

Reviews

Dictionnaire étymologique du breton, by Albert Deshayes. Douarnenez: Le Chasse-Marée, 2003. ISBN 2-9142-0825-3. Pages 764. €45.

Deshayes' new etymological dictionary is a timely and welcome contribution to the documentation of Breton, the traditional Celtic language of Brittany, on the Armorican peninsula of France. Previous scholarly treatments of the Breton lexicon can be found in the work of scholars such as Fleuriot (1964a and 1964b) and Guyonvarc'h (1984), and others mentioned below. The only general etymological dictionary of Breton to date, Henry (1900), valuable though it is, is incomplete and outdated.

The Breton vocabulary can be said to reflect three major lexical strands, each of which is well represented in the *Dictionnaire étymologique du breton* (DEB):

- (1) native Celtic material. As a Brythonic language Breton has close affinities with Welsh and Cornish, and more distant ones with the Goidelic languages Irish, Scottish Gaelic, and Manx.
- (2) Latin loanwords dating from the Roman occupation of Britain from 43 A.D. to about 425 A.D. (i.e. before the Bretons' insular ancestors had moved across the Channel). According to Jackson (1953, p. 76) some 800 Latin words entered Brythonic during this period, hundreds of which are still in use in modern Breton. Previous studies dealing with the Latin element in Brythonic include Loth (1892), Lewis (1943) and Haarmann (1973).
- (3) borrowings from Old, Middle and Modern French, numbering in the many thousands. This is the lexical strand which most serves to differentiate Breton from its sister languages. Piette (1973) is a study of French loanwords in Middle Breton.

To these one might add a fourth strand, namely 20th century borrowing from and calquing on Welsh, in part out of a desire to eschew French loanwords and to emphasize Celtic heritage. The Welsh borrowings in Breton have apparently never been examined in a linguistic study.

Articles in the DEB consist of a headword in bold; the first attested spelling and its date; part of speech; glosses (in French); etymology; cognates in the other Celtic languages, particularly Welsh and Cornish; derived forms in bold (in the order suffixed, then prefixed derivations); and finally compound words in bold (first with initial and then non-initial radical). Prefixed derivatives always start a new line, which inconveniently makes them look like headwords, giving a first impression that articles are misalphabetized. A slightly wider space between articles than within them is the only visual guide to locating headwords. A second edition of the DEB should strive for greater visual salience of headwords.

The dates of first attestation that Deshayes gives refer almost entirely to published dictionaries, a fact he attributes (p. 31) to the paucity of surviving Breton texts from the early and middle periods of the language's history. Consequently, the reader should not be surprised to see native Celtic words (e.g. *kreun*), or words borrowed from Old French (e.g. *balb*) or Middle French (e.g. *farleañ*), with a date of first attestation in the late twentieth century (1992 in these three cases).

Deshayes' etymologies regularly show Breton's connections with the other Celtic languages, especially Welsh and Cornish, even to the point of occasionally giving hypothetical forms as when he indicates that *dameuzh* 'reflection, refraction' would correspond with a Welsh word **damwth*. But he rarely attempts to connect reconstructed proto-Celtic forms with Indo-European roots or cognates. For instance, about *demez* 'engagement, civil marriage' one learns only that it comes from Celtic **do-am-wed*, but no information is given as to the meaning or further origin of these roots. There are occasional exceptions, as when we learn

that *haleg* 'willow' is cognate with Latin *salix*, or that *c'hwes* 'sweat' is related to Latin *sudare*, German *Schweiss* and English *sweat*. But these links are presented only sporadically, and no such information is given for *c'hweww* 'bitter' (cf. English *sour*), *hañv* 'summer' from Celtic **sam-o* (cf. English *summer*), or *kreis* 'center, middle' (cf. English *heart*, French *coeur* etc.).

The coverage of derived forms and compounds is quite thorough. These are regularly listed as subentries under the base, though generally with no crossreferences. Thus, the interrogative *petore* 'which?' is treated in the article *doare* 'way, manner, kind'; the adjective *emouez* 'conscious' is covered under *gouez* 'presence'; *tredan* 'electricity' is in the article *tan* 'fire', and *disseitegañ* 'to take away someone's innocence,' literally 'to un-seventeen,' is in the article *deg* 'ten.' A reader who does not already have a fairly sophisticated grasp of the principles of Breton word formation and the initial consonant mutations which many prefixes cause should therefore expect to have some difficulty locating words.

To be sure, some of the problems that Breton poses for the lexicographer do not have easy solutions, and Deshayes carefully explains his choices in the front matter. One such problem is the lack of consensus on an orthography. During the course of the twentieth century no fewer than four orthographies were proposed. In his dictionary Deshayes largely adopts the Interdialectal orthography elaborated between 1971 and 1974, albeit with occasional departures which he explains in the front matter (pages 18-29). In a few cases he adopts a convention from one of the other systems, such as the spelling *ked* for *ket* (the postverbal negative particle), or *barz* for *barzh* 'bard, poet', both based on etymological considerations. In other cases he disagrees with all existing solutions and proposes an innovation. Some of his proposals emerge from a desire for greater consistency between roots and derived forms, but more often he seeks to emphasize the kinship of Breton with its sister languages. For instance, what is usually spelled *aon* 'fear' here takes the form *ovn* (cf. Welsh *ofn*, Cornish *own*), and where one traditionally finds *gwalc'h* or *golec'h*

'washing,' depending on the orthography and the dialect, Deshayes proposes the new single form *gwalc'h*.

Extensive variation is another problem which the lexicographer of Breton must confront, and in this case Deshayes' final product would have benefited from a more systematic approach. He often treats variants in separate articles with no crossreferences, as with *damesell*, *demesell*, and *dimesell* (cf. Old French *damoisele* 'young unmarried lady'), *koulm* and *kloum* 'knot', and *koad* and *koed* 'wood,' (*koad* has a crossreference to its variant, but *koed* does not). When crossreferences are given they are not always helpful, since homophonous headwords are not differentiated. For instance, in the subentry *habask* 'moderate, peaceful,' formed of *be* + *pask*, the reader, invited to see *pask*, discovers that there are two such articles, meaning 'passover, communion' and 'food' respectively, and there is no way to know which *pask* was intended.

Neology is yet another problematic area for the lexicographer of Breton, since many neologisms have been proposed over the course of the twentieth century with varying degrees of success. The DEB includes a fair number of these (e.g. *rannvroelouriezh* 'regionalism,' *luc'hskeudennerezh* 'photography,' *bewoniezh* 'biology') while others, perhaps those whose usage was felt not totally established, are omitted (*jedoniezh* 'mathematics,' *stuzegouriezh* 'culturalism,' *kimiezh* 'chemistry,' *tredanva* 'electrical power plant'). Deshayes does not explain his choices, although he does claim (43) that the dictionary covers "tous les mots de la langue bretonne" ("all the words of the Breton language"). Not surprisingly, this claim is overstated, and it is not especially difficult to find words that are not treated, even apart from questionable neologisms (e.g. *fabrisian* 'parish councillor,' *faegegeg* 'scorn,' *fallvorudañ* 'to give someone a bad reputation,' *faskour* 'fascist,' *ficher-blev* 'hair stylist,' *fidamdoustik* 'by Jove!').

Despite a few shortcomings, the DEB will be immensely useful to anyone interested in Celtic etymology, and there is no question that Deshayes brings the necessary level of scholarship to the task. The few criticisms I have offered here are intended

merely to suggest ways to make a revised edition more user-friendly.

References

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***Le breton*, by Divi Kervella. (Collection sans peine).
Chennevières-sur-Marne: ASSIMIL, 2005. Pages xiii
+ 578. ISBN 2-7005-0328-7. €69.90**

This new Breton course, one of 41 language courses taught through the medium of French which are published by ASSIMIL, is not simply a new edition of the 1975 Breton text by Fañch Morvannoù. This is a completely new text which is in many ways a significant improvement over its well-known predecessor, with notable gains in user-friendliness.

The targeted language variety is described in the introduction as “un breton standard communément admis, compréhensible par le plus grand nombre, vivant et contemporain” (“a standard Breton which is widely accepted, understandable by the majority, alive and contemporary”) (p. vi). Whereas the earlier book presented endless dialect variants (usually with no information about where the different variants were actually used), Kervella is true to his word in presenting little regional variation, departing from this principle only when a non-standard feature is extremely widespread, such as the preposition *'ba* ‘in’ (contraction of *e-barzh e*), widely used in place of *e*, presented in lesson 85.

During the intervening years since the publication of Morvannoù, the *peurunvan* orthography has increasingly emerged as the spelling system of choice, thus making the innovative orthography of Morvannoù (1975) fairly obsolete. Kervella strictly follows the *peurunvan* system. The page layout, too, is much easier to follow in this new course and is visually more appealing, partly because the strict black and white color scheme of the original now includes grays and blue.

The text is divided into one hundred lessons which always consist of the following components. The meat of each chapter is the dialogue on the left-hand pages, in which the turns are simply numbered consecutively, presumably for ease of reference, rather than naming speakers in script-like fashion. On the facing (right-hand) pages a French translation is given, with idiomatic French

in normal typeface and literal translations of the Breton text frequently given italicised in parentheses. Below each dialogue appears a blue shaded box containing the pronunciation of each line, given in a folk phonetic orthography based on French conventions. Although linguistically-trained readers will wish that the IPA had been used, the system is nonetheless easy to interpret for those who read French. There is also an audio component which is available on cassette or CD.

Following the pronunciation field are footnotes corresponding to numbers scattered through the dialogue text. These notes supply comments on vocabulary usage or grammar. Finally, each lesson ends with two exercises, the first one consisting of sentences in Breton with their French translations on the facing page. The ASSIMIL method intends the students first to go through a passive phase, translating only from Breton into French, followed by an active phase in which they attempt the reverse direction. A card is provided which can be used to cover up the language one does not wish to see. The second exercise in each chapter is a sentence-completion task with a French sentence and its Breton equivalent, in which occasional words have been deleted which the student is to supply. An answer key always appears nearby and allows for quick self-checking.

Occasionally lessons end with a brief cultural note. The topics of these notes include traditional items of food and drink (cider in lesson 19, the pastry *kouign-amann* in 71), meal names (lesson 36), elements occurring in place names (*kêr* in lesson 45), and sports such as *gouren* or Breton wrestling (lesson 75).

Every seventh lesson is a review. These are much less chatty than similar reviews in the earlier book (which also struck me as patronizing), concentrating now on summarizing succinctly and usefully the new grammar of the preceding six units.

Kervella's book includes a very useful twenty-two page grammatical appendix providing an outline of most of the grammar covered in the book, including a few sample verb conjugations and preposition declensions. This is followed by a more than

forty page Breton-French glossary and then a French-Breton glossary of comparable length (there was no glossary at all in the earlier course). Each word is accompanied by the lesson number in which the word first appears in the text, thus allowing the glossary to also serve as a kind of index.

In summary, this new ASSIMIL Breton course is a very satisfying and nicely self-contained method for the individual learner who speaks French.

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***Everyday Gaelic (New Edition)* by Morag MacNeill. Interlink Publishing Group and Birlinn Publishers, 2006. ISBN 1841583405. 138 pp. Paperback £7.99; paperback with CD £12.99.**

When *Everyday Gaelic* by Morag MacNeill of Inverness, Scotland, was published under an unprepossessing mustard yellow cover by GAIRM, Glasgow, in 1986, there was no attendant fanfare; but it quickly became apparent to Gaelic learners that this book filled a niche and supplied the very kinds of idiomatic but modern, colloquial but appropriate, phrases that they longed to have all in one place and arranged under thesaurus-like headings that they found easily accessible. As a result, the book became something of a Gaelic best-seller. Now it has been revamped and republished by Birlinn Limited, Edinburgh, complete with an 80-minute CD.

The new edition is invitingly packaged in blue and white cover with the word Gaelic highlighted in gold. In addition, a heavily seeded dandelion head is pictured and surrounded by a halo of words: *Sgaoilidh sìol na Gàidhlig o là gu là o linn gu linn.* (The seed of Gaelic will spread/scatter from day to day from

generation to generation.) So the cover's message proclaims with triumphant optimism the difference twenty years have made in the world of Gaelic, not only in Scotland where at last Gaelic has secure status in law, but in the New World where a new Office for Gaelic Affairs opened in Nova Scotia in 2007.

The blue and white motif (the colors of Scotland's and Nova Scotia's flags) continues throughout this new edition. As in the earlier edition, major subject divisions are alphabetically arranged. For example, E: Meeting Friends and Getting Acquainted; J: Travelling, Transport and Accommodation. So typically, Section O: topic heading is highlighted in blue, e.g. In Town, large font, and subheadings in white, small font, on a ribbon of blue, e.g. 1. Places in Town, 2. Offices and Institutions, 3. Asking directions. Following these three subsections, two other sections follow in black lettering, also on blue background: **This is where to go** giving directional phrases like 'on your right' and 'Go down this road'; and **Outcome** with such phrases as 'Don't turn here' and 'It's a one-way street'. If it is not always clear what criteria have been used to differentiate the phrases in subsections, the overall effect is of brightness and easy access.

This effect is further seen in the triple-column page design, again following the original pattern, although now with double-spacing between the lines for greater clarity. The English phrases form column one, the equivalent Gaelic phrases column two, both in black, and the 'phonetic equivalent', based essentially on Scottish English sounds, make up column three, highlighted in blue. This column was the major weakness of the original, since one person's English pronunciation is not necessarily another's. However, in 1986 the growth in the numbers of North American learners of Gaelic was not anticipated, and no audiotape accompanied the volume. In 2006, however, the opportunity to include on a CD the phrases spoken by native speakers would suggest that such impressionistic phonetic representations are now happily redundant.

The CD, which may be purchased with the book, includes an

alternating female and male voice, introducing selected phrases in English followed by the Gaelic, with time for the learner to respond and practice. Occasionally alterations are made in the phrases or some words are omitted. However, since the English is also given, this does not present a serious problem. My own preference would have been an all-Gaelic CD, with clear instructions first given in English. After all, with the English phrases before him in the book, and since the prime target must be the learner who is already acquainted with Gaelic grammar and desires conversational phrases, the value of the CD lies in its clear Gaelic enunciation. However, the CD does include brief 'Listen and Learn' Gaelic conversations followed by explication.

Additions to the present edition of the book reflect updated language with regard to the numbering system, weights and measures, Public Office names, and modern technology. In addition, the 'Talking with Children' section (S: The Domestic Scene, p.114 ff) is amplified; and a completely new section, M: One-liners (Sayings and Jokes), is featured.

Birlinn Publishers is to be commended for this new edition which is likely to find its way on to the shelves of a whole new generation of Gaelic learners who will be thankful for its examples of good, idiomatic, every day Gaelic.

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Call For Articles

Journal of Celtic Language Learning,
volume 13

Journal of Celtic Language Learning (ISSN: 1078-3911) is an international review for researchers and teachers of 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 in addition to manuscripts submitted by scholars of modern Celtic languages world wide. 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 and software relevant to Celtic languages, linguistics and teaching.

Those interested are encouraged to submit research articles on language acquisition, linguistics of Celtic languages, or descriptive accounts of teaching techniques to one of the editors. Teachers who would like to share a successful language teaching technique or describe the modern Celtic language program in which they are teaching are invited also to submit shorter articles. All manuscripts for review should be prepared in MS Word and submitted electronically. **APA style should be strictly observed.**

Submissions are accepted year round, though we hope to go to press with volume 13 early in the fall, so please submit your contribution soon for consideration for this issue. Suggestions for books or language software to review, or offers to review such items, are always welcome.

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