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The uniqueness of the Irish case: an endangered official language

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to deal with the unique status of the Irish language inside the territory of the Republic of Ireland. Ireland is a bilingual state in which Irish is recognised by the constitution as the country's "national and first official language" of the country, despite being used daily by just a minority of the population. On the other hand, English is arguably the country's most widespread language and is described as "a second official language".

Its aim consists of the provision of a theoretical framework concerning the language policy and language endangerment's fields of study, analysing then the Irish language policies – with a focus on those aiming the revitalisation of the Irish language – in order to identify its critical areas and reflect on the language's future challenges, expected developments and role.

The method adopted to achieve the mentioned objective consists of the administration of a questionnaire to a sample of "Irish speaking" subjects. That investigation aims to collect language learners and speakers' attitudes towards the language, their use of the language and their opinions in relation to the current language policy.

The paper develops itself into four chapters treating respectively the development of the language planning discipline throughout the years, language policy's main issues and areas of study. It continues then with the investigation of the Irish language's current situation, to conclude then with the analysis of the questionnaire's results.

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Introduction

In today's globalized and hyperconnected world, the high relevance and utility of dominant languages – as for example English – represent a threat to the very existence of minority languages, which have little or no possibility to compete under these terms. For this reason, of a total of 7000 languages estimated in the world, half of these are endangered and 1500 are expected to disappear by the end of the century. Such an event would represent an inestimable loss not only in terms of linguistic variety but also in terms of cultural and historical knowledge. In the attempt of reversing the above-mentioned tendency, in recent years much research effort has been dedicated to the fields of language policy and language revitalization with the aim of understanding the reasons for language endangerment and death in order to develop effective strategies to protect the threatened languages. Among the many cases of endangered and minority languages, Irish, due to its history and its current situation represents an exception to the standard definitions.

Ireland was the first British colony and their dominion on the island lasted for over 700 years. During that period, due to the political, economic and cultural domination, the Irish language lost much of its power, status and speakers in favour of English, consequently ending up being very close to extinction by the end of the 20th century. Nonetheless, with the Irish gaining independence in 1922, the revitalization of the Irish language became one of the first objectives of the various governments leading the country through the decades. This made it possible for the language to reach an unprecedented degree of public recognition up to being proclaimed by the constitution the county's “national and first official language”, despite being spoken actively just by a minority of the population. On the other hand, despite English being by far the most widely used language in most domains it is described just as “another official language”.

100 years since the Republic of Ireland gained its independence, this dissertation aims to provide the theoretical tools to better understand the fields of language policy and language revitalization and, in light of this, to investigate the current state and situation of the Irish language to reflect then on the future of the language, on its role and its further developments. The work is divided into four chapters.

The first part is dedicated to the presentation of the discipline of language planning, its fundamentals and its developments throughout the decades. This part also deals with the inclusion of acquisition planning as part of the discipline and the evolution of the entire area of studies into that of language policy. In conclusion, it focuses on the fields of ethnolinguistics and language rights, both essential to support and protect minority language groups and their endangered languages.

The second chapter, instead, deals with the definition of the term “minority language” and with the concept of “language endangerment” by providing different studies and the point of view of various scholars. That said, it encompasses the main areas of intervention identified as those useful to reverse the endangerment process and the language switch from an endangered minority one to a widespread and dominant one.

The dissertation continues with Chapter Three, regarding the specific case of the Irish language. After introducing the history of the language with the aim of identifying the historical reasons for its endangerment, the chapter provides a classification and description of the current situation of the language, highlighting its critical areas and issues. To conclude, it explores the principal aspects of current Irish language policy, with a specific interest in those areas which can be exploited as a tool to revitalise the language.

The fourth and final chapter, instead, presents the survey on Irish language use and attitudes conducted on a sample of “Irish speaking” subjects. Following that, it shows and comments on its findings in connection to the prior sections.

CHAPTER 1

LANGUAGE POLICY – HISTORY AND FUNDAMENTS

Language policy is a discipline of the study area of sociolinguistics. This chapter will introduce the main aspects and issues of the field with a focus on those necessary to understand better the specific Irish case and its uniqueness.

1.1 Language planning

According to Kaplan and Baldauf (1997:xi), a language policy is “a body of ideas, laws, regulations, rules and practices intended to achieve the planned language change in the societies, group or system”. Stewart (1968) states that it can be applied to national languages, other native languages or “foreign languages used for special purposes” (Moeliono, 1986:23). A first paradigm of the discipline can be identified with “classic language planning” (Ricento 2000:206), which was first elaborated from the 1950s to the 1960s, and then generally accepted up to the late 1980s (Wright 2012:66). In that phase the discipline was called “language planning” by sociolinguists because it was a common belief that the use of languages inside of a state could be easily planned as much as economy.

As regards language planning, Nahir (1984:294-327) identifies 11 objectives that it could aim to achieve and among these the following can be mentioned:

- *Language revival - which is “the attempt to restore to common use a language that has few or no surviving speakers” (Nahir 1984)*
- *Language maintenance – to help the preservation of an endangered language*
- *Language spread – aiming to increase the number of languages speakers*

As Spolsky (2012:4) states, the above-mentioned paradigm was substantially the one adopted by nations after the First World War when it was assumed that “a nation is defined by its territory and its language”. Such an approach was well suited for both the post-Versailles and post-WW2 Europe, which was made up of “reasonably homogenous nation-states” in which there was generally a principal language adopted as the official one and minority languages “could be ignored or recognized”, since they were basically “powerless” (Spolsky 2012:4).

Classic language planning is divided into two areas, first recognised by Kloss in 1969, status and corpus planning (Ferguson 2006:20), while the third one, acquisition planning, was instead introduced by Cooper in 1989 (Siiner, Hult, & Kupisch, 2018:3). Status planning is, according to Fishman (2000) “the allocation or reallocation of a language or variety to functional domains within a society, thus affecting the status, or standing, of a language” while Cooper (1990:99-121), instead, defines it as “the deliberate efforts to influence the allocation of functions among a community's languages.”.

Kloss (1969:27) believes that a language’s status is given by the combination of the following elements: the number of speakers, juridical recognition, degree of standardisation and origin or “indigenusness”. To these, Stewart (1968:531) suggests the addition of vitality, intended as the percentage of speakers over the total population taken into consideration. From a merely juridical point of view, Kloss (1969:Ch4) describes these cases: a single official language such as English in the United Kingdom; a bilingual or multilingual state such as Irish and English in Ireland or French, Italian, German and Romansh in Switzerland; a language recognised as an official “on a regional level [such as] French in the Aosta region, German in South Tyrol” (Kloss 1969:29). Furthermore, despite not having juridic recognition, a language can be: promoted when its use is encouraged by the authorities; a tolerated one when it does not receive positive treatment from the state; or a proscribed one, which means that it is discouraged or prohibited one.

From a theoretical perspective, it is possible to distinguish between state nations and nation-states (Kloss 1969: 29). In the former, as stated by Caviedes (2003:250), language homogenisation might be used to allow or facilitate communication within the state and create a new shared sense of identity among the nation. In contrast, the latter refers to a territory occupied and inhabited by a majority of “ethnically and culturally unified” people sharing the same religion and language (Joseph 2012:1) and that “exists before the foundation of the state” (Wright 2012:65).

The following step is corpus planning, whose aim is to “move the language to a more elaborate level of standardization or an expanded set of functions” (Wright 2012:70).

This can be achieved through the intervention of “the language form” intended as “the code itself”, and trying to “engineer changes” into three different areas which are graphitization, standardisation, and modernisation. (Ferguson 2006:21). The first one, graphitisation, is considered by Haugen (1983) as “the first step in the standardisation of a language” and comes to be necessary to transform an oral language into a literate one or in those cases in which a local language “has not developed a standard orthography or which simply does not have a written history” (Kaplan & Baldauf 1997:40).

A further step in the process is represented by standardisation itself, consisting of the choice of a particular variety or dialect of a language to become the standard and ideal one “that the speakers of a language are asked to aspire to rather than one that accords with their observed behaviour” (Wardhaugh 2010:32). In other words, the selected norm becomes the one taught in prescriptive grammars, dictionaries but also used in all the relevant functions of the state such as commerce, administration and literature. Since the selected norm “inevitably becomes associated with power”, that one is usually associated with an elite (Wardhaugh 2010:32-33).

The third component, modernization, is described by D’Souza (1986:455) as a dynamic process through which a language “is made functionally suitable for use in new or extended domains”. This process principally affects vocabulary, especially in contexts where a specific kind of lexicon is required, such as “administration, the judiciary, journalism, broadcasting, higher education, research” (D'Souza, 1986:455). Similarly, Ferguson (1968) states that modernisation is "the process by which a language becomes the equal of other developed languages as a medium of communication; it is in a sense the process of joining the world community of increasingly inner translatable languages recognized as appropriate vehicles of modern forms of discourse" (in Shidhar, 1988:1).

As already mentioned, acquisition planning (AP) was the last component of language planning to be introduced. This cannot be considered as a part of the original classic language planning since it was only introduced in 1989 by Cooper, when, as will be seen later in this section, he levelled criticism towards the classic planning approach. As stated by Cooper (1989:157), acquisition planning, “refers to organized efforts to promote the

learning of a language” and it is “directed towards increasing the number of users — speakers, listeners, writers, or readers” (1989:33). According to Spolsky (2012: 74), it is principally addressed to the management of the country’s educational system, and it should have as its final aim “the teaching of the standard language to all”. Kaplan and Baldauf (1997 in Hogan-Brun et al. 2013:1), believe that it can be applied “in formal and informal settings, at the macro or micro levels of society, and may involve top-down or bottom-up approaches”.

In contrast with the above-mentioned, Ferguson (2006:34) proposes the adoption of “more encompassing” language planning in education, instead of acquisition planning. Such an alternative approach concerns “the choice of medium of instruction for various levels of the education system” – fundamental in multilingual contexts, it attributes greater relevance to the function of the home language, and consequently to intergenerational language transmission. Furthermore, it discusses “the second/foreign languages as curricular subjects of instruction” (Ferguson 2006:34) with a particular reference to whether they should be compulsorily adopted or not, which members of the scholastic community should be addressed and the duration of the teaching.

This field of studies can be considered the basis of many projects of revitalisation and efforts to reverse language shift actions, a topic that will be addressed in the following sections of this chapter. In the last few years, the focus of the acquisition planning discipline, especially in western Europe, has been on the choice of the language of instruction and on which should be the languages taught as a foreign or secondary language (Hogan-Brun, Robinson, & Thonhauser, 2013:4). According to Grin and Vaillancourt (1997), such a choice is often made on an economic basis while Bourdieu (1991) suggests it also lies in the common perception of the language’s value on the market (Hogan-Brun, Robinson, & Thonhauser, 2013:1).

On this latter point, what can be noticed is the overwhelming diffusion of the English language in the educational system “in different continents to all or most schoolchildren” (Cenoz and Gorter 2012:301) explicitly thanks to its widely recognized role of *lingua franca* in international communication. It is “presumed to be the most valuable language

within the language market in Europe and elsewhere” (Cenoz and Gorter 2012: 303) and therefore it “is considered a resource which opens doors for better opportunities and it is associated with social and economic mobility” (Cenoz and Gorter 2012:301-302).

However, as reported by Ferguson (2012:480), some scholars such as Mufwene, Phillipson or Pennycook, argue that the status of English as a global language might be a threat to global linguistic diversity since “[it] directly endangers some languages and marginalise others”, principally by replacing them in relevant domains such as “higher education and business” (Phillipson 1992, 2003; Phillipson and Skurtnabb-Kangas 1996, 1997, 1999; Mülhäusler 1996). Furthermore, it is reported to be “implicated in the process of cultural homogenisation” and more specifically “it is a vector of cultural ‘Americanisation’ (Phillipson and Skurtnabb-Kangas 1996, 1997, 1999; Pennycook 1995).

A relevant evolution in the discipline started when, during the 1980s, several factors led scholars such as Blommaert, Cooper, and Nekvapil to “turn against state action” (Jernudd and Nekvapil 2012:26). Among the main reasons for this criticism, one can signal the failure of economic planning and consequently “the loss of confidence of planning a language as well” (Spolsky 2012:6), together with the lack of efficacy of language planning policies in the ex-colonies that in the meantime had become independent states. In particular, Blommaert (2018:1) identified three main problems as leading lead to his scepticism towards classic language planning. The first one regards the reinforcement of linguistic oppression through language planning in the former colonies that often involved the confirmation of the former colonial language as “part of the institutional sociolinguistic hierarchy”, thus potentially endangering minority languages (Blommaert, 2018:2).

Similarly, Jernaedd and Nekvapil (2012:27) argue that “despite the intentions of the theoreticians of language planning, it [language planning] could not contribute to desirable change, but rather, to the solidification of social and economic inequality in developing countries”. As a second argument, starting from 1990, there was a relevant development in the language ideology field that “provided a critical deconstruction of –

notably – the notion of ‘language’ as a standardized artefact itself” (Blommaert, 2018:2). The result was a much more complexed conceptualisation of language, no longer aligned with the classic planning approach top-down, or in other words from the elites to the people. The third one, presented as a direct consequence of the previous one is, therefore, the need to take into consideration “actors at several scale levels and activities across the entire realm of social life” that previously were largely ignored in favour of “policy papers, international treaties and constitutional amendments” (Blommaert, 2018:2). Cooper, instead, provides an extended definition for “language planning” which is “the deliberate efforts to influence the behaviours of others concerning the acquisition, structure or, functional allocation of their language codes” (Cooper 1989:45). In a similar way to Blommaert, he proposed a more “empirically messy and emotional approach” (Jernudd and Nekvapil 2012:28). It was in this context of renovation of the discipline that Cooper proposed the above-mentioned acquisition planning as a separate and relevant component of language planning.

1.2 Language policy: ethnic identity and language rights

A second and currently adopted paradigm in the field is provided by language policy. Spolsky (2006:5) states that this is composed of “three inter-related but independent components”: language practices, language beliefs or ideology, and language planning or management. Language practices are described as “the actual language practices of the members of the speech community” (Spolsky, 2012: 5). Hymes (1972: 54) defines a speech community as “a group of people who share rules for conducting and interpreting at least one variety of a language or dialect. The term can be applied to a neighbourhood, a city, a region or a nation.” Similarly, Labov (1972:120-121) states that “[it] is not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements, so much as by participation in a set of shared norms: these norms may be observed in overt types of evaluative behaviour and by the uniformity of abstract patterns of variation which are invariant in respect to particular levels of usage”.

A second area deals with the study of speech community members’ attitudes toward each variety and the importance they attribute to it (Spolsky, 2012: 5). A practical example of the distinctive attribution to each variant existing in a given speech community is

provided by the case study of the Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand. As García (2012:94) reported, these people were deprived of recognition regarding culture and language from 1840 to 1987 under British rule first and under the Neo-Zealandese later. In 1987, after several efforts taken by Māori activists, the Māori Language Act recognised the language as co-official in New Zealand, together with English, and enacted a relevant action of revitalisation – a topic that will be dealt with in the following section. It is interesting to notice that in this context, as Fishman (1991: 243-244) reports, English is still used by Māori people in most working situations and media while Māori is widely used in the family and community domain. Considering this, it can be argued that while English keeps being considered “a resource which opens doors for better opportunities and it is associated with social and economic mobility” (Cenoz and Gorter 2012: 301), the Māori language is linked to auto-determination and identity (May 2010: 506 in Wright 2012: 71).

Spolsky’s third and last component (2012:5) is “what used to be called language planning” which he suggests calling language management. This latter term includes the two components recognised by classical language planning (status and corpus planning) and the one added by Cooper, which is acquisition planning and recalls a more flexible approach that “set values and direction but admit the continual need for modification to fit specific and changing situations” (Nekvapil 2006 in Spolsky 2012:5).

Ethnic identity & language

According to García (2012:79), the three components of language policy listed here are linked to the above-mentioned concept of ethnic identity. The latter can be related to one of those “actors at several scale levels and activities across the entire realm of social life” that Blommaert (2018:2) suggests taking into consideration when dealing with language planning (or policy). The term "ethnicity" describes a person's affiliation with a social group that has a similar ancestry and includes biological, cultural, social, and psychological aspects. (Padilla 1999:115). The latter is the one principally taken into consideration by Epstein and Heizler (2015:1) when describing ethnic identity as “a measurement of the feeling of belonging to a particular ethnic group”.

Fishman (1977:6) describes ethnicity as “phenomenological”, which means that it exists because humans recognise it as a “subjective cultural construct” on which lies “aggregation” and “socio-cultural organisation”. Similarly, Dorian (1999:25–26) explains that ethnicity “rests largely on social rather than on biological roots” suggesting that, as well as “socially constructed categories” it might alter as a result of outside influences like natural disasters, conflict, migration, resource scarcity or conquest that might make the shift “desirable” or forced.

Liebkind (1999:141) highlights that “one cannot choose the ethnic group in which one is born” adding that “ethnicity can be manipulated, although it cannot be situationally created out of nothing”. Berry (1990 in Liebkind 1999:142) listed four possible outcomes of the contact between two ethnic groups: “assimilation, separation, marginalisation or integration”. In the first case, assimilation, one group completely abandon its “cultural features” to embrace the ones of the other group such as language, religion, and culture. In separation instead, the group totally refuses the other cultural identity, sticking to its original one. Marginalisation represents a lack of a ‘satisfactory identity’ since neither the dominant nor the minority one is considered so. The latter case, which is integration, might have as a result “a truly bicultural identity” (Liebkind 1999:142) in which there is no loss of any ethnic identity marker though the subject taken into consideration “acquired necessary cultural skills to integrate into the larger society” (Liebkind 1999:142).

Researchers have identified over 80 ethnic identity markers such as language use, perceived as belonging to a certain ethnicity, and cultural habits such as music and food but also desire for ethnic cohesion and perception of discrimination (Schnell 1990 in Watzlawik, 2012), nonetheless, Padilla (1999:116), Fishman (1977 in García 2012:81), Dorian (1999:31), and Liebkind (1999:143) agree on the fact that, from a psychological point of view, language stands out as the most important identity maker thanks to its qualities. In fact, it is the basic element to name ourselves and the rest of the world to acquire our fundamental knowledge, so it is reported to be closely related to self-identity (Liebkind 1999:143). This process of knowledge also happens through socialisation intended as “an avenue whereby individuals are linked to the society i.e., to social norms and social values” (Fishman 1977:24) mainly through self-identification and the

consequent imitation of “significant others such as parents and teachers”(Padilla 1999: 115).

Furthermore, language is considered by Fishman as “the symbol par excellence” of ethnicity and Liebkind (1999:144), who shares this view, adds that it keeps being so even in those cases in which the language is not actively spoken anymore. However, the latter reports that according to many scholars, “identity can, and does, survive to the loss of the original group language”. In other words, although the members of an ethnic group might lose their language use or proficiency, this can keep being considered a relevant symbol of their ethnicity and an element of distinction from other groups.

Language rights

As reported in the previous section, Kaplan and Baldauf (1997: xii) describe language policy as “a set of laws, regulations or rules enacted by both governments and organisations”. Considering this, a relevant, though “newly developing” (Paulston, 1997:73) area of language policy is that of language rights which is reported to generally deal “with the rules that public institutions adopt concerning language use in a variety of different domains” (Patten and Kymlicka:16-25). The terms implied to refer to the field are "language rights," "linguistic rights," and "linguistic human rights", which are generally used as synonymous (Paulston, 1997:73) though the whole field, due to its complexity, still has not had “[its] practical meaning [...] established anywhere yet” (Kibbee 1996 in Arzoz, 2007:4) and consequently lacks of “[a] generally accepted standard legal definition” (LoBianco in Paulston:1997:73).

Language rights often specifically refer to minority rights since, although both minority and dominant languages do have rights, the ones of the latter are “well guaranteed and enforced by social rules and practices, irrespectively of their rights being constitutionally or legally entrenched” (Arzoz 2007:4). In contrast, minority language “is usually under constant pressure to abandon their mother tongue in favour of the majority language” (Pinto 2014:233) and consequently need more protection.

A basic and early distinction between the different kinds of language rights or “levels of protection that can be granted by law” (Arzoz 2007:5) is generally identified by scholars such as Arzoz (2007:5), Kymlicka and Patten (2003), and Reaumé and Pinto (2012:44) in Kloss’(1977) distinction between “tolerance-oriented” and “promotion-oriented” language rights. May (2015:355) explains that the former aim to grant the individual’s right to use their primary language “in the private, non-governmental sphere of national life” in domains such as the domestic and the public ones, for example in the context of “cultural, economic and social institutions”. In contrast, the latter’s objective is carried on by “public authorities [in] trying to promote a minority [language] by having it used in public institutions – legislative, administrative, and educational, including the public schools“ (Kloss 1977:2 in May 2015:355).

Pinto (2014:233) proposes a similar, though further-improved, system of classification dividing language rights into “minimal language rights” and “comprehensive language rights”. Minimal language rights refer to those “enumerated in several international treaties” (2014:233) also described as language liberties or “negative language liberties” with the main features of being universal, as far as traditional civil rights, and ensuring a statal non-intervention policy for what concerns the use of a minority language. (Reaumé & Pinto 2012:47). The above-mentioned “several international treaties” enumerating tolerance-oriented language rights – alternatively known as language liberties or minimal language rights – refer to international papers such as the ECHR (Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms or the "European Convention on Human Rights"), and the "ICCPR" (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) which took as a model the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights developed by the United Nations (Dunbar 2001:91). De Varennes (2001:17-18) classifies these rights as those regarding the private use of the language and states that documents principally dealing with this kind of linguistic rights can be seen as “the direct application of general human rights provisions [...] [such as] freedom of expression, non-discrimination, right to private life and the rights of members of a linguistic to use their own language with other members of their group” (DeVarennes 2001:18)

Comprehensive language rights, instead, are described by Pinto (2014:233) as those that “require the state to take positive steps to ensure the use of a particular language in communication with state bodies such as the courts, parliament, municipalities etc.”(2014:233). It is interesting to notice the similarity between this definition and that of promotion-oriented language rights provided by Kloss (1977). Once again, DeVarenes (2001:19) divides these rights into two main categories: those regarding “the fairness of judicial proceedings, and the other with the general use of public officials of minority languages” (DeVarenes 2001:19).

Reaumé and Pinto (2012:48) propose adopting the term “language accommodations” for the former point. This right lies in the state’s action of exceptionally granting an accused person who does not speak the court’s same language, to speak their own. In light of the exceptionality of this measure, “someone who is bilingual is expected to use the dominant language” (Reaumé 2002:597; Rubio-Marin 2003; Patten 2009:109-110 in Reaumé & Pinto 2012:48). Instead, the “general use of public officials of minority languages” has been promoted by international and supranational institutions such as the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), the Council of Europe, the European Union and the United Nations (Dunbar 2001:92; de Varenes 2001:20). Among the many documents treating this field, Dunbar (2001:92) reports that just the “Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities” and the “European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages” (ECRML) create “binding international obligations” (Dunbar 2001:92).

Looking closer at the ECRML, it is described as “the European Convention for the protection and promotion of languages used by traditional minorities” (Council of Europe 1992a) and after being drafted within the framework of the Council of Europe, it was made available for signing in 1992 and entered into force in 1998. (Groot 2019:115). It was signed by 34 European states while only 25 ratified it, making it enter into force (Council of Europe 2022) . The charter is divided into two main sections: Part II and Part III.

The first one, obliges members to safeguard their regional or minority language(s) through the implementation of measures reported by Groot (2018:118):

- *Recognition of the regional or minority language as an expression of cultural wealth*
- *Respect for the geographical area of each regional or minority language*
- *Resolute action to promote a regional or minority language.*
- *Facilitation and/or encouragement of the use of such languages in speech and writing as well as in public and private life.*
- *Study and research at universities or equivalent institutions*

Once again, Groot (2018:119) reports that Part III, instead, does not require the compulsory subscription to all its point by the members and has the object of ensuring advanced protection to the regional or minority group taken into consideration. More precisely, states should grant the minority language protection on not less than 35 undertakings, concerning the following areas:

- *Article 8: Education*
- *Article 9: Judicial authorities*
- *Article 10: Administrative authorities and public services*
- *Article 11: Media*
- *Article 12: Cultural activities and facilities*
- *Article 13: Economic and social life*
- *Article 14: Transfrontier exchanges*

A key requisite for the states to be able to apply for membership in the ECRML is the presence on its territory of at least one “regional or minority language”, defined as a language “traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population; and ii different from the official language(s) of that State” (Council of Europe 1992b:1-2).

CHAPTER 2

LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT AND REVITALISATION STRATEGIES

2.1 Language endangerment

The definition of minority language is a key topic for the language rights field and also in that of endangerment and language shift. The latter, language shift (LS), belongs to the area of language policy and, as Mufwene (2021:1) reports, it was first introduced by Fishman in 1964 but further expanded through the development of the Reversing Language Shift Model in 1991, thus giving more attention to the phenomenon of language endangerment and loss (LEL). Jernudd and Nekvapil (2012:31) state that Fishman's model can be seen as a summary of his research into language loyalty, maintenance, and planning. A definition for language loyalty and language maintenance is provided by Spolsky (2009:55), who describes these as “the ability (or lack of it) of speakers of a language to stand up to the pressure of more powerful ones” and “a situation where speakers continue to use a language even when there is a new language available”.

Mufwene (2020:1) also reports that according to Fishman (1991) language shift refers to a situation in which a population abandon their own variety to adopt another one, usually politically or economically dominant or more prestigious. Similarly, Kandler and Unger (2010:3855) define language shift as “the process whereby members of a community in which more than one language is spoken abandon their original vernacular language in favour of another”. When this process happens a minority language “[it] almost always shifts towards the language of the dominant powerful group” (Taylor and Wilson 2017:61), also described as the language of wider communication refers to “languages chosen by speakers of several languages to communicate with each other” (Spolsky 2009:61)

Once again, the definition of minority language appears to be crucial. It is important to notice that, as reported by Grenoble and Singerman (2014:1), the previously mentioned definition of minority language provided by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, based on quantitative and demographic criteria, might lead to some issues. An example of that is the exclusion of Irish Gaelic and Maltese as minority

languages of respectively, Ireland and Malta since in these states they are both co-official languages, together with English, nonetheless, following an exclusively demographical classification, they should be included (Groot 2019:116). Azoz (2007:4) explains that “when two or more languages are officially recognized, the purpose of these rights is to enable speakers of the minority language to use their own language rather than the majority language”.

Moreover, Owens (2000:2) reports that a speech community's simple demographic minority condition cannot be accepted as sufficient to identify a language as a minority. This is justified by the fact that “in some cases, a ‘minority language’ is actually spoken by a numerical majority” (Dorian 1981:39; Pandharipande 2002 in Sallabank 2012:102). This is the case of Paraguay where, though being spoken by a wide majority of the population, Guaraní is still not considered the dominant language, a role that is arguably attributed to Spanish which, in contrast, is spoken as L1 by just a small portion of the whole population (Wardhaugh 1987:31 in Owen 2000:3). In light of this, Allardt (1984:201 in Owen 2000:3) proposes the adoption of a discrimination based on domains which are “implicitly differentiated in terms of political and social prestige”. In this perspective, a minority language is used in a private context e.g., at home or with friends while the dominant one is adopted in public domains such as commerce, education, and media. Furthermore, Owen (2000:2) suggests that according to some scholars “minority languages are those that the given population perceive to be minority ones”. Gramsci (1971 in Sallabank 2012:116) identifies this gap of prestige between the languages taken into consideration as one of the main reasons for language shift and relates the condition of the dominant language with the term ‘hegemony’. In addition, minority languages, especially because of their presence in the given private domains “become associated with poverty and backwardness” (Harbert and al. 2009 in Sallabank 2012:116).

The mentioned process of “reduction in status/domain of a language and its speakers is known as minorisation” (Hagège, 2000 in Sallabank 2021:102) and it can be abrupt or gradual (Dorian 1981). The ultimate step in minorisation or endangerment is language death (Sallabank 2012:101) which, according to Crystal’s view (2000:1) happens when “nobody speaks it [the language] anymore”. However, as will be explained later in this

section, other scholars and institutions have provided different and more complex definitions.

Tsunoda (2006:42-47) identifies several ways in which languages death can verify and this classification lies on three criteria which are:

- Cause
- Speed
- Register

Among the causes, two macro-reasons can be identified: the death of the language's speaking population or language shift. The substantial differentiation between the two lies in the fact that in the former case the endangered language ceases to be spoken because its speakers die too while in the latter the speakers of the abandoned or recessive language adopt an alternative language described as conquering or spreading the language.

In the case of death of the speaking population, this can happen due to warfare, genocide, natural catastrophes and epidemy. Once again, further classification can be made by distinguishing between 'language murder', intended as the specific actions aiming to cause the extinction of a language for example by killing all of its speakers, 'biological language death' in the case in which the death of the speakers' population happens as a consequence of a rapid demographic fall and 'glottocide' when the death of the language is just a consequence of an event that kills all of its speakers, as a genocide might be. As concerns instead the temporal variable, this, as already reported can be sudden or gradual. Therefore, combining the two variables the result is:

- *a sudden glotticide*
- *a gradual glotticide*
- *a sudden language shift*
- *a gradual language shift*

The latter case is described as the most frequent one and could lead to situations such as the 'intermediate stage of bilingualism', consisting of a gradual replacement in domains of the endangered language in favour of the dominant language and 'proficiency

continuum', as described by Dal Negro (2004:52) a case in which "progressively younger age corresponds to progressively lower proficiency". Dal Negro (2004:52) provides this definition while reporting the concept of 'imperfect native speaker' or 'semi-speaker', created by Dorian (1977) indicating a situation in which, from a community point of view, as already mentioned, bilingual younger speakers denote a lack of full proficiency – in other words, age grading continuum. The reasons behind this might be an incomplete or "a casual and incomplete" acquisition of the language by more and more children (Dal Negro 2004:52).

The third and latter criteria, which is register, refer to the 'direction' of the language endangerment and loss. This can be distinguished in a 'bottom-up' process or in a 'top-down' one. For instance, an emblematic case of the former is that of Latin "being abandoned first in the family vernacular and surviving ultimately only in the most elevated" (Hill 1983:260 in Tsunoda 2006:47). In other words, language endangerment may be the result of external causes such as natural catastrophes, famine, diseases or war and genocide. Alternatively, it might be a stage following overt repression and economic, religious, cultural, or educational subjugation. These latter ones might cause the affirmation of a negative perception of the language community towards its own traditional language which might decide to abandon it, therefore causing a language shift. (Sallabank 2012:103; UNESCO 2003:2)

A certain degree of difficulty in classifying a language's state of endangerment, or oppositely "vitality", is noticed by Crystal (2000:19) who states that very much depends on the degree of transmission to children, the speech community's attitudes toward it and the presence of other languages, - especially if languages of wider communication - that might represent a threat to it. For this purpose, many scholars and institutions provided their own classification system starting with Fishman's GIDS (Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale) developed in 1991 in the context of the Reversing Language Model (Fishman 1991:85; Gomashie & Terborg 2021:168; Sallabank 2012:106). Therefore, as said by the scholar himself (Fishman 1991:2), the scale is intended to provide not only a classification of the state of endangerment of a language but also some theoretical and practical guidelines to stop and reverse the process.

As suggested by the name of the scale itself, Fishman considers language transmission as “the gold standard of language vitality and the most important factor in language survival”. Fishman (1991:113 in Sallabank 2012:106) and Gomashie & Terborg (2021:168) reports he collocates it at the top of the criteria to evaluate a language’s state along with:

1. *intergenerational transmission*
2. *mass media use*
3. *language use in education/language of instruction*
4. *literacy use*
5. *age of speakers*
6. *language of work*
7. *official or governmental use*

It must be remembered that the present scale has been developed to provide a classification of language endangerment and a theoretical and practical set of instructions that communities could use to reverse language shift (Fishman 1991:1).

Despite being recognised that GIDS “remains the foundational conceptual model for assessing the status of language vitality” (Simons & Lewis 2010:104), it has been criticised by Sallabank (2012:116) since it does not treat the causes of language shift which are suggested to potentially be useful to reverse it. Additionally and as it will be further explained later, Simon and Lewis proposed an improved and extended version of the scale since this one does not include all the possible statuses that a language can have.

Table 2.1 Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale

Degree	Description
1	endangered language (still) used in the educational sphere, in the work sphere, in the mass media and on higher levels, even on state level
2	endangered language used on lower levels (local media and government offices)
3	endangered language used in the local work sphere, in which interaction between speakers of the minority and majority languages occurs
4	endangered language used as the language of instruction in schools, in looser or tighter dependency on instruction in the majority language
5	endangered language is used for instruction, but not in formal education
6	endangered language used in family settings as a means of intergenerational handing down of traditions and is thus handed down in this way
7	endangered language used by the older generation, which is already beyond the age of biological reproduction
8	the endangered language used (known, remembered) by several of its older speakers

Note adapted from: Fishman 1991 in Jernudd & Nekvapil 2012:31

In the wider context of UNESCO's commitment to supporting endangered languages and avoid their disappearance, in 2003 was developed a scale to evaluate a language' state of endangerment, the UNESCO's Language Vitality and Endangerment framework (LVE) (UNESCO 2003:2). The criteria utilised to grade the endangerment state are (UNESCO 2003:7):

1. *intergenerational language transmission*
2. *absolute number of speakers*
3. *proportion of speakers within the total population*
4. *shifts in domains of language use*
5. *response to new domains and media*
6. *materials for language education and literacy*
7. *governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies (including official status and use)*
8. *community members' attitudes toward their own language*
9. *type and quality of documentation.*

Similarly to GIDS, also this model considers intergenerational transmission at the top of the factors influencing the endangerment state. Each of the listed factors is graded from extinct (6), critically endangered (5), severely endangered (4), definitely endangered (3), vulnerable (2), and safe (1) (Gomashie & Teborg 2021:168) and cannot be separated (UNESCO 2003:7)

Table 2.2 UNESCO’s Language Vitality and Endangerment framework

Degree of endangerment	Intergenerational language transmission
Safe	language is spoken by all generations; intergenerational transmission is uninterrupted
Vulnerable	most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e.g. home)
Definitely endangered	children no longer learn the language as mother tongue at home
Severely endangered	language is spoken by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves
Critically endangered	the youngest speakers are grandparents, and they speak the language partially and infrequently
Extinct	there are no speakers left

Note adapted from: UNESCO’s Language Vitality and Endangerment framework

In response to the above-mentioned critics of GIDS moved by Lewis and Simon, these two scholars developed the EGIDS (Expanded Intergenerational Disruption Scale) using the GIDS as “an orientation”, thus basing recognising intergenerational transmission as a key factor in the endangerment and “numbering [...] [the] levels [...] to maintain correspondence with Fishman’s GIDS” (Lewis and Simon 2012:109). For this reason, each level corresponds with the ones of GIDS except for the split of levels 6 and 8 into two sections – 6a, 6b and 8a,8b – and the addition of levels 0, 9, and 10 which are “entirely new descriptive categories that allow the EGIDS to be applied to all languages of the world (Lewis and Simon 2010:110). In total, the scale consists of 13 levels.

Table 2.3 EGIDS table and UNESCO

LEVEL	LABEL	DESCRIPTION	UNESCO
0	International	The language is used internationally for a broad range of functions.	Safe
1	National	The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government at the nationwide level.	Safe
2	Regional	The language is used for local and regional mass media and governmental services.	Safe
3	Trade	The language is used for local and regional work by both insiders and outsiders.	Safe
4	Educational	Literacy in the language is being transmitted through a system of public education.	Safe
5	Written	The language is orally used by all generations and is effectively used in written form in parts of the community.	Safe
6a	Vigorous	The language is used orally by all generations and is being learned by children as their first language.	Safe
6b	Threatened	The language is used orally by all generations but only some of the child-bearing generation are transmitting it to their children	Vulnerable
7	Shifting	The child-bearing generation knows the language well enough to use it among themselves but none are transmitting it to their children	Definitely endangered
8a	Moribund	The only remaining active speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation	Severely endangered
8b	Nearly extinct	The only remaining speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language	Critically endangered
9	Dormant	The language serves as a reminder of heritage identity. No one has more than symbolic proficiency	Extinct
10	Extinct	No one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language, even for symbolic purposes	Extinct

Adapted from: Lewis and Simon (2010)

2.2 Revitalisation strategies

As shown in the previous section and described by Dorian (1980 in Sallabank 2012:111), language endangerment is principally caused by a decline in the number of speakers and by a shift in the domains of use. For this purpose, in Fishman's Reversing Language Shift model (1991) intergenerational transmission is considered a key objective to contrast these tendencies. Furthermore, Döpke (2000 in Caldas 2012:351) points out that this goal is particularly significant since "before the schooling age, children are generally almost completely exposed to the home language – or languages – and this period of time corresponds to "the most important linguistically formative years of one's life". Furthermore, Caldas (2012:351) says that this language - or languages - is the one "with which the child will speak with the least amount of effort for the rest of his or her life" therefore becoming his or her 'mother tongue'.

Similarly, Friedmann and Rusou (2015:27) report the 'critical period theory' developed by Lenneberg and describe the critical period as "a period in which language is acquired more naturally and accurately, and this period has a certain onset and offsets" adding that several studies showed that by the age of four, "some aspects of a second language are not acquired as native anymore, and the acquisition already resembles that of adults who acquire a second language". These considerations further stress the importance of intergenerational transmission to produce true bilingual speakers and reverse language shifts. However, Caldas (2012:351) reports that most families do not adopt any kind of language family strategy simply transmitting to the children the mother's language(s), who is usually in charge of childrearing. The minority of parents who, instead, explicitly adopt a specific familiar language policy often choose to raise their children bilingual, to transmit and maintain their traditional language and culture. Conversely, others deliberately decide not to do it: this often happens in the case of languages suffering from low social prestige, as minority languages often are.

It is worth noting that scholars such as Baker and Jones (2000:121) stress that despite the crucial role of families and neighbourhoods in permitting the reproduction and survival of an endangered language, these "are not easily reachable by language planners", who instead can more easily intervene in governmental domains such as education.

This led many language revitalisation efforts to be based on a school-based approach rather than a familiar one (Romaine 2006 in Sallabank 2012:112). Furthermore, the above-mentioned European Charter for Regional or Minority languages affirms that formal education can and should have a fundamental role in every revitalisation and maintenance effort. For this reason, it suggests its state members grant the presence of the minority or endangered language “from pre-school education through university and higher-level education, including adult courses, teacher training as well as the teaching of the history and culture in relation to the minority language”. According to the specific situation, the states can decide whether to use the language as a medium of teaching or as a subject (Cenoz & Gorter 2012:313).

Similarly, Crystal (2000: 136-137) includes “a strong presence in the educational system” as one of the requisites for successful revitalisation. It must be noticed though, that from the scholar’s view, schools should not be charged with the whole responsibility to transfer the language to the new generation and furthermore, he refers to the ‘educational system’ intended in a broader sense, including adult education courses and activities promoting the people’s folklore and culture. An emblematic case of school-based revitalisation is that concerning the Welsh language carried on in Wales and based on a bilingual education in English and Welsh, in which the latter is used as a medium language (Williams 2014:248). Baker and Jones (2000:121) denote a certain degree of “growth [...], strength and stability” in the Welsh bilingual system which was first introduced in the 1950s. This is due to the strong commitment and support carried out by parents, both Welsh and non-Welsh speaking and the professional and professional effort made by the teaching staff (Baker & Jones 2000:121; Williams 2014:258). Additionally, Williams (2014:258) identifies as points of strength the “high academic achievement and a supportive culture and community basis”.

It could be argued that the mentioned revitalisation effort meets most of the requisites for an effective school-based maintenance and revitalisation policy listed by Sallabank (2012:115), which are:

- *Additive bilingualism and biliteracy*
- *The inclusion of cultural programmes*
- *Community involvement*
- *Supplementing the school-based programme with real reasons to speak the language outside the educational context*

However, despite the generalised positive perception of bilingual education proved by a certain degree of community participation, some scholars denounced a lack of efficacy on the latter point, consisting in creating daily speakers of the language. In fact, most young people are reported to stop speaking Welsh once they have left the education system and the reason behind this might be due to the scarcity of social opportunities or domains in which it can be used (Baker 2011; Hodges 2009, 2012; Thomas; Apolloni, and Lewis 2014 in Hodges 2021:4; Edwards and Newcombe 2005:137). It is explicative in that sense that “according to the 2011 Census, 562,000 people can speak Welsh in Wales but only 13% of Welsh speakers use it daily” (Welsh Government and Welsh Language Commissioner 2015 in Hodges 2021:4).

In other words, quite a frequent limitation in school-based revitalisations is the lack of domains in which people effectively can and desire to speak the language. Crystal (2000:131) argues that this happens because people need to get used to the language and this requires a constant exposition to it. The above-mentioned goal can be achieved through significant community activity in community places such as social centres and town halls and a strong presence in mass media such as radio, newspapers, and television as well as new media such as the internet and social media. In Crystal’s (2000) point of view, this would also increase the endangered language community’s visibility and prestige in the dominant community which, in the longer term can aim to obtain relevance in wider and higher public domains such as public administration, public services as well law and commerce. Expanding on the topic of endangered languages in new-generation media, Stahlberg (2021:420) highlights that the internet along with all the resources and tools that it offers can be a beneficial instrument to improve an endangered language’s vitality since it would grant:

- language support for learners and speakers *through language courses, events, cultural and literary materials in audio and video format can be created on different kinds of platforms and used by many kinds of users*
- communication among the members of the same speech community, even in the case of diaspora, to share information, and knowledge and to "maintain a linguistic identity with their relatives, friends, and colleagues, wherever they may be in the world" (Crystal 2000: 142).
- language's attractiveness among the young generation who spend much time on the internet, therefore "motiv[at]ing younger learners and help (re)build communities of speakers" (Sallabank 2012:117)
- prestige, since *the possibility to use the minority or endangered language online, makes it more interesting and important;*
- visibility, since, as pointed out by Crystal (2000), this would increase its presence from a local and global point of view;
- development, *which is considered to be the most important element since it does offer new opportunities and contexts for the speaker to use the endangered language*

Another resource to increase a language's visibility is the field of Language Landscape, described by Landry and Bourhis (1997:25) as "the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government building combined to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration". Gorter (2006 in Cocq et al. 2020:6) notes a recent-year growth of interest towards this field with specific attention to cultural globalisation, language identities, the widespread presence of English as well as minority language revitalisation. In fact, research confirms that the presence of a given written language in public places does have a positive impact on language revitalisation and language ideologies (Litvinskaya, 2010; Woldemariam & Lanza 2015 in Cocq et al. 2020:8).

As stressed by the above-mentioned EGIDS by Lewis and Simon (2012), another factor influencing a language's endangerment state is its official status. In fact, as pointed out by Choudhry and Houlihan (2021:215-16), the official recognition of an endangered

language would grant its speakers more political power, and more economic opportunities together with a higher consideration and self-consciousness of their cultural identity. In a similar way, Patten (2001:696-706) and UNESCO (2003:13), recognise official multilingualism as an efficient tool to promote the endangered speech community identity. Despite that, they both suggest that this measure alone does not guarantee long-term language maintenance and language vitality since “even though a language is publicly recognised it may not be the principal language of work business or civil society” (Patten 2001:701). For this purpose, Annamalai (2002: 1-3) suggests that the first objective of a multilingual State should be ensuring a high-quality and universally affordable education in all the official languages, to produce “people with the necessary language competence and attitude” to make possible the extension of the endangered language to the main functional area of the State: public administration, law enforcement and education.

However, Walsh (2011:130-4 in Williams 2012:175) argues that along with high-level language management, the actual use of the language and people’s attitudes towards the endangered language should be taken into consideration. Official recognition’s efficacy in preserving and restoring endangered language’s vitality is however considered a debated topic among scholars since it might lower the community’s perceived responsibility in preserving the endangered language (Ó Riagáin 2004 in Sallabank 2012:116). Similarly, Crystal (2000: 154) claims that “only a community can save an endangered language”. For this purpose, one can report the difference in outcomes between the Māori’s revitalisation of New Zealand and that of the Irish Gaelic in Ireland. The former was wanted and performed by the Māori community itself with the aim of restoring their ancient ethnolinguistic culture; the latter, instead, started from the government and, at least in its earlier stages, it did not include many promotion activities to raise the interested people’s involvement (Cooper 1989: 161 in Sallabank 2012: 117).

CHAPTER 3

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE IRISH CASE

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the reasons for the Irish language endangerment, moving forward with an analysis of the current situation of the language and of the language revitalisation policy currently adopted by the government.

3.1 Historical background and the language endangerment process

Irish Gaelic is an Indo-European language belonging to the Celtic linguistic group. The latter can be split into two distinct groups: the Gaelic and the Britton. Irish and Scots, as well as the recently revived Manx, are closely related to each other and belong to the former group. The latter, instead, includes Welsh, Breton and Cornish - another example of revived language. (Graffi & Scalise 2013:64; Ó Ceallaigh T.J. & Ní Dhonnabháin 2015:179). Manx and Cornish ceased to be spoken respectively in the 18th and 19th centuries but in recent years they both became the interest of ambitious revitalisation projects (MacAulay 1992:2-3). According to historians, the first Celtic language speakers arrived and settled in Ireland around 200-300 B.C from the Iberic peninsula where, similarly to the rest of western Europe, Celtic people and languages were widespread (Carnie 1995:2).

Starting from the 5th century, the above-mentioned people started expanding to the nearby Isle of Man and Scotland, establishing permanent colonies inhabited by Gaelic speakers (MacAulay 1992:2). It was later, from the 7th century, that the common Gaelic language spoken in these areas started presenting a more consistent degree of variation to the point that they started being seen as the three distinct varieties forming the Celtic Gaelic group (Fattovich 2010:4; MacAulay 1992:2). From 800, similarly to the rest of Europe, Ireland was subject to Viking raids. These additionally established several settlements which later became the island's first cities, e.g. Dublin, Wexford, Limerick and Waterford (Connolly 1998:579-580; Encyclopedia Britannica 2022). While these cities were founded as and remained Norse-speaking, the countryside "remained uniformly Gaelic in language and custom" (Barnes 2000). In light of the limited influx of Norsemen, these did not have a

major impact on the Irish language, culture and political status quo, which continued being under the rule of the Gaelic kingdoms.

The Anglo-Norman invasion from 1169 to 1171 resulted in the Lordship of Ireland in 1177, controlled by French-speaking Anglo-Norman lords loyal to the Kingdom of England. The remaining territory continued being ruled by the Gaelic Kingdoms, often in contrast with the Anglo-Norman settlers. Nonetheless, in the following years, several Anglo-Norman lords became Galicised adopting the Gaelic culture and language. To avoid losing the lords' loyalty and consequently the control of the island, in 1366 the English crown devised the Statute of Kilkenny, consisting of a set of laws aimed at banning the Irish language from the courts and for commercial purposes, also forbidding marriage between English and Irish people in Ireland (Trinity College Dublin 2021; Carnie 1995). These measures are the first example of official oppression against the Irish language and have been described as "the blueprint for apartheid in Ireland" (Bennett, Carpenter, & Gardiner 2018: 337).

In the context of the Tudor conquest of Ireland, to strengthen the English rule on the island in 1541 King Edward VII proclaimed himself King of Ireland and additionally developed a series of measures aiming at the imposition of the Anglican reformation as well as the use of the English language. The reaction of the Irish people to the former action was the elevation of Catholicism as a symbol of national identity and resistance against the imposition of the dominating English culture. (Zanichelli 2022). Instead, to spread the use of the English language on the island the English resorted sending English-speaking settlers from England and Scotland to many areas of Ireland. This caused a decline in the role of Gaelic Irish in the social hierarchy since administrative and powerful positions were often revoked to Gaelic speakers and granted to the new English-speaker settlers, relegating the use of Irish to the lower social classes. This caused the start of identification of English with progress and power and Irish with backwardness and poverty (Kennedy 2012:6). It must be mentioned that one of the most successful plantation operations was that carried out in the northern province of Ulster, which became almost exclusively English-speaking and adopted the Anglican faith (Carnie 1995:3).

Throughout the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries many uprisings were organised by the Irish to resist the above-mentioned cultural imposition carried on by the English, though these solely resulted in more explicit and harsh forms of repression. For instance, the Irish Penal Laws of 1695 stated Catholics – who corresponded to 90% of the Irish population – were forbidden to own weapons, study law and medicine and could not speak or read Gaelic or play Gaelic music. (Howell 2016: 21)

The affirmation of the Industrial Revolution during the 1780s on the island made majoritarian English-speaking locations such as Belfast, Dublin and the surrounding Pale become relevant economic centres. This led many people coming from the inner Gaelic-speaking countryside to emigrate to the mentioned English-speaking cities. From that moment Irish Gaelic started losing its primacy on the island and much of the population became bilingual and diglossic, alternatively using one of the two languages depending on the social and economic situation (Carnie 1995:3; de Fréine 1978).

Following the Act of Union of 1801, through which the Kingdom of Ireland was incorporated into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, the population on the island registered a constant and rapid growth until reaching 8 million inhabitants in 1841, 2.5 million of whom were Irish speakers. However, as a result of the Great Famine that hit Ireland from 1846 to 1849, one million people died and half a million emigrated to English-speaking countries resulting in a decrease in the total population to 6,5 million in 1851. The worst afflicted areas were the agricultural and rural ones on the western coast, where most of the Gaelic-speaking population resided, thus causing a high loss in the number of Irish speakers. Besides the emigrant's assimilation into their destination country's culture and language, another reason for this is that even those Gaelic speakers who continued residing in the Irish-speaking areas were involved in "internal cultural migration", voluntarily switching to English and not transmitting their original language to children. This happened because the already existing negative attitudes towards the language became even more rooted, also outside the cities so, Gaelic Irish started being seen as the symbol and cause of backwardness and poverty, while English was associated with economic opportunities, progress, and wealth.

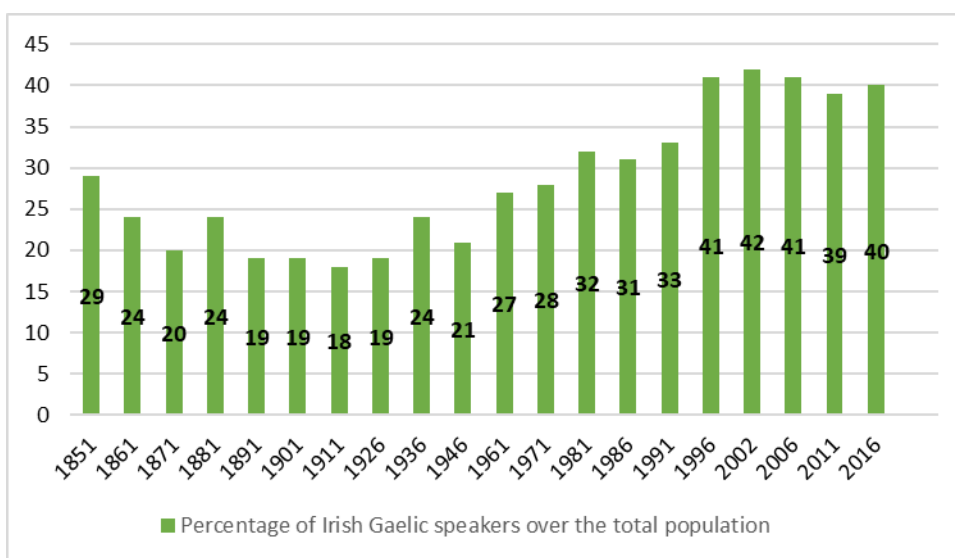
In the following decades, the negative demographic tendency continued, resulting in a decrease in the total number of inhabitants from 5,798,967 in 1861 to 4,704,740 in 1891. Among these, Gaelic speakers passed from being 1,105,536 in 1861 (19.1%) to 680,245 in 1891 (14.5%). Just 3.5% of these were under ten (Ó Dochartaigh 2000:8; Moriarty 2015:25; Ó Riagáin 1997). In the above-mentioned situation of constant decline and lack of intergenerational transmission, as well as a lack of presence in the domains of power, the 1871 census concluded that “there can be no error in the belief that within relatively few years Irish will have taken its place among the languages that have ceased to exist” (Hindley 1991:20 in Moriarty 2015:25). A first attempt of language revitalisation was carried out by the society *Conradh na Gaeilge*, ‘the Gaelic League’ which was founded in 1893. The principal aim of the organisation was the “de-anglicisation” of Ireland through the creation of a bilingual Gaelic and English society. To achieve that, the association focused its efforts on raising the language’s prestige among Irish English speakers through the production of modern literature and the production of literate Irish speakers by achieving its inclusion as a subject in the British school system as soon as it was permitted again in 1900 (Moriarty 2015:26). In spite the above-mentioned efforts, the decline in the number of Gaelic Irish speakers continued along with that of the general Irish population until when in 1911 over a population of 3.14 million people, 550,000 were Gaelic speakers corresponding to the 18 per cent (Roloff 2015:14).

However, on obtaining of independence from the United Kingdom in 1922, the newborn independent Irish government could immediately activate policies to secure and promote the Irish language, having as a first aim to “revert back [Ireland] to a monolingual Irish-speaking” country. This effort was carried out through the promotion of the language in legislation, territorial presence as well as compulsory education and its knowledge as a key requisite to be employed in many state organisations (Moriarty 2015:26; Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Dhonnabháin 2015:182; Williams 2012:184).

3.2 Language classification and current language situation

As shown in the previous section, the reasons behind the endangerment of Irish Gaelic can be traced to centuries of British political, economic, political, and cultural domination which, along with the famine of 1845 caused a generalised decline in the language which was progressively replaced with English (Sallabank 2012:104). Nonetheless, the above-mentioned measures enacted by the Irish state in 1922 and the following ones, which will be dealt with in the following section, did positively impact the language, leading to a reversal of the tendency, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 3.1 Percentage of Irish speakers over the total population from 1851 to 2016



Note: adapted from CSO data online; Ó Dochartaigh (2000:8)

Looking closer at the latest available data, the 2016 Irish census on population reports that of a total population of 4 million and a half people, 39.8 per cent - corresponding to 1,761,420 individuals – declared they could speak Irish Gaelic (Central Statistics Office 2016). Nonetheless, some scholars such as Bradley (2014:539) point out that the census did not distinguish between L1 speakers and L2 learners nor verified the actual proficiency of the respondents since it did not specify what was meant by “being able to speak Irish”. For these reasons, it is suggested that due to the strong emotional attachment of Irish people to the Irish Gaelic language, some of the respondents might have exaggerated their proficiency, thus causing an overestimation of the total number of proficient speakers.

Irish Gaelic language is, indeed, a “symbol of identity” for Irish people (Nic Eoin 2011 in Bradley 2014:539) along with other identity markers such as the Catholic faith, a shared

history of British dominion and the island of Ireland. These functioned as discriminating factors to provide an ethnic basis to justify their claim of independence from the United Kingdom at the beginning of the 20th century and on these, the state built its identity (Sutherland 2000 in Lo Bianco 2012:518). Therefore, starting from the first Irish independent government in 1922, the revitalisation of Irish has been promoted as a way to maintain Irish national identity and therefore Irish people learnt and supported language promotion because of this sense of identity (Watson 2008:74).

However, as Crowley (2016:11-15) notices, it was at the end of the 19th century that Irish Gaelic started being promoted as a national cultural identity marker by the Gaelic League and similar associations. Before that, the cultural hegemony of the English language in Ireland was not challenged by Irish Gaelic. Yet as Liebkind (1999:144) notices “linguistic identity should not be confused with language use or language proficiency”: people can have a positive attitude towards their ethnic language and at the same time not speak it, preferring instead another language to obtain socioeconomic advantages. In the Irish case, this can be seen in the fact that despite the fact that in the Irish Language Survey 2013, 67% of the respondents – both Irish speakers and not - declared they had a positive feeling towards the language. As can be seen in Table 5, just a tiny minority of those who declared they could speak the language actually do.

Table 4.1 Frequency of use of the Irish language

	Number	% of the population
Persons able to speak Irish	1,761,420	39.8
Spoke Irish within the educational system	558,608	31,7
Spoke Irish daily	73,803	4,2
Spoke Irish weekly	111,473	6,3
Spoke Irish less often	586,535	33,3
Never spoke Irish	418,420	23,8
Not stated	12,581	0,7

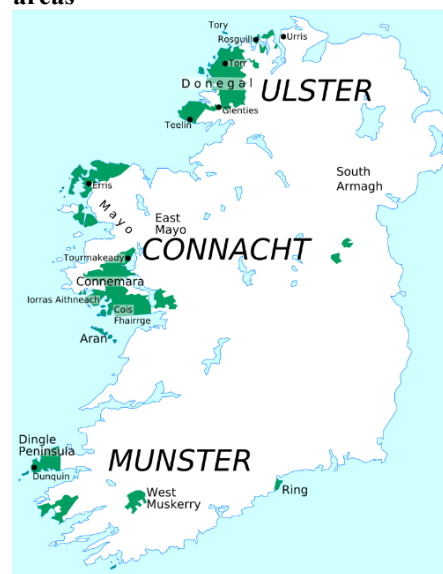
Note adapted from: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/pcp10esil/p10esil/>

It must be noticed though, that “the overwhelming majority of Irish speakers nationally are L2 speakers who acquired Irish within the educational system” (Williams 2012:185) and therefore this data might partly justify the high use of the language inside the

educational system and the lack of it in other domains. On the other hand, and as some scholars point out, for the Irish, speaking such a powerful language as English is, used as a language of wider communication, and as the prestige language in Ireland, abstract concepts such as ‘cultural heritage’ and ‘tradition’ might not be enough to be persuaded to use Irish instead (Edwards 2007 in McGee 2018:32; Ó hÍfearnáin 2009 in Sallabank 2012:119; Shah 2014:69).

Within the mentioned national context, an exception is represented by the Gaeltacht areas consisting of large areas of counties Donegal, Mayo, Galway, and Kerry, as well as sections of counties Cork, Meath, and Waterford where Irish is, or at least, was until recent days, the first language of the residing population (Údarás na Gaeltachta 2022). As may be seen in Table 5, the percentage of the Irish-speaking population is higher than in the rest of the country and furthermore, the language is more widely used in daily and weekly communication outside the educational system.

Figure 3.2 Official Gaeltacht areas



Note: adapted from Angr (2016)

Table 3.2 Gaeltacht’s Irish-speaking population

	Number	% of the population
Persons able to speak Irish	63,664	66.3
Of which:		
Spoke Irish daily	20,586	21.4
Spoke Irish weekly	6,284	9.8
Persons who spoke Irish less often, never or in the educations only	36,794	38.2

Note adapted from: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp10esil/p10esil/ilg/>

As stated by Williams (2012:184) the remoteness of the region was a key factor in preventing its total Anglicisation throughout the centuries permitting the Gaeltacht to be still currently considered the heartland of the Irish language.

However, as seen in the previous section, insulation was also an indirect cause of the generalised emigration which led to the depopulation interesting the region from the potato famine up to the 1980s. The leading reasons in the past could be identified in the long-term effects of the potato famine, land impoverishment as well as overpopulation, while in recent years it is linked to the lack of occupational opportunities and consequently economic stability. This can be observed in the fact that from 1851 to 1971, the population of Ireland decreased by about 50% - from 6.5 million to less than 3 million - while that of the Gaeltacht decreased by about 95%, from 1.5 million to 70,568 (Kearns 1974:88).

Figure 3.3
Areal recession of the Gaeltacht



Note adapted from: Kearns (1974:84)

As reported by Bradley (2014:542), among the many efforts taken by the government to resolve the emigrational and demographic crisis the Gaeltacht had long been experiencing, the institution of the Údarás na Gaeltachta – meaning “Gaeltacht Authority” – successfully resolved the situation. The agency, charged with the responsibility for the economic, social and cultural development of the Gaeltacht, could successfully stem emigration through consistent economic investments which led to the creation of several job positions. This is reflected in the increase in population registered from 78,568 in 1971 to 96,090 in 2016 (CSO 2016, 2022).

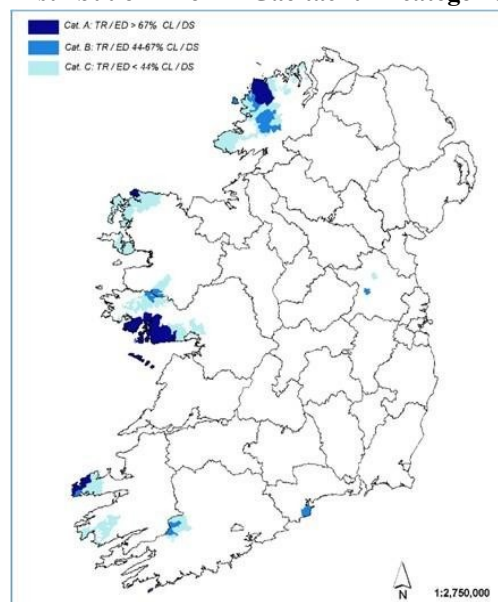
However, “the demographic survival of the Gaeltacht seems assured but its existence as a Gaelic-speaking population is dangerously imperilled” (O’Cinneide 1985 in Bradley 2014:541). The economic development attracted in fact many visitors, tourists as well as former emigrants together with their “non-Irish speaking partners and children” (Bradley 2014) which all have had “anglifying consequences by and large” (Fishman 1999:126). The Ó Giollagáin et al. Comprehensive Linguistic Study (2007 in Williams 2012:185) States that the Gaeltacht is in crisis, the state has an active role in the shift to English and

the educational system as well “is encouraging the social use of English among those whose Irish fluency is adequate or better” (2007 in Williams 2012:185).

As in figure 4, the study divided the Gaeltacht into the three following zones:

- *Category A—This district has more than 67% of the total population (3 years and older) that speak Irish on a daily basis (taken from the 2002 Census)*
- *Category B—This district has between 44%-66% of the total population (3 years and older) that speak Irish on a daily basis (taken from the 2002 Census)*
- *Category C—This district has less than 44% of the total population (3 years and older) that speak Irish on a daily basis (taken from the 2002 Census).*

Figure 3.4
Distribution of Gaeltacht categories



Note: adapted from Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007)

The study, therefore, highlighted that within the officially delimited Gaeltacht areas, just a small number of communities effectively use Irish Gaelic as a communication tool. Furthermore, as happens in the rest of the country, despite having a positive attitude towards the Irish language, Gaeltacht’s young people’s dominant language is English due to their higher proficiency in it and “[its] socially and technologically enhanced communicative functionality” (Mac Donnacha 2014:2-3). That said, the authors of the study concluded that Irish Gaelic will unlikely “remain the predominant community and family language [in even the strongest surviving Gaeltacht communities] for more than another fifteen to twenty years” (CLS 2007 in Mac Donnacha 2014:2-3).

Williams (2012:184) affirms that the death of the Gaeltacht as an Irish-speaking area would cause the loss of a “disproportionate number of L1 speakers” thus causing further serious degradation of the language’s vitality Irish Gaelic is considered by UNESCO’s Atlas of World Languages (1996) – based on the above-mentioned LVE scale - as a “definitely endangered” language. The level corresponds to the EGIDS seventh-level

“shifting” which is denoted by a knowledge of the language of the child-bearing generations but a lack of intergenerational transmission.

This is therefore reflected in the fact that the national intergenerational transmission has been described as “very low” by the Houses of the Oireachtas Service – the Irish parliament, a part of the government. In a comparable way, the use of the language in the domestic context has been estimated to be applicable to “less than 5% of the overall population” (McGee 2018:28) and in any case, the number of speakers outside the educational system is just 77,148 (CSO 2016).

The Irish language situation has often been described as unique for its being a minority language spoken by far more L2 speakers than native speakers (McCloskey 2001 in Moriarty 2011). As will be explored in the following section, the above-mentioned particular situation can be described as the result of the language policies and revitalisation efforts carried out by the Irish government to revitalise the language throughout the years.

3.3 Analysis of the Irish language policy and revitalisation strategies

As mentioned earlier, the revitalisation and maintenance of the Irish language have been one of the government’s main objectives since the constitution of the first independent Irish state. Moriarty (2015:27) reports that the evolution of the state’s language policy can be divided into distinct phases, each characterised by different aims and consequently different approaches. From 1922 to the end of the 1960s, the focus was on preserving the Gaeltacht as an Irish-speaking region and reversing the language shift to English in the rest of the county, aiming therefore to restore Ireland as a monolingual Irish-speaking county. Nonetheless, from the 1970s with the failure of the efforts to reach the latter aim, “it became necessary to approach the bilingual reality of the country” (Moriarty 2015:27), and the efforts were directed towards establishing an Irish-English diglossia, continuing to preserve the Gaeltacht.

In 2010 the Irish Government published the 20-year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 (Government of Ireland 2022), which was elaborated taking into consideration the

above-mentioned Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht, and the report of the Coimisiún na Gaeltachta (2002).

The Strategy is enacted through a 5-Year Action Plan and the 9 areas of intervention are:

- legislation and status
- education
- language transmission by the family – early intervention
- media and technology
- the Gaeltacht
- administration, services and community
- economic life
- cross-cutting initiatives
- dictionaries

3.3.1 Status planning

To achieve the mentioned objectives, the government enacted a policy of official recognition (McGee 2014:31), leading the Irish language to obtain full recognition in all formal legal areas (Lo Bianco 2012:518): public administration, law enforcement and education (Annamalai 2002:1-3). From a juridical point of view, Ireland is a bilingual state and according to the constitution, established in 1937 with a strong nationalist “inspiration and characterisation” (Lo Bianco 2012:516), the Irish language is the state’s “national and first official language” while English is described as “a second official language” (Government of Ireland 1937).

The official recognition of the language was confirmed and further increased through the introduction of the 2003 Official Language Act aiming “to increase and improve [...] the quantity and quality of services provided for the public through Irish by public bodies” (An Coimisinéir Teanga 2022). Furthermore, the measure was brought to the institution of the Office of An Coimisinéir Teanganga – the language commissioner - charged with the responsibility of informing and assisting the citizens about their language rights and guiding the public bodies in complying with their language obligations provided by the Act (Official Language Act 2003). O'Neill (2013 in O'Connell 2021:21) claims that the

Official Language Act was the “first, formally articulated language policy document outlining the obligations on the State to provide public services in the Irish language”.

In other words, the Act aims to grant citizens comprehensive language rights of using Irish “in communication with state bodies such as the courts, parliament, municipalities etc.” (Pinto 2014:233). Nonetheless, despite the language being, in accordance with the Act, used in signage, official announcements, and broadcasting, it has never been used as the working language of the Irish parliament (McGee 2018:31).

As regards the use of Irish in signage, the Act states that in the Gaeltacht official placenames should be displayed in Irish Gaelic only (official maps, legal instruments and official road signs) while in other parts of the county they should be bilingual English and Irish. As demonstrated by Doibhlin (2021:174-180), the significance of this measure is linked to the general trend of adaptation and “transliteration” of Irish toponyms to English, as part of the language shift. For instance, the placename “Cartrún Uí Dhúgáin” meaning “Duggan’s quarter(land)” throughout the years evolved in the Anglicised form “Cartrondoogan”. Furthermore, as already mentioned, the presence of a minority language in the linguistic landscape leads to benefits such as higher visibility and prestige along with a generally positive outcome in the revitalisation processes (Crystal 2000; Litvinskaya, 2010; Woldemariam & Lanza 2015 in Cocq et al. 2020:8).

Since 2007 Irish has been recognised as a working and official language of the European Union. Despite Irish being *de facto* a minority language in the country (Coimisinéir na teanga 2022), Ireland did not join the ECRML – the above-mentioned European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The cause can be identified in the title’s reference to “regional or minority language” which according to the Irish government’s representatives was in contrast with the status of the official and national language recognised by the Constitution. Despite the efforts taken by the ECRML board to meet Ireland’s requests, including changing the admission requisites and adding the case of “official languages which are less used in the whole or part of the territory” - with specific reference to the Irish situation – Ireland did not join the Charter. Some claim that joining the ECRML could have “improved the situation of the Irish language, particularly in certain domains” (Ó Murchú 2020:139-141).

3.3.2 Acquisition planning

Similar to the Welsh case, mentioned in the section about language revitalisation, the educational system is a key tool enhanced by the Irish government to revitalise the Irish language (O'Connell 2021:3; Bradley 2014:539). As McGee (2018:31) reports, in the years following the independence, Irish was implemented as the medium of teaching in the whole educational system, starting from the infant classes. Nonetheless, Irish was gradually replaced by English due to the high diffusion of the latter and the lack of “communicative need for Irish” (McGee 2018:31).

Currently, the Irish education system is divided as follows:

- Pre-primary education or ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education) covers the education of children from 3 to 5 years old (Citizens Information Board 2022). It is not provided by the state but by the private, voluntary or community sectors. Among the different possible settings such as crèches, playgroups, and nurseries, there are the naíonraí – Irish-medium playgroups. The latter have been indicated as crucial “in establishing language usage patterns and in developing competence in the language” (Hickey, 1997; Hickey, 1999 in Ó Ceallaigh; Ní Dhonnabháin 2015:186). The Ní Thuairisg and Ó Duibhir’s survey (2016 in Mhic Mhathúna & Nic Fhionnlaoich 2021) shows that 31% of infants’ parents choose the above-mentioned pre-primary education for their child. The Strategy aims at providing such a kind of school “in every area where there is an Irish-medium primary school, and in other areas where there is a demand” (Government of Ireland 2022).
- Primary education is divided into junior and senior infant classes and from the 1st to 6th grade (Citizens Information Board 2022).
- Post-primary education is divided into the junior cycle, covering the education of students from 12 to 15 years old, and the senior cycle, for students from 15 to 18 years old (Citizens Information Board 2022).

Both primary and post-primary schools are divided into the following categories:

- English medium schools, defined as “mainstream” by the Government (Government of Ireland 2022), in which Irish is taught as L2 as a compulsory subject for all students from 6 to 15 years old, are widespread in the whole country. Doubts about their efficacy have been raised since, “in spite of the 1500 class hours that a student spends being taught Irish” (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní

Dhonnabháin 2015:187), “a notable minority of students fail to attain mastery in Irish listening, speaking, and general comprehension skills” (Harris 1984, 1988, 1991; Harris et al. 2006; Harris and Murtagh, 1998, 1999 in Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Dhonnabháin 2015:187).

- Irish-medium maintenance/heritage language education can only be found in the Gaeltacht areas. Here Irish is used as the medium of communication and its teaching was developed for that of L1. Despite that, in recent years the number of L1 students decreased and 46% of students had no or little knowledge of the language (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007:11 in Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Dhonnabháin 2015:187).
- Irish-medium immersion (IMI) also called Gaelscoileanna refers to Irish medium schools outside the Gaeltacht. Tsunoda (2006:202) defines immersion teaching as “[a]n environment [...] in which learners will only hear and speak the language [that is being revitalised]” as reported by Grenoble and Whaley (2005:51). This type of education has proved to be more effective in creating L2 proficient speakers if compared to the English medium school (Harris, 1984; Harris and Murtagh, 1987, 1988; Harris et al., 2006 in Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Dhonnabháin 2015:187). It has to be noticed though that such proficiency achieved through the IMI system cannot be compared to that of an L1 showing:
a restricted vocabulary and simplified grammar limited to domains experienced in school, they often transfer from English syntax and lexicon, they do not acquire native-like syntactic competence and lack distinctive idiomatic conversational features i.e. lack lexical and pragmatic expressions natural to a native speaker (Genesee and Lindholm-Leary, 2013; Harley, 1992 in Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Dhonnabháin 2015:187).

That said, the Language Education Policy Profile developed by the Council of Europe (2007:17-18) signals that the limited results in revitalising the Irish language can be linked to difficulties present in the educational system. As already mentioned, the number of Irish native speakers is greatly decreasing – also in the Gaeltacht - and on the other hand, the total number of people claiming to be able to speak Irish is increasing. This can be seen in the changing geography of the language recording a decrease in the number of speakers in the Western part of the county and an increase in the East, with Dublin being the main destination for internal migratory fluxes.

The reason behind this phenomenon is that a high proportion of those claiming to have some knowledge comprises students who were compulsorily required to study Irish but show little proficiency, mainly made up of passive skills – and therefore not suitable for intergenerational transmission. This causes and justifies the tiny usage of language outside the educational system and in the domestic domain (Council of Europe 2007: 18).

Furthermore, despite the positive attitudes of the population towards the language, it has been pointed out that the excessively formal and classic teaching method of Irish, based on written activities rather than oral ones, leads pupils to progressively lose their enthusiasm and motivation to learn and speak the language as the school years go on. In relation to that issue, Darmody and Daly (2015) found that English-medium school pupils at primary and post-primary levels showed negative attitudes because they felt that “learning the Irish language was difficult, less useful, and less interesting than English and Mathematics”. Such a traditional and static way of teaching has been related to a scarcity of confidence with the language identified in some teachers. For that reason, the Strategy points to the introduction of “a new specialisation in Irish-medium primary teaching (partial or total immersion) in Colleges of Education” and states that “student teachers will follow a defined programme of language teaching in the Gaeltacht” (Government of Ireland 2022).

As concerns instead the university education sector, English is the only available medium of teaching except for two universities – Law and Irish (University College Cork) and Irish and Journalism (Dublin City University) (Irish Universities Association Website 2014 in Bradley 2014:542) and dedicated foreign languages courses (McGee 2018:37). The COE Language Education Policy Profile additionally states that the education system might have been charged with too much responsibility in the language revitalisation process and this might be one of the causes of the language revitalisation’s limited outcomes (Language Policy Division COE; Department of Education and Science Ireland).

3.3.3 Inter-generational transmission and the media

As already mentioned, despite being fundamental in every revitalisation process, intergenerational transmission and family use of the endangered language are “not easily reachable by language planners” (Baker and Jones 2000:121). Despite that, the Strategy recognises them as a fundamental element for obtaining a positive outcome in the revitalisation process and therefore fixed as objective, among all, the sensibilisation of families and of the society to the importance of English and Irish bilingualism, further local support for Irish-speaking families, assistance to grandparents and other elder people to transmit the language. Furthermore,

The Gaeltacht Summer Colleges will place more emphasis on family language learning experiences so that networks of natural use of Irish can be promoted with mechanisms for their continuation post-Summer College in families and among friendship groupings (Government of Ireland 2022).

As regards the media, Moriarty (2015:27) points out that starting from the 2000s, the Irish government started enacting a third kind of language policy paradigm in which one can find “a new level of synergy between the macro-level LPP initiatives enacted by the government and those enacted from the micro level” such as the institution of TG4, an Irish-speaking television channel. In fact, the implementation of “high-quality broadcast services through the medium of Irish” is mentioned in the 20-year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 (Government of Ireland 2022).

The main Irish-speaking television broadcast services in the country are RTÉ - the national public service broadcaster, Raidió na Gaeltachta – the radio service controlled by RTÉ and TG4. The Strategy sets as future objectives the normalisation of a bilingual television schedule and the further development of Raidió na Gaeltachta for what concerns RTÉ and the funding of TG4 to permit it to reach the set objective of 6 hours programming in Irish – starting from a media of 4.58 hours daily (Government of Ireland 2022). As reported by Quill (1994), despite the status of the national public broadcasting service in Irish RTÉ, since its foundation in 1960, it has failed in its aim to reach and involve the Irish-speaking audience and therefore ended up decreasing the number of programs in Irish – in favour of those in English - in order to continue attracting financial incomes from advertising – essential for the network existence.

On the other hand, TG4, formerly known as TnaG, was founded in 1996 by a set of language activists unsatisfied with the service provided by RTÉ. The first objective of the channel is to provide “to provide Irish-language programming for Irish speakers” though taking into consideration the potential audience’s preferences and aiming to entertain rather than at educate. The result is a wide set of programs, that match the audience’s interests and cover different niches and targets such as children’s programs, sports programming, western movies etc. (Moriarty 2015:53-55). From a sociolinguistic point of view, the channel provides Irish speakers with reasons to use the language outside the educational system and therefore creates a wider network of Irish speakers (Moriarty 2015:57).

CHAPTER 4

SURVEY ON LANGUAGE ATTITUDES AND USE OF IRISH

This chapter presents and discusses the outcomes of the questionnaire administered to a champion of Irish speakers with the aim of investigating their opinions about the language and their usage habits. In light of this, it relates them to the theory discussed in the prior chapters.

4.1 Methodology and participant's background

The data reported in this section were gathered through an online questionnaire shared with students and staff of Trinity College Dublin during the autumn of 2022. All 18 participants were 18 or older. The survey consisted of 32 questions divided as follows: 19 single and multiple-choice questions, 5 rating scales, 4 matrix questions, 3 open-ended questions and one dropdown question.

The gender, age groups and place of origin of the participants are as indicated in the tables below:

Table 4.1 - Gender of the participants		
Male	9	50%
Female	8	44.5%
Prefer not to say	1	5.5%

Table 4.2 - Age of the participants		
Age 18-24	1	16.6%
Age 25-44	9	50%
Age 46-64	5	27.8%
Age 65-74	3	5.6%

Table 4.3 - Participants' place of origin – Gaeltacht or non-Gaeltacht area		
Gaeltacht	1	11.1%
Non-Gaeltacht area	17	88.9%

Table 4.4 - Participants' place of origin description		
Urban	9	52.9%
Suburban	1	5.9%
Rural	6	35.3%
Both urban and rural	1	5.9%

All respondents declared to perceive “Irish” as their ethnic identity.

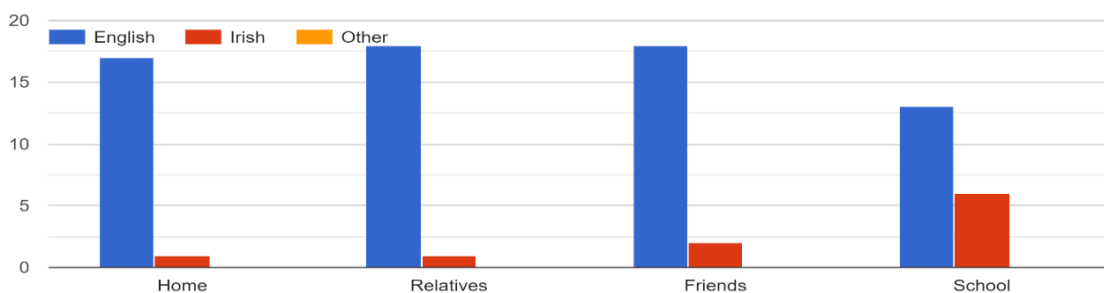
Table 4.5 – Number of English L1 and bilinguals		
English L1	18	100%
Bilinguals – Irish and English as L1	4	22.2%

4.2 Knowledge and use of the language

As shown in the data set in Figure 4.1, English was the most widely used language during the participant’s childhood. The only outstanding situation is represented by education, in which Irish was the predominant language for 33.3% (number) of those who answered. This can be justified by the fact that – as shown in Table 4.6 - “school” is indicated as the context in which the majority of the respondents (72% - number) acquired most of their knowledge and skills in the Irish language. The sectors in which intergenerational transmission could take place – family and home – recorded an incidence of just 11.8% (number) - a percentage not completely covering that of the participants declaring that they have Irish as an L1. It is interesting to notice the presence of an “Irish residency scheme” – suggested by some participants – among the contexts in which most Irish was learned. This consists of a service of university accommodation aiming “to offer students an opportunity to live in a mini-Gaeltacht in university accommodation” (Trinity College Dublin 2022) by encouraging students to use the Irish language for daily communication. Similarly, Gaeltacht summer courses have been indicated as a useful tool for spontaneously widening language knowledge outside the education system.

Figure 4.1 Main language of the participants during childhood divided by context

8) During your childhood, which language did you mainly use in the following contexts?

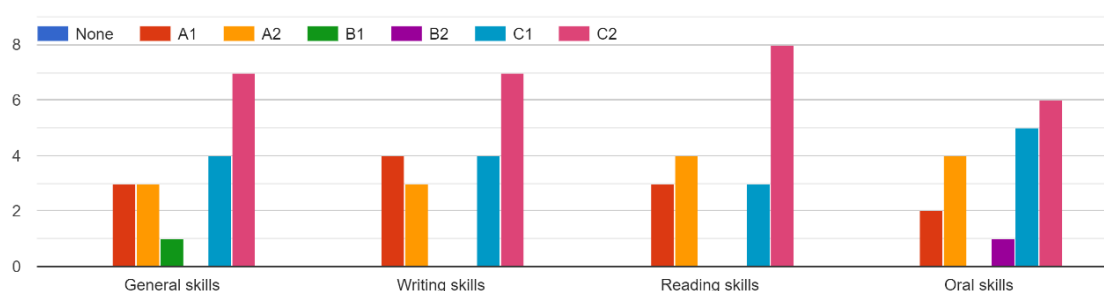


Situation	Number	Percentage
Family/Home	2	11.1%
Schools/University	13	72.2%
In the Gaeltacht (summer courses and work)	2	11.1%
Irish residency scheme	1	5.5%

Unlike the method adopted by the Government’s census, the questionnaire further investigated the self-assessed proficiency of the respondents by asking them to grade their proficiency on each of the four language skills on the CEFR scale. As can be noticed in Figure 4.2, none of the participants declared not knowing Irish and, by contrast, the average knowledge proved to be significantly advanced with a relative majority declaring to have a C2 level of general proficiency. What can be noticed is the absence of people declaring they have an intermediate and upper-intermediate level – corresponding to the B1 and B2 levels. Among those who answered the survey, a majority have an advanced or proficient (C1-C2) level in Irish and a minority a beginner or elementary level (A1-A2). This outcome might further point to the wide range of language-level situations which can be included under the description of “being able to speak Irish” mentioned by the Government’s census and used to determine the total number of Irish speakers.

Figure 4.2

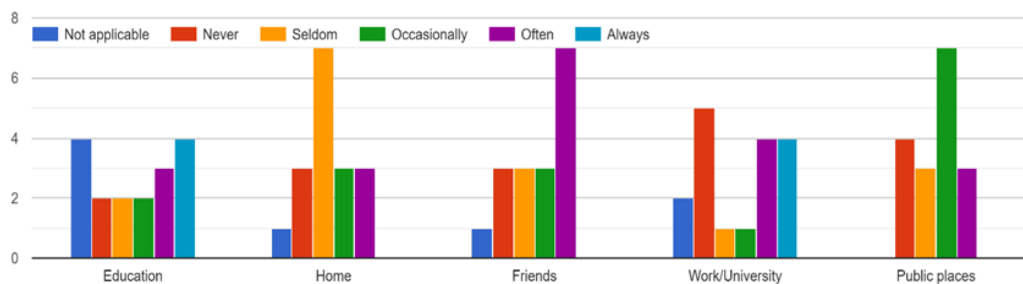
9) How would you evaluate your proficiency in Irish?



As concerns instead the practice of the language, the only domains in which the language is “always” used is that of “education” as well as that of “work and university”. At the same time, the latter is that in which most participants declared to “never” speak Irish. Irish is principally used by the participants “occasionally” in public places, “seldom” at home and “often” with friends. The latter answers might be seen as encouraging since both of the mentioned contexts belong to the private domains which contribute the most to the vitality of the language and are yet more difficult to be reached and influenced by language planners.

Figure 4.3

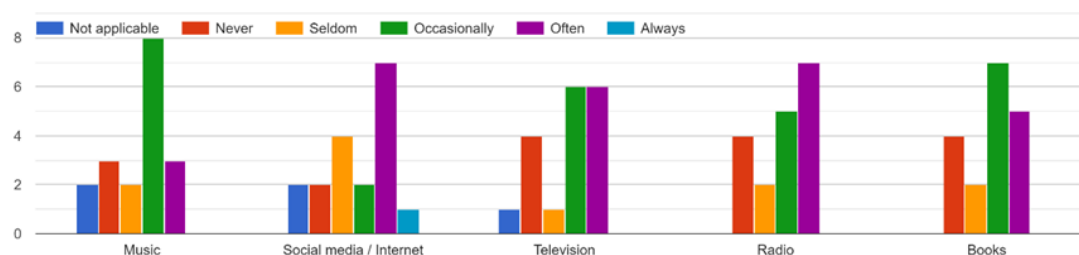
11) How often do you speak Irish in the following contexts?



A percentage of 78% of those interviewed declared using Irish as a language for music, social media/internet, TV, radio, and books. The peak has been registered in social media use, resulting in being above the media. The frequency of utilisation for each tool can be found in Figure 4.4. This result might further stress the importance of media in providing potential speakers with occasions to spontaneously use the language as a communication tool, suggesting that further supporting them might be a feasible way to increase its spontaneous use, improving the language's situation. All those interviewed declared that they would like to increase their proficiency in Irish. The main reasons for this are linked to matters of ethnic identity, of which language is considered a relevant part, and to the desire to improve the participants' communicative skills, or in other words to communicate better with other Irish speakers. The methods adopted to achieve the above-mentioned goal, excluding those provided by the education system, include participation in social events such as Irish language camps and cultural activities in the Gaeltacht, joining Irish club or societies, listening to Irish Gaelic radio, music and TV as well as using it with friends and familiars.

Figure 4.4

12) How often do you use Irish in the following media?



4.3 Education

As mentioned in the previous section and here confirmed by the data reported in Figure 4.5, the participant's interest in the language increased in the years following the end of the education cycle highlighting, perhaps, a teaching approach to the language which might be improved to further interest and involve the students into the language learning process and use. As in Figure 4.6, this might be the case of post-primary junior cycle education, which received the highest number of neutral evaluations for what concerns its quality. Despite that, the respondents' overall experience with Irish teaching was evaluated as "very positive" in most of the cases, in all the different cycles of studies. It must be noticed that the high amount of "not applicable" answers in the university sector might be linked to the scarcity of structures teaching in Irish. The overall quality of the teaching materials has been judged as "good" by 38.9% of the respondents while a total of 38.9% found it "weak" or slightly better. None found it "excellent". The lack of adequate teaching materials might be one of the issues leading to the low efficacy of mainstream English-medium primary and post-primary schools. Despite this, some of the respondents pointed out that from their point of view, an improvement in the teaching materials as well as in that of the teaching methods could be noticed in recent years.

Figure 4.5 Participant's interest in the Irish language during school years and now

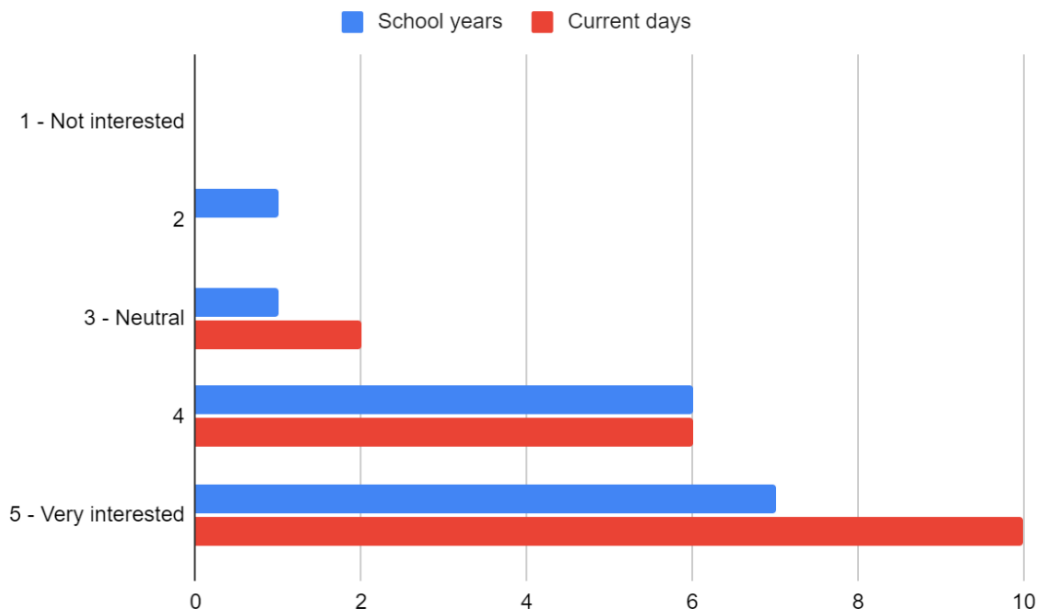
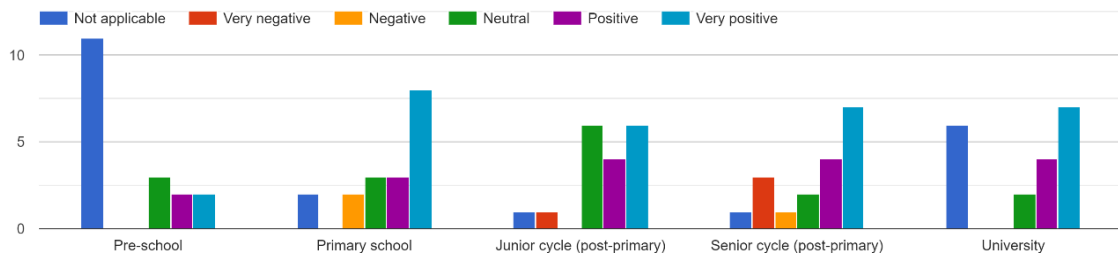


Figure 4.6 Participants’ evaluation of their experience with Irish teaching at school

18) How would you evaluate your school experience with Irish learning?



Question 19 was an open question aiming to collect the respondents’ suggestions to improve the quality of teaching the Irish language inside the education system. Most suggestions regarded the need to teach the language with the aim to form active and proficient Irish speakers rather than being over-focused on exams and written skills. Others suggested the extension of the immersion teaching method – that of the Gaelscoil (Irish medium schools) – to all English medium schools, in order to achieve better learning results combined with an expansion of the situation and domain in which speaking Irish is needed as desirable.

Here are some of the collected answers:

“In our secondary school, there was a mix of students who had attended Gaeltacht schools and had good Irish, and others who had hardly any Irish. Classes were directed at the weaker students and involved a lot of learning off and basic grammar - I thought the course itself was interesting. I would prefer to see more focus on the local Irish dialect, particularly in Gaeltacht areas”

“Use Irish as the linguistic medium for wider education. At present, there is no practical use for Irish in daily life for the majority of people living in Ireland.” expressed in other words by another participant as “Every school should be a Gaelscoil.”, meaning an Irish medium school.

“Move away from technical grammar training in primary and secondary schools; and concentrate on teaching pupils to speak and communicate” or similarly “The system in post-primary is too exam-focused. There should be more time allocated to speaking the language”

4.4 Current situation and future of the language

As seen in Figure 4.8, Irish is seen as a minority language by the overwhelming majority of the respondents (83.3%) while 66.7% also think it is an endangered language. Despite that, Irish is seen as Ireland’s first language by half of the participants. This contrasting outcome could be linked to the high official recognition and presence in the public domain of which the language benefits which might have led half of the respondents to see it as the county’s “first language” – as from the data set displayed in Table 4.7 - despite being used by a minority and therefore being recognised as an endangered language – as most of the respondents answered. Another interpretation of the mentioned question could be linked to the respondents’ ideology, which could be in favour of either language as Ireland’s principal language and this might have influenced their point of view.

Figure 4.7

23) Do you see Irish as a minority language?
18 risposte

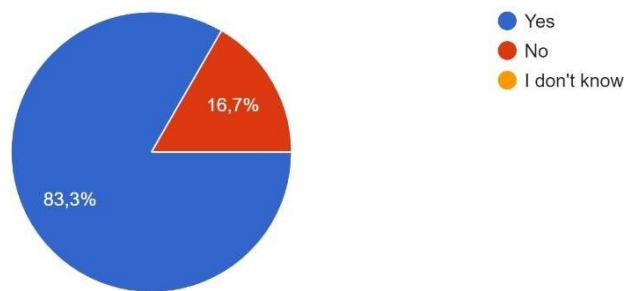


Figure 4.8

21) Do you see Irish as an endangered language?
18 risposte

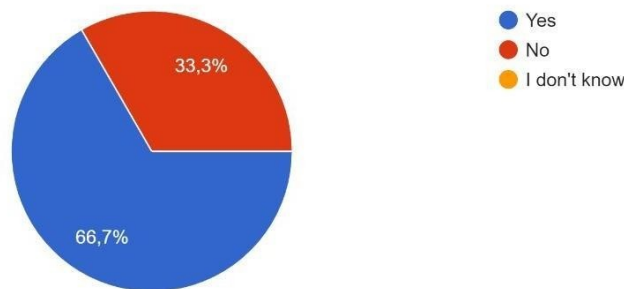


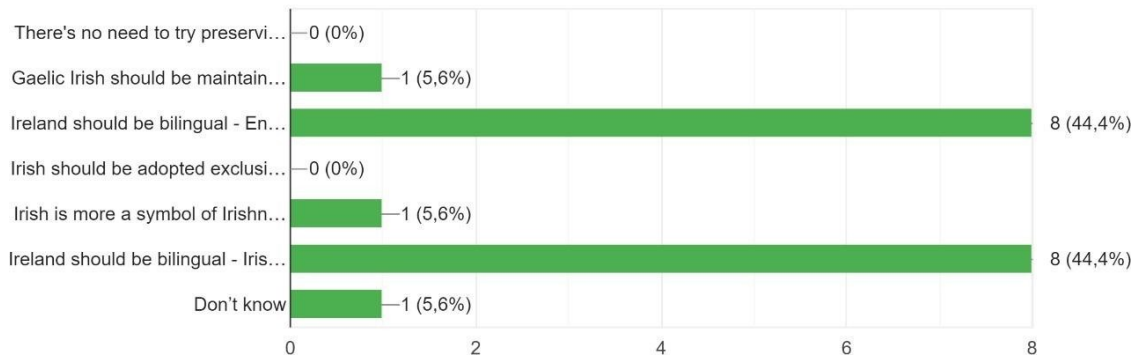
Table 4.7 – Ireland’s first language

Language	Count	Percentage
Irish	9	50%
English	9	50%

Figure 4.9

26) Which of these statements most closely matches your views?

18 risposte



English's high diffusion and utility are seen as a threat to the Irish language by the relative majority (44.4%) of those who were asked.

Yes	8	44.4%
No	5	27.8%
Maybe	5	27.8%

None of the participants thinks that “there's no need to try preserving and supporting the Irish language” or that it should be adopted exclusively as the language of culture and art. About half of them declared (44.4%) that Irish should be a bilingual country with English as the main language and roughly the other half (44.4%), in contrast, declared that in the same context Irish should be the main language. 5.6% of those who answered thought Irish is more a symbol of Irishness rather than a communicative tool and another 5.6% thought it should be maintained just in the Gaeltacht. Again, as seen in the question regarding Ireland's first language it can be noticed that there is a clear-cut division between those supporting the enhancement in the use of the Irish language until replacing the current role of English and those who instead, prefer maintaining the current linguistic situation with English as the main language in daily life – though continuing supporting Irish.

As may be observed in Table 4.9, the majority of the respondents declared that they have a very positive attitude towards the language and none of them has a “negative” or “very negative” one.

This is reflected in the fact that the public use of Irish is judged in a very positive way (5/5) by 89% of the interviewees and as positive (4/5) by the remaining 11%. That said, nearly all participants declared they would like their children to speak Irish (94.1%) while 5.9% stated that they would like this but “just in some situations”.

Very positive	12	66,7%
Positive	4	22,2%
Neutral	2	11,1%

That said, as indicated in Table 4.10. the state and families are perceived as those principally in charge of the intergenerational transmission of the Irish language respectively by 29.4% and 23.5% of those who answered. 17.6% thought that both schools and families should collaborate to reach the mentioned goal while 29.4% believe that the whole society should be involved in the process.

Families	6	33.3%
State	4	23.5%
School and families together	2	11.1%
Church	0	0%
All of the above	6	33.1%

As concerns instead the expected development trends of the language in the next years, the respondents showed a certain awareness of the current ongoing linguistic development trends described in the previous section since, as seen in Table 11, the majority of interviewees believe that the number of speakers will increase, though, the general proficiency will decrease. Despite that, 33.3% of those interviewed expected proficiency in the language to increase in the following years.

	Number of speakers	Number of respondents	Proficiency level	Number of respondents
It will increase	61,1%	12	33,3%	6
It will decrease	11,1%	2	55,6%	10
It will remain similar to now	27,8%	5	11,1%	2

The final question asked the participants whether they wanted to add express something in general about the Irish language with the aim of collecting the participants' spontaneous suggestions and opinions about the language. Here are some of them:

“Just that there is cause for hope and for despair. On the one hand, I think technology offers much more opportunities to immerse oneself in Irish of a high quality on a daily basis (through listening to podcasts, for instance, or joining an online conversation circle). Also, with opportunities opening up in broadcasting and translation, a career through Irish seems much more viable than it's ever been. But whether because of decreasing attention spans or because people don't read as much anymore, the standard of Irish that people are able to achieve seems to be steadily dropping. I'm not sure how to tackle that as I imagine that it's a problem that's not just confined to the Irish language and is rooted in general changes in society and in the way we teach our children.”

“I think the state needs to do what other countries have done in the past and make the executive decision to just have absolutely everything in Irish. It forces people to learn it. If people truly want to break their colonial ties, if they truly want to be free from the association of the UK they need to reclaim and take pride in their language as their first language. That's how the British monarchy erased our language and that's how we take it back.”

Others stated the belief that “attitudes towards the Irish language have vastly improved in the last 10 years. It is now very trendy to speak Irish”, expressing though “wider concerns about the long-term sustainable transmission of the language, particularly within homes, families and communities” because of the decline of the Gaeltacht. Different answers notice a general improvement in the quality of teaching materials and others suggested the use of media as effective teaching tools.

4.5 Limitations of the survey

The limitations of my survey are represented by the limited number of respondents and the low participation of people coming from the Gaeltacht and Irish L1 speakers. With higher and more diversified participation, the study would have collected a wider range of experiences with the language and consequently more points of view, which could have been useful for better understanding the future challenges of the Irish language.

4.6 Discussion

All participants described their ethnic identity as “Irish”, despite a high majority of them declaring to be English monolingual and using it as the main language in most domains. This result confirms that, as reported in chapter 2, “ethnic identity can and does survive the loss of the original group language [as a communication tool]” (Liebkind 1999:144). In addition, some of the respondents in question 10.1 declared to desire to increase their knowledge of the Irish language as well as improve their communication skills to “connect with heritage” because they feel it is part of their identity. From this outcome, it might be assumed that ethnic identity does influence people’s attitudes towards the language.

The questionnaire, then, showed that people with similar sociocultural backgrounds – from a non-Gaeltacht urban area and growing up in an English-speaking family – can achieve a wide range of proficiency in the Irish language going from an A1 to a C2 level. This can be reconducted to the criticism towards the method adopted by the Census in estimating the number of Irish speakers expressed by Bradley () and reported in chapter 2. The census in fact, by simply asking citizens “Can you speak Irish?” catalogues as Irish speakers people who could potentially have radically different levels of proficiency and consequently different communication abilities going from basic to advanced/native speaker. Such a method might interfere with the estimation of the vitality of the language since “number of speakers” and “proportion of speakers within the total population” are relevant criteria taken into consideration in the estimation process. In other words, an overestimation in the number of Irish speakers by including people who empirically cannot effectively communicate through Irish could have brought an overly positive classification of the Irish language’s vitality – currently evaluated as “shifting” or “definitely endangered”.

The questionnaire evidenced the centrality of the education system in the transmission of the language since “school” was indicated as the domain in which the highest number of participants learned the most of their Irish skills as well as the only context in which Irish was used as the dominant language in most of the participant’s childhood. In relation to this latter data, if on the one hand, it confirms the generalised lack of intergenerational transmission and the consequent absence of the Irish language in the private domain outside the Gaeltacht, on the other hand, it shows the importance of education system in at least providing Irish pupils with at least a basic knowledge of the language.

In light of this and given the difficulty in planning or at least influencing the intergenerational transmission, a successful measure might consist in further supporting and promoting the naíonraí – Irish-medium playgroups - in order to at least partially, reactivate the transmission of the language in the first years of life achieving then the advantages of the “critical period theory” described by Lenneberg (Friedmann and Rusou 2015:27) according to which after the age of four “some aspects of a second language are not acquired as native anymore, and the acquisition already resembles that of adults who acquire a second language”.

The presence of the language in the education system, recommended by Crystal (2000) as one of the basic measures to grant a successful revitalisation action, is an effect of the official recognition granted to the Irish language and recognised by Patten (2001:696-706) and UNESCO (2003:13), as an effective tool to protect and promote an endangered language’s identity. This can be found in the fact that despite English being the dominant language in the country’s majority of domains, half of the interviewees declared to think of the Irish language as the county’s first language and wish it could someday replace English in its current role. On the other hand, the other half believes that, in the same context of bilingualism, English is Ireland’s first language, and it should continue having its current role in society. Nonetheless, the concern about the fact that official recognition could possibly reduce a community’s perceived responsibility, as reported by Ó Riagáin (2004 in Sallabank 2012:116) in the transmission of the language can be partially found in the 22% of the respondent’s belief that it is exclusively a public responsibility.

As mentioned, when discussing the Welsh revitalisation through the education system a reason for the lack of use of the language outside the education system is the lack of situations in which is possible and required to do so.

The data set displayed in Figure 4.4 confirmed the high impact of media in the revitalisation action, as described by Crystal (2000) to raise the language's visibility and prestige as well as sustained by Stahlberg (2021:420) to improve a language's vitality. On this latter point also agree with Fishman (1991:113) and UNESCO, since they both included media as one of the most influential factors in determining a language's vitality/endorsement level.

The survey, in fact, highlighted an outstandingly generalised use of the Irish language in all kinds of media, even by those having a basic level of proficiency and those who do not frequently use the language as a communication tool, therefore providing them with spontaneous interaction with the language. By extension, it was interesting to notice that similar to the Welsh revitalisation case discussed in chapter 2, some of the questionnaire's respondents denounced a similar situation in which despite desiring and having the ability to use the Irish language in spontaneous situations people cannot do it due to the lack of contexts in which it is appropriate to do it. Again, as stated by Crystal (2000) "only a community can save a language" so, regardless of achieving a high proficiency through the education system perhaps more efforts should be invested in creating a truly bilingual English and Irish-speaking environment, even outside the Gaeltacht. This way, regardless the level of proficiency achieved through the education system people could use and practice the language daily, progressively reaching a generalised high proficiency, therefore having the possibility to gradually reactivate the intergenerational transmission. Of course, and as suggested by a questionnaire's participant, the Gaeltacht and its native speakers should have a central role in the process.

As shown in Table 4.11, most participants seem to be aware of the expected future development trends of the language illustrated in chapter 3 since the majority of them declared to expect the number of speakers to increase and at the same time the average level of proficiency to decrease.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this dissertation was to present a theoretical framework regarding the fields of language policy and language revitalisation and, on the basis of this, the analysis of the Irish language's current situation and the related language policy in the Republic of Ireland so as to reflect on its expected developments and future challenges.

In the first chapter, this dissertation reviewed the main components of language planning – status, and corpus planning, and acquisition planning. It then reported on the evolution of the discipline into that of language policy, which also considers the people's use and opinions towards the language. Considering this, it focused on two aspects of the above-mentioned new approach: ethnic identity, in which language emerges as its “symbol par excellence”, and language rights, with specific reference to the European Framework of Regional or Minority languages in its key points.

Chapter 2 dealt with the classification of languages according to their vitality or endangerment level. In light of this, it identified intergenerational transmission, the presence in the education system and in the media as the universally recognised factors influencing a language's vitality and therefore those on which language revitalisation should be based. It also highlighted that despite the private domains of languages being the most effective in revitalisation, they also are the most difficult to influence with language policy and language planning.

Chapter 3 dealt with the specific case of Irish, providing an excursus on the history of the Irish language and identifying the British domination and the Great Famine of 1845 as the main reasons for the progressive language endangerment which led Irish to risk extinction by the end of the 19th century. It continued by analysing the current linguistic situation characterised by a paradoxical situation in which Irish benefits from full juridical recognition, being therefore transmitted through the education system, but at the same time registering a low intergenerational transmission and a low daily use rate. The chapter highlighted the scarce efficacy of the mainstream education system in creating proficient Irish speakers together with the lack of contexts in which the use of the Irish language is

needed, required, or appropriate, resulting in a trend of growth in the number of speakers - L2 speakers - but a decrease in the average proficiency in the language.

In addition to that, as highlighted by Bradley and confirmed by the questionnaire, the method adopted by the Government to estimate the number of Irish speakers through the Census could have led to an overestimation in the number of speakers, influencing therefore the evaluation of language vitality, which might be even more endangered.

Chapter 4 reported the outcomes of the questionnaire which confirmed the survivance of the Irish ethnic identity despite the Irish language being scarcely used as a communication tool. It highlighted the centrality of the education system in the effort to revitalise the Irish language, the wide range of proficiency levels which can be included in the term “Irish speaker” and the lack of domains in which the language can be spontaneously used. Furthermore, it outlined two different points of view as concerns the current and the desired future role of the Irish language in Irish society: some consider Irish to be the legitimate language of Ireland and therefore hope it will someday replace English in its current role while others believe the situation will not change.

For future research, it could be interesting to update the analysis with the latest demographic data coming from the 2022 Census and highlight the possible differences to verify to what extent the objectives listed in the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 have been achieved and their effects on the Irish language. Furthermore, an analysis of the language policy of Northern Ireland – part of the United Kingdom and a member of the ECRML – could also provide some suggestions relevant to the language situation in the Republic of Ireland.

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APPENDIX
SURVEY ON LANGUAGE ATTITUDES AND USE OF IRISH

Personal background

1) What's your gender?

Male

Female

Prefer not to say

Other

2) What's your age?

3) What's your nationality?

Irish

Other(s)

4) What do you consider to be your ethnicity?

Irish

Other(s)

5) Are you from a "Gaeltacht"?

Yes

No

6) How would you describe your place of origin?

Rural

Urban

Other(s)

7) What do you consider to be your native language(s)?

Irish

English

Other(s)

8) During your childhood, which language did you mainly use in the following contexts?

	English	Irish	Other(s)
Home			
Relatives			
Friends			
School			
Home			
Relatives			
Friends			
School			

9) How would you evaluate your proficiency in Irish?

	None	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
General skills							
Writing skills							
Reading skills							
Oral skills							

10) Would you like to improve your proficiency in Irish?

Yes

No

10.1) Why/Why not?

11) How often do you speak Irish in the following contexts?

	N.A	Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Often	Always
Education						
Home						
Friends						
Work/University						
Public places						

12) How often do you use Irish in the following media?

	N.A	Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Often	Always
Music						
Social media/ Internet						
Television						
Radio						
Books						

13) Where/How do you think you have learned the most Irish?

Home

School

Not applicable

Other(s)

Attitude towards the Irish language and its teaching

14) How would you rate your interest in Irish during your school years?

1 Not interested	2	3	4	5 Very interested
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15) How would you rate your interest in Irish nowadays?

1 Not interested	2	3	4	5 Very interested
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16) What's your general opinion about Irish?

1 Very negative	2	3	4	5 Very positive
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17) Have you ever tried to improve your Irish outside school? If so, how?

18) How would you evaluate your school experience with Irish learning?

	N.A	Very negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very positive
Pre-school						
Primary school						
Junior cycle (post-primary)						
Senior cycle (post-primary)						
Pre-school						
Primary school						
Junior cycle (post-primary)						
Senior cycle (post-primary)						
University						

19) What would you suggest to improve it?

20) How would you evaluate the teaching materials in Irish used at school?

1 Weak	2	3	4	5 Excellent
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Opinions about the future of the language

21) Do you see Irish as an endangered language?

Yes

No

I don't know

22) What do you consider to be the first language of the Republic of Ireland?

Irish

English

Other(s)

23) Do you see Irish as a minority language?

Yes

No

I don't know

24) Would you like your children to speak Irish?

Yes

No

Just in some situations

25) Do you see the diffusion and usefulness of English as a threat to the Irish language?

Yes

No

Maybe

26) Which of these statements most closely matches your views?

- There's no need to try preserving and supporting the Irish language
- Gaelic Irish should be maintained and protected only in the Gaeltacht
- Ireland should be bilingual - English as first language
- Irish should be adopted exclusively as the language of culture and art
- Irish is more a symbol of Irishness rather than a language for daily use
- Ireland should be bilingual - Irish as first language
- I don't know

27) How do you perceive people speaking Irish in public?

1 Negatively	2	3	4	5 Positively
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28) In your view, is Irish mainly used by young people or by older people?

Young people

Elders

Other(s)

29) Who should be responsible for the transmission of the Irish language?

Families

State

School

Church

Other(s)

30) How do you expect the number of Irish speakers to change in the next years?

It will increase

It will decrease

It will remain similar to now

Other

31) How do you expect the proficiency of Irish speakers to change in the following years?

It will improve

It will decrease

It will remain similar to now

Other

SUMMARY IN ITALIAN

La presente tesi si pone come obiettivo l'analisi delle politiche linguistiche adottate dalla Repubblica d'Irlanda nell'ambito della rivitalizzazione della lingua irlandese, al fine di identificarne le criticità e riflettere sui possibili sviluppi che questa potrà avere in futuro, oltre che del ruolo che potrà avere nella società irlandese.

Il primo capitolo di questo lavoro punta ad introdurre il campo di studi della pianificazione linguistica e quello delle politiche linguistiche, entrambe appartenenti alla sociolinguistica e alla linguistica applicata. La pianificazione linguistica classica, elaborata tra gli anni '50 e '60 e generalmente accettata in ambito accademico fino agli anni '80 è composta da status e corpus planning. Per status si intende il numero di parlanti, il suo grado di standardizzazione, la sua autoctonia o meno sul territorio, la sua uniformità ed il suo riconoscimento linguistico che può quindi produrre stati monolingue, bilingue (o multilingue) o contenenti lingue regionali. Il corpus planning invece, riguarda la selezione di una norma della lingua e la sua adozione a standard di riferimento per la grammatica prescrittiva, dizionari, eventualmente espandendone il vocabolario affinché risulti adatta all'impiego nelle situazioni strategiche di uno stato come commercio, amministrazione ed istruzione.

Alla fine degli anni '80, tuttavia, diversi accademici si dichiararono scettici nei confronti della pianificazione classica a causa della sua scarsa considerazione delle diverse variabili sociolinguistiche dei diversi attori sociali, finendo spesso per risultare come un'imposizione da parte dello Stato pianificatore. Per questo motivo, in molti elaborarono diversi approcci più o meno radicali. Cooper, ad esempio, propose l'elevazione della pianificazione dell'acquisizione (ossia di tutte le attività aventi come scopo la trasmissione e l'insegnamento della lingua, a partire da quelle scolastiche) come terzo elemento della pianificazione linguistica. Spolsky, invece, propose l'adozione del più generico termine "politiche linguistiche" per indicare l'intera disciplina nonché l'adozione di un approccio più inclusivo e flessibile che desse maggiore spazio agli altri attori sociali, come le minoranze linguistiche che spesso risultavano discriminate dalle politiche di pianificazione linguistica. A questo scopo ai tre componenti della pianificazione linguistica si aggiunsero anche gli usi e le opinioni dei parlanti nei confronti della lingua.

Nell'ambito di questo rinnovato approccio, dunque, si intensificarono gli studi sull'identità etnica e sul suo rapporto con la lingua e nel campo dei diritti linguistici. L'identità etnica, essendo un concetto determinato più su basi sociali che biologiche, può venir alterata in seguito all'influenza di fattori esterni come conflitti, migrazioni o conquiste che possono rendere l'adozione di un'altra etnia "desiderabile" o forzata (Dorian 1999:25–26). Tra gli oltre 80 indicatori di identità etnica come i simboli religiosi e culturali, il legame con un territorio, la lingua emerge come "il simbolo per eccellenza" (Fishman 1993) anche nei casi in cui non viene più utilizzata come mezzo di comunicazione. La tutela delle lingue minoritarie o comunque fragili appare dunque essenziale al fine di garantire la sopravvivenza di identità etniche che altrimenti rischiano di venire assimilate da altre più dominanti. Questa tutela, dal punto di vista giuridico, si concretizza nel campo dei diritti linguistici comprendente i "*comprehensive language rights*" e i diritti minimi linguistici. I primi si riferiscono alla politica linguistica adottata dagli Stati nei confronti delle lingue presenti sul loro territorio che può tendere ad una loro promozione, tolleranza o proibizione. I secondi, invece, sono ispirati ai diritti fondamentali dell'uomo e sono presenti in numerosi trattati internazionali, anche se l'unico ad avere valore giuridico è la Carta europea delle lingue regionali o minoritarie. Questa fornisce agli Stati aderenti le linee guida per tutelare o promuovere le loro lingue minoritarie.

Il secondo capitolo prosegue con l'approfondimento di concetti quali la classificazione delle lingue secondo la loro vitalità, o grado di rischio d'estinzione e delle strategie per invertire o ritardare il processo di estinzione. Tra le cause che portano una lingua a divenire a rischio d'estinzione si possono identificare, da un lato, la morte dei suoi parlanti a causa di guerre, persecuzioni o calamità naturali ed il "*language shift*" ossia l'abbandono più o meno spontaneo della propria lingua originale, spesso minoritaria, in favore di una dominante e maggiormente diffusa. Mentre tra i fattori che più influenzano il grado di rischio d'estinzione vi sono la trasmissione intergenerazionale, la presenza nel settore scolastico, la presenza nei media, il numero di parlanti nonché il grado di riconoscimento giuridico. Studiosi come Fishman con il suo "*reversing language shift*" o Crystal con la "*language death theory*" propongono, attraverso l'intervento nei diversi

ambiti sopraelencati, diverse strategie utili alla conservazione e alla rivitalizzazione della lingua.

La trasmissione intergenerazionale, in virtù della sua capacità di creare nuovi parlanti madrelingua attraverso la trasmissione della lingua in ambito domestico e familiare, risulta essere l'area d'intervento più efficace al fine della rivitalizzazione. Nonostante ciò, non trattandosi di un contesto pubblico bensì privato, risulta difficilmente raggiungibile ed influenzabile dalle politiche linguistiche e di pianificazione. In alternativa, dunque, molto spesso le attività di rivitalizzazione si concentrano nel settore dell'educazione in quanto più semplice da pianificare anche se meno efficace nella formazione di parlanti di livello avanzato o madrelingua. Il riconoscimento giuridico, invece, pur garantendo una certa tutela della lingua attraverso il suo impiego in contesti ufficiali non è ritenuta sufficiente per garantirne l'uso spontaneo e quotidiano tra i cittadini.

Completata quindi la premessa teorica al campo di studi, il terzo capitolo tratta nello specifico il caso linguistico irlandese evidenziandone le caratteristiche peculiari che lo distinguono dalle altre lingue minoritarie e a rischio d'estinzione. In primo luogo, l'irlandese viene oggi classificata come una lingua "shifting" o "a serio rischio d'estinzione". I motivi storici che hanno portato a questo stato di rischio possono essere indentificati nella secolare dominazione politica, economica e culturale della Gran Bretagna che ha portato ad un progressivo perdita di prestigio della lingua irlandese che, estromessa dalle posizioni di potere come amministrazione e commercio, è stata sempre più relegata a lingua del popolo e simbolo di povertà ed arretratezza. Infatti, già dal XII secolo, dopo secoli di indipendenza politica e culturale irlandese sotto diversi regni celtici, con l'invasione anglo-normanna e la conseguente creazione del regno d'Irlanda, sotto controllo inglese, l'isola cominciò ad essere – a varie riprese – sempre più assoggettata alla politica e alla cultura inglese. Questo processo culminò poi nelle "plantations" ossia nella massiccia immigrazione di popolazione inglese e scozzese in determinate aree dell'isola, come avvenne con successo nell'Ulster e nell'istituzione del Regno Unito di Gran Bretagna e Irlanda nel 1801.

Se già in questo momento storico la lingua irlandese mostrava segni di debolezza e retrocessione, la carestia delle patate del 1845-50 mise a rischio anche la sopravvivenza

stessa della lingua. Essa, infatti, causò la morte e l'emigrazione di un totale di 2 milioni di irlandesi, in massima parte parlanti gaelico. Presa coscienza della precarietà della lingua, dagli anni '90 dell'800 nacquero diverse società culturali con l'obiettivo di valorizzare e promuovere l'uso della lingua irlandese sia nella vita quotidiana che nella letteratura al fine di rinobilitare la lingua. Questa, infatti, anche agli occhi degli irlandesi stessi, veniva sempre più spesso associata a povertà e miseria spingendoli quindi a preferire l'inglese, considerata la lingua delle opportunità. Solamente nel 1922 con l'istituzione primo stato irlandese indipendente dopo secoli, iniziò la rivitalizzazione della lingua.

Attualmente, la lingua irlandese gode di un riconoscimento giuridico senza precedenti nell'ambito delle lingue minoritarie essendo elevata a "lingua nazionale e prima lingua ufficiale" e dunque presente in ogni ambito ufficiale, dall'amministrazione all'istruzione; l'inglese, invece, viene descritta come "un'altra lingua ufficiale" ed è anch'essa impiegato in ambito ufficiale. Ciononostante, nella maggior parte del paese l'inglese è la lingua dominante in ogni ambito mentre l'irlandese, scarsamente utilizzato come mezzo di comunicazione nella vita quotidiana e non soggetto a trasmissione intergenerazionale, viene appreso principalmente attraverso il sistema scolastico. La maggior parte degli istituti utilizza l'inglese come mezzo d'insegnamento e insegna l'irlandese al pari di una lingua straniera; vi sono poi le *Gaelscoil*, in cui l'irlandese viene utilizzato come lingua-mezzo. Le prime, di gran lunga più diffuse sono spesso criticate per la loro inefficacia nel formare parlanti competenti ed in grado di utilizzare la lingua in contesti quotidiani. La situazione risulta differente nelle *Gaeltacht*, ossia le aree occidentali in cui l'irlandese sopravvive come lingua nativa, utilizzata sia come lingua ufficiale che come lingua di comunicazione. Le *Gaeltacht* emergono dunque come delle oasi linguistiche di fondamentale importanza per la vitalità e la sopravvivenza della lingua stessa. Se fino agli anni '80 il principale fattori di rischio di queste di rischio era rappresentato dalla consistente emigrazione dovuto dalla scarsità di opportunità lavorative, dagli anni '80 in poi con il miglioramento del contesto economico, a preoccupare è l'immigrazione di L1 inglese che minacciano la dominanza dell'irlandese nella zona. Vista l'alta diffusione della lingua grazie alla sua presenza nel sistema educativo e la diminuzione dei nativi irlandesi nelle *Gaeltacht*, negli ultimi anni la lingua ha registrato un aumento nel numero

di parlanti a fronte di una diminuzione nel livello medio di competenza linguistica. Inoltre, come segnalato da Bradley, la stima del numero di parlanti effettuata attraverso la somministrazione alla popolazione della domanda “Sai parlare irlandese?” presente nel censimento irlandese potrebbe aver causato una sovrastima nel conteggio. Infatti, molti irlandesi in virtù del loro orgoglio di appartenenza all’etnia irlandese rappresentata appunto dalla lingua irlandese, potrebbero aver esagerato la propria competenza linguistica in fase di compilazione.

Il quarto capitolo, infine, presenta i risultati di un sondaggio di 31 domande condotto su un campione di 18 cittadini irlandesi che hanno dichiarato di avere competenza linguistica in irlandese. L’obiettivo del questionario è investigare sull’uso e sulle opinioni degli irlandesi nei confronti della lingua irlandese. Dallo studio è emerso che la maggior parte dei partecipanti ha avuto l’inglese come lingua dominante nella maggior parte delle situazioni durante la propria infanzia. L’unico contesto in cui è stata segnalata una rilevante presenza dell’irlandese è quella dell’istruzione all’interno della quale, peraltro, la maggior parte dei partecipanti ha dichiarato di aver acquisito gran parte delle proprie conoscenze in irlandese. Attraverso la richiesta di autovalutazione delle competenze linguistiche dei partecipanti è stato possibile dimostrare l’ampio raggio di competenze linguistiche ascrivibili sotto la definizione di “parlante nativo”, variabile da un livello C2 ad un livello A1, confermando quindi quanto segnalato da Bradley. I partecipanti hanno segnalato una mancanza di contesti in cui l’utilizzo della lingua irlandese è effettivamente richiesta o desiderabile. Un altro dato interessante emerso durante il sondaggio è una divisione nella concezione della lingua irlandese, da alcuni vista come la legittima lingua del paese e che dunque un giorno dovrebbe sostituire l’inglese nel suo attuale ruolo e altri che invece accettano gli attuali ruoli delle lingue. Si è inoltre registrata un’alta frequenza di utilizzo dei media in lingua irlandese sottolineandone quindi la rilevanza ai fini della rivitalizzazione linguistica.