



***Celtic Presence: Studies in Celtic Languages and Literatures: Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Cornish.* Piotr Stalmaszczyk. Łódź: Łódź University Press, Poland, 2005. Hardcover, 197 pages. ISBN: 978-83-7171-849-6. \$36.00.**

**Emily McEwan-Fujita**, University of Pittsburgh

This book's central theme, as the author notes in the preface, is "dimensions of Celtic linguistic presence" as manifested in diverse sociolinguistic contexts. However, the concept of "linguistic presence" gives no coherence to this group of disjointed essays. In a traditional Celtic studies approach, the book covers both linguistic and literature topics. The linguistic topics include Celtic lexical influence on local English varieties in present-day Ireland and Cornwall and the Cornish language revival in Cornwall, while the literature topics covered include contemporary Scottish Gaelic poetry in Scotland, and a purported Celtic tendency in Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Welsh-language poetry and prose to highlight the importance of place and placenames. Two sociolinguistic chapters make important points about how regional English variants have been overlooked in the assessment of Celtic linguistic influence on English, and many of the chapters provide primers on their respective topics, based on secondary sources. However, the literature chapters—and the book overall—uncritically conflate linguistic and cultural definitions of "Celtic," a problem of ongoing concern in Celtic studies (Nagy 2002:7).

Chapter One, "Celtic Elements in English Vocabulary," starts by outlining the two basic theories of the evolution of the Celtic languages and setting the Celtic languages in the context of language contact with varieties of English in the British Isles. The author briefly reviews the prevalent idea that language contact resulted in a largely one-way English influence on Celtic languages, and he then argues with reference to the research of David L. White that there was in fact Brittonic influence on English. Stalmaszczyk argues that assessments of minimal Celtic influence on English have mainly based their conclusions on the written Standard English in the southeast of England, and have failed to take into account Celtic influences on local and regional English variants. To further support this idea, the remainder of the chapter describes various aspects of Celtic lexical influences on English, particularly regional English variants. Lists of examples of the more well known Celtic loanwords in English are given, broken down into the categories of Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Scottish Gaelic from Latin, Manx, Welsh, Cornish, and Breton via French. Another section lists the most well known indirect borrowings from Continental Celtic into English. The author concludes the chapter by advocating closer analysis

of Celtic influences on local varieties and dialects of English, a position with which the reviewer agrees, since ideologies of standard language have permeated academic inquiry to the extent that the standardized variety of a language is too often taken to be the only legitimate variety of a language worth study.

Chapter Two, "The Lexicon of Irish English," continues with the theme of Celtic influences on the English lexicon, considering Irish (*Gaeilge*) influences on Irish English. The chapter begins with a description and analysis of the various labels given to English in Ireland, including Irish English, Hiberno-English, and Anglo-Irish. For the remainder of his discussion, the author opts to use "Irish English" as both a hyperonym for all varieties of Irish English, and a cover term for all English variants in Ireland except Ulster Scots (p. 41). Stalmaszczyk makes another important point from a sociolinguistic perspective, arguing that the formal examination or recognition of Irish varieties of English has been relatively overlooked in Ireland, both in studies of Celtic influence on English and in official status. For example, he points out that Irish English as such has no official status in Ireland; the only named varieties with official status are "Irish" (*Gaeilge*) and "English" (which is often assumed to mean Standard English). This is related to the point in Chapter One regarding how regional varieties of English are overlooked in the assessment of Celtic linguistic influence on English; it provides the only thread of topical continuity in the book, but is not emphasized sufficiently by the author.

Following a review of the literature describing Irish English, and another discussion of terminology that contrasts "Irish literature" (*as Gaeilge*) with "Anglo-Irish literature" (in English), the remainder of Chapter Two is taken up by an ordered discussion of selected Irish elements in Irish English vocabulary, beginning with a nine page discussion of borrowings with a diminutive suffix (*-een* being the most common element, which often expresses affection, contempt, or familiarity). Lists of the best-known examples of loanwords, hybrid forms, and derived forms are provided, which the author gleans from lexicographic evidence including various dictionaries, lexicons, glossaries and descriptions of varieties of Irish English. The drawbacks of this approach, acknowledged by the author, include the problem that frequency of usage was not assessed for these loans, and the possibility that older ones may be outdated. Also included in the chapter as examples of Irish influence on Irish English are discussions of semantic conflation, loan translation, terms of endearment, and prepositional constructions.

There is no apparent link between the first two chapters and Chapter Three, "Scottish Gaelic Language and Literature in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries," which focuses on contemporary Gaelic poetry. Stalmaszczyk starts with a history of Gaelic in Scotland from the earliest times to the present, and a survey of Gaelic language shift and revitalization efforts. The chapter then shifts abruptly to literature, with no effort to link to the sociolinguistic introduction. There is a brief and poorly organized summary of the historical background of Gaelic literature in Scotland, beginning with the Book of the Dean of Lismore (1512-1526). The author chooses to focus on the genre of the *brosnachadh catha* or "battle incitement," tracing it up to the twentieth century, then confusingly returning to a discussion of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. He gives a brief account of the poetry of Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair as representative of the eighteenth century, but unfortunately makes no mention of the nineteenth century (apart from a single sentence on Màiri Mhór nan Òran in the *brosnachadh* section).

The twentieth century Gaelic poetry section consists of brief biographies and discussions of major influences and themes in the poetry of the "Big Five", Sorley MacLean, George Campbell Hay, Derick S. Thomson, Iain Crichton Smith, and Donald MacAulay (here I give only the English versions of their names). A final section on recent developments in poetry mentions some of the newer male Gaelic poets such as Christopher Whyte, but no female poets such as Meg Bateman. The main theme—not terribly insightful—is that contemporary Gaelic poets differ from traditional ones in that they have become global in their outlook and the scope of their topics.

The analyses of poetry presented here represent only a digest, and provide no new information or insight that has not been previously published elsewhere. The reader in search of primary analysis of contemporary Scottish Gaelic poetry would be advised to consult the introductions to anthologies listed in the book's bibliography, including *Nua-Bhàrdachd Gàidhlig/Modern Scottish Gaelic Poems* edited by Donald MacAulay (Edinburgh: Canongate 1987 [1976]), and Ronald Black's *An Tuil: An Anthology of Twentieth Century Scottish Gaelic Poetry* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1999), as well as more recent journal articles and book chapters by scholars such as Michel Byrne, Michelle MacLeod, and Moray Watson.

Chapter Four, "History, Decline and 'Revival' of Cornish" contains only the most tenuous link to Chapter Three; it begins with a brief history of "traditional" Cornish which is divided into Primitive (AD 600-800), Old (800-1200), Middle (1200-1575), and Late (1575-1800) periods. Stalmaszczyk describes in some detail the Cornish texts produced in the Old, Middle, and Late periods while Cornish was a "traditional" spoken language, including the Christian religious drama *An Ordinalia Kernewek* (The Cornish Ordinalia), a mystery cycle composed in the late fourteenth century. The author describes the twentieth century discoveries of new Middle Cornish manuscripts and the contributions these have made to the understanding of traditional Cornish.

A section on the decline and "death" of Cornish follows, and then a similar section on the "revival" of Cornish. As in most of the other chapters of the book, there is almost exclusive reliance on secondary sources, and a lack of theorization. The concise description of the avowed linguistic bases of the various revived and reconstructed forms of Cornish is useful, since there are so many competing claims to authenticity and accuracy—including Unified Cornish, Common Cornish (*Kernewek Kemmyn*), and Traditional Cornish (aka Modern Vernacular Cornish). However, the section lacks a theoretically-grounded discussion of language *ideology* (e.g., Payton 1997), which is what makes such "language wars" interesting from the point of view of socially-oriented studies of languages, such as in sociolinguistics or linguistic anthropology.

The chapter ends with a final section on Cornish influence on the regional English of Cornwall, which has little to do with the rest of the chapter, but does relate to Chapters One and Two where the influences of Celtic linguistic elements on English in general and regional English variants in particular are discussed. In a footnote the author states that another Cornish lexical influence is found in Cornish placenames, which exceed the scope of this book, but a discussion of these would have tied in well with Chapter Five.

Chapter Five, "Names and Places in Celtic Literature" is the weakest chapter in theoretical terms. The author claims in Chapter One that "the term Celtic is used exclusively in linguistic terms" throughout the book; in other words, describing a linguistic variety as "Celtic" indicates that the variety is structurally (linguistically) classified as Celtic, but makes no claims about the culture of the speakers. Likewise, under such a claim, describing a work of literature as "Celtic" would merely indicate that the work was composed in a linguistic variety classified as Celtic. However, a purely linguistic definition of "Celtic" is insufficient to justify the kind of literary analysis the author attempts here, which is to claim that "Celtic literature" is "saturated" with elements of landscape images and placenames. The author finds an expressive continuity across wide stretches of time and space: from the Irish *Dinnshenchas* (AD 887-1079) and *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, to early Welsh literature and Scottish and Irish bardic poetry, to contemporary Scottish Gaelic poetry, and Brian Friel's largely English-language play *Translations*. But if the trope of placenames is a commonality in "Celtic literature" as a whole, why is there no evidence given for Cornish or for Breton? The chapter ends up being little more than a collection of quotes from poetry and prose works bound together by assertions that placenames play an important role in each work quoted. The reasoning is circular: works display a concern with placenames because they are Celtic, and they are Celtic because they display a concern with placenames.

A quote from the contemporary Scottish Gaelic poet Donald MacAulay included in the chapter makes the real point of note about the material in the chapter: "In the Gaelic tradition there are many poems and songs about places. These appear also in modern verse, though not in such a high proportion and certainly *to a different purpose...*" (MacAulay 1987:49) (p. 15, my emphasis). In other words, many Scottish Gaelic speakers (and by extension Irish and Welsh speakers) have composed works about places in their native language in a way that indicates that places and placenames for them are imbued with cultural as well as individual significance. But they have done so *for different purposes in different times and places, and Celtic cultural continuity cannot be presupposed based solely on the use of a Celtic linguistic medium*. A critical approach would require paying attention to inter-cultural *variation* in the use of language in literatures composed in Celtic languages.

Chapter 5 is frustrating (as indeed is the entire book), not least because of the author's claim that "I refrain from introducing any theoretical or interpretive framework but nevertheless I intend to show the variety of functions place-names assume in literature (and culture)." Why *not* introduce a theoretical framework? A purely descriptive work relying on primary sources might be able to succeed without one, but not a book that relies almost entirely on secondary sources. In fact, the author *has* brought in a theory from cultural geography, that place names are a constitutive component of the landscape and a link between nature and culture, and that they bind society to its physical environment (pp. 136-137).

The best that can be said of the book is that the chapters present compact and entirely self-contained introductions to a group of very loosely related topics in Celtic languages and literatures. Overall, they provide a useful collection and synthesis of classic and up-to-date secondary sources on the linguistic evidence of contact between Celtic linguistic varieties and English linguistic varieties, and the extensive influence of the former upon the latter. From this perspective, the chapters could possibly be useful as survey-style course readings if augmented with discussions of theories that could be applied to the data. (In a side note, one minor

annoyance of the book for the English language prescriptivist is the almost total lack of semicolons; throughout the book the author almost always joins two independent clauses with a comma.)

However, the serious flaws of the book are its overall lack of cohesiveness, in both topic and theoretical agenda, its deliberate attempt to avoid theory and the subsequent lack of any substantial new conclusions, and the book's participation in uncritical construction of the concept of "Celtic-ness," with no reference to recent critiques of the concept from anthropology, archaeology, and Celtic studies itself (e.g., Chapman 1992; James 1999; Nagy 2002). As Maria Tymoczko notes in "What questions should we ask in Celtic studies in the new millennium?" (Tymoczko 2002), Celtic studies practitioners as a whole must re-orient from a nineteenth-century descriptivist focus to twentieth-century critical theoretical concepts drawn from contemporary humanities and social sciences, such as ideology and intertextuality. I also believe that when concerning themselves with the relationship between language and culture, Celtic studies scholars would do well to engage in a dialogue with disciplines that focus on this relationship, such as linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics. Only in this way can Celtic studies survive and thrive in the twenty-first century.

## **Bibliography**

Chapman, Malcolm

1992. *The Celts: the Construction of a Myth*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

James, Simon

1999. *The Atlantic Celts: Ancient People or Modern Invention?* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press

MacAulay, Donald, (ed.)

1987 [1976]. *Nua-Bhàrdachd Gàidhlig/Modern Scottish Gaelic Poems*. Edinburgh: Canongate.

Nagy, Joseph Falaky, (ed.)

2002. *Identifying the Celtic: CSANA Yearbook 2*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Payton, Phillip

1997. Identity, ideology and language in modern Cornwall. In Hildegard L. C. Tristram (ed.) *The Celtic Englishes*, pp. 100-122. Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag.

Tymoczko, Maria

2002. What questions should we ask in Celtic studies in the new millennium? In Joseph Nagy (ed.) *Identifying the Celtic: CSANA Yearbook 2*, pp. 10-29. Dublin: Four Courts Press.