NON-INDO-EUROPEAN FEATURES OF CELTIC LANGUAGES

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Exercise 1 (find the video clips on the Map of Languages at www.languagesindanger.eu)

Listen to the extract 1 (Irish) and extract 2 (Welsh). Both of these people are native speakers of Irish and Welsh. They are also native speakers of English. Can you hear/see any resemblance to English in what they say at all?

Exercise 2

You are going to work out four characteristic features of Celtic languages.

2.1 Here are the texts of what they said:

Irish

Tá cat beag agam sa bhaile. Pússaoi is ainm dó. Tá fionnadh bán agus donn air. Tá súile glasa aige. Tá a ionga an-ghéar. Tá sé trí bhliana d'aois. Níl madra agam. Tá teach s'againne róbheag do ainmhithe móra. Ach tá lucha againn, mar sin féin!

Welsh

Gartref, mae gen i gath fechan. Ei henw yw Pwsi. Mae ei blew yn wyn a bron. Mae ganddi lygaid gwyrdd. Mae ei chrafangau yn finiog iawn. Mae hi'n dair oed. Does gen i ddim ci. Mae'r tŷ sydd gennym yn rhy fach i anifeiliaid mawr. Mae gennym lygod, serch hynny!

English

At home I have a small cat. Its name is Pussy. Its hair is white and brown. It has green eyes. Its claws are very sharp. It is three years old. I don't have a dog. The house we have is too small for big animals. We do have mice, though!

2.2 Feature 1

The underlined words are the third person forms of the verb to be:

	Affirmative	Negative
Irish	*Tá*	*Níl*
Welsh	*Mae*	*Does*

Complete: The verb comes at the _____ (where?) of the sentence in Celtic languages.

2.3 Feature 2

Look at these examples from the texts:

English	A cat	The cat
Welsh	Cath	Y gath

English	Sharp	Very sharp
Irish	Géar	An-ghéar

English	Small	Too small
Irish	Beag	Róbheag
Welsh	Bach	Rhy fach

English	Home	At home
Irish	Baile	Sa bhaile
Welsh	Cartref	Gartref

Complete: Some initial consonants in Celtic languages can change to indicate the grammar of the sentence. These changes include:

Irish	**Welsh**
B > _ _	B > _

(This change is pronounced the same in both languages, despite the spelling)

C > _

G > _ _

Give examples of where this sound change (known as 'mutations') indicates the:

	Irish	**Welsh**
Locative	_____	_____
Modification of an adjective	_____	_____
Feminine gender		_____

2.4 Feature 3: Prepositions

Like Semitic languages (Arabic and Hebrew, for example), prepositions (such as *with*, *on*, *at*, etc) can decline – they change their form according to the number and person (much like verbs in other languages). The prepositions in the text that are declined are:

Irish	**Welsh**
Ag, 'at'	*Gan*, 'with'
Do, 'to'	
Ar, 'on'	

In the texts, find the following forms:

To him	_____	(Irish)	With her	_____	(Welsh)
At me	_____	(Irish)	With me	_____	(Welsh)
At us	_____	(Irish)	With us	_____	(Welsh)
On him	_____	(Irish)			

2.5 Feature 4: Possession

Like Russian, Celtic languages do not possession a verb 'to have'. You might have noticed from the above examples that possession can be shown using the verb 'to be' plus a preposition.

The preposition used in Irish is *ag* ('at') and in Welsh it is *gan* ('with'). So, from the texts, we saw:

Irish: *Tá cat beag agam* ('There is a small cat at me'): I have a small cat.

Welsh: *Mae cath fechan gen i* ('There is a small cat with me'): I have a small cat.

How is the following said in the text and how would it be translated literally?

We have mice

_____ (Irish)

(There are ...   )

_____ (Welsh)

(   )

It (the cat) has green eyes:

_____ (Irish)

( )

_____ (Welsh)

( )

Thus, we have worked out that Celtic languages are:

1. *V_____-initial languages, or VSO (verb-subject-object)*

2. *Subject to _____ changes, to show syntax and gender*

3. *Like Hebrew and Arabic, in that they decline their _____*

4. *Like Russian, in that they possess no verb 'to _____'.*

These are sometimes termed the 'Non-Indo-European features' of Celtic languages, because they are not shared with the languages that surround them (that is, English and French), or other languages in Western Europe.