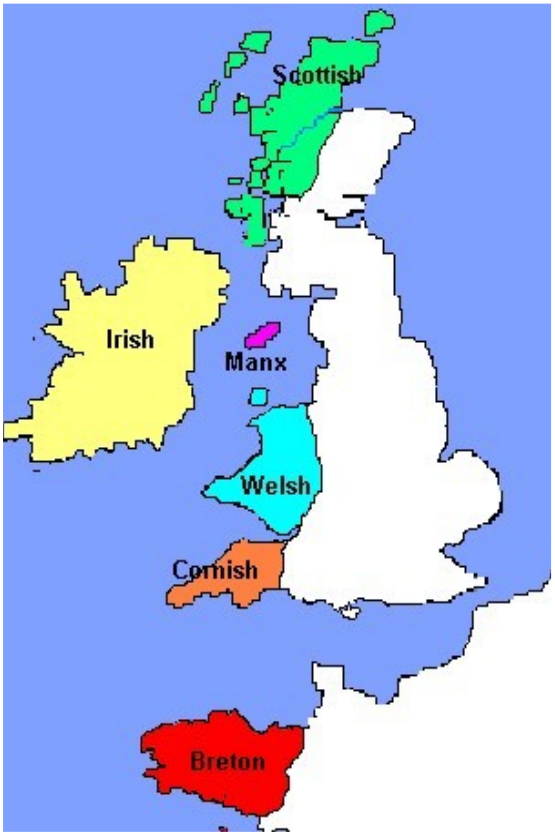
Celtic Languages

1. History

From about 500 BC, the Celtic languages were spoken across much of Europe, but exist today mostly in the British Isles, where they have been spoken since the Middle Ages (5th to 15th centuries). There are currently more than 800,000 speakers of Celtic languages which include **Welsh** (around 500,000 speakers in Wales), **Irish Gaelic** (80,000 speakers in Ireland and Northern Ireland), **Scottish Gaelic** (60,000 speakers in Scotland), **Cornish** (300 speakers in Cornwall), **Manx Gaelic** (300 speakers in the Isle of Man) and **Breton** (200,000 speakers in Brittany – many people fled to France during the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain in the 6th century). The languages Cornish and Manx are endangered languages and almost became extinct in the 19th century, but due to a revival in the 20th century, they were kept alive. The language Breton is today considered an endangered language as the number of speakers is falling every year, since most of the speakers are over 60 years old.



2. Grammar Structure

a) SVO vs VSO

Modern English is an **SVO** (**S**ubject-**V**erb-**O**bject) language. For example:

I	saw	the man	this morning
S	**V**	**O**	

However, Celtic languages have a **VSO** structure. For example (Irish Gaelic):

Chonaic	mé	an fear	ar maidin
saw	I	the man	on morning
V	**S**	**O**	

b) Inflected Prepositions

In Modern English, prepositions are not inflected, but in Celtic languages they are. For example:

English	**Welsh**
on	ar
on me	arnaf
on us	arnom
on you (s)	arnat
on you (pl)	arnoch
on him	arno
on her	arnyn
on them	arni

Some examples of inflected Portuguese prepositions: ao, à, pelo, pela, do, da

c) Substantive mutations

In English, nouns (substantives) are fixed and only change in the case of a plural. However, in Celtic languages, they can change depending on the preceding preposition. For example:

English	Irish Gaelic
the man	an fear
of the man	an fhir
to the man	don fhear

Here is an example of a substantive mutation in a plural:

English	Welsh
boat	cwch
boats	cychod

Note that, in Celtic languages, the letters ‘w’ and ‘y’ are considered to be vowels.

d) Verbs

Verb conjugation is very different between English and the Celtic languages.

Example:

English: The man was painting a chair yesterday.

Irish:	Bhí	an fear	ag	péinteáil	cathaoir	inné
	was	the man	ing	paint	chair	yesterday

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ri1Vw3w1_10

Examples of Scottish Gaelic music:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7jW5qDexnc
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jC-CWsQ-KTo

Example of Irish Gaelic music:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y30sWVkg6OU

Example of traditional Irish music called “Ceilidh” music (pronounced “kaylee”):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKiXmEsTD6M

Example of traditional Scottish Ceilidh music:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NxybGw1WchE

Example of modern Irish folk music:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67HYCMLJlQo