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Sociolinguistics

Alex Mullen

Abstract

This chapter begins by considering the motivations for undertaking sociolinguistic studies and discusses the range and quality of evidence that can be marshalled for early Britain. The pre-Roman linguistic situation and the advent and spread of Latin are assessed using linguistic and archaeological evidence, and the extent and nature of Latin–Celtic bilingualism across time, space, and social levels explored. A presentation of the long-standing debate on the nature of Latin spoken in Roman Britain follows, and new evidence is offered to counter the traditional view that British Latin was particularly conservative. The chapter closes by looking at the legacy of the linguistic impact of Roman Britain, briefly considering the post-Roman inscriptions and language contact phenomena in the Germanic languages.

Keywords

bilingualism, British Celtic, British Latin, curse tablets, epigraphy, identities, language, sociolinguistics, *Aquae Sulis*/Bath, Ratcliffe-on-Soar (Nottinghamshire)

Introduction

Roman Britain has not traditionally been on the agenda for discussing ancient sociolinguistics. Language rarely makes an appearance in the standard handbooks, general histories, or archaeological syntheses, even though everyone knows that the arrival of the Romans made a significant impact linguistically through the introduction of the Roman *Reichsprache* and its cultural handmaiden, Greek. The linguistic content of the resultant Latin (and, to a much smaller extent, Greek) epigraphy is generally deemed to be standardized, formulaic, and not really worthy of comment beyond specialist works on language. Furthermore, Celticists studying the languages of Britain have largely skipped straight to the Middle Ages, since virtually no pre-Roman or Roman period Celtic epigraphy exists, in contrast to the Continent, where Celtic languages are attested in Gaul (in Greek and Roman script, see *RIG* I, II.1, II.2, III, IV; Woolf 1994; Lambert

2003; Mullen 2013a: 95–121); Italy (in the alphabet of Lugano, a form of the Etruscan alphabet, see *RIG* II.1; Lejeune 1971) and Spain (in Iberian script, see *MLH* IV; Simkin 2012). However, while it is fair to admit that direct evidence is relatively scarce, numerous indirect routes to reconstructing linguistic contours are available, and, used with care, linguistic information can prove surprisingly fertile in understanding the nature of identities and cultural interactions more broadly.

In this chapter I briefly confront some of the key questions that we might ask of the evidence and present a view of the state of play. How does the linguistic situation evolve from the Iron Age, through Roman occupation, and thereafter? How widespread was bilingualism? Who spoke which language, to whom, and when? How similar or dissimilar linguistically were different parts of Roman Britain? Are regional or social dialectal variations reconstructible? Where is our British Romance language? But we should first ask a more basic question: why should anyone other than sociolinguists care?

Simply put, languages express identity. As a result, language use should be relevant to everyone interested in understanding Roman Britain. As soon as we speak, we communicate, not only the intended message but also numerous other subtle, intended or unintended, clues about our multi-layered identities. It is often assumed that the uptake of Latin in the provinces indicates a move towards being more Roman. 'Latinization', indeed, is used almost interchangeably with 'Romanization'. In a similar vein, evidence of resistance to Latinization and the persistence of local languages have been taken as a sign of rejection of both Roman culture and integration into the Empire. Consider, for example, the entry for *Britannia* in the second edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Hammond and Scullard 1970: 181): 'The class distinction, however, manifest in the contrast between the Celtic spoken by the common man and the stilted Latin of his superiors, had the seeds of trouble.' Employing concepts such as language and culture interchangeably brings a tacit appreciation that languages might be very closely identified with cultures themselves: Latin *is* Roman culture, Celtic *is* indigenous culture. Herein lies a grain of truth that needs to be explored, but the full picture will be much more intricate. Languages always express identity, but we know that the relationships between language and culture and language and ethnicity are not so straightforward.

The Evidence

The evidence at our disposal proves surprisingly varied. The most obvious, main source of linguistic material derives from Roman epigraphy. Taken in its widest sense, this encompasses the large numbers of lapidary inscriptions (*RIB* I, III), right through to the writing tablets from some twenty sites including Vindolanda, Carlisle, and London (Pearce 2004: 47–48; for the texts, see *RIB* II.4; Carlisle; *Tab. Vindol.* I, II, III, IV.1, IV.2; Tomlin 2003). 'Curse tablets', which in Britain typically ask for justice after a theft, have been turning up with regularity, and well over thirty sites now offer examples, though Bath, and to a lesser extent Uley, lay claim to the largest share. Also featuring in British epigraphy are words, often simply names, found on a range of types of ceramic, metal, glass, gems, plaster, mosaic (Ling 2007), leather (Rhodes 1987), stone, bone, and wood, which are subsumed under the grand title *instrumenta domestica* and have been published in the eight fascicules of *RIB* II. Inscriptions on coins constitute a closely related set of direct evidence, but, as the preserve of a distinct discipline, are published separately (for a discussion of coins, see Walton and Moorhead, this volume). Other non-epigraphic evidence consists of occasional, and sometimes opaque, discussions of the linguistic situation in Britain found in authors such as Tacitus, the Roman grammarians, and, later, Bede (e.g. *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.1). Literary texts by Roman authors of British origin might also have provided us with dialectal words used without comment, but, again, their absence—or perhaps our inability to identify them—is striking. Additional important material includes borrowings between languages: both Celtic borrowings in Latin and Latin borrowings that can be uncovered in the subsequently attested Celtic languages. A comprehensive discussion of all this material is not possible here; rather key material will be presented to illustrate salient points.

Language in Pre-Roman Britain

The point of departure for assessing continuity and change in the linguistic composition of Roman Britain must be to establish the language(s) of pre-Roman Britain. Scholars generally concur that the main language of the island was Celtic—one of the distinctive branches of the Indo-European family of languages—and yet are equally convinced that we have no epigraphic remains. So how can we be so sure?

The broader linguistic and historical context of the British Isles indicates that Celtic languages were spoken over a large part of the area in the Iron Age.[1] The earliest written evidence from or about Britain in Latin and Greek repeatedly presents us with personal, deity, and place names of Celtic origin and, very occasionally, non-onomastic Celtic features. Tacitus states that the local languages of northern Gaul and Britain hardly differed (*sermo haud multum diversus, Agricola* 11) and we have direct evidence for the linguistic composition of the former, the Celtic language, Gaulish. In the absence of any evidence for a significant linguistic shift in the Late Pre-Roman Iron Age, it is hard to argue against the view that Celtic was widely spoken in Iron Age Britain. For how many generations, by how many, in which communities and alongside which other languages cannot be firmly ascertained.

A major consideration in defining the linguistic contours of pre-Roman Britain will be the advent of Latin. *Britannia*, technically speaking, comes to life in AD 43, but this is by no means the first contact with Romans, nor with Latin. Caesar had investigated the island in the mid-first century BC and cross-channel diplomatic and economic links had long been established (Gosden 2004: 104–110; Cunliffe 2005: 446–484) so, by the first century BC, a growing percentage of the communications in trade and other matters must have been undertaken in Latin, at least in southerly areas. Unfortunately, the vast majority of these early communications have not been transmitted across the centuries. This is no doubt partly a result of the nature of some of the transactions, but perhaps also because, even when the communications may have been suitable for permanent record, there was no local tradition of writing.

Virtually no pre-Conquest inscriptional evidence exists from Britain, though finds of writing equipment from contexts dated to before AD 43 indicate that writing was taking place, though probably to a limited extent (see Hanson and Conolly 2002: 156, 159, for the early styli). The inscribed material itself is restricted to a handful of graffiti on pots that are mostly imported (Partridge 1982; Hanson and Conolly 2002: 156), and we cannot exclude the possibility that they may have been incised on the Continent or by visitors to Britain. Apart from this meagre evidence, we are reliant on writing on coins (see Nash 1987: 118–142; Mays 1992; Williams 2007), some of which Williams (2001: 10, 14, 7) cogently suggests may betray knowledge of other non-numismatic inscriptional types and which demonstrate knowledge of ‘non-Roman’, local writing in Gaul.[2] Several pre-

Conquest British coin legends show Celtic names, some with local rather than Latinate endings (e.g. *VOLISIOS, CARTIVELLAVNOS*), and also, possibly, the Celtic word for 'king' in the accusative *RICON*—as in *TASCIO RICON*—where *RIX* might be equivalent to Latin *REX* (de Bernardo Stempel 1991; Creighton 2000: 168–172). If we do interpret *RICON* as a Celtic noun, it would demonstrate that British communities were willing to write British, even though in a restricted and specific usage. Intriguingly, writing of the local language never seems to extend beyond British coin legends, despite the relatively widespread writing of Celtic on the Continent. Although the strength of the oral tradition in the country may have been a factor against the uptake of literacy, the most plausible explanation for this restricted usage must be that literacy arrives later in *Britannia* than elsewhere and that, by the time it does, Latin has proved its worth as *the* written language.

Latinization and the Extent of Bilingualism

In the early twentieth century the orthodoxy stated that no written Celtic was to be found in Roman Britain because Latin had become ubiquitous. Too much was made of Tacitus' comment that Agricola 'principum filios liberalibus artibus erudire . . . ut qui modo linguam Romanam abnuebant, eloquentiam concupiscerent' ('educated the sons of the leading men in the liberal arts . . . so that those who just lately had been rejecting the Roman language now conceived a desire for eloquence' (*Agricola* 21)). The Latin inscriptions were also over-optimistically interpreted; inscriptions scratched on tiles, such as *Primus fecit x*, were described by Haverfield (1923: 32) as showing that literacy in Latin (and therefore the Latin language) had permeated to workmen. However, these formulaic phrases do not necessarily imply anything but low-level literacy, and there is no reason to assume that the authors were not speaking Celtic, either exclusively or in tandem with Latin. We must not fall into the trap of viewing the textual record as a direct reflection of spoken language and must be aware of the distancing effect not only of formulaic language but also of scribes, stonemasons, and manuals (Pulgram 1950; see Hope, this volume, for a discussion of inscriptions).

The Celticist Jackson, in his magisterial work *Language and History in Early Britain* (1953), argued that the attitude of earlier scholars towards the linguistic situation 'was fortified by the then very general ignorance about Celtic linguistics and history, and by the prejudice rife among some English historians against everything Celtic' (Jackson 1953: 94). Indeed, anti-Celtic sentiment and Classical cultural arrogance, conscious or subconscious, do seem to have been factors in the development of scholarship on *Britannia*. Jackson (1953: 105) formulated a more sophisticated approach, concluding that:

> Latin was the language of the governing classes, of civil administration and of the army, of trade, of the Christian religion, and very largely (but perhaps not entirely) of the people of the towns. The rural upper classes were bilingual; the peasantry of the Lowland Zone, who constituted the great bulk of the population, spoke British and probably knew little Latin; and the language of the Highland Zone (apart from the army and its native camp-followers) was to all intents and purposes exclusively British.

Jackson's illustration of a variegated linguistic landscape for *Britannia* resonates with recent research into ancient multilingualism, which has reached beyond Latin and Greek literary and other high-status remains and has used modern linguistic theory to help interpret the complexity of language contact (Adams 2003; Mullen and James 2012; Mullen 2013a). One important aspect of this cross-disciplinary research is an appreciation of the value of sociolinguistics in understanding the large numbers of interlinking factors that can determine the nature, extent, and vitality of both societal and individual bilingualism. There are no hard and fast rules for linguists; rather an appreciation of tendencies built up through numerous detailed case studies. Sociolinguistic models do not support the Jacksonian view that bilingualism in Roman Britain would have effectively been restricted to the rural upper class. We would instead expect varying levels of bilingualism dependent on social background, occupation, education, area of birth/work, age, gender (a factor missing from Jackson's account), and so on. Levels of Latin would have been disparate: from the flawless Latin of highly educated local and immigrant elites, to muddled scraps of Latin spoken, of necessity and rarely, by isolated communities. Most of the Latin in Britain would fit somewhere on the continuum in between and would have displayed regional and social variation (Adams 2007, 2013), particularly given the lack of formalized, mass education. We would expect to find contact phenomena that occur in situations of bilingualism: the transfer of idioms, morpho-syntax, phonology, and loanwords. Some of these phenomena would have been restricted to the language of individuals, specific communities, or regions, though others may have been more pervasive. In some areas reduced languages, which are created to facilitate communication where there is little education, may have formed.

Can these hypotheses based on models and plausibility find evidential support? That there must have been widespread bilingualism in Roman Britain is witnessed by the large number (*c.*1,000) of Latin loanwords that can be found in the Insular Celtic languages: Welsh was so affected that it has been described as ‘akin to the Romance languages descended from Latin’ (Charles-Edwards 2013: 76). Many Latin loanwords are likely to have been borrowed in the Roman period, and, in principle, it should be possible to try to describe cultural contacts through borrowings. However, their dating is fraught with difficulties, and we are not certain of the exact linguistic origin of several forms. Scholarship on Latin loanwords in Brittonic languages (Breton, Cornish, and Welsh) has a long history (for an overview of scholarship dating back to the Renaissance, see D. E. Evans 1983: 960–3), and the need for an up-to-date, precise, and well-documented study was highlighted by Gratwick in 1982, but the gap still remains to be filled satisfactorily. Even when we do have a firm idea of etymology and date, the interpretation can be challenging. Although some borrowings are easy to interpret—for instance, Latin *scribendum* ‘writing’ underlies Welsh *ysgrifennu*, and Latin *grammatica* ‘grammar’ gives Welsh *grammadeg*—others are much harder given native forms already existed, for example, the borrowing of Latin *pontem* ‘bridge’ (Welsh *pont*), *piscis* ‘fish’ (Welsh *pysg*), and *bracchium* ‘arm’ (Welsh *braich*). The large numbers and wide range of lexical borrowings and also the morphological and syntactical features that may be influenced by Latin[3] strongly suggest that a substantial group of bilinguals has to be assumed as well as prolonged and intimate contact (Mac Cana 1976: 195).

Bilingualism between Latin and Celtic entailed a two-way traffic of loanwords. Latin itself contains around 150 Celtic loanwords, which might be informative about linguistic and cultural contacts (Schmidt 1967; Wild 1976; Porzio Gernia 1981; Lambert 2003: 204–207). Loans concerning wheeled vehicles are common (for example, *essedum* ‘war-chariot’; *petorritum* ‘four-wheeled wagon’), as are clothing terms (e.g. *birrus* ‘hooded cloak’; *sagus/m* ‘tunic’ (see *Tab. Vindol.* II, 192)), but these were almost certainly borrowed through contact between Latin and Celtic speakers on the Continent rather than in Britain. The Celtic words attested in the Vindolanda Tablets may already have been in military Latin created on the Continent or borrowed from the speech of the continental auxiliaries stationed at Vindolanda, rather than through contact with the local Celtic-speaking Britons. The linguistic make-up of the auxiliaries, who were composed of a mixture of Germanic- and Celtic-speaking communities from Batavia (southern Netherlands) and Tungria (Belgium), makes tracing the origins of Celtic features in the texts complex. The tablets do demonstrate links with the world outside the fort: one writer moans about the *Brittunculi* (*Tab. Vindol.* II, 164), and a civilian complains about his treatment at the hands of the soldiers, but it is difficult to assert specifically local authorship. Indeed, the complaining civilian describes himself as a *hominem trasmarinum* (*sic*) (*Tab. Vindol.* II, 344; l. 15), and it is often impossible to tell whether the Celtic features are British or continental. The word *souxtum* (*Tab. Vindol.* II, 301) illustrates this point: originally interpreted by Adams (1996) as a ‘Celticized’ form of Latin *sumptum*, we are now confident that it is a Celtic word for a type of vessel, since it is attested in a second-century potter’s account from Vayres (Gironde) and occurs later in Insular Celtic (Early Irish *suacht*, Scottish *suacan*, Old Cornish *seit*) (Lambert 2000, 2004; Adams 2007: 597–598; Jørgensen 2008). The problem arises in trying to work out how and when the loanword entered the Latin used at Vindolanda, whether from continental or local British Celtic (if, in fact, it is a borrowing and not a code-switch or interference).

Whatever the precise origins of the Celtic loanwords, contact between military and civilian populations would naturally be a route for their dissemination through British

Latin (Adams 2007: 581–582). Indeed, while research into the distribution of classes of settlement type has, at the highest level of abstraction at least, supported the traditional division of *Britannia* into north and west 'military' and south and east 'civil' zones (e.g. Sargent 2002: 224; Taylor 2007: 109–118), Jackson's view (1953: 106) that the Highland was almost 'exclusively British' in language must be questioned. The linguistic realities will never follow closely such invented boundaries, as Jackson (1953: 106) himself admits, and the military sites may have constituted influential centres of Latinization.

Hanson and Conolly (2002: 156) have demonstrated that 'many lower-status settlements across the country-side have produced examples of *stili*', and, since these would presumably have been used to write Latin, this may indicate a more widespread use of Latin and Latin literacy than usually conceived. Indeed data from the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) might help us to explore this proposition concerning rural literacy in more detail. Approximately 100 styli have been identified and assigned the date range 'broad period Roman' on the database. These, along with the whole range of *instrumenta scriptoria*, need to be thoroughly assessed, as they allow us to explore the dynamics of Latinization. This is a tall order: *instrumenta scriptoria* are not always easy to identify; we are well aware of the broader problems of the biases in metal detecting, reporting, and analysis that affect the PAS; and, for the distribution of *instrumenta scriptoria* to be of value, the PAS data must be supplemented with information from the Historic Environment Record, published and unpublished excavation reports, museum and private collections, and so on. While we wait for more detailed research to be completed, Figure 1 provides a rough indication—*caveat lector*—of the distribution of styli: some possible constraints on metal detecting are shown (Robbins 2014), and a kernel density plot indicates the finds of styli. The map presents us with a relatively unsurprising distribution that mirrors relatively closely the total distribution of PAS Roman finds (see Richards et al. 2009: figs 40, 41), though there are some areas of interest that will require further exploration. For example, Mattingly has stated, based on Hanson and Conolly's survey of excavation reports and information from museum and local authority archaeologists, that 'a number of interesting blanks in the distribution [of styli] can be noted (Cornwall, Devon, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Shropshire), corresponding to areas with comparatively few villas' (Mattingly 2006: 461). This statement is based on the partial information collected by Hanson and Conolly and requires modification, given that the densest area of PAS finds lies in the East Midlands. As we explore further and think about increased Latinization in *Britannia*, we must not be binary: more Latin does not *necessarily* mean less Celtic, but it almost certainly means widespread bilingualism.

Insert Figure 1 here

Since Latin–Celtic bilingualism was not unusual in Roman Britain, we might legitimately ask where the direct evidence for written Celtic is, especially given our less pessimistic views of levels of civilian literacy. Jackson's dictum that there is no written Celtic to be found whatsoever has only recently been reconsidered. He stated (Jackson 1953: 99–100) in no uncertain terms:

> It should always be borne in mind that British was not a written language, and that the *only* language of writing was Latin; it would not occur to anyone to write in British, nor would they know how to do so . . . In Roman Britain those who had enough education to know the alphabet had enough to know some Latin and those who had none did not write at all.

The material available to him in the early twentieth century merited that kind of response. Unfortunately, the effect has been that few Celticists have focused on Roman Britain, and Classicists have been left to deal with the evidence. In 1987, Tomlin announced that two tablets in the Bath collection (*Tab. Sulis* 14, 18) might be Celtic and asked Celticists to ‘enlighten their classical colleagues’ (Tomlin 1987: 19). The tablets are difficult to interpret, but have been reasonably analysed as Celtic (for a consideration of both tablets, see *RIG* II.2 *L-107–08; Mees 2005; Mullen 2007b; for a discussion of *Tab. Sulis* 18 only, see Schrijver 2004: 16–17; 2005, 57–60). *Tab. Sulis* 18 (Figure 2) is more conducive to analysis as the text is complete, the transcription more certain, and the word boundaries clear. The transcription can be given as:

1 *adixoui*

2 *deịạna/de◌̣vina*

3 *deịeda/de◌̣veda*

4 *andagin*

5 *vindiorix*

6 cuamịịn

7 *ạị*

One interpretation of the text yields the following suggested translation: ‘I, Vindiorix, O divine Deveda(?), shall fix an evil (?fate *vel sim.*) on Cuamiina’ (Mullen 2007b: 41).

Insert Figure 2 here

An important consideration is whether these Celtic tablets are rare attestations of written British Celtic or traces of continental visitors to the shrine. The exact relationships between the forms of Celtic attested on the Continent and in Britain are still under examination, making firm linguistic conclusions elusive. Although we know that

British Celtic is closely related to Gaulish, it is unclear for this period precisely which linguistic features would have distinguished the two varieties, so we are left arguing from other evidence. We know that *Aquae Sulis* was a cosmopolitan sanctuary and visitors were frequent from the Continent, where Sulis and the related Sulevia group of goddesses were also worshipped (see *RIB* I for inscriptions by continental visitors). On the Continent, curse tablets were written in Gaulish until at least the third century AD, so it would have been conceivable for a Gaul to write to the goddess in his vernacular. However, we have no certain evidence that Celtic-speaking Britons could not do the same, and we await future publications and finds to decide whether *Tab. Sulis* 14 and 18 are more likely to be British or Gaulish (*RIB* IV will contain all the known curse tablets and writing tablets from Roman Britain).

Curse tablets often provide an insight into lower-level society (for the status of the authors, see *Tab. Sulis* 95–98; Tomlin 2002: 171–172, 174; for the issues in assigning authorship, see *Tab. Sulis* 98–101; Tomlin 2002: 170–171) and are a more fruitful source of Celtic than much of the epigraphic record (Russell 2006). Although the full edition of the Uley tablets remains unpublished, Tomlin has commented that ‘three or four puzzling tablets from Bath and Uley . . . may be British Celtic transliterated’ (*Uley* 114). One published tablet (*Uley* 33), provides a possible parallel to *Tab. Sulis* 18. Although it is damaged, the best reading of line three contains the word *aexsieumo*, which is not obviously Latin and may be a Celtic verb. The naming context also has a non-Latin flavour with three of the four names analysable as Celtic: *Minu(v)assus*, *Senebel[l]ena*, and (possibly) *Lucilia*, which Hassall and Tomlin (1995: 378 n. 1) suggest is not the Latin *nomen* but conceals a Celtic name element (see *CPNRB*; Mullen 2007a). The addition of Latin *filia* and *filius* to the transcription is modern; these names almost certainly show the non-Roman use of plain genitive names as patronymics.

Celticists have largely overlooked the naming evidence from Roman Britain, concentrating instead on continental Celtic onomastics. However, the evidence is not meagre and can help to reveal the *indigènes* within the Latin discourse: around 500 Celtic names can be gleaned from the epigraphic *corpora*, plus a further 48 in numismatic and 22 in literary sources (see the annually updated database *CPNRB*). Celtic names rarely appear in either *duo* or *tria nomina* formulae (see Mullen 2007a). In fact, there are no instances of Celtic names in these formulae in any of the hundreds of published curse tablets from Roman Britain. A mere 6 per cent of Celtic names appear in *duo nomina*, almost all from tombstones and militarized areas, while fewer than 2 per cent appear in *tria nomina*, again all from highly Roman contexts (e.g. the inscription of *Tiberius Claudius Togidubnus* (*RIB* I 91; Bogaers 1979)).

Across *Britannia* we see that filiation markers show a similar pattern. British Celtic would probably have simply used the genitive of the father's name to mark filiation. Of the naming formulae attested in Britain that include Celtic names and filiation, 70 per cent of the instances from *RIB* I show the Latinate filiation marker *filius, fil* or *f*, compared to only 20 per cent in the curse tablets. The latter amounts to only three examples, two of which are found in the elegant *Tab. Sulis* 30 (Figure 3) and are very likely the work of a scribe. We should caution against the modern tendency to add Latin filiation markers to the transcriptions of British inscriptions. Clearly, it is understandable in certain circumstances to reconstruct a filiation marker for the inscriptions on stone where there is an obvious space for it and traces of letters. However, where there is definitely no space (e.g. *Sule(u)is Sulinus Bruceti VSLM* (*RIB* I 105)) and/or the filiation marker is not necessarily expected (e.g. *Lucilia Mellossi . . . Minu(v)assus Senebel[l]enae* (*Uley* 33)), it is misleading to make this addition, as it implies assimilation to the Latin formula, which had not necessarily occurred.

Insert Figure 3 here

Celtic names are interesting in themselves as they are composed of lexical elements (e.g. *Vindiorix* in *Tab. Sulis* 18 is formed from lexical elements denoting 'white/shining' and 'king'), and, when they are compared with the Latin names used alongside them, tentative assumptions might be made concerning linguistic and cultural contact. There seem to be four main ways in which Britons adopt Latin nomenclature:

1. adoption of 'colourless' Latin *cognomina* such as *Latinus*, *Civilis*, or *Maximus*;
2. adoption of Latin names wholly or partly homophonous with Celtic names, perhaps because they expressed an awareness of Celtic–Latin interaction and/or facilitated comprehension. The three most common British Celtic name elements, *Sen, Luc*, and *Bel*, all have common parallels in Latin;
3. translation of the Celtic name into Latin: for example, *Primus* is the translation name for *Cintusmus*; this requires a comprehension of the lexical meaning of the names in both Celtic and Latin and perhaps expresses duality of identity;
4. adoption of names of patrons and other important figures.

These different methods of adoption, which, arguably, could roughly indicate a scale of increasing 'Roman-ness', have been deemed useful in assessing the level of integration into new lifestyles and familiarity with the *Reichssprache* (Mullen 2007a). However, in many cases names may have been adopted for personal and particular reasons that are now irrecoverable, and the hierarchy for adoption is a blunt tool. Approaches to life under Roman imperial power were multi-faceted and complex, sometimes unpredictable, and it would be a mistake to assume too much about the identity of people on the evidence of naming choice and naming formulae.[4] Nevertheless, setting the names in their context (Raybould 1999; Mullen 2007a), and in the context of other evidence for bilingualism and linguistic varieties, may aid us in our quest.

Latinitas Britannica: The Nature of British Latin

Trying to define 'British Latin' is as ridiculous as trying to describe 'British English'. Languages are never monolithic and display overwhelming variation. British Latin would have been no different, although, in contrast to British English, we have little chance of describing the complexity given our meagre resources. Traditional opinions on British Latin are again largely attributable to Jackson (1953). He stated that, on the one hand, the language shares features with the western Empire, especially Gaul, but, on the other, there is 'a peculiar look to the picture of Vulgar Latin in Britain'—namely, that 'the sound-system of Latin in Britain was very archaic by ordinary Continental standards' (Jackson 1953: 94, 107). Partly as a result of an occasional lack of clarity in the text as to whether he refers specifically to the language of the 'squirearchy' or to the Latin of Britain more generally, his view that elements of the British Latin were conservative and old-fashioned was uncritically adopted outside linguistic circles and extended to foster the still relatively widely held belief that British Latin was archaic (see Gratwick 1982: 6, 69–70).

But, even if we understand Jackson's archaic *Latinitas Britannica* to be the preserve of the Romano-British elite, his vision of the Romano-British linguistic landscape should be reconsidered, not least because we now have much better evidence. Jackson was primarily interested in the phonology of the Brittonic languages from the first to twelfth centuries AD, and his conclusion was formulated using the evidence of Latin loanwords into the Insular Celtic languages as transmitted by mainly post-Roman sources. The material on stone and *instrumenta domestica* from Roman Britain had not yet been gathered into an easily accessible corpus (*RIB*) and, more importantly, there were hardly any known curse tablets—now our best source for British Latin. A great deal hinged on the reconstruction of the form of Latin loanwords at the point at which they were borrowed into Celtic—that is, the spoken form of Latin with which Celtic speakers came into contact: a subject of no little controversy.

In the 1980s, the Classicist Gratwick launched a scathing attack on Jackson's *Latinitas Britannica*, followed by a rigorous defence by the Celticist, McManus (1984). Smith (1983) took the debate further by presenting a non-partisan, meticulous study of the linguistic features of the material published in *RIB* I and other 'similar sources' (1983: 896), this time also considering morphology, lexis and semantics.[5] In distilling the responses to Jackson's British Latin, several important points emerge:

1. *Dating and nature of evidence*. Borrowings may retain traits from the donor language long after those traits have been lost or modified in the donor; that is, just because early loans into British Celtic show features of early Latin does not mean that the Latin of Britain continued to be of early type throughout the Roman period. Conversely, much of the loanword evidence is potentially late, and some liable to be that of the learned Latin of the Church. Furthermore, Roman lapidary evidence is generally standardized and formulaic, and a proportion, sometimes not identifiable, will have been put up by visitors to the province.[6]

2. *Broader picture*. Jackson underestimates the impact of British Celtic and 'insularity' on British Latin and overlooks the evidence of Latin loanwords into Irish (McManus 1983).

3. *Linguistic detail*. Jackson's 'Twelve Conservative Features' of British Latin partly dissolve under scrutiny.[7]

4. *Interpretation*. Jackson's assumption that the 'squirearchy' is the main route of transfer for Latin into British Celtic is an oversimplification, as is his 'apartheid' construction of 'Roman' and 'Briton' (Gratwick 1982).

5. *Conclusion*. British Latin can 'no longer be accepted uncritically as archaic or conservative' (Russell 1985: 29, see also D. E. Evans 1983: 979).

After considering the claims and counter-claims of the scholarship on Latin in Roman Britain, we are left with a pervasive scepticism as to whether the evidence will ever allow us to describe the linguistic variation.[8] However, these scholars were working in a largely pre-curse-tablet era. The curses are often not subject to quite as many barriers to reaching ‘British Latin’ and are now allowing insights into the possible range and variety of non-standard British Latin. Linguistic analysis of the Bath curse tablets suggests, for example, that British Latin contains some possible regionalisms (such as, perhaps, the preference for *involo* instead of *furo* for the verb ‘to steal’) and that Gallic and British Latin share some ‘north-western’ characteristics caused by the common Celtic background, cross-Channel contacts, and distance from Italy (Adams 1992; Schrijver 2002).

Curse tablets also allow us to examine more closely the only one of Jackson’s ‘Twelve Conservative Features’ of British Latin whose existence in Britain (though not interpretation) was not questioned by the scholarship of the 1980s. The feature is B/V alternation in spelling (Jackson’s point number seven), which indicates a merger of standard Latin [b] and [w] and shows regional variation across provincial Latin. It occurs rarely in the evidence from *Britannia* and the Balkans, but very commonly in Italy and North Africa and commonly elsewhere. For Britain, the inscriptional material and the evidence of Latin loanwords into the Brittonic languages (Welsh, Cornish, and Breton), where [b] and [w] appear to be kept distinct, implies that the merger did not take place. A revised interpretation (Mullen 2013b) of a curse tablet from Ratcliffe-on-Soar (Nottinghamshire) suggests that we must scrutinize even this feature.

Initially edited with some degree of uncertainty (Hassall and Tomlin 1993: 310–314), the revised analysis of the inscription found in 1990 at Red Hill, Ratcliffe-on-Soar (Figure 4) argues that it concerns the theft of a mule and contains two examples of B/V alternation: *vissacio* for *bisaccio* 'saddle-bags' (l. 7) and *pavlatoriam* for *pabulatoriam* 'fodder-bag' (l. 5). The original text of the 1990 find, perhaps dating to the third or fourth century, is written from right to left and almost entirely in mirror image capitals.

Insert Figure 4 here

Here is a revised transcription and tentative translation.

nomine Camụlorigi et Titọcune molam quam perdeḍerunt

in fanum dei ḍ[..]v[.] çuicumqueẹ ṇ[. . .]n involasit

mola illam ut samguin suum [m]ittat usque die'm' q[..]

moriatur [quic]ụmque iṇṿollṿa[. . .] hụrta mor'i'atur

et pavlatoriam quicumque [……] involạsit

et ipse moriato mo[ri]atur quicumqui illam

involasit et vertogn ḍe ospitio uel vissacio

quicumque illam involasit a devo moriotur

In the name of Camulorix and Titocuna I have dedicated in the temple of the god the mule which they have lost. Whoever stole that mule, whatever his name, may he let his blood until the day he die. Whoever stole the objects of theft(?) / fencing(?), may he die, and the fodder-bag, whoever stole it, may he also die. Whoever stole it and the trinket(?) from the stable or the saddle-bag, whoever stole it, may he die by the god.

The alternation of B/V occurs twice in this short text and the conclusion seems irresistible: the merger of /b/ and /w/ is likely to have occurred in the idiolect of the author. The problem with extrapolating beyond this meagre evidence to say that the merger may have been more widespread is that, so far, no other published curse tablet offers a clear example of a B/V alternation (Adams 2007: 653). Indeed, in his survey of British Christian and pagan lapidary inscriptions spanning the first to the ninth centuries AD, Barbarino (1978: 30–39; his sources are *RIB* I and Macalister 1945) found 80 correct usages of B in initial position and no examples of V and 354 correct usages of initial V and only 2 examples of B for V, and, in intervocalic position, only 1 example of V for expected B in 107 tokens and no examples of B for V in 139. However, we have to consider correctness in spelling as a possible factor for the lack of B/V alternation in certain material from Britain, rather than *necessarily* assuming that the merger has not taken place in the spoken language. The curse tablet from Ratcliffe-on-Soar provides us with fertile linguistic material: a context of potentially low-level education, a local author,[9] and hints of a spoken variety (Adams, forthcoming). It looks as if, on the basis of this tablet, the [b]–[w] merger may have been a feature of British Latin in *some* idiolects, periods, and areas, though the B/V alternation was avoided in writing through adherence to orthographic norms. The other possible examples of B/V alternation in the inscriptional record (e.g. *bagis bitam* (*RIB* I 1); *Vivio* (17); *Betto* (2144); *Vrocatae* (*RIB* II 2503.160); *parbo* (*RIB* II 2503.444)), which have often been brushed aside as masons' errors or the work of continental visitors, should now be re-examined.

We might consider that the traditional interpretation of distinct [b] and [w] sounds in Latin loanwords into British Celtic also needs to be revisited (Jackson 1953: 88–90, 363–365, 413). If, after careful examination, we can show that the sounds are kept apart, then we need to establish securely the dating and nature of these loanwords. Some may, of course, be early (before the merger in spoken Latin of the Empire) and others late (either from learned ecclesiastical Latin (Thomas 1981: 61–79), or from spoken Latin after the differentiation of the sounds in initial and post-liquid positions, as we see in some of the Romance languages). If the loanwords showing no merger are, at least in part, imperial in date, and we now have evidence that the B/V alternation (indicating a merger) may have been attested in some varieties of British Latin in the imperial period, then this may be useful evidence for the variegated linguistic landscape of the province along social, temporal, and geographical lines (Hamp 1975; Smith 1983: 935–938).

Jackson's view (1953) that the countryside was Celtic speaking, with the exception of the rural elites, has been undermined by the finds of Latin curse tablets in rural contexts, whose authors complain, often in low-level Latin, about relatively minor thefts. As we have seen, current research is encouraging us to be more generous about levels of literacy (Pearce 2004: 44), and therefore Latin and bilingualism, among the civilian population. Bilingualism theory teaches us that a restriction of Celtic–Latin bilingualism to the rural elite is unlikely and that the authors of curse tablets, such as the one from Ratcliffe, were very likely to have been bilingual to an extent. The rural elite are clearly not the almost exclusive purveyors of Latin loanwords into British Celtic, as Jackson (1953) proposed. We need to attempt to identify, describe, and explain the differences and similarities between the Latin(s) of the loanwords and the Latin(s) on the ground, which may demonstrate mixtures of different types of Latin from a range of time depths and contexts. The vigorous and complex discussion of the nature of Latin loanwords in the Brittonic languages and *Latinitas Britannica* finds itself with more fuel for debate.

The End of *Britannia*: Post-Roman Inscriptions and the Germanic Languages

As we creep past the end of Roman rule, Ogam inscriptions, often under-appreciated by Classicists, are important evidence for assessing the linguistic composition of Britain. These texts date from the fourth century AD onwards and are attested in southern Ireland, Scotland, the Isle of Man, Wales, and south-western England (for the texts, see Macalister 1945; Nash-Williams 1950; Thomas 1991–2; Okasha 1993; Tedeschi 2005; Edwards 2007, 2013; Redknap and Lewis 2007; for discussions, see McManus 1991; Sims-Williams 2003; Charles-Edwards 2013: esp. 96–173; for dating, see Charles-Edwards 2013: 119). They are the earliest attestations of Insular Celtic (with the possible exception of one or two curse tablets) and are inscribed using an alphabet comprised of linear incisions and loosely influenced by the Roman alphabet, according to a majority of scholars (Harvey 1987, 1989; Lehmann 1989). The earliest examples, incised on standing stones, mainly consist of personal names and formulae. In Britain, the inscriptions appear in Celtic in Ogam script, and also, much more commonly, bilingually in Celtic in Ogam script and in Latin (Figure 5). In addition, related texts occur written in Latin using only the Roman script (conversely, the inscriptions in Ireland are almost always only in Irish; see Charles-Edwards 2013: 119). This is not the place for a full discussion of the details of the Ogam stones and their Latin congeners, but it is worth touching on the debate that has sprung up around the Latin versions.

Insert Figure 5 here

Charles-Edwards (1995: 715–718) has argued that the presence of Latin on British Ogam stones suggests that the inscribing communities were bilingual and that their British Latin shows some distinctive ‘spoken’ developments, not least the collapse of the case system, which was also happening simultaneously in British Celtic (Koch: 1982–3). The fifth-century ‘Corbalengi stone’ from Penbryn, Ceredigion, for example, reads *CORBALENGI IACIT ORDOVS*, and offers what seems to be a genitive singular personal name where standard Latin would require a nominative. Adams (2007: 616–620) presents a different interpretation of the same material. For him, the mistakes in case agreement suggest that Latin is *not* known by the inscribing communities; rather they recognize that they might want to use Latin but, in the absence of competence, incorrectly copy features from other Ogam inscriptions into their scrappy, written Latin. Given our poor knowledge of the inscribing communities (in many cases it is hard to be sure whether we are dealing with Irish speakers in Wales or local communities)[10] and in the absence of lengthy texts, it is difficult to make any firm decisions between what seem to be plausible views of the same material. Nevertheless, other evidence—for example, the contemporary non-ecclesiastical loanwords into Old Irish, which come via British Latin rather than British Celtic, and the fact that apparently ‘Ogam-influenced’ Latin texts occur in areas with no Ogam inscriptions—suggests that a Celtic-influenced Latin may have been spoken beyond the context of the Church in the post-Roman Highland zone (Charles-Edwards 2013: 109–110). What we can state with certainty is that written Latin had some currency in communities in the far west of what had been *Britannia*, even after the decline of Rome.[11]

One other major clue for reconstructing what might have been happening to the linguistic composition of Britain during the Roman period could be the languages that the Germanic-speaking incomers to the island encountered from the fifth century onwards.

Unfortunately, as with many aspects of the history of post-imperial Britain, there are far more questions than answers. In recent decades, the crux of the debate concerning the *adventus Saxonum* has moved away from the issues of precisely when, where, and who, and has involved a reconsideration of the mass invasion of Germanic-speaking peoples altogether. This change was motivated by a move in the twentieth century away from Germanic origins for England, reinterpretation of the historical sources, and, most importantly, increasingly sophisticated analysis of the growing archaeological evidence. The revisionist stance argued that there had been no large-scale change in population and that cultural change had been brought about by a small number of elite incomers. The current consensus still seems to support immigration of relatively significant numbers into Britain (Hamerow 1997; Ward-Perkins 2000: 519–523), though one of the revisionists, Higham (2007: 12), has stated that 'there is a real danger that an elite dominance interpretation of cultural change is becoming the new orthodoxy'. This particular debate seems set to continue.

Linguistic evidence has increasingly been deemed an essential element in making sense of the ambiguous remains from the post-Roman period. The clear success of the English (Germanic) language and the apparent lack of elements of Latin and, especially, British Celtic in Old English have led some linguists to view a massive invasion and change of population or 'cultural annihilation' as indispensable (e.g. Coates 2007; Padel 2007).[12] But we should hesitate before assigning a victory to the 'mass-migrationists': the evidence from linguistics needs to be handled more cautiously. First, language change may be brought about without the condition of massive population replacement. Not only that, but when speakers of one language shift to another with little access to education, the contact-induced change in the target language may tend to involve transfer of phonology, morphology, and syntax rather than loanwords. In other words, when speakers of British Celtic/Latin shifted to Old English, the impact on Old English may have been grammatical rather than lexical. This type of change is much harder to recover, especially for typologically similar languages (though Schrijver (2002) and Tristram (2007) claim to have identified some possible examples), and will be unlikely to have affected the standardized Old English of the elite, which was the main variety of language committed to writing until the twelfth century (Tristram 2007: 201). So the possibility of language change without population replacement remains open, though we need to try to work out how and why, if they stayed put, the local communities of England steadily shifted away from both their British Celtic and their Latin in favour of the Germanic tongues of the incomers.[13]

The element often missing from the immediately post-Roman story has been a serious consideration of Latin, though Schrijver (2002, 2007) has recently been putting spoken Latin back in the picture (see Russell (2012: 219–224) for a series of associated methodological issues). The question often posed by scholars of post-Roman Britain is: ‘why don’t the English speak Welsh?’ (Tristram 2007: 192). But we might legitimately wonder what has happened to spoken Latin too, if we think that Latinization had been successful—at least in certain areas and social groups—and given the lapidary evidence just discussed and the continued use of spoken Latin forms on the Continent, despite incursions from outside the old Roman Empire (Ward-Perkins (2000) and Halsall (2013) compare the post-Roman situations in northern Gaul and Britain). Indeed, considering how important the Roman Empire must have been for at least some Germanic-speaking mercenaries and traders originating outside the official boundaries of the Empire, we might even wonder whether the *lingua franca* between local and incomer in post-Roman Britain might have been Latin. But there is no consensus on how much Latin the members of the *adventus* encountered in Britain. We can be sure that the linguistic situation varied along geographical and social lines, and the new arrivals would have encountered different varieties of language, depending on where and when they landed and with whom they came into contact. It is perhaps the fact that the end of Roman rule upset the social framework for this complex Latin–Celtic societal bilingualism that provided the ideal conditions for the uptake of a new language, whose speakers may have had a strong sense of ethnolinguistic identity.

Conclusion

Though the indigenous communities of Roman Britain did not have a writing system or literature of their own and barely feature in Classical texts, they can be materialized in the material remains of the province, including its epigraphy. Sociolinguistic analysis can provide information for multiple identities and cultural contacts through naming choices and linguistic features. The oft-neglected linguistic evidence, which can even be enshrined in later languages, is essential in reaching nuanced conclusions on social interactions in the province and is constantly renewed with new finds and revisions of the old. This evidence should not be used to supplant the other archaeological material, or its literary and historical handmaidens, but rather to complement it, and is a vital component in enabling us to understand Roman Britain.

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Figure 1.

Kernel density plot of the distributions of 'broad period Roman' styli recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme as of 17 January 2014, plotted against selected constraints

Source: Robbins 2014 fig. 4 for constraints, with kind permission of the author; background map data from Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service, Crown Copyright/database right 2013. Produced by L. Wallace.

Figure 2.

Tomlin's line drawing of *Tab. Sulis* 18

Source: reproduced with the kind permission of the author.

Figure 3.

Tomlin's line drawing of *Tab. Sulis* 30

Source: reproduced with the kind permission of the author.

Figure 4.

Tomlin's line drawing of the lead curse tablet at Red Hill, Ratcliffe-on-Soar

Source: Hassall and Tomlin (1993: 311), reproduced with the kind permission of the author.

Figure 5.

Latin and Ogam-inscribed stone, St Dogmaels/Llandudoch, Pembrokeshire, Wales, (a) photograph, (b) drawing and transcription

Source: © Crown copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales.

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[1] The difficult issues of possible 'pre-Celtic' and non-Indo-European/Indo-European (e.g. Germanic) languages in contact with Celtic (D. E. Evans 1983: 952–954) and of Pictish in Scotland (Charles-Edwards 2013: 89–92) will not be tackled here.

[2] This is due to their use of theta and barred d, which are employed on the Continent to represent the so-called *tau gallicum* sound of Gaulish language; see Mullen (2013a: 102–103).

[3] For example, the definite article from the demonstrative pronoun, compounding of two or more prepositions, syntax of subordinate clauses, and the pluperfect, for which see Mac Cana (1976). Russell (2012: 222–223) argues that, while the pluperfect may have been created under influence from Latin, the model presented by Mac Cana cannot work. See D. E. Evans (1983: 973) for citation of other possible non-lexical features of contact-induced change.

[4] Toponyms (place names) are another source of linguistic and cultural information, though their interpretation raises just as many problems as for personal names (see Rivet and Smith 1979; Parsons and Sims-Williams 2000; De Hoz et al. 2005). Parsons (2011: 122) notes that no more than 7% of place names in Roman Britain are Latin and many post-Conquest names, even for Roman creations, are Celtic (Rivet 1980).

[5] Mann (1971) produced an incomplete list of features found in the inscriptional material, which he purported to be evidence of spoken Latin in Britain, supplemented by features in the coinage a few years later by Shiel (1975). These attempts to identify spoken language through the testimony of lapidary and numismatic material were met with distain by Smith (1983: e.g. 895–896, 935–936).

[6] See Mann (1985) for the view that the epigraphic habit never really catches on among local Britons, even recruits into the army (see also Hope 1997; Mattingly 2008; Noy 2010). J. Evans (1987) notes that the graffiti on pottery are more useful than lapidary inscriptions for charting literacy in Britain, since they are not biased towards the military and foreign authors. For literacy in Roman Britain, see also Raybould (1999); Ingemark (2000); Williams (2001, 2002, 2005, 2007); Hanson and Conolly (2002); Pearce (2004).

[7] According to Smith (1983), Jackson's numbers 3, 5, 10 (1953: 87–88, 93–94) need to be withdrawn altogether, numbers 1, 2 (1953: 86–87) modified, and numbers 4, 6, 8–9, 11–12 (1953: 88, 90–93, 94) retained but with a warning that perhaps the developments were possibly rather later in Vulgar Latin itself than Jackson allowed.

[8] If only we had better evidence, Hamp's study (1975) of 'social gradience' in British Latin could be a useful approach. Adams (2007: 591–596), however, notes that Hamp's article is inaccurate and expresses frustration that it 'goes on being quoted with approval'.

[9] The penultimate word of the Ratcliffe curse, *devo*, allows identification of a potentially 'local' feature; see Mullen (2013b: 269).

[10] Sims-Williams (2002) has pointed out that a significant percentage (70%) of the pre-Norman inscriptions from Wales are ‘Irish’ in some sense. Indeed, in the stone inscription cited in the main text, *CORBALENGI* is a name of Irish form (with an -a- composition vowel) and yet appears to belong to a member of the *Ordovices* (see Sims-Williams 2002: 26; Russell 2012: 216 n. 74; Charles-Edwards 2013: 176).

[11] Latin also continues to be used in elite contexts: parts of the Llandaff charters date to the early seventh century and Gildas is well educated in Latin (see Lapidge 1984).

[12] There are many more early Latin loanwords than British Celtic in Old English, even once the later ecclesiastical Latin borrowings have been removed; some of these may be from continental Latin, but surely not all (see Parsons 2011: 120–121).

[13] See Ward-Perkins (2000: 523–524) for the suggestion that the Law of Ine, which gave preferential treatment to Saxons, may have been a motivating factor.