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The Decline and Revival of the Cornish Language

Jon Mills

University of Kent

After the Norman Conquest

- Saxon landowners replaced
- Mottoes of the gentry
- Middle Cornish literature

The Decline of Cornish
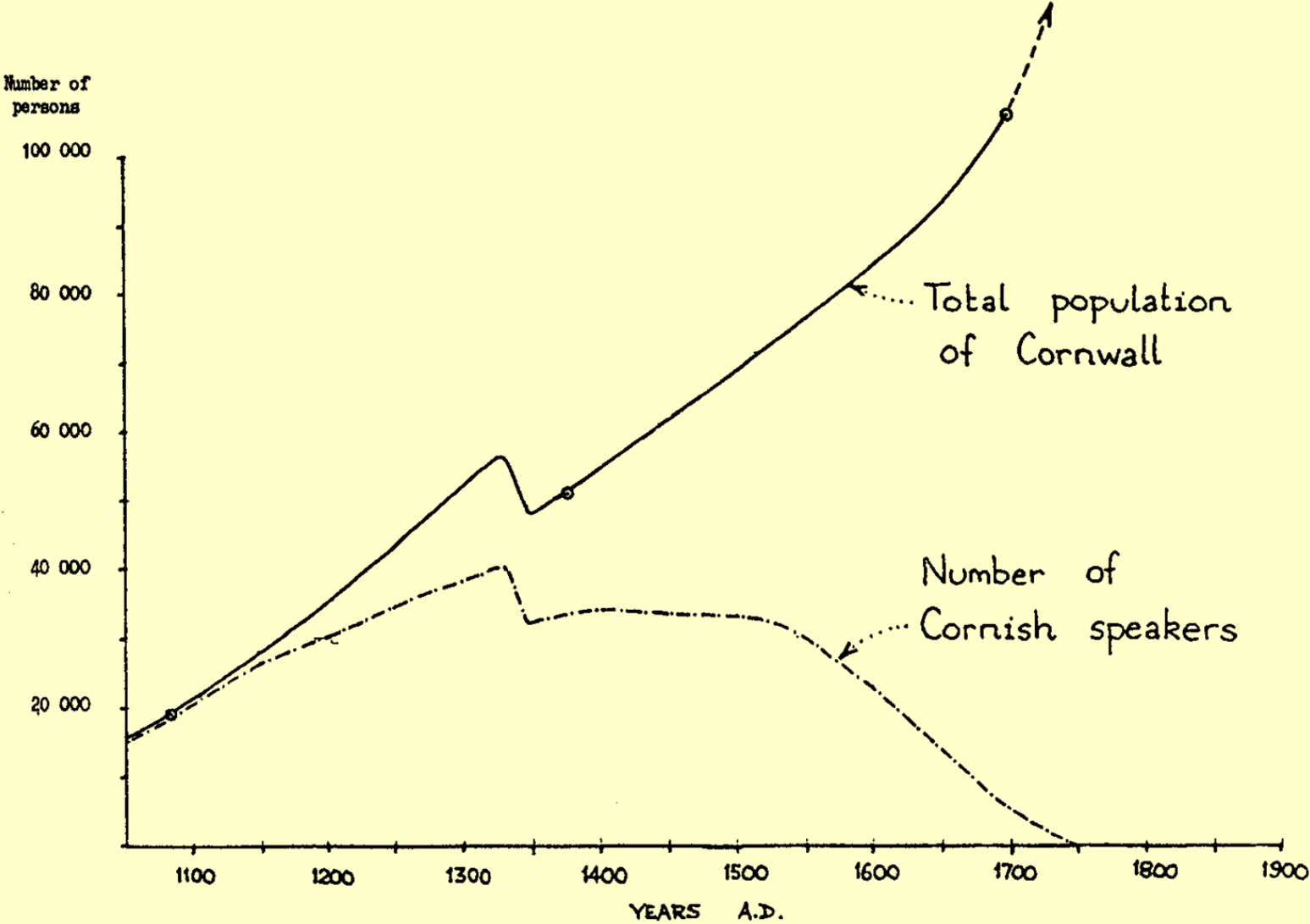
(George 1986)

Following the Tudor Accession

- 1497 Rebellion
    - Michael Joseph – An Gof (The Smith)
    - Thomas Flamank
- 1549: The Prayer Book Rebellion.
    - "And so we the Cornyshe men (wherof certen of us under stande no Englysh) utterly refuse thys newe Englysh."
    - 11% of the population of Cornwall slaughtered
- Henry VIII (1491 - 1547)
    - Dissolution of the monasteries
    - Smashing and looting Glasney and Crantock colleges

Prayer Book Rebellion

HEMM A GOVHA AN KOLL A
GOLLJI GLASNEDH HA'N
MERNANS A VILYOW A
WLASKARORYON GERNEWEK YN UNN
DHEFENDYA A GA FYDH, YETH
HA DEVOSOW KELTEK

THIS COMMEMORATES
THE LOSS OF GLASNEY COLLEGE
AND THE DEATH OF
THOUSANDS OF CORNISH PATRIOTS
IN DEFENCE OF THEIR FAITH, LANGUAGE
AND CELTIC CUSTOMS.

1549 - 1999
KERNOW ARTA

Richard Carew (1555-1620)

- Baronet of Anthony in Cornwall

- "An Epistle concerning the Excellencies of the English Tongue" (1605)

- "… for if meeting them by chance you inquire the way or any such matter, your answer shall be, Meea navidna cowzasawsneck"

The Retreat of Cornish

17th and 18th centuries

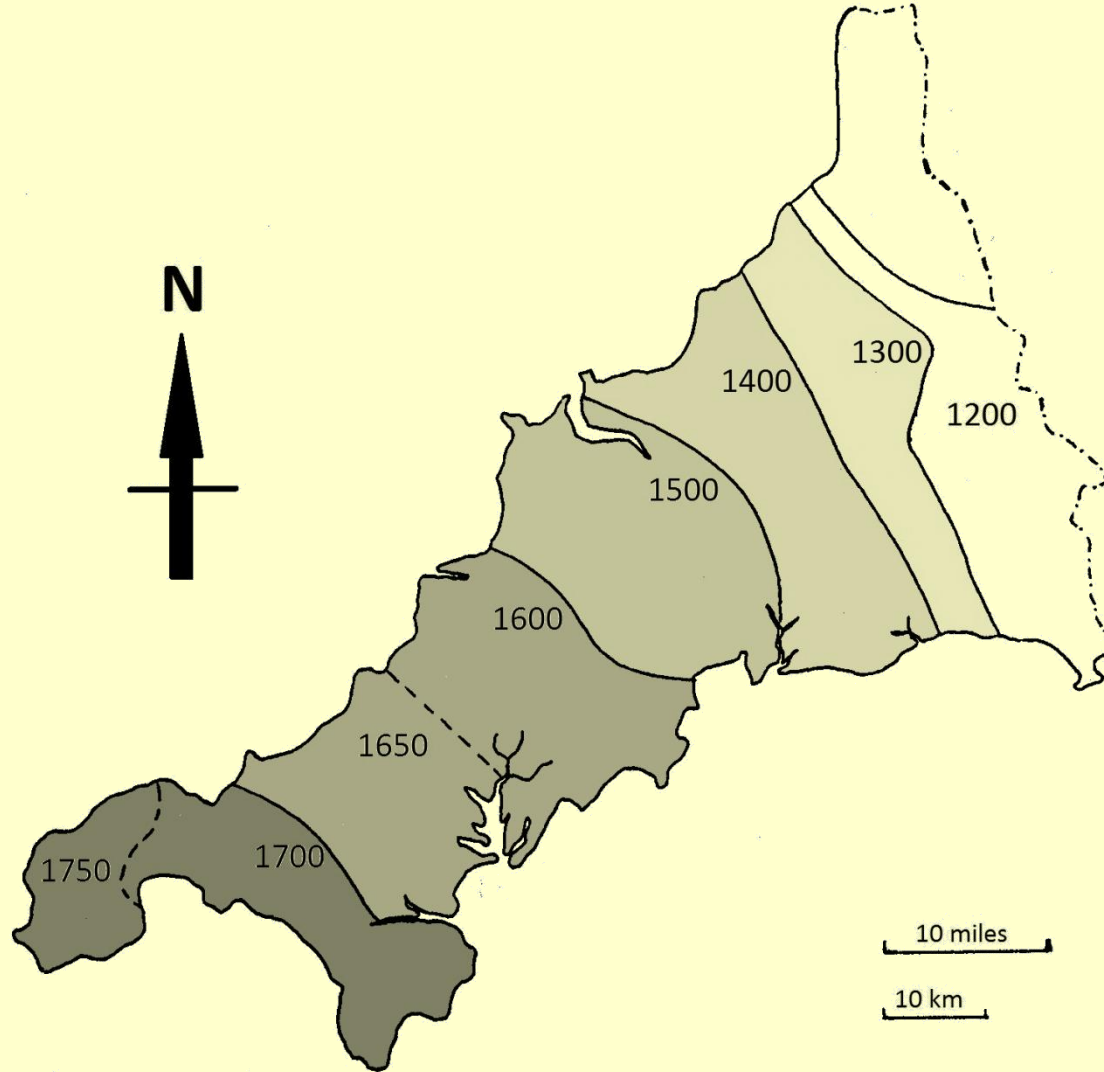An lavar coth yu lavar guir

Bedh darn re ver, dhan tavaz re hir

Mez den heb tavaz a gallaz i dir.

19ᵗʰ Century

To honour the Memory of
JOHN DAVEY, of Boswednack
in this Parish (b. St. Just, 1812; d. Boswednack, 1891),
who was the last to possess any considerable
Traditional Knowledge of the Cornish Language,
& that of his Father & Instructor JOHN DAVEY,
of St. Just (b. Boswednack, 1770; d. St. Just, 1844),
well known as a Mathematician & Schoolmaster,
both of whom lie buried near; this Stone was
set up by the St. Ives Old Cornwall Society,
1930.
Geriow Ganow Den yu kepar ha Dourow down,
ha Fenten Skyans avel Gover ow-resek. Pr. xviij 4.

Start of the Revival

"Why should Cornishmen learn Cornish?

There is no money in it, it serves no practical purpose and the literature is scanty and of no great originality or value.

The question is a fair one, the answer is simple.

Because they are Cornish."

(Henry Jenner 1904 *Handbook of the Cornish Language)*
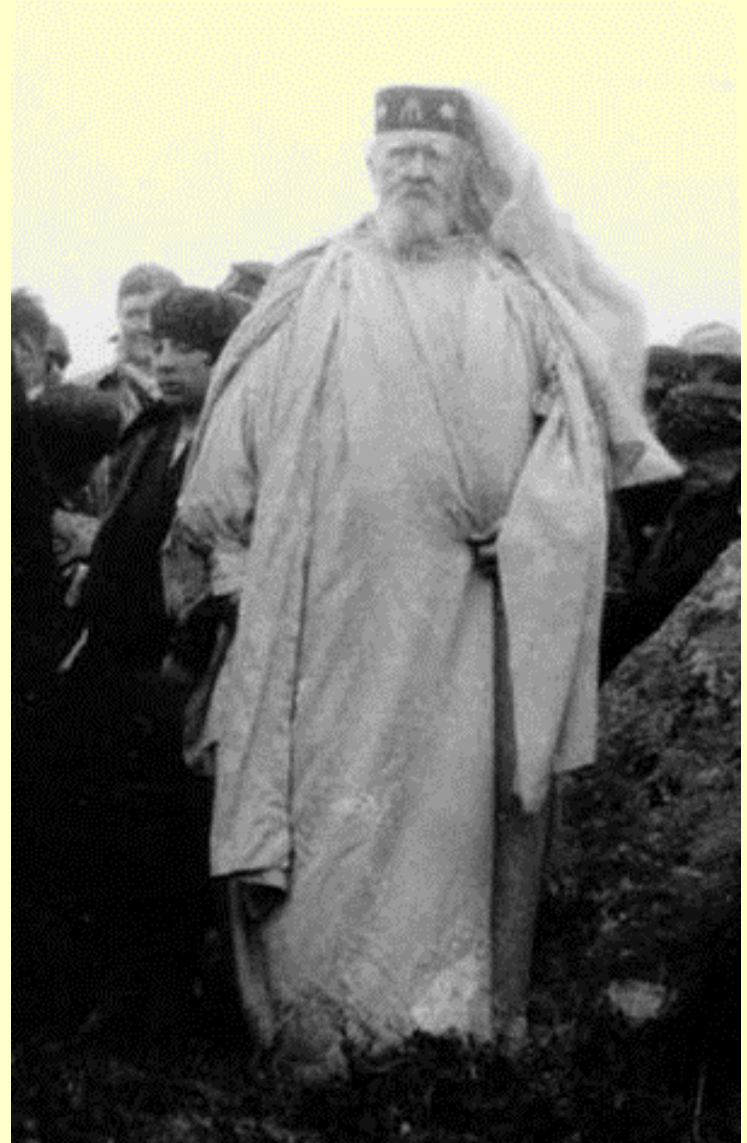
Unified Cornish

- 1929 *Cornish for All* (Morton Nance)

- 1934 *English Cornish Dictionary*

- 1938 *Cornish - English Dictionary*

- The 1952 *English-Cornish Dictionary*

- The 1955 *Cornish-English Dictionary*

Criticism of Unified Cornish

"Our Institute takes the view that the so called Unified Spelling invented by Nance has never been explained, i.e. we have never had any real discussion of the principles on which it was based. We regard the dictionaries with their high proportion of words invented by the comparative method as suspect, because they don't give dated forms, and we feel that some of the lost words can probably be recovered from dated Middle Cornish place-names and may prove to be other than the forms invented for them by Nance. Lastly, following the work of the Leeds Survey of English Dialects, we suspect that the pronunciation currently used for modern Cornish (based on an ultimate form of Wessex Middle English) may be wrong and that the true phonetic range is still just recoverable from an area west of an isogloss that cuts off the Land's End and part of the south side of the Lizard."

Charles Thomas, Institute of Cornish Studies (1972)

Tripartite Split

- 3 orthographies
  - 1929 Kernewek Unys - Unified Cornish
  - 1988 Common Cornish - Kernewek Kemmyn
  - 1991 Modern Cornish – Kernewek Nowydga
- Stimulus
  - Competition
    - Publications
    - Classes

1997 MP Andrew George

- "Me a le gans Dew Ollgallojak del vedhaf len ha perthy omryans gwyr dhe hy braster an vyternes elisabet, hy Erys ha Sewyoryon, herwyth an laha. Ytho Dew re'm gweressa."

2000 SGRÙD Research "An Independent Academic Study on Cornish"

- "A reasonable estimate of the number of speakers able to use the language effectively for everyday purposes is around 300"
- Cornish spoken in a wide variety of situations:
  - the conducts of business in Cornish organisations;
  - in cultural events;
  - in a wide variety of social activities when speakers congregate;
  - "There may be, perhaps, 10 families using the language in the home"

2001 - Doris Ansari

- Portfolio Holder for Education 2001-

- Teaching of Cornish culture "dangerous and would put Cornwall on the road to the Balkans"

2002: Candy Atherton MP for Falmouth

HEATHCLIFF O'MALLEY

- Would not support moves to make the Cornish language part of the school curriculum

- "It is a sad fact that some ethnic minorities suffer discrimination. I strongly believe that diversity of culture should be celebrated and that education is a key to acceptance" (*Western Morning News* 23 Aug. 2002).

2002

Article 3. [Comment 16] The Advisory Committee notes that the Government does not consider the people of Cornwall to constitute a national minority. The Advisory Committee however notes that a number of persons living in Cornwall consider themselves to be a national minority within the scope of the Framework Convention. In this, the Advisory Committee has received substantial information from them as to their Celtic identity, specific history, **distinct language**, and culture.

Council of Europe (6 June 2002) "First Report on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities"
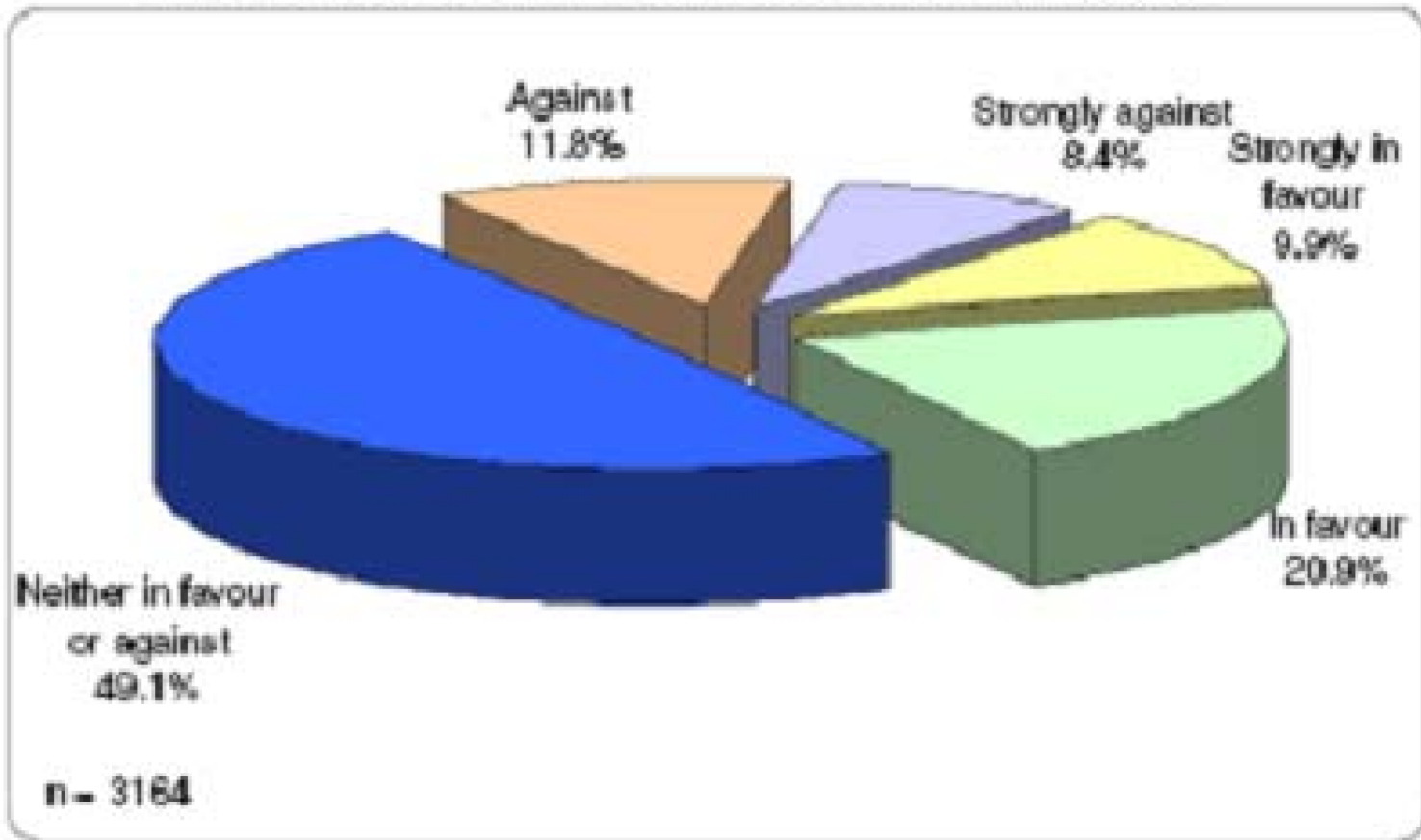
2002

- Official "minority language" status
- Part II of the 1992 Council of Europe Charter for Regional and Minority Languages

2005

- **Strategy for the Cornish Language**
- **Funding support for Cornish language confirmed**
- **2007**
  - **Standard Written Form Debate**

2007 Quality of Life Survey, awareness of Cornish

4.2.37 Support Opportunities For Use Of Cornish Language

Against 11.8%

Strongly against 8.4%

Strongly in favour 9.9%

In favour 20.9%

Neither in favour or against 49.1%

n = 3164

Base: All respondents

The Standard Written Form

"The Standard Written Form (SWF) for Cornish represents a common ground for users of all existing orthographies and for speakers of all varieties of Revived Cornish. ... to provide public bodies and the educational system with a universally acceptable, inclusive, and neutral orthography. ....In order to accommodate the range of variation in the modern spoken language, the SWF is much more inclusive of variant forms than any previous Cornish orthography. Care has been taken to construct a system which speakers of all varieties of Revived Cornish can learn to use quickly and easily, in a manner which suits their linguistic and aesthetic preferences. Even users who have not had formal instruction in the SWF should find it relatively easy to read" (Bock, Albert & Benjamin Bruch (2008) "An Outline of the Standard Written Form of Cornish" p.1).

Hierarchy of Main and Traditional Forms

Main	Traditional		
<k>	<c> (before back vowels)	[k]	*kar / car* 'friend'
<hw>	<wh>	[ʍ]	*hwel / whel* 'work'
<ks>	<x>	[ks]	*eksamnya / examnya* 'examine'
<-i>	<-y>	[i]	*dyski / dysky* 'teach'

- "… to provide public bodies and the educational system with a universally acceptable, inclusive, and neutral orthography" (Bock & Bruch 2008: 1).
- "… traditional graphs do not have equal status with their counterparts <k>, <hw>, and <-i>, and will not appear in elementary language textbooks or in official documents produced by public bodies" (Bock & Bruch 2008: 4).

Problems with the Standard Written Form

- Lacks consensus
- Does not treat all sections of the community fairly
- Does not unambiguously encode all current orthoepies.
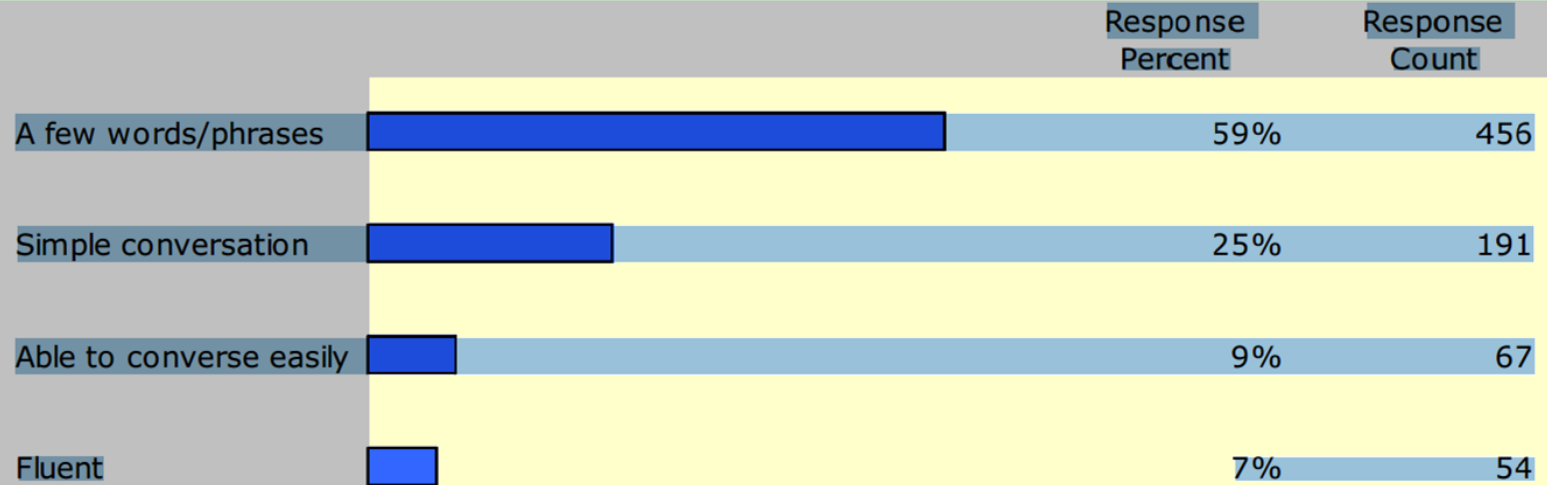
Kernewek Standard

- Created in response to the SWF

- Aims to correct the errors in the SWF

- Uses traditional graphs

- Makes use of diacritics to unambiguously and simultaneously convey all current orthoepies.

2013 CLP Cornish Language Survey

- 799 people completed the survey.
- The internet
  - seems to play a significant role in maintaining language use.
  - has also over taken correspondence courses as a learning method.
- Inter-family transmission was strongly cited as a learning method,
  - but such transmission does not currently indicate any great fluency.

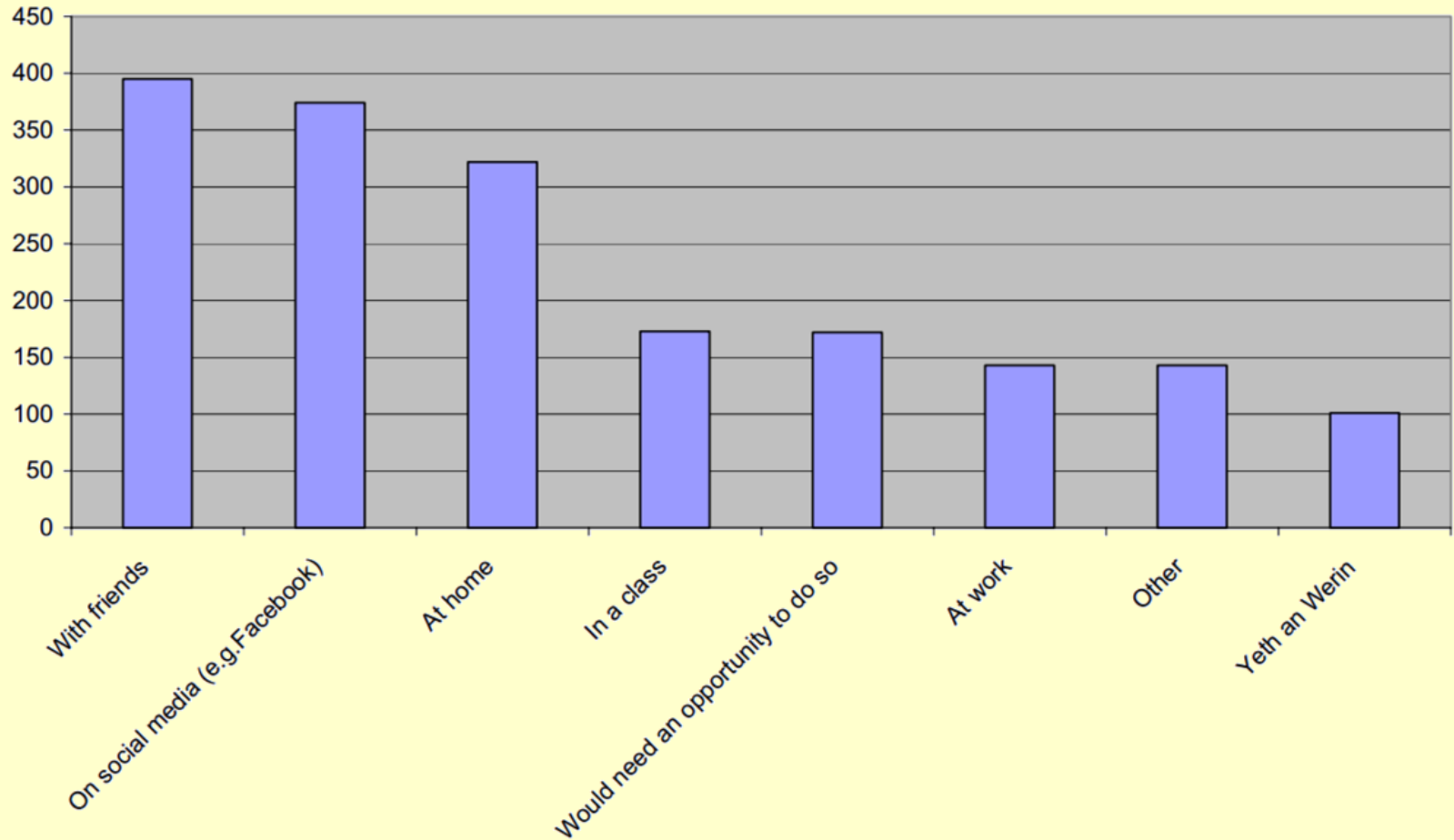# 2013 CLP Cornish Language Survey

1. How much Cornish do you know?			Response Percent	Response Count
A few words/phrases			59%	456
Simple conversation			25%	191
Able to converse easily			9%	67
Fluent			7%	54
		Answered Question		768
		Skipped Question		31

2013 CLP Cornish Language Survey

Question 4: Where do you use Cornish?

Today

- Cornish Language Partnership promotes SWF
- Publishers promote
  - Kernewek Standard
    - Most published orthography
    - 1st translation of the entire Bible
  - Unified Cornish
  - Kernewek Kemmyn

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