



The Cornish Language in the Nineteenth Century

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For my parents.

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1

Introduction

Bookending either end of the period covered by this book are the stories of two people: one, an elderly fish-seller, whose death in 1777 sparked the proposition that alongside her passing, the Cornish language became extinct; the other at the centre of the establishment, the son of a Bishop, an employee of the British Museum who, although not the first academic to write about the language, produced the book which started the twentieth-century language revival.¹ Interestingly, it is Dorothy (Dolly) Pentreath's (1692?–1777) name which has more widely entered both the public consciousness and that of academics researching language decline and death rather than that of Henry Jenner (1848–1934). Pentreath's image and descriptions of her as the last speaker, or the last known native speaker, of Cornish are marketed for tourists visiting Mousehole, where a slate plaque marks the site occupied by her cottage. In the churchyard

This work is based on my PhD thesis *The Status of the Cornish Language in the years between the death of Dolly Pentreath in 1777 and Henry Jenner's publication of A Handbook of the Cornish Language in 1904* submitted to the University of Exeter.

¹ Henry Jenner, *A Handbook of the Cornish Language chiefly in its latest stages with some account of its history and literature* (David Nutt, 1904).

at Paul, where Pentreath is buried, stands a granite monument erected by the philologist Prince Louis Lucien Bonaparte (1828–1895). Jenner, although known within Cornwall as the founder of *Gorsedh Kernow* [the Cornish Gorsedh], has not reached the wider public consciousness to the same extent.

Following an examination of the definitions and frameworks used and developed by academics researching issues around language decline and revival, in this chapter I discuss the previous research carried out on the period after Pentreath's death and how deeply, or otherwise, this period has been analysed in previous studies. Academic studies of this period in the history of the Cornish language are few and often form part of a longer work on an allied aspect of the language. I also discuss how contemporary nineteenth-century writers presented the issues regarding the death, or otherwise, of Cornish.

Chapter 2 contains a discussion of the deterioration of Cornish in the period before Dolly Pentreath's death, examining the principal reasons for this decline, including those described by William Scawen (1600–1689) in the seventeenth century.² I discuss the significance of the Reformation to the language shift which occurred in Cornwall in the following century and the retreat of the language towards the west. In Chapter 3, I assess the life and legacy of Pentreath. I consider the possible manipulation of her status as the 'last' speaker of Cornish and discuss how the information we do have about her was mainly produced by men of a very different social class to her own. I also consider the evidence of other possible speakers who were contemporaries of Pentreath before moving to examine the correspondence between Fred W.P. Jago (1817–1911) and Bernard Victor (dates unknown, active nineteenth century) about Pentreath and her memorial. As part of this discussion of how Pentreath is remembered, I look at the events held to commemorate the centenary of her death and how she was portrayed in newspapers both at the time of her death and in the century following this.

² *Old Cornish Manuscript collected by William Scawen*, EN/1999, Kresen Kernow, Redruth.

Chapter 4 turns to a discussion of one of the principal works produced during the nineteenth century: Fred W. P. Jago's English-Cornish dictionary.³ I analyse Jago's Introduction to the dictionary which offers his motivations for creating the work before examining the dictionary itself as a source for wider information about the status of the Cornish language at the time. I consider both Jago's own concerns for his legacy as well as the public perception of his work as discussed in newspaper reviews of the time and how the dictionary was (dis)regarded by the compilers of later English-Cornish dictionaries.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I turn to the work of Henry Jenner and discuss why this is regarded as the catalyst for the twentieth-century Cornish language revival. Chapter 5 examines the wider publication of Cornish texts in the nineteenth century and how Jenner was perhaps not necessarily regarded as *the* expert on the Cornish language by his contemporaries. I consider the role of the Reverend Wladislaw Lach-Szyrma (1841–1915) by examining his correspondence with Jenner and the papers concerning Cornish which both men presented in the 1870s. I also examine the research into contemporary use of Cornish both men carried out together, including the individuals with knowledge of Cornish they interviewed before analysing Lach-Szyrma's attempt to promote the language through an essay competition.

Chapter 6 examines Jenner's work in the period in which he was writing his *Handbook of the Cornish Language* [hereafter *Handbook*]. I compare this work with Edwin Norris's (1795–1872) earlier *Sketch of Cornish Grammar* (1859) and consider the aims both men stated as to why they produced a Cornish grammar.⁴ I discuss the manuscripts of Jenner's proposed Part III of his *Handbook* and posit reasons why this remained unpublished.⁵ These reasons are perhaps linked to the short-lived Celtic-Cornish Society which I discuss, but Jenner's correspondence with his publisher David Nutt also sheds some light on the matter as I

³ Frederick William Pearce Jago, *An English-Cornish Dictionary compiled from the best sources*, (Simpkin, Marshall & WH Luke, 1887).

⁴ Henry Jenner, *Handbook of the Cornish Language*; Edwin Norris, *Sketch of Cornish Grammar*, (Oxford University Press, 1859).

⁵ *Cornish Reading Lessons by Henry Jenner (proposed Part III of the Handbook)*; *Proposed Cornish Language Exercises by Jenner*, Nance Collection, Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro.

explore. I also examine further elements of Jenner's wider correspondence and writings both in and about Cornish. Finally, after a description of Jenner's further research on the language during this period, I consider Jenner's legacy and role in the language revival.

In Chapters 7 and 8, I consider other examples of contemporary use or discussion of the Cornish language. In Chapter 7, I analyse the presence of Cornish, or discourses concerning the language, in travel writing, memoirs, novels, non-fiction, and histories of Cornwall written during the period 1777–1904. In Chapter 8, I turn to glossaries and further discussions regarding the language in contemporary newspapers before examining the articles on the language which were published with increasing frequency in academic journals based both within and outside Cornwall. I finish by presenting the evidence of additional letters and manuscripts before closing the chapter with an analysis of the claims of Ralph Allin-Collins (1878–1948) to have hereditary knowledge of the language. Finally, in Chapter 9, I discuss my conclusions regarding the status of Cornish in the nineteenth century and how the archival evidence can offer a variety of possible interpretations.

The subject of minority language decline, endangerment and death has long been explored by researchers. As I shall explore in Chapter 2, William Scawen described the reasons for the decline of Cornish in detail during the 1680s. In the twentieth century, as ethnographic methods came into greater prominence within academia, the study of minority languages, their status, and the threats faced by them grew as a research area.⁶ Definitions of the stages common to many minority languages as their use declines are, therefore, highly useful for both researchers and language communities seeking to either halt the decline of their language or revive one previously lost or in grave danger of dying out. However, many different terms are used and without clear definitions the differences between them can become confused.

⁶ See, for example: Maurice Swadesh, "Sociologic Notes on Obsolescent Languages," *International Journal of American Linguistics*, 14.4, (1948), 226–235; Nancy C. Dorian, "The Fate of Morphological Complexity in Language Death: Evidence from East Sutherland Gaelic," *Language*, 54.3 (1978), 590–603; Igor Krupnik, "Extinction of the Sireniki Eskimo Language: 1895–1960," *Études/ Inuit/ Studies*, 15.2, (1991), 3–22; David Crystal, *Language Death*, (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Analysis of the changing positions of minority languages, and the reasons behind this, has long been a topic of research for academics in the fields of both languages and linguistics. Harrison concludes that the terminology used to explain this often takes the form of metaphors.⁷ One of the principal phrases used in this field is the concept of language death—when one language is completely replaced by another, leading to parents no longer passing on the original language to their children.⁸ Nettle and Romaine define this occurrence further: top-down death involves the disappearance of a language from official domains of use, such as those of government and religion, leading to the language functioning only in domestic settings amongst families and friends.⁹ The obverse, language death from the bottom-up, occurs when people stop using a language in the family and it only survives in a ceremonial form.¹⁰ The crucial concept here is that this definition of language death concerns the processes through which a language dies out, not a definition of its status as dead. For a language to be living, therefore, it needs to have speakers using it across a range of domains.

Nevertheless, this is problematic. As Crystal points out, how many fluent speakers are needed to guarantee the continued vitality of a language?¹¹ Do these speakers need to be fluent? A language could remain, but only in a recorded form, this allows for the continued existence of Latin and Ancient Greek. A dead language may no longer be living, it may only survive in a recorded form (both literary and auditory), it may even have only one living speaker, who might not be fluent, but it does exist.

Total death is different from language death. Total death, as described by Mufwene, occurs when there are no longer any living speakers of a

⁷ K. David Harrison, *When Languages Die: The Extinction of the World's Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge*, (Oxford University Press, 2007), 5.

⁸ Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine, *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages*, (Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

⁹ Nettle and Romaine, *Vanishing Voices*, 91.

¹⁰ Nettle and Romaine, *Vanishing Voices*, 92.

¹¹ Crystal, *Language Death*, 11.

language, after a process of language death has occurred.¹² Unsurprisingly, as Harrison has shown, further metaphors are needed to distinguish between these, extinction being frequently used in this context. According to Campbell, a language is extinct when it cannot be spoken by anyone in any domain of use.¹³ If we compare this definition to the definitions of language death above, it is problematic. As we have seen, languages can continue to exist in a recorded form and without fluent speakers. Crucial, therefore, to these definitions of the living (or otherwise) status of a language is the number and fluency of speakers. Hinton et al. define a language as almost extinct when it has between 1 and 100 users in communities where no one else knows or uses the language.¹⁴ This, by itself, would appear to be a reasonable definition. If a language has under 100 users, it is in danger of dying out if these people are not replaced. However, as Crystal points out, without wider population statistics to give context, even this definition is problematic.¹⁵ If 500, or even 100, speakers constitute the entire population of an isolated village in which only one unique language is spoken, there is no pressure from another language, and all children will be brought up speaking the language, it could be argued that the language is in a healthy position. Consequently, extinction, as a definition of a language's condition, and as also described as total death above, should be reserved for those situations in which a language has no living speakers at all, and this is the definition of language extinction which I shall be applying to my analysis of the issues in this book.

Nevertheless, we still require further terminology to define Cornish during the period of this study. If a language still has remaining speakers and a recorded form, but is evidently undergoing a process of language death what terms can we use to describe it? The term moribund, which Crystal notes was first adapted from the discipline of medicine

¹² Salikoko Mufwene, "Language Birth and Death," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33 (2004): 201–222, 204.

¹³ Lyle Campbell, *Historical Linguistics: An Introduction*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 317.

¹⁴ Leanne Hinton, Leena Huss, and Gerald Roche, (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language Revitalisation*, (Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2018). xxi.

¹⁵ Crystal, *Language Death*, 11.

by Michael Krauss, centres around the importance of intergenerational transmission of a language.¹⁶ Harrison also defines a language as moribund if it is no longer being learned by children as a native language.¹⁷ Eventually remaining speakers of the language will age and die and as they are no longer being replaced by native speakers the language too will die out. Similarly, McCloskey emphasises the position of a moribund language as being only used by a dwindling number of elderly speakers, a consideration key to any discussion of Cornish in the nineteenth century.¹⁸ In 1995, the United Kingdom's Foundation for Endangered Languages was established. It defines moribund languages as those not being transmitted to the next generation.¹⁹ This offers a term to use to describe a particular form of language death and therefore is the interpretation of the term which I shall use during this book.

For those languages which lack living speakers, but which do exist in recorded forms, Hinton et al. offer the term dormant.²⁰ This term is important as it helps to add clarification to languages which are not spoken, but which are linked to a particular ethnic population.²¹ Again, this appellation offers a means to describe a particular set of circumstances pertaining to language death and I will use this definition here. There is also the possibility of language preservation, where the texts and accounts of a language exist as artefacts and could be used to revive, or at least keep a record of a language's existence.²² This leads into maintenance, where some use is made of a heritage language alongside the dominant language.²³

Thus far I have examined some of the terms used by those academics researching the status of minority languages. As is to be expected, there

¹⁶ Crystal, *Language Death*, 20.

¹⁷ Harrison, *When Languages Die*, 8.

¹⁸ James McCloskey, "A Global Silencing," *The Poetry Ireland Review*, 52 (1997): 41–46, 41.

¹⁹ Crystal, *Language Death*, viii.

²⁰ Hinton, Huss, and Roche, (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language Revitalisation*, xxvi.

²¹ M. Paul Lewis, and Gary F. Simons, "Assessing Endangerment: Expanding Fishman's GIDS," *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique—Romanian Review of Linguistics*, 55.2 (2010), 103–120, 109.

²² Mufwene, "Language Birth and Death," 208.

²³ Nancy Hornberger and Haley De Korne, "Is Revitalization Through Education Possible?," in Hinton, Huss, Leena and Roche, *The Routledge Handbook of Language Revitalisation*, (Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2018), 94–103, 95.

are further terms which examine the processes by which languages begin, and experience, language death. Language shift, whereby a population chooses to move from speaking the community vernacular language to another (often dominant) language is problematic in that it encompasses a whole series of decisions and events by which a whole community, or perhaps just sections of it, chooses to change the principal language they use to communicate.²⁴ Kandler et al. emphasise the often difficult decisions this involves, including of issues of perceived language prestige, job opportunities, and mobility.²⁵

I discuss issues concerning this process of language shift with regards to the switch from using Cornish to using English in Chapter 2. Key to this switch is whether the Cornish people chose to adopt English themselves—otherwise known as voluntary shift, or whether the use of English was imposed on them, a forced shift. Nettle and Romaine describe voluntary shift as the process by which a population accord more value to another language and therefore switch to using it. Forced shift is the process by which a population is made to switch to using another language. For Nettle and Romaine, the Cornish people were not forced to switch to using English.²⁶ In communities which assimilate and switch to using another, often majority, language, patterns of language usage involving bilingualism are witnessed. As we have seen above, it is when the former language is maintained by the elderly and is no longer being passed onto and used by the youngest generation that language death follows. Yet, this process of language switching is not as clearcut as moving from monolingual use of the original language, through bilingualism, to residual bilingualism in a small section of the population. Often, the usage of the original language can become confined to certain settings and practices. When this leads to the vernacular language remaining in everyday use, but another language being used in higher

²⁴ Harrison, *When Languages Die*, 98.

²⁵ Anne Kandler, Roman Unger, and James Steele, “Language shift, bilingualism and the future of Britain’s Celtic languages,” *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences*, 365, 1559 (2010): 3855–3864, 3855.

²⁶ Nettle and Romaine, *Vanishing Voices*, 91.

status settings, or even just for written texts, it is known as diglossia.²⁷ Here, the languages can co-exist because they are not competing within the domains of use.

Language shift by using different languages in different social settings matches the concept of top-down language death (if imposed) or bottom-up language death (if chosen by the community) as discussed above. We should introduce two further terms to this discussion here: threatened and endangered languages. A language is described as threatened if it has a small range and population sizes, and experiences rapid speaker decline.²⁸ An endangered language is one where those people who know the language no longer use it and younger generations do not learn it.²⁹ As such these terms differ slightly, but significantly, from the terms extinct, moribund, and dormant previously discussed. I shall also be using them with the definitions above in this book. There is also the possibility of so-called language suicide, when a community chooses not to speak their language.³⁰ In Chapters 2 and 3, I will be discussing the period in which Cornish was in decline and assessing whether it was threatened or endangered and why some elements of Cornish society switched to using English. Conversely, Chapters 5 to 8 will discuss the period in which the language revival begins to move to the fore. This raises further questions as to whether a language in the process of revival is threatened or endangered.

As we have seen, academics researching the use, decline, and revitalisation of minority languages have defined terms to describe the status of a language and the process of language shift. The next stage in minority language research was to examine this process and identify the stages common to the decline of many minority languages. This led to the creation of frameworks which could be used to assess the health of a

²⁷ Kandler, Unger, and Steele, “Language shift, bilingualism and the future of Britain’s Celtic languages,” 3858.

²⁸ Amano et al., “Global distribution and drivers of language extinction risk,” *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* 281: 20,141,574 (2014), 4.

²⁹ Hinton, Leanne, Huss, Leena and Roche, Gerald (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language Revitalisation*, xxi.

³⁰ Crystal, *Language Death*, 86.

language and describe steps which could be taken by communities to revitalise their languages.

Joshua Fishman's work has centred on sociolinguistic concepts of languages and their position in society. His 1991 monograph, *Reversing Language Shift*, is one of the key texts concerned with judging the health of a language revival.³¹ Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Scale [hereafter GIDS], introduced in this work, offers a means of analysing the situation of an endangered language and steps to be worked through when seeking to revive a language.³² Key to GIDS is Fishman's belief that parental decisions regarding intergenerational transmission are crucial to the continued use of minority languages. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, certain families in West Cornwall did pass on their knowledge of Cornish to their children even when this amounted to a few words and phrases. Fishman also emphasises those fundamental domains in which languages need to be used: education, mass media, and governmental services. Renko-Michelson used GIDS to assess the status of Cornish in the twenty-first century.³³ In addition to this, one previous study has applied Fishman's GIDS to the status of Cornish in the nineteenth century: that of Kenneth MacKinnon on the contemporary position of Cornish for the Government Office of the South-West in 2000.³⁴ He found it a useful tool for tracking the process of the twentieth-century language revival.

Fishman revisited GIDS and his ideas concerning the reversal of language shift in an edited volume of 2001.³⁵ Although Fishman's scale has been both used as a basis for assessing the health of minority languages since its introduction, it has, in turn, been adapted by others seeking to explore definitions of language revitalisation and death, and other scales of assessment have also been produced. One of the best-known of these is that of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and

³¹ Joshua A. Fishman, *Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages*, (Multilingual matters, 1991).

³² Lewis & Simons, "Assessing Endangerment," 105.

³³ Zsuzsanna Renko-Michelson, "Language Death and Revival: Cornish as a Minority Language in UK," *ESUKA-JEFUL*, 4.2 (2013), 179–197.

³⁴ Ken MacKinnon, *Cornish Language Study*, (Government Office of the South-West, 2000).

³⁵ Joshua A. Fishman (ed.), *Can threatened languages be saved? Reversing language shift revisited: an twenty-first century perspective*, (Multilingual matters Ltd, 2001).

Cultural Organisation [UNESCO].³⁶ The UNESCO framework offers both a descriptor as well as a numerical ranking. It makes a distinction between levels of endangerment according to the number of speakers, but the only mention of domains other than the spoken use of the language comes in the ‘unsafe’ category. No allowance is made for languages which may have a strong literary form. Similarly, the descriptors in the framework produced by *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, an annual online and print reference guide to the world’s languages, focus on the strength of the spoken language.³⁷ Again, this framework offers a descriptor of the language, but here there is no numerical ranking. However, it does offer a concept of the number of speakers required to describe a language as nearly extinct.

Lewis and Simons offered a critique of GIDS and created an expanded version of the scale in 2010. Amongst their reasons for doing so was their observation that GIDS could not be used to describe all possible language situations.³⁸ Their criticisms also extended to both the UNESCO and Ethnologue frameworks. Lewis and Simons praised the wider categorisation for the less widely used languages within the UNESCO framework but felt that their label ‘Safe’ covered far too many eventualities.³⁹ Within their work, Lewis and Simons highlight the importance of the identity of a language and how this relates to how it is used.⁴⁰ Lewis and Simons then offer four possible categorisations in response to this question: Historical, Heritage, Home, and Vehicular.⁴¹ A historical language is extinct, without speakers or an identifying community linked to it. Heritage languages can be described as dormant. They might be used at a ceremonial level, but, importantly, can also be being used by a growing number of new speakers. A home language is one being used daily within the home. How it can be further defined depends on other factors linked to language decline or endangerment. Finally, a vehicular language is one used by different speech communities who use

³⁶ UNESCO (Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 8).

³⁷ Lewis and Simons, “Assessing Endangerment,” 108.

³⁸ Lewis, and Simons, “Assessing Endangerment,” 106.

³⁹ Lewis and Simons, “Assessing Endangerment,” 108.

⁴⁰ Lewis and Simons, “Assessing Endangerment,” 114.

⁴¹ Lewis and Simons, “Assessing Endangerment,” 114.

Table 1.1 Lee and Van Way: LEI scale of intergenerational transmission⁴⁴

5	4	3	2	1	0
Critically Endangered	Severely endangered	Endangered	Threatened	Vulnerable	Safe
There are only a few elderly speakers	Many of the Grandparent generation speak the language, but the younger people generally do not	Some adults in the community are speakers, but the language is not spoken by children	Most adults in the community generally are speakers, but children generally are not	Most adults and some children are speakers	All members of the community, including children, speak the language

it as a common language. It therefore has a purpose both for its own language community as well as other speakers.⁴²

The Catalogue of Endangered Languages offers a further framework for assessing the status of languages, the Language Endangerment Index [hereafter LEI]. This framework was designed to allow assessment of the status of any language, even if not much precise information is available.⁴³ LEI assessment is based on four scales: intergenerational transmission; absolute number of speakers; speaker number trends; and domains of use. These scales are reproduced as Tables 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4.

Lee and Van Way detail a series of five reasons why the LEI offers a valuable way of assessing languages, not all of which are relevant to

⁴² Lewis and Simons, "Assessing Endangerment," 114–115.

⁴³ Nala Huiying Lee, and John van Way, "Assessing levels of endangerment in the Catalogue of Endangered Languages (ELCat) using the Language Endangerment Index (LEI)," *Language in Society*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (April 2016), 271–292, 273.

⁴⁴ Lee and van Way, "Assessing levels," 281.

Table 1.2 Lee and Van Way: LEI Scale of Absolute Number of Speakers⁴⁵

5	4	3	2	1	0
Critically endangered	Severely endangered	Endangered	Threatened	Vulnerable	Safe
1–9 speakers	10–99 speakers	100–999 speakers	1000–9999 speakers	10,000–99,000 speakers	> 100,000 speakers

Table 1.3 Lee and Van Way: LEI Scale of Speaker Number Trends⁴⁶

5	4	3	2	1	0
Critically endangered	Severely endangered	Endangered	Threatened	Vulnerable	Safe
A small percentage of the community speaks the language, and speaker numbers are decreasing very rapidly	Less than half of the community speaks the language, and speaker numbers are decreasing at an accelerating rate	Only about half of community members speak the language. Speaker numbers are decreasing steadily, but not at an accelerated pace	A majority of community members speak the language. Speaker numbers are gradually decreasing	Most members of the community speak the language. Speaker numbers may be decreasing, but very slowly	Almost all community members speak the language, and speaker numbers are stable or increasing

⁴⁵ Lee and Van Way, “Assessing levels,” 281.

⁴⁶ Lee and Van Way, “Assessing levels,” 283.

Table 1.4 Lee and Van Way: LEI Scale of Domains of Use⁴⁷

5	4	3	2	1	0
Critically endangered	Severely endangered	Endangered	Threatened	Vulnerable	Safe
Only used in a few very specific domains, such as in ceremonies, songs, prayer, proverbs, or certain limited domestic activities	Used mainly just in the home and/or with family, and may not be the primary language even in those domains for many community members	Used mainly just in the home and/or with family, but remains the primary language of these domains for many community members	Used in some nonofficial domains along with other languages, and remains the primary language used in the home for many community members	Used in most domains except for official ones such as government, mass media, education, etc	Used in most domains, including official ones such as government, mass media, education, etc

the historical assessment of Cornish.⁴⁸ The framework allows the non-expert to gather an overall view of the issue. It can aid communities with an endangered language to highlight the issue, and it offers a tool for researchers to assess the situation of a language. It is for this final reason, that the framework offers a tool for assessing the status of languages in a variety of contexts that I have chosen to use the LEI to determine the condition and standing of Cornish at key points throughout the period covered in this book.

⁴⁷ Lee and Van Way, “Assessing levels,” 285.

⁴⁸ Lee and Van Way, “Assessing levels,” 272. The other reasons consider: (iv) comparison of language statuses between languages in different situation, which can assist with funding proposals; and (v) any possible correlation between biodiversity and linguistic diversity. Questions regarding the funding of Cornish during the nineteenth century did not, as far as I have discovered, arise; and unlike many world languages, Cornish is not particularly linked with vocabulary relating to biodiversity.

The LEI Scale of Intergenerational Transmission reproduced in Table 1.1 offers four levels to describe a language which is not being transmitted to the children's generation, as opposed to two in the original GIDS, and three in the UNESCO framework. Even the fifth level, that described as vulnerable, allows for a language to only be used by some children. Therefore, a greater range of definitions is afforded to us by using just this scale alone. The LEI is designed that it can be used to assess a language on the four factors represented by the four scales yet also allows for an absence of data or information on any the scales to still permit an assessment.⁴⁹ This is key to its usefulness in assessing the historical use of Cornish, where the evidence can offer a variety of interpretations.

The division of the scale of Absolute Number of Speakers, reproduced as Table 1.2, seems to make allowances for those situations where a language might be spoken by entire small, isolated community without any threat of language shift towards a neighbouring language. In those cases, languages are endangered by the possibility of their own population naturally dwindling, rather than language use changing. As I shall show when discussing the use of Cornish in the nineteenth century, there are points where we can name individuals able to speak some Cornish, and they are listed by contemporary philologists and antiquarians, thus this framework allows some scope for movement between categories at any given moment in time.

As with the scale of Absolute Speaker Numbers, being able to assess trends in speaker numbers is an additional valuable tool in judging the condition and standing of Cornish during the period covered by this book. Of interest here is the differentiation between the rates of decline in the number of speakers, their capabilities, and how this affects the position and status of a language. Of great relevance to the use or otherwise of Cornish in the period under reflection, is the final scale in the LEI, the Scale of Domains of Use. As can be seen in Table 1.4, three levels of the scale measure language use mainly carried out within the family and home, and a fourth level describes language use in nonofficial domains.

⁴⁹ Lee and Van Way, "Assessing levels," 278.

Table 1.5 Lee and Van Way: Language Endangerment Index and Levels of Certainty⁵¹

Language endangerment index	Level of certainty
100–81% = Critically endangered	25 points possible = 100% certain, based on the evidence
80–61% = Severely endangered	20 points possible = 80% certain, based on the evidence
60–41% = Endangered	15 points possible = 60% certain, based on the evidence
40–21% = Threatened	10 points possible = 40% certain, based on the evidence
20–1% = Vulnerable	5 points possible = 20% certain, based on the evidence
0% = Safe	

How the LEI differs from all the previous frameworks discussed previously, is in the way it combines the information used in Tables 1.1–1.4 to produce an overall score to judge both how safe, or otherwise, the condition of a language might be, but also, how certain we can be of this status being correct. The score for intergenerational transmission is multiplied by two and added to the other scores (this means the highest possible score is 25 if all the tables are used). This total is then converted into a percentage according to how many scores are used.⁵⁰

The double weighting given to the score for intergenerational transmission reflects the importance Fishman gave to this within the GIDS framework. All languages need to produce new speakers to survive. Table 1.5 offers the endangerment index following use of the above calculations to judge the levels of endangerment for a language at any given point. According to how much of the framework detailed in Tables 1.1–1.4 is used, we can then calculate how certain this level is judged to be.

Alongside an analysis of the evidence discussed in this book, I offer a description of the status of the Cornish language at key periods

⁵⁰ Lee and Van Way, “Assessing levels,” 285.

⁵¹ Lee and Van Way, “Assessing levels,” 286.

during the timeframe covered by my research by applying the definitions identified above according to the evidence presented.

The Cornish language community has produced several discussions regarding the decline of Cornish in the period before the death of Dolly Pentreath in 1777, and its existence or otherwise between this point and the publication of Henry Jenner's *Handbook* in 1904. Academic studies of Cornish during the period under consideration here are few and often form part of a work examining other aspects of the language.⁵² In his monograph *Cornish Literature*, Murdoch surveys the surviving remains of Cornish manuscripts, but he does offer some analysis of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵³ Murdoch introduces reasons why Cornish declined, including the domination of English, a lack of printed literature and the Book of Common Prayer and the Bible not being available in Cornish. Murdoch acknowledges that this terminology needs to be unpicked. He offers a discussion of what is meant by language death, that it occurs with the death of the penultimate speaker or, interestingly, that language death could occur with the passing of the final individual who uses a language as their main language but is able to use others. That language death could be taken from the point of the death of the penultimate speaker is an understandable marker, with the argument that the one remaining speaker has no one left with whom to communicate. However, this does not account for the possibility of a language spoken by several individuals who are geographically isolated, and unable to communicate with each other through other forms. The death of the final person who uses a particular language as their main one is also problematic as this does not account for bilingual speakers who mainly communicate in another language, as is the current situation with Cornish. Murdoch goes so far as to describe identifying a final speaker as less relevant.⁵⁴ This is a very different opinion compared

⁵² See for example: Jon Mills, "Genocide and Ethnocide: The Suppression of the Cornish Language," in *Interfaces in Language*, ed. by John Partridge, (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 189–206. In his assessment of the Cornish language in relation to official policies through history, Mills concludes that there is little evidence to show Cornish being used in the nineteenth century, 201.

⁵³ Brian Murdoch, *Cornish Literature*, (D.S. Brewer, 1993).

⁵⁴ Murdoch, *Cornish Literature*, 4.

with those researchers for whom tracing a known line of unbroken transmission of the language is key. Murdoch also discusses the importance of Cornish as a community language in daily use and points out that over the course of the nineteenth century interest in Cornish from antiquarians and scholars was growing.⁵⁵ For Murdoch, Cornish did not die because there was always a knowledge of the language, although it ceased as a community language. Writing as he was on Cornish literature, Murdoch emphasises the few literary remains which date from this period, and their overall importance.

In charting the decline of Cornish during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Murdoch differentiates between those who had a transmitted knowledge of the language and others who were further removed.⁵⁶ This is a key point to make. As the eighteenth century progressed, those men attempting to preserve Cornish were doing so from an increasingly difficult position, in some cases having not learned the language in the home as a child. Murdoch's conclusion is that Cornish ceased to function as a community language as it was not being transmitted to younger generations but, the language continued to exist because it had a presence in the written word. This would, therefore, allow for a revival to occur.

For Payton, Cornish historian and former Director of the Institute of Cornish Studies, Cornish survived.⁵⁷ Payton discusses examples of those individuals known to have spoken Cornish during the period after Dolly Pentreath's death and although he does not go so far as to comment or reflect on the status of the language during this period, he does raise the point discussed above regarding how many speakers constitute a living language whilst mentioning the case of John Davey (1812–1891), often cited as the last speaker with a knowledge of Cornish.⁵⁸ Davey, from Zennor, learned Cornish from his father according to the St Ives historian John Hobson Matthews.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Murdoch, *Cornish Literature*, 4.

⁵⁶ Murdoch, *Cornish Literature*, 132.

⁵⁷ Philip Payton, *Cornwall: A History*, (Cornwall Editions Limited, 2004), 40.

⁵⁸ Payton, *Cornwall: A History*, 176.

⁵⁹ John Hobson Matthews, *A History of the Parishes of Saint Ives, Lelant, Towednack and Zennor, in the County of Cornwall*, (Elliot Stock, 1892), 404.

For Wakelin, like Murdoch, the work of the nineteenth-century philologists and antiquarians in studying texts and publishing editions of texts and dictionaries indicates there was a growing interest in Cornish.⁶⁰ Wakelin does not comment on what these endeavours might have meant with regards to the status of the language, although he does state that these written works do not equate to Cornish becoming more widely spoken.

The fullest study of the history of the Cornish language was written by the Celtic historian Ellis.⁶¹ For Ellis, Cornish was a dead language which could still be found in place and personal names, alongside Cornish dialect terms.⁶² Ellis offers no definition of the term died, nor what the persistence of terminology in placenames, grammar, and dialect means in terms of the status of the language. However, for Ellis a language does not die alongside the death of the final remaining speaker because later generations do retain childhood knowledge.⁶³ Here, Ellis echoes the viewpoint that intergenerational transmission keeps a language alive. However, he does not offer a commentary on why he sees a difference between the death of the final speaker and continued use of a language by people with some knowledge. The condition Ellis describes here seems to me to be that of isolated second language or bilingual speakers lacking opportunities to converse with others in the same position. Ellis posits an interesting idea first mooted by Jenner. The reason the numerals in Cornish survived for so long was that it is easier to count in the first language in which one is taught to count, rather than in a second language.⁶⁴ It seems that for Ellis, people with knowledge of these words are very different from those people who might have been able to hold conversations. For example, Ellis questions whether

⁶⁰ Martyn Wakelin, *Language and History in Cornwall*, (Leicester University Press, 1975), 24.

⁶¹ Peter Berresford Ellis, *The Cornish Language and its Literature*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1974).

⁶² Ellis, *The Cornish Language*, 1.

⁶³ Ellis, *The Cornish Language*, 123.

⁶⁴ Ellis, *The Cornish Language*, 126, quoting Jenner, "Traditional relics of the Cornish language in Mount's Bay in 1875," *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 1875–6.

John Davey learned Cornish from reading Pryce's *Archaeologia Cornu-Britannia*, a book known to have been owned by the family.⁶⁵ Ellis raises an important distinction between those individuals who can learn a language from a literature (whether textbooks or other sources) and those who can remember a few stock phrases. Unfortunately, Ellis does not go so far as to explain what this means in terms of the status of Cornish language, he only laments that Jenner did not meet Davey and take note of his knowledge.

Ellis notes the nineteenth century saw a growing interest in local antiquities within Cornwall which led to the establishment of the Cornwall Philosophical Institution in 1818; this became the Royal Institution of Cornwall in 1821. In 1833, the Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society was also founded. As I shall show in Chapter 8, systematic examination of the journals of these learned societies shows that papers were given on various aspects of the Cornish language. There was a scientific interest in the language from within the Cornish community. However, Ellis does not comment on what effect this increased scholarship had on the status of, or interest in, the Cornish language.

Ellis returned to the subject of the Cornish language in 1998 in a short work, *The Story of the Cornish Language*.⁶⁶ Here, he asks whether Cornish did die and offers a definition of what he means by the concept of language death.⁶⁷ Ellis's definition of language death, that it occurs after there is no more legacy knowledge of the language is an interesting one, because it makes no provision for the work of philologists or language learners, thus it seems that for Ellis, the academic and preservation work of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is to be categorised separately. As in his 1974 work, the important factor is intergenerational transmission of the language, and Ellis continues by giving examples of families where knowledge of Cornish was passed on and concluding that Cornish continued to be spoken until the end of the nineteenth century.⁶⁸ I feel Ellis states his position far more clearly than in 1974, although in

⁶⁵ Ellis, *The Cornish Language*, 129.

⁶⁶ Peter Berresford Ellis, *The Story of the Cornish Language*, (Tor Mark, 1998).

⁶⁷ Ellis, *The Story of the Cornish Language*, 20.

⁶⁸ Ellis, *The Story of the Cornish Language*, 20–21.