

Subject: AHG issues
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Thread-Topic: AHG issues
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The 1st AHG meeting roughly grouped issues around a SWF in three groups

- Consonant issues (the written representation of consonant sounds)
- Vocalic length issues (including ways to indicate pre-occlusion)
- Vowel system issues

The two first issues proved to be the main stumbling blocks. It was agreed that a common agreement had to be reached on these issues. The third set of issues, relating to the vowel system, will have to be worked out during the period leading up to the second AHG meeting.

Specifically, we would like to ask advisers for their opinion on the following problems:

Vowel length and its representation in the SWF

The underlying phonology of KK postulates a three-way distinction in vowel length: short, half-long (=long in polysyllabic words), and long (in monosyllables). It can be said that Neo-Cornish has repeated a development which took place in the traditional language: under the influence of English prosody, half-long vowels were shortened. At the same time, phonemic status shifted from consonant quantity to vowel quantity.

KK is the only form of Revived Cornish which aspires to such an early prosody. However, it can safely be stated that apart from a very few speakers no one pronounces the half-long vowels of KK anything other than short.

e.g. KK <gwydhenn> ["gwI:\DEn] -> standard RC ["gwID@n], ["gwIDIn]

As prosody is normally the part of the pronunciation of a foreign language which is most difficult to learn, this change was to be expected. Indeed, most speakers of Revived Cornish don't even know that they are not pronouncing the vowels in question as intended, or they don't hear the difference. It is improbable that this feature of Revived Cornish will ever change in a way which would reflect the orthoepy of KK more closely. We may ask ourselves if this should not be acknowledged. At the moment, the unrecognised discrepancy between the recommended orthoepy of KK and the way the language is actually pronounced results in IPA transcriptions (e.g. in the Gerlyvrik) which differ from the spoken de-facto standard to a significant degree, e.g. KK <kemmer> (normatively ["kEmmEr] but {often/in use}["kEm@r])

-> Should half-long vowels still be distinguished orthographically from short ones in the SWF even they are not part of the phonology of 99% of today's Cornish speakers?

The same applies to geminate consonants which Anglophones normally find very difficult to pronounce. Indeed they are not a regular feature of any variety of spoken Revived Cornish. Many KK teachers don't even mention their existence and tell learners that double consonant spellings are a purely orthographical device to indicate that preceding vowels are short.

-> Should the SWF still try to tell learners to pronounce geminate consonants even though it seems improbable that a significant number of speakers will ever master this feature? Should IPA transcriptions in dictionaries continue to indicate a prescribed pronunciation which the vast majority of fluent speakers in Cornwall never use or even know about?

-> How should vowel quantity be marked in the SWF:

- 1) by doubling consonant graphs (to mark short vowels) as in KK
- 2) by doubling vowel graphs (to mark long vowels)
- 3) by diacritic marks on vowels as in KS up to revision 15
- 4) by a mixed system as in KS 16?

<i>, <y>, <e>, <ei?> /i/ /I?/ /e/, /I:/

Revived Cornish is a living language, and as such has gone through a development of its own. The phonology of almost all present day speakers does not recognise a phonemic distinction between /i/ and /I/. Indeed, both are treated as long and short allophones of one and the same phoneme /i/ [i:, I]. It can therefore be argued that the SWF should take actual modern usage into account. This is all the more important since reconstructions of the vowel system of the traditional language differ in this respect and cannot be reconciled. It seems to us that in this impasse, the only way forward is to leave the decision to today's speakers by recognising how they deal with this issue. The result is clear: Revived Cornish has a two-way phonemic distinction between /i(:)/ and /e(:)/.

On the other hand, the phonology of KK recognises three front vowel phonemes /i/, /I/, and /e/ which are spelt <i>, <y>, and <e> respectively. All other Middle Cornish based orthographies only recognise two phonemes, viz /i/ and /e/, which are spelt <y> and <e> in UC and <y, i> and <e> in UCR. RLC only distinguishes between the two phonemes /i/ and /e/ as well.

UCR (and to a certain, unsystematic extent, UC) shows Vocalic Alternation, a phenomenon described by Williams, in stems which have /I/ in KK,

e.g. UCR <bedhaf> 'I will be' :: <bydh> 'he/she will be'; KK <bydhav> :: <bydh>.

The phonology of KK does not recognise Vocalic Alternation except in one verbal paradigm, viz the imperative of <bos>, 'to be': <bedhewgh> 'be! (pl.)' :: <bydh> 'be! (sg.)'.

In Revived Late Cornish, the reflex of KK /I/ has merged with /e/ and is spelt accordingly whereas the reflex of /i/ has not. The latter tends to diphthongise in final stressed position, as in RLC <chey> [tʃeɪ], 'house'.

e.g. KK, UC, UCR <pysk>, <bys> [pɪ:sk], [bɪ:z] (often: [pɪsk], [bɪz]) 'world' -> RLC <pêsk>, <bêz> [pe:sk], [be:z].

One of the suggested compromise orthographies, KS, recommends using the digraph <ei> for MC /I:/, LC /e:/ in this type of words, whereas the second, KD, advocates keeping MC <y> and telling speakers of RLC to pronounce it [e] in stressed syllables. Another possible solution would be to spell <y> in the written representation of MC and <e> in that of LC although that would probably result in too big a distance between word-forms in the two variants, since many words would be affected.

To further complicate matters, it is apparent that most users of KK interpret <i> and <y> as the written representations of the long and short version of only one phoneme, /i/. Thus there is a strong contrast between the orthoepy of KK and how most users of the orthography actually speak.

e.g. KK <pysk> 'fish', <pryv> 'snake', and <bys> 'world', with the recommended pronunciation [pI:sk], [prI:v], and [bI:z] respectively, are normally pronounced [pɪsk], [prɪf], and [bɪz].

-> How, in your opinion, should this degree of variation be accounted for in a Single Written Form?

- 1) allow variant spellings, e.g. MC <bys>, LC <bes>
- 2) use an umbrella spelling, e.g. <beis> for both pronunciations
- 3) spell affected words in a conservative way which would allow speakers of both variants to deduce the pronunciation, e.g. <bys>; MC rule: <y> = /I/; LC rule: <y> = /e/ when stressed, /ɪ/ when unstressed

<-i> vs. <-y>

Another issue which has been identified is the distribution of <i> and <y> in unstressed final syllables. KK spells words like <gwari>, <gweli> etymologically in accordance with its morpho-phonemic principles. Users of UC/R object to seeing <i> in this position because the medieval scribes invariably used <y> there. It has been pointed out that many users of KK misinterpret <i> as the representation of long [i:] and consequentially pronounce the cited examples as [gwɔri:], [gwɛli:]. On the other hand, using a phonetic spelling for these syllables - while making the word-forms look closer to those in the traditional corpus - would result in alternations like <gwary> : <gwariow>, <gwely> : <gweliow> which could make learning parts of the morphology more difficult (but not without parallels, e.g. Eng. happy ~ happier).

-> How, in your opinion, should KK <i>, <u> in unstressed open ultima be spelt in the SWF?

- 1) morpho-phonemic spellings like <gwari>:<gwariow>
- 2) phonetic (and 'authentic') spellings like <gwary>: <gwariow>
- 3) ...

Phonetic spellings in final unstressed closed syllables would lead to even more variation between singular and plural forms, e.g. <seythyn : seythunyow>. If a more phonetic approach were chosen for open syllables, there would still be a case for phonemic spellings in words like <seythun>, <kegin>.

-> How, in your opinion, should KK <i>, <u> in unstressed closed ultima be spelt in the SWF?

KK <iw>, <yw>, <ew>, <uw?>; UC <yw>, <ew>; UCR <ew>; RLC <iw>, <ew>

This issue is linked with the question of <i> :: <y> :: <e>. A coherent solution for both issues would be preferable. It is universally recognised that present day Cornish speakers normally don't pronounce the KK diphthongs <iw> and <yw> any differently. However, KK representatives on the AHG have made the point that learners should aspire to a pronunciation in which these diphthongs are distinguished. How that is to happen when most of the teachers don't make the distinction themselves is another question, however - but in probably not one which concerns the orthography of the SWF.

As RLC distinguishes between two diphthongs, /iU/ and /eU/, the radical UCR solution of writing KK <iw>, <yw>, <ew> (and <uw>) as <ew> indiscriminately - apart from etymological <yw> in a few cases - does not seem feasible. Both main variants of spoken revived Cornish distinguish two diphthongs, /iU/ and /eU/ (often pronounced [uU] and [eU] respectively).

-> Should the SWF take this feature of the revived language into account or try to maintain etymological distinctions, at least in writing?

-> Should the diphthong <uw> /yU/ which has recently been described by Keith Bailey, be part of the SWF?

Trond.