the success rates for the Baccalauréat exam were 99% for 30 Breton high schools with a further 15 having a 100% success rate. Bretons also excel in the CAPES and Agrégation national competitive exams in all disciplines.

catalyst in the language shift in that, for many, this was the first time that they had been plunged into a uniquely French-speaking environment. Their military training may also have reinforced their sense of French nationalism given that a high percentage of Bretons were assigned to combat units¹⁸ with many serving up to five years during the war years (both World War I and World War II).

It is difficult to estimate the extent to which nationalistic fervour (combined with fiercely hostile reactions against pro-Nazi Breton nationalist groups such as the *Breiz Atao*) may have stifled support for the language and culture following World War II. Some historians (cf. Coativy 2017) estimate that supporters of the Breton language and culture of all political stripes were often branded as potential traitors for at least 20 to 30 years after the war.¹⁹ This corresponds to my own observations.

Seen from another perspective, perhaps an even more decisive factor which sealed the fate of the Breton language as a societal language was the modernization of the economy and society which started after World War I. This process of the economic expansion accelerated rapidly after the Second World War leading to the industrialisation of agriculture and fishing. The direct effect was the demise of traditional family farming and fishing which, in turn, tore apart the social fabric which maintained Breton as a community language. The outcome was the largescale out-migration of the poorest, unemployed, rural dwellers to the large urban centres of France. As we have already said, these were often the best speakers of traditional Breton.

An often-overlooked factor which further hastened the decline of the language was the passing of the last monolingual speakers during the 1960s and 1980s. While they were alive, families and friends were obliged to speak Breton in the household, regardless of their views on the use of Breton.²⁰ However, after these monolinguals passed away, and on account of the growing social space occupied by the French language in everyday life (radio, television, newspapers, schools, government administration, business matters . . .), bilingual Breton speakers increasingly drifted towards the use of French. In this sense, in most families, the language shift occurred almost seamlessly and, in some respects, unconsciously.²¹

18. For example, 60% of the French fusiliers-marins commandos who took part in the D-Day landings in Normandy on June 6, 1944, were Bretons.

19. In local Cornouaillais Breton one still hears people say *Breiz atao, mad da lao* (*lazhañ*) 'Breiz atao (members) good for the slaughter'.

20. I observed this first hand as a child when visiting my great-grandparents in Saint Yvi, who had great difficulty in expressing themselves in French.

21. Léontine Manchec (born 1902) angrily rejected my claim that her nieces, born during the

As a result, the contexts in which Breton can be used naturally have been steadily eroded. In most cases today, native Breton speakers no longer bother to speak Breton to one another and spontaneously address their peers in French, particularly in public places where non-Breton-speakers are omnipresent. This means that occasions to speak Breton during a normal day have been radically reduced over the past fifty years.²² The consequence is that many older native speakers are actually forgetting their native language and feel more comfortable speaking French.²³

To conclude this section, Breton no longer survives nowadays as a community language but rather is used within an array of disparate networks and clusters scattered throughout the country, including the large cities of Upper Brittany. For this reason, the time for revitalizing Breton *as a community language* has long past. Though it is true that French is the only language permitted for official purposes, this should not be taken to imply that the authorities forbid Breton speakers from using the language in public places. Rather, the self-imposed social constraints are so powerful that most Breton speakers, except in more militant circles, generally choose not to do so. For this reason, it is very conceivable that a visitor passing through the hinterland of Breton-speaking Brittany might never hear a word of the language. In this respect, one might describe Breton today as a hidden or secret language or, perhaps better, a language of intimacy.

4. Passive speakers

For all of the sociolinguistic, economic and historical reasons indicated above, by the 1950s, the majority of parents had mastered spoken French to varying degrees (often with heavy Breton substrate influence) and consciously refused to speak Breton to their own children ‘for their own good’. As a result, the baby-boomers were largely conditioned by their parents to forsake the family language, a move that went hand in hand with French governmental initiatives in favour of cultural and linguistic assimilation. ‘Progress’ was the *leitmotif* and the language, and all things Breton, were portrayed to be a drag on economic, social and intellectual development of the region. Just as Breton was associated in people’s minds with an impoverished

1950s, could not speak Breton. ‘That’s impossible! Of course, they can! They simply prefer to speak French!’ came the reply (*circa* 1980). Indeed, though they could understand Breton, they could not speak it.

22. Today, it is virtually impossible to start a Breton language conversation in a public place with a stranger.

23. One informant, born in 1900 and who immigrated to Paris in 1920, told me years ago that he realized this process had been achieved when he began dreaming in French.

past, the French language and culture were presented and perceived to be the keys to a radiant future. This view was largely vindicated in economic terms by the period known as the *Trente Glorieuses*, that is, the thirty years of rapid economic growth spanning the years from 1950 to 1980.

An important fact to keep in mind is that, although the shift to French was very rapid, it was not entirely complete in the sense that, even though young people were actively discouraged from speaking Breton, large numbers of children born between 1945 and 1970, now between 45 and 70, understood the local varieties in their areas perfectly, even if they could not speak or chose not to speak the language.

Despite dramatically enhanced attitudes toward Breton and Breton culture over the past 50 years, the social and economic reality described above largely explains the stigmatization which is still attached to speaking Breton today, especially in the minds of the oldest speakers (i.e. the inheritors of naturally-transmitted Breton).

Having said this, and we have implied above, speaking Breton has become more fashionable in some circles today, particularly (but not solely) among younger, formally-educated members of the middle class, but to some extent among older Breton-speaking women (Guillou 1998, Broudig 2007) who now see learning Breton as 'fashionable'. This tendency is perhaps part of a world-wide phenomenon which is well described in Bud Khleif's 1978 article entitled "Ethnic Awakening in the First World". Indeed, since the Second World War, Western nations have witnessed the rise of huge numbers of university-educated people and the foundation of what he calls the 'knowledge-class'. This knowledge class is largely composed of baby boomers and their children whose origins are generally to be found in the working class. For this reason, the members of this class have tended to be more sensitive, particularly since the 1960s, to the plight of minority cultures around the world.

In the case of Brittany, an increasing number of people in this category would like to relearn the local forms of Breton they heard around them during their childhood. This may be partly due to a rise in cultural, linguistic and ethnic self-awareness which Khleif considers to be a reaction against globalization, modernization and what is often perceived to be the rise of a cold, impersonal new world order:

[Ethnicity] can be regarded as a search for roots, for identity ...for coping with issues of alienation in a mass society. The resurgence of ethnicity cannot only be understood as a tool for social mobility but also as a widespread

quest for community, a search for authenticity in the face of the overwhelming forces of modern life that are thought to be conducive to depersonalization, bureaucratization, and unresponsiveness

(Khleif 1978: 103-4).

Furthermore, he describes this rise of ethnicity as being intimately associated with decolonisation and the decline of the former European colonial powers in the wake of the World War II. The former colonial powers and, now, the United States, which is seen by many critics of colonialism to be their successor, are often portrayed as the major culprits of cultural and linguistic repression. Since the 1960s, politically liberal activists have attempted to portray the Bretons (and other European minorities) as victims of the same colonial forces that once dominated peoples around the world.²⁴ The desire to return to one's roots and to encourage the use of minority languages thus appear to be part of a dual process: on the one hand, to counter the past effects of colonialism and, on the other, to resist the cultural alienation provoked by the socio-economically dominant nation states around the world (including former colonial powers) which are currently leading the drive towards globalism.

5. Practical barriers to language maintenance and revitalization

Yet another obstacle preventing the maintenance of Breton as a societal language is linked to the overwhelming technological changes and advances that have been sweeping over the world, particularly during the past 30 years. This is especially the case regarding the development of technology, in particular the computer and Internet. Multitudes of concepts linked to the modern age are totally foreign to Breton, a language that was, until very recent times, primarily adapted to rural and maritime cultures. This fact alone has resulted in a dearth of native neologisms in all domains linked to modern life: science, IT technologies, economics, business, mechanics, geopolitics and so on.

In this sense, it would be inaccurate to say that Breton has been 'replaced' by French (as one often hears) since Breton never developed native vocabulary in any of these fields. Rather, it would be more precise to assert that the language has been progressively squeezed out of existence by French, and now English, as new technologies and lifestyles continue to emerge and enter into common usage.

24. Cf. Coadic 2013, Hechter 1975.

The fact is that, in the decades following World War I, the creation of neologisms by native speakers progressively ceased as Breton began to yield ground as a community language. A few examples which I collected decades ago from speakers born between 1890 and 1910 are as follows: *marc'h-du* 'locomotive' (lit. 'black-horse'), *marc'h-houarn* 'bicycle' (lit. 'iron-horse', later replaced by French *velo*), *karr-tan* 'automobile' (lit. 'fire-cart', often replaced by French *oto*). Today, in practical terms, even fluent speakers unconsciously switch to French to discuss more technical subjects such as automobile repair, banking, etc.

Current attempts by University educated specialists to fill the lexical void have probably arrived too late and, perhaps worse, recent neologisms are frequently calqued on abstract French-influenced reasoning (with one word encapsulating one concept) rather than metaphorical compounds which are common in Breton. The result is that the new vocabulary often strikes native Breton speakers as peculiar and foreign. Despite brave attempts to introduce the new vocabulary, only a few stalwart defenders of the language have actually succeeded in incorporating recent neologisms into their speech. Paradoxically, using such vocabulary in a conversation with a native speaker is often enough to cut the conversation short.

In addition to these lexical difficulties, the highly fragmented dialects (cf. Figure 2 below) create real barriers to communication between native speakers in various parts of Brittany. Having said this, the differences between the dialects are often grossly exaggerated by the speakers themselves who often *believe* that they cannot carry on a conversation with people from outside of their respective areas.²⁵ The reality is far more complex and the supposed obstacles regarding inter-comprehension are, in my view, overly emphasised and much more closely linked to social and psychological considerations than purely linguistic factors.²⁶

25. Furthermore, such impressions of unsurmountable linguistic barriers between speakers of different regions, even if exaggerated, are every bit as significant as real linguistic obstacles and, as one can imagine, such opinions have seriously contributed to inhibiting inter-dialectal use between native Breton speakers. These real or imagined frontiers have long encouraged and served as a pretext for Bretons to shift to French as a *lingua franca*.

26. My informants in Saint Yvi claimed that they felt relatively comfortable speaking Breton as far Pont Aven (30 km to the east), as far as Carhaix (50 km to the northwest), Leuhan/Poullaouen (30 km to the north) and Ergué Gaberic (10km to the west), the area west of Quimper being considered off limits linguistically (according to them). The people of Bro Vigouden were literally considered to be a different ethnic group described locally as being the descendants of Mongols! The same was true of the Vannetais who were said to be "incomprehensible" (German 1984). Yet, in the late 1960s, I accompanied older male relatives (masons by trade) to the Trégor region (Plouaret, Tonquedec and La Roche Derrien) where

It is largely on account of the stigmatization associated with the dialects and the low social status of rural speakers that *Gwalarn* militants, led by Roparz Hemon and others, concluded during the 1920s that the only way to stop the decline of Breton was to create a modern independent Breton state with a national linguistic norm structured along the lines of those of other modern European nations.

While the political objective for an independent Breton state failed miserably, along with the collapse of the Third Reich (with whom these nationalists were closely allied), the notion of the single, literary, standard Breton model, spelt in the unified *peurunvan* orthography they supported, has prevailed and is now the linguistic model taught in nearly all the private and public schools across Brittany.²⁷

Extreme dialectal differences have thus been presented as unsurmountable obstacles by defenders of the new Breton norm and this standardized linguistic model is seen as the only hope for the survival of the language. Paradoxically, opponents of the Breton language use the same argument to promote the use of standard French.

One of the main points defended by some militants has long been that, prior to the Treaty of Union with France in 1532, Breton was formerly a unified language and that the current dialects are the result of degenerative French influence. For this reason, the rich dialectal variety observed in the spoken vernaculars is considered as a menace to the existence of the language. On the other hand, the new norm represents a resuscitated and rejuvenated form of Breton that will allow it to regain its former vitality and status.

While French influence on Breton, especially lexical influence, is undeniable, the counter-argument put forward by those more sympathetic to dialectal Breton is that such views are not only prescriptive but linguistically and historically fallacious. It is known, for instance, that the current dialects existed long before the unification with France (Guyonvarc'h 1984) and may even have their roots in Armorican Gaulish (Falc'hun 1963, 1981, Fleuriot 1980, German 1984, 1991, Evans 1990). Indeed, some go as far as to say, with a hint of sarcasm, that the new Breton norm is largely inspired by the standard French model itself, a linguistically unified vision that is utterly foreign to the sociolinguistic situation that has characterized Brittany since the Middle Ages. In very broad terms, the most radical advocates of

they spontaneously communicated with the Trégorrois in Breton with relative ease.

27. Much of the tension surrounding the use of *peurunvan* (unified) spelling as opposed to the *skolveurieg orthographe universitaire* (devised by François Falc'hun in the 1950s), deals with this highly emotional, ideological and political conflict, a conflict which still rages to this day.

this view defend the following position regarding Breton and its future:

- a) ‘New’ or ‘neo’ Breton is not really ‘Breton’ at all, but rather a sort of ‘Esperanto’ that is far too distant from the naturally transmitted forms of the language;
- b) The dialects are thus the only legitimate forms of Breton;
- c) Since the dialect speakers will pass away within the next ten to fifteen years, these dialects themselves are doomed to disappear;
- d) Trying to maintain them is, at best, a ‘rear-guard’ action that is condemned to failure;
- e) Supporters of the dialects (as well as of the new norm) would be better off accepting their certain demise and simply mourn their passing (Le Berre 1989).²⁸

For obvious reasons, the two positions on Breton are irreconcilable.

6. Regional cultural and linguistic identities

It is interesting to note that the fragmentation of the dialects mentioned above corresponds very closely to cultural and geographical divisions within Brittany itself. In turn, this explains why many older Bretons are far more attached to their regional Breton identity than to any sense of a national or political Breton identity *per se*.

Unlike the nationalist sentiments often expressed in Wales, Ireland or Scotland, feelings of Bretonness²⁹ have not generally translated into the desire for Breton nationhood or political independence from France (except for a handful of Breton activists). Indeed, one point that has often been overlooked by some specialists is that, since the French Revolution (especially since the late 19th century), most Bretons feel equally Breton and French.

28. Fañch Morvannou, the founder of *Etrerannyezhel* orthography and Professor of Breton at the University of Western Brittany, told me a few years ago that “Breton will certainly die, but at least it will die ‘loved’.”

29. The idea of ‘ethnic’ or ‘racial’ identity is a concept rejected by the French state. This explains why questions regarding ethnic origins are absent from the national census. The only defining criterion for being ‘French’ is citizenship. Nevertheless, there are very real, if latent, feelings of what could describe as ethnic belonging in Brittany, as well as in other regions of France. For instance, physically, the typical Breton is often described as being relatively short, stocky, having high cheekbones, light coloured-eyes, dark or reddish hair. In terms of character, they are variously described as tough, stubborn to a fault, hot-tempered, hard workers, hard drinkers, brawlers, competent and courageous seamen and soldiers, poets and dreamers. Breton women are portrayed as strong-minded and fiercely independent. Whatever the merits of these stereotypes, they exist and are known throughout France itself.

Poll after poll demonstrates this reality which can be explained by the fact that, for over two centuries, the French State has inculcated republican ideals of citizenship into the population via the school system and society at large. In this respect, feeling both Breton and French is quite comparable to feeling simultaneously, say, Texan and American in the United States. In general terms, the Breton sense of identity is thus far different from that of the modern Welsh, Irish and Scottish where cultural distinctiveness is often defined in terms of historical animosity towards England and the English. For most Bretons, the British and Irish situations are quite foreign and expressions of hostility towards France are rare, even if more and more Bretons do indeed proclaim their cultural uniqueness these days.³⁰

The traditional sense of identity is thus more closely bound to the local region in which they grew up. These areas often steeped in rich cultural lore and preserve original linguistic characteristics as well. Examples of such areas are the following *pays* or *broiow*: *Glazig*, *Melenig*, *Bigouden*, *Pagan*, *Bidar*, *Pourlet*, etc. This is far more representative than any notion of national political identity.³¹

This micro-vision of Breton identity is thus far more revealing of the nearly tribal-like way in which Breton culture and language have been experienced by the older generations than is generally recognized. Directly and indirectly, the visceral attachment of speakers to their local variety of Breton can be very simply explained by their love of region. The map of the *bro* in Figure 1 corresponds remarkably well with the map in Figure 2 featuring the dialects and micro-dialects of Brittany.³²

One of Denis Costaouec's informants in La Forêt Fouesnant summarizes the situation nicely and echoes what I have often heard in nearby Saint Yvi: "the only form of Breton that we are attached to is the one we speak at home, between us, and which we know cannot be learnt except by speaking the language" (Costaouec 2002).³³

30. Militants, however, might argue that this lack of political will is directly linked to the ignorance of most Bretons about the conquest of Brittany by the French crown during the late 15th century and Breton history more generally which they see as a long period of political indoctrination, acculturation and colonization.

31. As the older generations pass away, even this micro-vision of Breton identity is now disappearing.

32. Figures 1 and 2 were adapted on the basis of the original maps available at geobreizh.bzh. Despite the editorial team best efforts, no contact was established. Thus, the maps have been completely rebuilt, without however distorting their original look and feel.

33. My translation.

7. Normalized Breton vs traditional Breton

For all of the reasons presented above, it is estimated that only 4–6% of Bretons below the age of eighteen know any Breton at all (a rise of 4 points since 2000, however) at all, and most of these have learnt it at school, not in the household. According to some guesstimates, there are approximately 10,000 to 15,000 fluent speakers of the Breton standard ranging in age from 10 to 50 years old. Most of these are university-educated, middle-class urban dwellers for whom French is the native language. Because of their youth, their formal education, their literacy in Breton and social status, not to mention their willingness to use the language in public places, the impetus is clearly on the side of those who are adopting the new Breton norm.

On the negative side, many of these young people, but certainly not all, speak Breton in much the same way French learners often speak English, that is, with phonological and grammatical interference from French.

In addition, as mentioned above, they tend to use numerous neologisms that are not understood by native speakers. However, these are difficulties that educators could correct over time. But the task will be difficult.

French prosodic influence on Breton is particularly striking and can be partly explained by the fact that younger learners have been unconsciously conditioned to feel that the Breton accent, with the strong tonic stress on the penultimate syllable,³⁴ sounds ‘backwards’, ‘ugly’, ‘rough’ and even ‘Germanic’.³⁵ As one young man put it to me, ‘who wants to speak like your grandparents?’

The conclusion is astounding: even though young Breton speakers can often accurately imitate the accents of older family members, French sociolinguistic norms and negative value judgments about the stress system on the penultimate, which is inherent to the language, are so powerful and psychologically ingrained that new speakers often cannot bring themselves to adopt it when speaking Breton. Indeed, even hearing a pronounced Breton accent in French can still provoke reactions of amusement and even derision.

34. Generally, stress is placed on the final syllable in Vannetais Breton.

35. In my experience, most of these kinds of remarks are made by younger women. Men tend to think of Breton as a ‘manly’ language, etc.



Figure 1. The traditional cultural regions of Brittany



Figure 2. Breton-language dialect map of Brittany in relation to the bishoprics

8. Barriers to communication between generations

I want to stress that the point here is not to criticize the young learners; quite the contrary. The efforts made by young people to learn Breton border on the heroic given that the older generations have adamantly refused to help them. The effect, however, is that the traditional dialectal models are generally inaccessible to them.

In addition to the cultural, educational and age differences between older traditional speakers and new speakers, the linguistic hurdles between the two groups are considerable and can discourage communication between them, particularly in regions where the linguistic distance between the written and spoken languages is particularly marked. This is the case for Cornouaille and Trégor, for instance, where the 58% of all native speakers live – 39% and 19% respectively (Broudic 2009). Indeed, Breton-language teachers administering the Breton language option of the national French *baccalauréat* exam tell me that only about 10% to 15% of students passing the orals would feel at ease carrying on a conversation with older dialect speakers in most areas.

9. Which linguistic model for Brittany?

This brings us to the next point: which linguistic approach is best suited to teaching the Breton language: a ‘bottom-up’ approach, in which renewed support for the sociolinguistically stigmatized dialects of the traditional speakers (90% of all speakers) would be advocated, or the present ‘top-down’ approach, that is to say, the continued advocacy of the new normalized model?

Clearly, endorsing the current standard language offers the distinct advantage of linguistic uniformity and thus enhanced mutual comprehension between learners. Furthermore, it is far easier pedagogically-speaking to teach a linguistic norm sharing the same grammatical rules and possessing a common lexicon. But the downside is that the *breton des livres*, as it is often called, is frowned upon and viewed as unnatural by traditional speakers.³⁶

In defence of the new standard, some argue that all languages change and that the emergence of the new Breton normalised variety is no different from the rise of the French and English standard models. The counter-argument is that the *Gwalarn* inspired model was not the work of native speakers at all, but rather a majority of learners (albeit excellent learners) who lacked an intuitive feel for the language, hence the accusations of artificiality.

36. More harshly, some call it *breton chimique* or ‘chemical Breton’.

Regardless of one's opinions, it seems fair to say that the rise of the new standard model has led to the appearance of a new form of diglossia in Brittany, that is tied not only to linguistic differences but also educational, age and class distinctions which contrast with the older sociolinguistic division between a native-speaking clergy (on which the new standard is based) and a largely illiterate but native-speaking peasantry (cf. German 2009). The sociolinguistic situation in Brittany today could thus be viewed as a multilevel system with standard French as the national norm at the summit, standard Breton as the regional norm and the vernacular Breton and French varieties representing the paritary forms of both languages.

To summarize, when people talk about 'defending', 'saving'³⁷ or even 'revitalizing' the Breton language, the fundamental question should be this: what are they really talking about – the naturally transmitted varieties, the new standard model or both? The point is crucial (not only in the case of Breton, but all threatened languages and dialects) because what underpins the entire discussion about the use of Breton is how we define what 'Breton' actually is – as opposed to what it 'should be'. Opinions about this vary radically and discussions on the subject are often so emotionally charged that constructive exchanges are sometimes impossible.

10. Shifting sands

Undoubtedly, one of the major achievements of Breton-language activists has been the creation of full-emersion Diwan language schools since the late 1970s. This success sparked the creation of competing bilingual programmes in the both Catholic and public schools. Without them there would be virtually no Breton spoken by anyone under 30 years old today. As a result, neither would there be university-level degree courses in Breton or the CAPES and certainly not the new Breton Agrégation exam.

Moreover, as mentioned above, the more positive attitudes towards the Breton language and culture observed today can be understood as part of a broader movement which arose in Europe and North America in the 1960s, the aim of which was to defend minority rights (cf. Khleif 1978). For some, this has been expressed as an interest in Breton music, dancing, regional history and the like. For others, far less numerous, the new-found interest in Breton culture has led to an increase in the desire to learn the 'language'. However, in the minds of most, this can only mean learning

37. Speaking about 'saving' a language is a false analogy which attributes living qualities to an inanimate entity or concept. Languages do not 'die' or 'survive' and are not 'saved' as such. It is the speakers of the concerned languages who choose (often on account of social or economic pressures) to speak them or not.

standard Breton, just as one would study any other modern ‘language’ such as French, German or English. Yet, as we have seen, the Breton situation is complex and the choices are complicated by the reality on the ground. Despite all of these hurdles, significant numbers of people, both young and old, want to learn or relearn ‘Breton’. This is an incontrovertible fact. The task for young learners has been relatively simple: to study the standard model taught at school. However, for thousands of passive speakers or native speakers seeking to write or read ‘Breton’ (in this case, meaning their home dialect) the task is daunting owing to a dearth of study materials.

Aside from the well-known confusion provoked by initial consonant mutations,³⁸ simple attempts to look up basic dialect words in a standard Breton dictionary can often result in failure. The examples listed below are purposely restricted to comparisons between southern Cornouaillais words and their equivalents in the major normalized dictionaries, especially those favouring *peurunvan* spelling.³⁹ The difficulties listed here, however, are similar for passive and native speakers throughout Western Brittany.

10.1 The spelling is often too distant from their pronunciation to be recognized

An example of this difficulty can be seen in map 96 of Jean Le Dù’s *Nouvel Atlas de la Basse-Bretagne* (2001). In the major standard dictionaries, one encounters *hiziv* in *peurunvan* orthography, *hiziw* in *etrerannyezhel* (inter-dialectal) orthography and *hiziou* in *skolveurieg* (orthographe universitaire) forms which are in fact closer to Welsh *beddiw* than to the actual vernacular forms heard in the living language.⁴⁰ Not one of the 198 points of this atlas provides an example of a pronunciation even remotely approaching it. Rather, going from the North to South, one encounters variants such as *heye*, *hirie*, *hirio*, *hiniou*, *hiou*, *chiou* and so on.

Other examples of this kind abound: standard *abalamour da betra* ‘why, for which reason’ corresponds to southern Cornouaillais *blam bra*, standard *a-us* ‘above’ for southern Cornouaillais *heuc’h*, standard *teuziñ* ‘to melt’ for southern Cornouaillais *toëni*, standard *lazbañ* ‘to kill’ for southern Cornouaillais *lao*.

38. When encountering the mutated word for “dog” after the possessive adjectives, for example, *Ma c’hi* ‘my dog’, *da gi* ‘thy dog’, *he c’hi* ‘her dog’, *e gi* ‘his dog’, *ho ki* “your dog”, the learner does not necessarily know whether to look the word up under C’H, K or G. The word is found in the dictionary under *Ki*.

39. In particular, Hemon & Huon 2005.

40. For more on the topic of competing orthographies in Brittany see Wmffre 2008.

The forms of verbs such as *kavout* ‘to get/have’ and *bezañ* ‘be’ are *kaout* and *bout* in southern Cornouaillais respectively. Truncated local forms render them unrecognizable with regard to their standard equivalents as can be seen in the following table showing the forms of the past habitual of *kaout*:

	Standard Breton (Peurunvan)	Southern Cornouail- lais	Translation
1.	<i>am bez</i>	<i>(me) nef</i>	‘I habitually have’
2.	<i>az pez</i>	<i>(ti) tef</i>	‘you (sg.) habitually have’
3.	<i>en (he) devez</i>	<i>(haoñ / hi) nef</i>	‘s/he habitually has/gets’
1.	<i>hor bez</i>	<i>(neñ) nef</i>	‘we habitually have’
2.	<i>ho pez</i>	<i>(hwi) pef</i>	‘you (pl.) habitually have’
3.	<i>o devez</i>	<i>(hènn/hè) nef</i>	‘they habitually have’

10.2 The dialect word they know is simply not found in the dictionary and/or the semantic distinctions regarding a given concept are not defined in enough detail

One simple example is *brumenn* and *morenn* (cf. Hemon & Huon 2005 s.v.) which translate the generic French word *brume* ‘fog’. In southern Cornouaille, *brumachenn* (not found in most dictionaries) is sometimes used as the generic. Nevertheless, *fulaienn* is the common word for fog in a few parishes of southern Cornouaille including Saint Yvi and is not known elsewhere. For this question, my current Saint Yvi informants (pc. 2018; all between 65–75 years of age for this question) give examples such as *fulaienn-mor* ‘sea-mist’ and *fulaienn-beol-tomm* (lit. ‘hot sun fog’), the early morning haze that announces a hot summer day. Distinctions such as these generally tend to be absent from most dictionaries. Indeed, *fulaienn* is not to be found in any of the dictionaries I have consulted (online or otherwise) except in Alan Heusaff’s dictionary of Saint Yvi Breton (Heusaff 1995). *Morenn* is a kind of ‘vapour’ or ‘sea-mist’ (which is unknown to them or perhaps forgotten).⁴¹ Distinctions such as these generally tend to be absent from most dictionaries.

41. Alan Heusaff (1995:117) describes words for fog in terms of percentages of humidity: *fulaienn* > 91%; *lusenn* > 70%–90%; *morenn* < 75%; he does not seem certain about *mogidell*? Personally, I see this as wisps of fog (resembling puffs of smoke, but this may be a personal interpretation influenced by *moged* ‘smoke’). *Lusenn*, *morenn* and *mogidell* are unknown to my current Saint Yvi informants.

10.3 The Breton word proposed for a given concept or object is simply not used or even understood in their particular dialect

The differences in the use of the following interrogative pronouns provide some simple examples of how basic lexical differences can be a hurdle to communication between not only the regional varieties and the standard language but also between dialects themselves: standard *pegoulz* or *peur* ‘when’ vs. southern Cornouaille *pevare*;⁴² standard *penaos* ‘how’ vs. southern Cornouaille *piseurt mod*, *pe mod*; standard *perak* ‘why’ vs. southern Cornouaille *praskôz* (< *petra a zo kaoz*). The standard forms would be understood in the Léon and Trégor regions, however.

10.4 The word exists both in the standard and in the dialect but is used with a different meaning

One common example is the use of standard *bag all* to translate ‘etcetera’. For most native speakers it means ‘and all’ as in the following example: *Sar’ho peg betram me lammo barz boutou bag all!* ‘Shut your mouth or I’ll jump in it (wooden) shoes and all!’ Another example is Standard Breton *diforc’h* ‘different/différence’ but also ‘abortion’ (cf. Hemon & Huon 2005) which is often used to avoid the French borrowing *diferañs* (in universal use in the vernacular). Although *diforc’h* is indeed used with the meaning of ‘difference’ in parts of the Vannetais dialect area, for most speakers, *diforc’h* only means ‘an aborted cow or pig fetus’. Finally, *gweladenn* is often defined in standard Breton to mean a ‘visit’ (touristic or otherwise) or an ‘interview’ whereas in southern Cornouaille it refers to the ‘inspection’ of a future bride’s farm by the groom’s parents (usually his father). Again, there is a vast number of examples such as these.

10.5 Neologisms unknown in traditional language often used by standard speakers

In such case, native speakers revert to French words.

Standard Breton *urziataer* vs. Fr. *ordinateur* ‘computer’, pronounced as in French

Standard Breton *skinwel* for Fr. *television*, pronounced [tɛlɛviˈzɛin] :

Standard Breton *skingomz* vs. Fr. *post* or *radio*, pronounced as in French

Standard Breton *pellgomz* vs. Fr. *telefon*, pronounced as in French⁴³

42. In addition, *benn pevare* (with future reference) vs. *pevare* (with past reference).

43. All the standard examples are taken from Hemon & Huon 2005.

These few examples are just the tip of the iceberg and, because most native speakers are generally illiterate in Breton, using any normalized dictionary can prove to be an exasperating experience and users tend to give up after a few futile attempts.⁴⁴

11. Bridging the gaps

Now that I have presented this rapid sketch and shown some of the practical obstacles that complicate communication between learners and native speakers, I would like to propose a project to publish at least six to seven (and ideally as many as nine) pedagogically coordinated dialect dictionaries along with accompanying dialect grammars. Each one of these dictionaries and grammars would correspond to one of the major geolinguistic areas of Western Brittany corresponding to Figures 1 and 2. This approach would require a dedicated team effort and discussions are currently under way with interested parties and institutions.

As we have seen, a rich array of pedagogical materials is available to teach standard Breton. The main argument in favour of the approach proposed here is that it would provide pedagogical resources to assist those seeking to master the varieties spoken in their home region.

- a) The first category concerns the roughly 100,000 to 150,000 (my own estimate) native dialect speakers mentioned earlier, 90% or more of whom are functionally illiterate in Breton. Ideally the existence of dialect dictionaries would disprove the widely held prescriptive view that their varieties are worthless *patois* (sometimes described as *trefoedach* ‘gibberish’ by purists) in relation to a supposed superior standard model. Rather, they would be shown to be coherent linguistic systems in their own right, having their own phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical functions and rules.

Realistically, however, for the sociolinguistic reasons outlined in this paper, only a handful of people in this category would be inclined to study their own varieties.

- b) Secondly, a very important slice of the population, namely passive speakers, has been largely ignored until now. They are the target population in this article. Interestingly, in 2007, 22% of those questioned in Broudic’s study, claimed to understand Breton while only 13% claimed

44. One notable exception is Francis Favereau’s excellent dictionary, *Geriadur ar Brezhoneg a-vremañ*, 1992 [2000]. However, it is mainly intended for people who can already read Breton (i.e. his examples are not translated into French).

to actually use the language (Broudic 2009). These figures have certainly dropped since 2007 but we could estimate their number today at somewhere between 50,000 to 100,000 people.

Most of these people are over 40 years of age and were often discouraged from speaking Breton by their parents, relatives and the society at large. Nevertheless, because they heard the language around them on a daily basis spoken by older relatives and neighbours while growing up, many often understand their dialects perfectly, but cannot speak the language themselves. As already explained, the reasons for this are simultaneously social, linguistic and often psychological.

Elements of this population could potentially provide a numerically significant pool of new speakers. It must be said that many people in this category have a far more positive self-image in terms of Breton identity than their parents and grandparents did. Furthermore, they often feel a sense of loss and frustration at not speaking the family language. Consequently, there is a *significant social demand* on their part to reconnect with their own dialects to which they are often still viscerally attached. As mentioned earlier, this is part and parcel of the affective ties with the local micro-cultures seen in Figure 1 above. Significantly, many of these people are not necessarily interested in learning the standard language, a variety which has very different social functions and applications.

If provided with the proper resources, encouragement and backup, many of the people in this category could be fluent within a relatively short time, some within a matter of months. On the downside, the networks in which they can use the language are rapidly shrinking and, in some areas, no longer exist!

- c) Finally, many young learners who have studied the standard language may want to use the resources to interact with what is left of the core population of traditional speakers in their areas.⁴⁵

At this point, I should add that even under the best of circumstances it would be unrealistic to imagine that Breton will ever become a community language again. At best, what we are talking about here is providing a means

45. A few years ago, André Le Gac, *conseiller général*, and Annaig Daouphars, *chargée de mission* (Finistère) launched a project entitled “Quêteurs de mémoires” (Memory seekers) the goal of which was to bring children who are learning Breton into regular contact with older native speakers. It has been widely praised but its success has been limited.

to fulfil a real need on the part of several thousand potential new speakers who might, indirectly or directly, reinforce pre-existing linguistic networks and clusters i.e. citizens seeking to relearn their regional language and culture as a way of (re-)discovering their own past.

The good news is that the raw materials for the dictionaries and grammars exist for all the regions of Brittany.⁴⁶ Since the 1980s, numerous doctoral theses focussing on the grammar of regional Breton varieties have been written and many of these have been published or are available online. High-quality dialectological fieldwork is also currently being conducted independently by teams of young Breton scholars (without the support of any university funding).

In order to be successful, however, both the dictionaries and the grammars would need to be designed following the same structure and format so as to allow both standard and dialect speakers to compare the vocabulary and grammatical features which distinguish the dialects a) from each other and b) from the standard language itself.

12. A dialect dictionary for South-central Cornouaille

The advantage of dialect dictionaries is that they would allow users to avoid certain pitfalls mentioned above because the entries would only include the dialect words from the speaker's region and these would be written in an adapted orthography recognizable to the inhabitants of a given area. In terms of presentation, a typical dictionary entry could be organized as follows:

- a) The entry, transcribed in adapted orthography so that the native speaker or passive speaker of a given area can easily recognize the word s/he is reading;
- b) For those who can read the IPA, the dialect word is followed by a phonetic transcription along with variant local pronunciations (this would be particularly useful for those focussing on tonic stress, degrees of vowel aperture, etc.);

46. Several dialect dictionaries already exist such as Jean Le Dù's (2012), *Le Trégorrois à Plougrescant*. In October 2017, a thematically organized dictionary was published by M. Bouzec, J. Goapper and Y. Souffez, in which I actively participated for over six years, entitled *Le Breton des rives de l'Aven et du Bélon, Blaz ha blazig c'hoarzh*. Another example is Christian Fagon and Yann Riou's (2015) *Bredoneg ar Gear, on Teuzor*. These three examples are all immensely valuable contributions to the local vernaculars and the cultures they reflect.

- c) Whenever possible or pertinent, the collector and/or informant's initials and his/her parish are also indicated;
- d) The word is then written in *peurunvan* orthography to show the connection with the standard language, thus permitting a two-way exchange between traditional speakers and young learners;
- e) The definition(s) and, finally, the word used in context.

The presentation is detailed and is perhaps even cumbersome, but it does offer the advantage of being relatively complete.⁴⁷ In order to provide the reader with some concrete examples, here are extracts from the first draft of my forthcoming dictionary on the Breton of Saint Yvi. The examples (with my English translations) are thematically-organized and come from a section on the human anatomy.

THE ANATOMY

The human skeleton

skeuletenn [skə'letən]^{BL} *skeledenn*— *skeleton*

framm ' c'horf [fɛxãm ə 'xɔəf]^{BL} *framm ar c'horf*— idem, lit. *frame of the body*

eskornou korf 'n den [ɛs'kɔʁnu |kɔəf n'dē:n]— (MFK-SY) *the human skeleton*, lit. *the bones of the body*

eskornou 'n den [ɛs'kɔʁnu n'dē:n] (MK, MFK-SY)^{BL} *eskern an den*— idem, lit. *the bones of a human being/person*

Bones

erchen [ɛəʃən] (GG-SY, AH-SY, MK-SY), **ersen** [ɛəsən] (MK-SY), pl.

erskenou [ɛəs'kɛnu], **eskornou** [ɛs'kɔnu] (GG-SY, MK-SY)^{BL} *eskern*— *bone, bones* (**erchen** is historically a plural and has been reanalysed as singular by some). **Askorn** is used for the singular in many other dialect areas, including in standard Breton.

mél-ersen [mɛ:l 'ɛəsən] (MK-SY)^{BL} *mel-askorn*— *bone marrow* (lit. *the honey of the bone(s)*)

bouédenn [bwe:dən] (AH-SY)^{BL} *bouedenn*— idem (also *the pulp / flesh a fruit*)

47. These are extracts from the fieldwork that I have conducted over the past thirty-five years in south-central Cornouaille (Finistère), an area stretching eastward between Quimper and Rospenden. It focusses on a core area centring on and around the parishes of Saint Yvi and Elliant. To date, I have collected upwards of 10,000 lexical items and popular rhymes, riddles, sayings as well as idiomatic expressions.

THE ANATOMY

Cartilage and joints

kranken [ˈkxãŋkən] (AH-SY) ^{BL} *kranken*—cartilage (also a crab);

'c'hranken ba penn 'n erchen braz 'cartilage found at the end of a large bone' ^{BL} *ar c'branken e penn un askorn bras*

Bé zo kranken ba kig sal. (MF-SY)

^{BL} *Bez' ez eus kranken e kig sal.*

There is cartilage in the bacon (Fr. lard).

koubl [kubl] (AH-SY) ^{BL} *koubl*—the joint between two bones;

koubl i vrec'h, e r'har [ˈkubl i vʁeːχ/ ˈkubl i ˈʁæːə] ^{BL} *koubl e vrec'h, e c'har*—(his) arm or leg joint

mailh [maiλ] ^{BL} *mailh*, pl. **mailhou** [ˈmaiλu] (MK-SY) ^{BL} *mailhoù*

—finger joint or knuckle; also, large mallet, hammer (fig. a fist)

Hém' dapo 'n tol mailh ganim vo ket pell! (MK-SY)

^{BL} *Hemañ a dapo un taol mailh ganin-me bremaik!*

Lit. *He will catch a blow of a mallet (fist/knuckles) with me soon*

I am going to punch him before long!

Flesh and muscles

béo [beø] (AH-SY) ^{BL} *bev*—the quick (sensitive area of flesh, esp. under the nails)

'Skilfenn zo ouét ba'm béo. (JLS-Bre)

^{BL} *Ar skilfenn a zo aet er bev.*

The splinter went right into the quick.

kig [kik] (MK-SY) ^{BL} *kig*—meat, flesh, muscles

kig frost [ˈkik ˈfxɔs] (MK-SY) ^{BL} *kig froast*—flabby, soft muscles

kig stert [ˈkik ˈstɛət] (MK-SY) ^{BL} *kig start*—hard, powerful muscles (lit. hard meat)

Haoñ neus kig stert ba i vrec'h! (MK-SY)

^{BL} *En en-deus kig start en i vrec'h!*

His arms are solid muscle! Lit. He has hard meat in his arms.

gwëen [gʷɛːn] (AH-SY, MK-SY) ^{BL} *gwevn*—well-muscled, sinewy, tough and wiry

13. Dialect grammar

Naturally, corresponding dialect grammars would also need to be created. These would be similarly presented in local adapted orthography with a presentation of core grammatical features common to all dialects. The key characteristics specific to each area would thus be highlighted to facilitate communication with native speakers.

If successful, these tools could eventually be developed into teaching manuals targeting a variety of different regional audiences and would supplement the corresponding pedagogical materials already available.

14. Conclusion

I want to stress that the objective here is not to propose the replacement of the normalized language as it now stands. On the contrary, it is hoped that this approach would enrich the knowledge of the spoken language of all regions by permitting Breton speakers of all backgrounds and opinions to examine the connections between the standard language and the living dialects which, after all, are the result of the natural transmission of the language over several millennia.

Given that language is first and foremost an oral phenomenon, this is not a mere detail that can be swept under the carpet, but rather a highly significant factor underlying the legitimacy of any living language. If this is not respected, the 'language' being promoted risks being perceived as little more than an artificial creation or invention, devoid of any historical and social depth. Indeed, most natural languages have varieties and, among these varieties, registers ranging from the formal (*langue disparitaire*, Le Berre & Le Dù 1996) to informal (*langue paritaire*, *ibid.*) that are governed by socially-determined criteria. In this regard, Breton should be no different. Solely promoting a high register of standard language is tantamount to putting a new roof on a dilapidated old house with crumbling walls and foundations. Without shoring up the supporting structure, the roof, regardless of the quality of the workmanship, serves little purpose.

At the heart of this project is the desire to respond to a very real societal need on the part of many individuals who, for reasons ranging from nostalgia for the past and love of region to simple intellectual curiosity, would like to learn, relearn, or simply familiarize themselves with the native dialects spoken by their older family members and neighbours.

As we have seen, when taken collectively, there are currently somewhere from 150,000 to 250,000 traditional speakers and passive speakers combined who currently do not have the linguistic tools which would permit them to explore their own varieties. Even if only 2% to 5% of this target population actually made the effort to study/relearn the local varieties using the resources proposed here, this could assist somewhere between 3,000 and 12,000 people.

I do not want to end this paper on a pessimistic note but, despite the possible benefits of such an approach, the obstacles are formidable, not the least of which is the time it would take to prepare and publish the dictionaries and grammars. Sadly, the majority of the last generation of traditional native speakers (that is, those born in a monolingual Breton society) will be gone in the next 10 to 15 years.

Furthermore, the approach itself, as well as the premises on which it is based, would certainly be rejected by many, primarily on the grounds of linguistic propriety.

Finally, considering the profound demographic changes in Brittany linked to the current effects of globalism (i.e. considerable in-migration of non-Bretons and the out-migration of younger native Bretons), this proposal may have little resonance among significant segments of the population. However, some of the lessons gleaned here may be of help, if not for Brittany, for other linguistic communities in the world facing similar difficulties. This is my sincere hope.

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