Foreign neighbours: Climate, language, and the future[1]

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ABSTRACT

Translation is predicated on a knowledge of other languages, and the knowledge of foreign languages distinguishes translators from other language professionals, such as copy editors or copywriters. Yet, little attention is generally paid to the consequences of language acquisition for the world view of translators. In this article, it is argued that altered notions of time and attention follow on from immersion in other languages and that these changing perceptions are crucial to moving towards a more sustainable engagement with our planetary condition. If debates around artificial intelligence have dwelt overwhelmingly on the translation product – how the human translator fares in competition with the machine – much less has been written about translation process, about the lifelong acquisition of languages by translators which informs their stance towards societies and cultures. Using two minority-language accounts from the Western seaboard of Europe, the article explores the elements of language contact that counter dominant short-term and extractivist visions of what constitutes cultural contact and political value. It is argued that the value of foreign language knowledge goes beyond a technical or instrumental facilitation of the translator's task, and provides a crucial justification for multilingual translator education in a period of highly endangered biocultural diversity in Europe.

Keywords: translation, minority, ecology, biocultural diversity, education

Tuji sosedje: podnebje, jezik in prihodnost

IZVLEČEK

Prevajanje temelji na znanju drugih jezikov. Prevajalci se razlikujejo od drugih jezikovnih strokovnjakov, kot so lektorji, redaktorji, uredniki ali tekstopisci, ravno po znanju tujih jezikov. Kljub temu pa se na splošno posveča malo pozornosti, na kakšen način znanje tujih jezikov vpliva na svetovni nazor prevajalcev. Poglavitna teza članka je, da poglobitev v druge jezike spremeni naše pojmovanje časa in pozornosti ter da so te spremembe v dojemanju ključnega pomena za bolj trajnostni odnos do stanja, v katerem se nahaja naš planet. Če so se razprave o umetni inteligenci dosedaj večinoma osredotočale na prevajalske izdelke (npr. na to, kako se človeški prevajalec znajde v konkurenci s strojem), je bilo veliko manj napisanega o tem, kako vseživljenjsko usvajanje jezikov prevajalcev izoblikuje njihov

1 This article is based on a lecture delivered to the Faculty of Arts, Aberystwyth University, Wales on 6 September 2023 on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the University.

pogled na družbe in kulture. Članek na podlagi dveh primerov, ki opisujejo rabo manjšinskih jezikov z zahodne obale Evrope, raziskuje elemente jezikovnega stika, ki nasprotujejo prevladujočim kratkoročnim in ekstraktivističnim pogledom na to, kaj je kulturni stik in politična vrednost. V zaključku je postavljena trditev, da vrednost znanja tujega jezika presega zgolj to, da tehnično ali instrumentalno olajša prevajalčevo nalogo, temveč da ta dodatna vrednost predstavlja ključen zagovor upravičenosti večjezičnega izobraževanja prevajalcev v obdobju zelo ogrožene biokulturne raznolikosti v Evropi.

Ključne besede: prevajanje, manjšine, ekologija, biokulturna raznolikost, izobraževanje

1. Introduction

1994 saw the publication of the first issue of *The Letter*, the journal of Lacanian psychoanalysis in Ireland. The opening article by Cormac Gallagher was entitled "Tír gan teanga, tír gan anam: An Irish Stew?" A founding figure of the Lacanian movement in the country, Gallagher set out to explore, in his own words:

> the position of Irish people with regard to their native tongue and in particular the effect of the position on our patients' sense of identity and on a practice of psychoanalysis that lays such emphasis on speech and language. (Gallagher 1994, 1)

According to Ian Parker and David Pavón-Cuéllar, one of the tasks of the analyst "is to *listen* to this speaking subject, providing a strange confidential space for this analysis and to speak of their distress and to hear connections made between past and present in their own speech, connections that they have never heard before" (Parker and Pavón-Cuéllar 2021, viii). What happens then for the speaking subject when that speech changes, when making connections between past and present is radically disrupted by language shift? Gallagher argues that in Irish life this question is largely neglected due to the toxic legacy of a form of utilitarianism that asks the corrosive question of Irish, "what use is it? – as if a language were not what creates a subject or a people, rather than simply being an instrument of communication to be abandoned when a more useful one appears" (Gallagher 1994, 6). I want to use this notion of utilitarian extractivism – which underpins the unsustainable exploitation of the planet's resources in the service of an ideology of untrammelled growth – to argue that the case of minoritized languages and modern continental European languages in these islands must be considered together. In terms of both the climate emergency as well as desirable societal and human outcomes, we need to conceive of language plurality as a collective ambition rather than as an evolutionary bun fight for individual spoils.

Part of the challenge of considering the shared interests of different language disciplines and their advocates is dealing with narrative capture. When Sarah G. Thomason argues

in *Endangered Languages* that the causes of language endangerment are diverse, her list is hardly controversial: "They range from the death of all of the speakers (by massacre, starvation, or devastating introduced diseases) to social, political, and economic pressures that lead people to give up their minority language in favour of a majority language" (Thomason 2015, 2). The image that springs to mind here is that of struggle, of brutal competition where the least well-adapted perish. The credo of Social Darwinism, the survival of the fittest, is endlessly amplified by the competitive ethic of contemporary market capitalism which has provided the template for much social policymaking in recent decades. As the philosopher Richard Rorty (1979) points out, it is "pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions" (cited in Jackson 2021, 86). That this evolutionary picture should also be used as a cover story for language decline, language death or language displacement is scarcely surprising. However, if we look at the origins of the metaphor of struggle and its subsequent fortunes in the scientific world, an alternative conceptual path emerges, one that is more capable of encompassing language diversity and also more sympathetic to life practices that are less likely to destroy the planet.

After reading Thomas Malthus's famous *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) in October 1838, Charles Darwin claimed that on the basis of his own observations of the struggle for existence in the animal and plant kingdom, "it at once struck me that under these circumstances favourable conditions would tend to be preserved, and unfavourable ones to be destroyed. The result of this would be the formation of new species. Here then I had at last got a theory by which to work" (cited in Jackson 2021, 87). In other words, one of the core texts of laissez-faire capitalism provided a working hypothesis for Darwin's enquiries. As the historian Theodore Roszak has argued: "Far from reading the ethos of the jungle into civilized society, Darwin read the ethics of industrial capitalism into the jungle, that all life had to become what it had become in the early mill towns: a vicious 'struggle for existence'" (Roszak 1992, 153). The difficulty with this view was how to combine massive evolutionary change with Gregor Mendel's notion of genetic inheritance as the transmission of fixed characteristics. The neo-Darwinian hypothesis that subsequently emerged explained away the contradiction between evolutionary change and static transmission using the idea of the chance mutation of genes, such that intense competition and blind chance became the guiding metaphors of the biological sciences. A young biologist by the name of Lynn Margulis was not convinced of the universal applicability of this hypothesis, for which she had found scant evidence outside the carefully controlled environment of the laboratory. In 1967, her article "On the Origins of Mitosing Cells" was published in the *Journal of Theoretical Biology* after being rejected 15 times. In this paper, she sketched out her emerging theory of endosymbiosis, the biological process that leads

one kind of bacteria to establish itself inside another kind of bacteria to produce a third, more complex nucleated cell. All living beings are the result of an evolutionary pact between different bacteria and every cell in our bodies bears the trace of this inheritance. As development economist Tim Jackson notes: "New species are a collaborative effort. Evolution emerges out of a cooperative response to the changing conditions of life" (Jackson 2021, 93). The notion of change as a cooperative response to changing conditions means a radically different set of metaphors or pictures for societies and a planet which desperately need to break with what Jackson dubs the "unholy trinity of Darwinian capitalism: nature as a struggle, profit as a competition and consumption as insatiability" (Jackson 2021, 92). If languages were viewed from a cooperative, symbiotic perspective, as opposed to a disjunctive, competitive one, how might they collectively contribute to new practices of dwelling in our societies? In this context, I want to explore two notions: time and attention. As part of this exploration, I will be making passing reference to two Irish-language works that are about Wales and were written more than fifty years apart: Pádraig Ó Fiannachta's *An Comharsa Choimthíoch* (1957) and Diarmuid Johnson's *Seacht dTír Seacht dTeanga* (2021).

2. Regime of time

Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, a future Professor of Irish in Maynooth University and translator of the Catholic Bible into Modern Irish, was part of a quixotically doomed project in the 1950s: that of converting Methodist Wales to Catholicism. The most tangible fruit of this project was not, unsurprisingly, a long list of born-again Welsh Catholics, but rather his 1957 work *An Chomarsa Choimhthíoch*, in which he tries to explain why two nations in such close geographical proximity, and with so many shared historical and linguistic links, should know so little about each other. Dispelling the myth of the neighbour's foreignness involves, for Ó Fiannachta, communicating a shared love among the Irish and the Welsh for the expressive possibilities of language:

> Tá cluas gear ag an mBreatnach chun gontact agus líofacht cainte. Tá ceard an *cynghanedd* ("dán díreach") á chleachtadh i gcónaí ag baird tuatha agus iolscoile. Tá rian an *cynghanedd* ar sheanfhocail agus coraí cainte e.g. *Nid ar redeg y mae aredig*, "Ní ar sodar a dhéantar treabhadh". (Ó Fiannachta 1957, 71)[2]

2 "The Welsh speaker has a sharp ear for precise, fluent speech. The *cynghanedd* metrical form is still practiced by poets in rural areas and in the academy. The influence of the *cynghanedd* can be seen in common expressions and in proverbs, e.g. *Nid ar redeg y mae aredig* ('More haste, less speed')." (All translations into English are by the author of the article.)

This degree of familiarity with the Welsh language and culture makes an important assumption about time and language that I want to develop here. The German sociologist Hartmut Rosa, in his recent work *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World* (2021), speaks of the fundamental social formation of modernity which is oriented towards an ever-accelerating culture of infinite growth. The rapid accumulation of resources is founded on a basic reorientation in modernity away from a society where there were fixed or pre-ordained positions or ranks in life and towards one where there is basically a privatization of what constitutes the good life. What Rosa means by this is that each individual must determine what the good life is, and must then organize access to the resources – health, wealth, human connections – that will ensure that such a life becomes a possibility. The difficulty for the modern self, however, is twofold.

Firstly, gaining access to resources proves increasingly fraught because the basic principle of competition in contemporary societies means that individuals are constantly asked to reinvent themselves – to become smarter, fitter, healthier, more performative. Secondly, the fixation on resources becomes an end in itself, and consequently we lose sight of what these resources might be for. In our desperate effort to procure the resources, the ends they serve – physical, mental and social wellbeing – become increasingly remote. The more quickly you go, in effect, the more instrumental your relationship with yourself and your environment proves. You have less time to attend to your inner self and your external world. The social consequences of time scarcity are a triple form of dissonance: ecological, social, and psychological. First, ecological dissonance because the kinetic inferno of material growth ignores the limits of the natural sustainability of the planet. Secondly, social dissonance because the dehumanization of technological and market instrumentalism means that a growing number of citizens feel left behind in the backwaters of political exclusion. And the third form of dissonance is psychological, insofar as the explosion of mental health issues in contemporary societies and the anti-depressants epidemic in the developed world – as detailed by Mark Fisher in *Capitalist Realism* (2009) – point to the heavy toll being taken on individual wellbeing due to the iron-pumping productivism of the modern corporatized workplace (Fisher 2009). Some of the questions that might then be asked are: Where do we situate modern languages in all of these developments? Should modern languages be considered a resource, according to a logic of accelerated accumulation, that will make you richer, smarter, faster? Should they be subsumed under the extractivist logic of a pragmatic instrument used to capture or exploit resources, whether domestic or foreign?

There is, of course, an immediate difficulty with these approaches. A basic feature of language learning is that it requires time. Lots of it. Ó Fiannachta first comes to Wales in 1948 to learn the living language, and his book appears nine years later.

Describing his first language learning experience, working on a farm near Llanbedr, Ó Fiannachta claims: "Chaithinn an lá le feirmeoir cheithre mhíle amach fén dtuaith. Do bhí Breatnais go leor ag muintir na feirme, ach ní raibh aon tsuim acu ina múineadh. Do bhíos féin óg, gan puinn tusiceana ar an saol mór agam agus is dócha go rabhas róbhog leo" (Ó Fiannachta 1957, 11–12).[3] As many unthumbed chapters of language manuals attest, language acquisition is not for the faint-hearted. Students of modern languages are constantly ambushed by the old dictum that the more you know, the more you know you don't know. As the applied linguist David Little pointed out in a lecture in University College Dublin on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), as one moves from level A1 to A2 and from A2 to B1, the progression in the amount of time needed to master the different levels is not arithmetical but geometrical. There is then, I would argue, a fundamental tension between what I have called elsewhere the instantaneous time of digital modernity and the durational time of second language acquisition (Cronin 2013, 494). Indeed, one of the major problems we are faced with as advocates of modern languages is that what we are representing appears to be seriously out of synch with the temporal regime of late modernity. What would happen, however, if this problem were to become part of the solution? What if, instead of trying to pass off language learning as something it is not – a quick fix – we were to make a virtue of its irreducible difference? In other words – if we accept, as we must – that acquiring an effective degree of proficiency in a foreign language requires an inescapable commitment to the long term, what would be the consequences? I would suggest there are at least two of them.

A first consequence pertains to language policy itself. From a durational perspective, language learning at the secondary level needs to be linked to language learning at primary and tertiary levels. Why? Because it is only by recognizing that language learning is a long-term, lifelong commitment that we are likely to achieve real proficiency in a language as opposed to getting caught in a delusional short-termism that promises learners, citizens and employers alike a competence that cannot be delivered. A second consequence is how thinking in terms of what Stewart Brand calls "the Long Now" – that is, considering the present from a long-range perspective – means asking why modern languages policies exclude modern languages (Brand 2000). Why is English often considered separately from Irish, Welsh, and other modern European continental languages in official policymaking? One of the major insights to have emerged in sociolinguistic debates around translanguaging, or what Alistair Pennycook and Emma

3 "I used to spend my days with a farmer four miles outside the town. The people on the farm were fluent Welsh speakers but they had no interest in teaching it to me. I was young myself, with little knowledge of the ways of the world, and I probably wasn't insistent enough."

Otsuji have dubbed "metrolingualism" is that language users tend not to have rigidly compartmentalized areas of language practice (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015). In effect, speakers have language repertoires that encompass all the languages they possess, and depending on the situation they will select and mix elements on this language continuum. As societies and cities increasingly become sites of what Jan Blommaert and others have called "linguistic superdiversity" (Blommaert 2013), translanguaging practices are even more in evidence, a fact acknowledged in the CEFR aspiration to the formation of the "plurilingual social agent". It can be argued that considering language as a lifelong practice means considering second language acquisition holistically from a translanguaging perspective. In other words, integrating the teaching of the language into the teaching of all the other languages the user speaks or acquires, rather than serially, as a kind of additional multilingualism where discrete competences are layered.

The long-term thinking embedded in the durational time of language knowledge is a crucial epistemic virtue in what Roman Krznaric calls our "age of pathological short-termism", where, "[n]ations bicker around international conference tables, focused on their near-term interests, while the planet burns and species disappear" (Krznaric 2020, 4). Finding out about the *comharsa coimhthíoch* or foreign neighbour through the medium of language takes time, and that is precisely why time and language matter in planetary terms in becoming better ancestors.

3. Regime of attention

Diarmuid Johnson is alive to the importance of ancestry and devotes the second chapter of his *Seacht dTír Seacht dTeanga* to the birth county of his Welsh mother: "Ceredigion – an Seandúchas ar Thaobh mo Mháthar" (Johnson 2021, 18). This book can be understood as a kind of polyglot memoir in which Johnson charts his encounters with culture and society in as many as seven different languages: Welsh, Polish, Breton, German, Romanian, French and Irish. What I want to suggest here is that one of the consequences of this multilingual, autobiographical speculation is the reworking of a category that has become central to the market dynamics of our age – attention.

Relating to others, whether human or non-human, implies, first and foremost, paying attention to them. Are you all sitting still and paying attention? The familiar injunction of the school teacher has become the watchword of the new economy. If the notion of economy is based on the management of scarce resources, then, in a media-saturated world attention has become the most precious resource of all. By the mid-1990s Michael Goldhaber was already arguing that with the emergence of digital technologies, traditional factors of production would decline in importance relative to that of attention

(Goldhaber 1996; 1997). Thomas Davenport and John Beck in their *The Attention Economy: Understanding the New Economy of Business* (2001) predicted the monetization of attention, where consumers' attention would be so sought after that services would be offered free of charge in exchange for a few moments of it (Davenport and Beck 2001, 213).

What these developments highlight is a fundamental shift in economic emphasis, namely from production to promotion. In information-rich environments, a series of media gates exist to filter information to potential users or consumers. Not all of these media gates have the same power coefficient. An ad in a local college newspaper will not reach the same audience as an ad on prime-time television. If the absolute cost of disseminating information has fallen dramatically over the centuries – it is substantially cheaper to post a blog in the 21st century than it was to print a book in the 1600s – the cost of getting past the filters of preselection has risen exponentially (Falkinger 2007, 267). In other words, as societies became more and more heavily invested in various forms of mediation, from the rise of the audiovisual industries to the emergence of digital technologies, it is less the production of goods and services than the production of demand through the capture of attention that absorbs increasing amounts of resources. Getting people to take notice is the main income generator for what McKenzie Wark has famously dubbed the "vectorialist class" (McKenzie Wark 2004).

Focusing on the economics of attention inevitably implies a certain set of assumptions, notably the maximization of profits through the minimization of costs in the context (whether real or imagined) of market competition. In the standard neo-classical paradigm, the economy is primarily concerned with the optimal management of scarce resources. The ends to which these resources are employed are normally outside the paradigm's area of competence. However, a notion of attention which is solely concerned with means and not ends is hardly viable as a theory of attention, because attention is invariably bound up with value.

William James, in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), pointed out that a notion of attention that was purely passive was unable to account for the ways humans go about paying attention. James is critical of the British school of Empiricism (Locke, Hume, Hartley, the Mills, and Spencer) for not engaging with the notion of "selective attention". He argues that, because their main concern is showing that "the higher faculties of the mind are pure products of 'experience'", they must be understanding experience as "something simply *given*" (his emphasis). James goes on to claim:

> the moment one thinks of the matter, one sees how false a notion of experience is which would make it tantamount to the mere presence to the senses of an outward order. Millions of items of the outward order

> are present to my senses which never properly enter into my experience. Why? Because they have no interest for me. My experience is what I agree to attend to. Only those items which I notice shape my mind – without selective interest, experience is an utter chaos. Interest alone gives accent and emphasis, light and shade, background and foreground – intelligible perspective, in a word. It varies in every creature, but without it the consciousness of every creature would be a gray chaotic indiscriminateness, impossible for us even to conceive. (James 1890, 402–403)

Out of the "[m]illions of items of the outward order", we choose to pay attention to certain items and not to others. Attention inescapably involves value because it implies a choice determined by particular ends (safety, sanity, satisfaction) that are believed to be important. In the circular relationship of attention and value, subjects value that to which they pay attention and pay attention to that which they value. Ends cannot, therefore, be discounted in any credible attentionscape. However, the purely economistic representation of attention prevents us from asking the most basic of ends-oriented questions. To what ends is directed the attention that will decide our future? Put another way: If our future is strongly determined by those things to which we might pay attention to in the present (for example, public transportation in our cities), then does it not stand to reason that the underlying value systems of our "selective attention" should be a matter of explicit and sustained public debate?

One of the immediate effects of engaging with another language is that you begin to pay attention to phenomena that you had previously ignored – news reports on the country where the language is spoken, songs on YouTube in that language, speakers of the language that you overhear on public transport. Johnson becomes aware of aspects of early Irish Christian influences on Brittany through a Breton-language book he picks up in a secondhand bookshop in Morlaix, which informs his visit to the statues to be found in *La Vallée des Saints*:

> I measc na nÉireannach naomh atá dealbhaithe agus clochshamhlaithe sa Vallée des Saints lámh le Carnoët idir Carhaix agus Callac i meán na Briotáine, tá Pádraig, tá Fiachra, tá Rónán, agus tá Breandán. Tá cuntas ar an gcéad triúr den cheathrú sin sa leabhar *Buhez ar Zent*, is é sin 'Beatha na Naomh', leabhar a bhíodh sna tithe ag na daoine sa 19ú haois ar fud na Briotáine. (Johnson 2021, 155)[4]

4 "Among the Irish saints represented by stone statues in the Vallée des Saints near Carnoët between Carhaix and Callac in central Brittany, are Patrick, Fiachra, Rónán and Brendan. There are accounts of the lives of the first three in *Buhez ar Zent*, that is, 'The Lives of the

Access to language, for Johnson, means repeated access to difference. In 2013 Ethan Zuckerman, the Director of MIT's Media Lab, announced to the world an unsettling paradox (Zuckerman 2013). The Internet Age, which had promised a boundless utopia of global connectivity, was in fact delivering not openness but closure. His extensive research on web and social media usage showed that users overwhelmingly accessed content in their own language, about their own culture and in their own geographical area. The electronic frontier was rapidly turning into the digital backyard. The political consequences of this cyber narcissism soon became all too evident in the silo hatreds of the alt-right social media, rejecting the foreign, the migrant, the impure. Not learning foreign languages has meant not paying attention. Or rather it has meant paying attention only to what reinforced monocultural and monolingual supremacism.

Learning a modern language fundamentally alters an individual's regime of attention. Yet, we could also argue that this utopian promise extends to a whole society. By way of illustration let us consider one issue which has become the single most pressing social concern in Ireland today, as in so many other societies: the housing crisis. Why have the relevant decision makers not consulted the Fondation Abbé Pierre publication *15 idées contre la crise du logement* (2017)? Why has there been no opinion piece in mainstream media on Marianne Leblanc Laugier's *La crise du logement: un jeu de dupes?* (2017). Both of these French publications offer perspectives on and solutions to the housing crisis that are relevant beyond the borders of France. The most obvious answer to my question lies in my failure to translate the titles. They are in French. But colleagues here well-versed in other languages – German, Italian, Korean, Welsh – could make a similar point. Our regimes of attention are hopelessly compromised by our failure to engage more fully with modern languages. The solutions, the perspectives, and the insights relevant to contending with major social problems available in other languages are simply ignored. This is why learning modern languages is not some decorative afterthought of the finishing school, but is in fact at the heart of meaningful, contemporary debates on political democracy. A healthy pluralism in the public sphere is vitally dependent on expanding the range of societal and policy options on offer. And for this, more than ever, we need modern languages, including, of course, the indigenous languages of our islands, the British Isles.

Diarmuid Johnson, for his part, argues that it is what estranges us, not what reassures us, that matters most in language encounters:

Saints', a book that was to be found commonly in people's houses throughout Brittany in the 19th century."

> Bítear ag fiafraí díom an bhfuil an Bhreatnais agus an Ghaeilge cosúil lena chéile. Tá agus níl. Ach níl. Is dhá theangacha Cheliteacha iad an Bhreatnais agus an Ghaeilge, ach ní chiallaíonn sé sin ach go bhfuil an t-urú agus an séimhiú iontu araon, an briathar i dtús na habairte, an forainm réamhfhoclach iontu araon, an aidiacht tar éis an ainmfhocail, agus rud nó dhó ó thaobh na típeolaíochta de. Ach is sna difríochtaí móra atá eatarthu atá an rud is díol spéise dar liom, na fuaimeanna atá sa dá theanga, an dúiche ina labhraítear an dá theanga, agus an meon a mhúnlaigh an dá theanga le míle go leith bliain anuas (Johnson 2021, 43).[5]

The experience of the other language triggers a shift in the regime of attention not only in terms of immersion in a different soundscape, but also in an exploration of how that language has interacted with its human and more-than-human surroundings ("dúiche") over an extended period of time ("míle go leith bliain anuas"). The cause for celebration among Celtic languages is less the consolation of their commonality than the vibrancy and creativity of their differences.

Over the course of 150 years, Wales has shifted from being one of the primary sites of fossil fuel extraction in the world to a nation which has sought to be the best of ancestors, building future-proofing into the formulation of government policy (Welsh Government 2015). Thinking about this question of the future, the language of the Tewa Indians of the American Southwest has an expression "pin peyeh obe", which translates as "look to the mountain". When the Tewa elders use the phrase, they mean that if we look at things as if from the top of a mountain we get a broader view, we see what lies ahead (Brand 2000, 144). If we turn in another direction, however, we also see what lies behind. In other words, the long view is not only forwards, it is also backwards. Just as our present was once someone's distant future, if we want to make sense of what might or ought to happen in the future we need to understand how we got here from our distant past. As our sense of time extends in both directions, being responsible for what might happen to future generations involves being equally responsible for learning appropriately from past generations. To think far back is

5 "I am often asked whether Welsh and Irish are similar to each other. Yes and no. But no. Welsh and Irish are two Celtic languages, but this only means that both have eclipsis and lenition, the verb in initial position, prepositional pronouns, the adjective after the noun, and one or two other shared typological features. But, in my own opinion, what are most interesting are the major differences between them, the sounds in both languages, the areas where the languages are spoken, and the mentality that has shaped both languages over the last thousand years."

to develop the reflex of the long view which is not the subsidized indulgence of the scholar, but a core survival value of any culture which wants to exist well into the future. In navigating current circumstances, we need to look again to the mountain, and situate languages – the indispensable prerequisite for interlingual translation – at the heart of ancestral wisdom and resilient future building.

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