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## Can Language Policy Make Multiculturalism Work?

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### *Abstract*

Researchers in the field of language policy have disagreed as to the effectiveness of language policy; some experts would claim that language simply cannot be managed. Drawing on international case studies, this paper will explore how effective language policy might work in multilingual societies. Interestingly, the dominance of English as a world language is quoted as an example of both language management success and failure. On the one hand, English is perceived as being a threat to indigenous languages which are portrayed as endangered species; on the other, the hegemony of English as a world language is perceived as a sociolinguistic reality which cannot be controlled. Where English is seen as the powerful dominant language, non-native speakers are perceived as having a linguistic handicap, unless of course they learn to speak the language of power. This view is sometimes called the 'conspiracy theory', i.e. the powers-that-be orchestrate the spread of English. The other school of thought rejects the 'linguistic sentimentalism' of the conspiracy theory and argues that, in spite of all our best efforts to manage language use and prevent the spread of English, quite the opposite has happened. In both cases, diametrically opposed views of multilingualism and diaspora are presented. A third school of thought puts forward a more positive case for language policy which could operate effectively in multilingual environments. Drawing on empirical data from various classroom experiences, these studies advocate an additive bilingual environment which recognises the sociolinguistic reality of the spread of English, on the one hand, and the valuable cultural capital of indigenous languages, on the other. In line with this vision, a plausible case in favour of effective language management is presented.

*Keywords:* Ireland; Language Policy; English-speaking world; multicultural; foreign language acquisition; bilingualism

Does Ireland really need a Language Policy, or are all the recent studies, reports etc. much ado about nothing?<sup>1</sup> And if it does, can we be sure it is going to work? Experts in the field of

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<sup>1</sup> Pol Ó Dochartaigh and Miriam Broderick: *Language Policy and Language Planning in Ireland*. A Report from the Royal Irish Academy for Modern Language, Literary and Cultural Studies. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2006; David Little: *Languages in the Post-Primary Curriculum*. Dublin: NCCA, 2003, accessed on 4 May 2009 [<http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/publications/languagesdiscussionpaper.pdf>]; David Little: 'We don't do Policy here' -the Case of Ireland, accessed on 18.12. 2009 at

sociolinguistics have disagreed as to the effectiveness of policy in managing language use.<sup>2</sup> The spread of English is a case in point, with scholars quoting its rise as a *lingua franca* as an example of language management failure.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the decline of Ireland's heritage language 'Gaeilge' (Irish) during the early years of the new Republic is frequently quoted as an example of language policy failure. The findings from this research would appear to suggest that some are dubious about the need for policy at all, with studies showing as many examples of bad as good practice. What is certain is that Ireland is at a crossroads, in terms of its sociolinguistic evolution. Having experienced unprecedented changes in its demographics during the Celtic Tiger years, with an influx of immigrants from diverse cultural backgrounds, the question is, does the new Ireland need a policy at all?

The tension which exists between Ireland's official bilingualism and emerging multilingualism adds another layer of complexity to the Irish experience with immigration. Recent Census figures reveal that over half a million Irish residents speak a foreign language in the home, representing over 12% of the total population.<sup>4</sup> While some are sceptical about the effectiveness of policy, it certainly could help Ireland in its transition from a bilingual to a multilingual society.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the purely social issues, there are also compelling economic arguments in favour of a Language Policy that might address the shortage of language skills in Irish graduates and thereby strengthen Ireland's position in a competitive global marketplace. This paper will examine previous scenarios and studies from other societies that are of relevance to Irish policymakers at this crossroads and, in doing so, seek to establish why effective policy is absolutely crucial to a harmonious and prosperous future.

In contrast to other anglophone societies, Ireland's exposure to immigration and multiculturalism has been relatively recent and short-lived, with a history that has typically

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<http://www2.Lse.Ac.uk/language/pdf/LETPP%20-%20David%20Little.Pdf>; Heidi Zojer: 'When the Celtic Tiger Roared, Foreign Modern Languages Whispered: Modern Languages in Ireland 1998-2008'. In: *Yearbook of the Association of Third-Level Teachers of German in Ireland* 5 (2010), p.177-187; Royal Irish Academy National Committee for Modern Language, Literary and Cultural Studies, National Languages Strategy. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Spolsky: *Language Policy*, 4th ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Phillipson: *Language Policy and Linguistic Imperialism*. In: Thomas Ricento (ed.): *An Introduction to Language Policy*. 5th ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009, p. 346-357; Abram De Swaan: *Words of the World: The Global Language System*. Cambridge: Polity Press and Blackwell, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Accessed on 4 November 2012 at

<http://cso.ie/en/newsandevents/pressreleases/2012pressreleases/pressreleasethisisireland-highlightsfromcensus2011part1/>.

<sup>5</sup> Muiris O'Laoire: 'Educating for Participation in a Bilingual or a Multilingual Society? Challenging the Power Balance between English and Irish (Gaelic) and Other Minority Languages in Ireland'. In: Christine Helot and Anne-Marie De Mejia (eds): *Forging Multilingual Spaces: Integrated Perspectives on Majority and Minority Bilingual Education*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2008, p. 256-264.

been characterised much more by emigration. Other English-speaking societies with longer traditions of immigration, such as America, the United Kingdom and indeed Canada offer a wealth of experience from which Ireland can learn. In the absence of an explicit Language Policy, American society has had an implicit English Only policy which has prevailed, in spite of many efforts to challenge the status quo. A similar situation existed in the United Kingdom until quite recently, with a failure to recognise the linguistic skills of ethnic minorities as a resource, and the resulting deficit in economic performance. The third anglophone country examined below, Canada, has often been quoted as a best practice model for Language Policy, which officially recognises multilingualism within a bilingual framework. Two main aspects will now be investigated in all three societies: firstly, the role which English can play as both an integrating and divisive factor in multilingual settings and, secondly, the central importance of language teaching to promote positive perceptions of bilingualism.

### **USA – The Melting Pot?**

While the U.S.A. has never had an explicit Language Policy as such, it has been argued that the prevailing linguistic culture defaults to English, thereby obviating the need for an explicit policy. The Constitution does not make direct reference to any language; however, it is written in English and it was generally believed in the early years of the founding fathers that language choice should be left to the individual, rather than imposed from the top.

Nonetheless, in the absence of an explicitly articulated policy, certain practices and beliefs emerged; i.e. an implicit *modus operandi* was understood to be the status quo. English was perceived as the glue that would unite diverse linguistic groups into a cohesive whole. The melting pot ideology which originally saw diversity as something positive, was subsequently misinterpreted by some leaders as an obstacle to be overcome. The 20<sup>th</sup> century was characterised by a predominantly monolingual mindset in American society, with both Roosevelt and Reagan urging immigrants to acquire English in order to assimilate into American society.<sup>6</sup> Paradoxically, a country with a rich tapestry of diverse ethnic backgrounds failed to recognise that diversity as a valuable resource.

The xenophobia of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was instrumental not only in promoting English but in demoting all other languages.<sup>7</sup> Bilingualism became associated with a lack of patriotism and

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<sup>6</sup> Colin Baker: *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1996.

<sup>7</sup> Spolsky, *Language Policy*.

monolingual attitudes became deeply entrenched by the 1930s. Coupled with this negative view of bilingualism at a societal level was the erroneous belief that bilingualism was not beneficial at an individual level either. In both popular and academic circles there was a widespread belief that bilinguals were for the most part intellectually inferior to monolinguals. Indeed, this perception had its roots in a view put forward towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Professor Laurie which was also widespread in the United Kingdom.<sup>8</sup> The link between bilingualism and low intelligence was upheld by various studies conducted in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with some scholars maintaining that bilingualism only led to mental confusion.<sup>9</sup>

The validity of these earlier studies was called into question by research conducted in Wales in the 1950s.<sup>10</sup> The findings suggested that bilingualism is not necessarily a source of intellectual disadvantage, and that other sociolinguistic factors are more important in determining the success or otherwise of bilinguals. These findings were further reinforced in the sixties by research carried out in Canada.<sup>11</sup> Peal & Lambert (1962) compared the development of monolingual and bilingual children and their findings suggested that, far from having a detrimental effect on academic development, bilingualism can have cognitive advantages over monolingualism. This particular study represents a major turning point in the history of research into bilingualism, and, while it was not without weaknesses, challenged the negative perception put forward by Laurie some decades earlier.<sup>12</sup>

With regard to the development of language minority bilinguals in a majority language setting, a link between learning difficulties and bilingualism has often been put forward in both the USA and the UK. Interestingly, misdiagnosis of bilingual students as having learning disabilities has led to court cases, with minority children being categorised unfairly by monolingual assessment criteria.<sup>13</sup> The absence of an explicit policy to protect the rights

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<sup>8</sup> Simon Laurie: *Lectures on Language and Linguistic Method in School*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1890.

<sup>9</sup> David Saer: The Effects of Bilingualism on Intelligence. In: *British Journal of Psychology* 14 (1923), p. 25-38; David Saer, F. Smith and J. Hughes: *The Bilingual Problem*. Wrexham: Hughes and Son, 1924; N. T. Darcy: A Review of the Literature on the Effects of Bilingualism upon the Measurement of Intelligence. In: *Journal of Genetic Psychology* 82 (1953), p. 21-57.

<sup>10</sup> William Jones: *Bilingualism and Intelligence*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1959.

<sup>11</sup> Elisabeth Peal and Wallace Lambert: The Relationship of Bilingualism to Intelligence. In: *Psychological Monographs* 76/27 (1962), p. 1-23.

<sup>12</sup> Baker, *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, p.122.

<sup>13</sup> Guadalupe Valdes and Richard Figueroa: *Bilingualism and Testing: A Special Case of Bias*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1994.

of linguistic minorities led to discrimination against their children and the implicit 'English-Only' policy turned a blind eye.

A famous court case in the United States was instrumental not only in highlighting the plight of linguistic minorities, but also in broadening the goals of bilingual education to include minority language and culture. The Lau versus Nichols case concerned Chinese students who were discriminated against by the San Francisco School District. The Supreme Court eventually ruled that the students' linguistic rights had been violated by the school. This case has been described by scholars as a major milestone in the ongoing efforts to provide a level linguistic playing field for ethnic minorities in American society.

In many ways, the 1968 Bilingual Act provided a much needed forum to address the needs of ethnic minorities and challenge the monolingual ethos which had prevailed hitherto. For the first time in American history, funding was to be provided for educational programmes that taught in languages other than English. The Act was debated at length in the Senate and some convincing arguments in favour of cultural pluralism and multilingualism were put forward; however, the counter arguments in favour of providing immigrants with a successful transition to English were more prevalent.<sup>14</sup> And so, many regarded the Bilingual Act as a wasted opportunity, with an extremely narrow definition of 'bilingualism' and restricted to providing English tuition to the Spanish-speaking poor.<sup>15</sup> In subsequent decades, others criticised the implementation of the Bilingual Programme, by claiming that it was generally considered to be remedial education, the main goal being to equip ethnic minorities with English, at the expense of their native languages.<sup>16</sup> A broader definition of bilingualism, incorporating dual language education from an early age in the educational cycle, might have enabled the Bilingual Programme to have a more positive impact. While it was an important milestone in recognising the linguistic rights of the immigrant workforce, it failed to present a serious challenge to the prevailing monolingual ethos.

More recently, in the 1980s, the bilingual debate has come to the fore once again in the USA, with some scholars maintaining that it is essentially about how language diversity fits within

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<sup>14</sup> Spolsky, *Language Policy*.

<sup>15</sup> Joshua A. Fishman: The Politics of Bilingual Education. In: James E. Alatis (ed.): *Report of the Twenty-First Annual Georgetown Round Table Meeting of Languages and Linguistics*. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1971, p. 47-58.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Lewis: *Bilingualism and Bilingual Education*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981.

the prevailing national ideology.<sup>17</sup> In effect, bilingualism is not simply confined to pedagogical issues such as language of instruction etc., but has much broader sociocultural implications for society as a whole. It involves a paradigm shift in popular perceptions of language use, and in this way, represents a huge challenge to the hegemony of English as the *lingua franca* in the United States. The language battles which have been fought since the 1980s have demonstrated the extent to which negative attitudes towards multilingualism still prevail, with some American states legislating in favour of Official English Only. The opposing viewpoint put forward by the English Plus lobbyists grew out of concern at the growing xenophobia in North America and the need to emphasise the positive aspects of cultural and linguistic pluralism.<sup>18</sup> This movement also emphasised the importance of multilingual skills for the development of America's economy on the international stage. In his review of James Crawford's book on bilingual education, Ovando highlights the fact that there were many successful cases of dual language education during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and that it was not until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that English became associated with American loyalty and patriotism.<sup>19</sup> He criticises the English Only movement that prevailed during William Bennett's time as Secretary of Education (1985-1988) and warns that some of the advocates were overtly racist in their views. He also outlines how the bilingual issue became a political football for pro- and anti-bilingualists, with unfortunate consequences for the neglected language curriculum.

What of the economic implications of the USA's implicit Language Policy? Since the 1980s, there has been renewed emphasis on foreign language learning in both Europe and North America, with the realisation that citizens with multilingual competence will be required for the global workplace.<sup>20</sup> Huge resources are being spent on second language education on the one hand, while the linguistic minorities who speak many different languages are marginalised. In the absence of an integrated and explicitly articulated Language Policy, these practices appear contradictory and display a lack of language management, in that they fail to harness natural linguistic resources to improve America's economic performance in a competitive global marketplace.

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<sup>17</sup> Carols J. Ovando: Essay Review, Politics and Pedagogy: The Case of Bilingual Education. In: *Harvard Educational Review* 60/3 (1990), p. 341-356.

<sup>18</sup> James Crawford (ed): *Language Loyalties: A Source Book on the Official English Controversy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

<sup>19</sup> Ovando, Essay Review, p. 341-356

<sup>20</sup> Baker, *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*.

A recent trend shows signs for hope, however, as the two-way dual language classroom has demonstrated in New York City.<sup>21</sup> This model integrates students with different linguistic profiles: those who are learning English, those who are already bilingual and those who are learning a language other than English. Instruction is rigidly split between both languages, with half the time spent in English and half in Spanish. These programmes have the potential to integrate attitudes to and practices of bilingualism that have traditionally been separated. More importantly, they have the possibility of fostering a learning environment that is positive about and respectful of cultural and linguistic difference. It remains to be seen whether such innovative projects will become more prevalent - indeed, more importantly, whether they will succeed in challenging the monolingual ethos that currently prevails in American society.

### **United Kingdom**

Up until quite recently, the UK has had no explicit Language Policy, even though it has had a much longer exposure to multiculturalism than its immediate neighbour, Ireland. In the aftermath of the Second World War, economic recovery was for the most part fuelled by the contribution of immigrant workers from its former colonies in the Caribbean or the Indian subcontinent. The new arrivals brought with them several languages; however, these were largely ignored in mainstream education. A monolingual mindset, similar to that which prevailed in the USA, dominated the thinking at an official level and it was believed that teaching minority languages as an integral part of the curriculum might be disruptive.

Some progress was made, however, in the seventies. Not only did the immigrant workforce become empowered through citizenship status, but also there was a growing awareness about the educational needs of ethnic minorities.<sup>22</sup> The Bullock Report represented a significant attempt to address the language requirements of immigrant children and questioned teaching approaches which required a child to abandon his/her mother tongue.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ofelia Garcia: Teaching Spanish and Spanish in Teaching in the USA: Integrating Bilingual Perspectives. In: Helot and De Mejia, *Forging Multilingual Spaces*, p.31-57.

<sup>22</sup> Linda Thompson: Policy for Language Education in England: Does Less Mean More? In: RELC Journal Vol. 35, no. 1 (2004), p.83-103.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



‘The school should adopt positive attitudes to its pupils’ bilingualism and wherever possible should help maintain and deepen ...knowledge of the mother tongues.’<sup>24</sup>

This national initiative was echoed at European level with a draft directive proposing that member states should offer free tuition in the national languages of migrant workers as part of the mainstream curriculum (EC Commission 1976). A year later, the original draft was modified from ‘provision’ to ‘promotion’ i.e. the European Council was simply urging member states to *encourage* native language teaching for the children of migrant workers.<sup>25</sup> This distinction between ‘promotion’ and ‘provision’ is crucial in understanding why the historical insights contained in the Bullock Report never actually had much impact on real practice, as it has been surmised that the valuable insights it contained were merely aspirational, and never had much effect on the school experience.<sup>26</sup>

Some years later, the Swann Report (1985) recommended that minority languages should be included in the curriculum at second level, but there was no such recommendation for primary level. Furthermore, it was recommended that mother tongue teaching should take place *outside* mainstream schooling and underlined that bilingual education would *not* be supported.

And so, while the Swann Report (1985) went some way toward recognising the importance of ethnic identity, it failed to meet the demand for community languages to be taught within the mainstream curriculum. In spite of all these studies and developments, the negative perception of bilingualism continued to prevail and the educational performance of bilinguals continued to be measured according to monolingual criteria. A similar situation to that which prevailed in the USA emerged with regard to testing and assessment procedures, with a tendency to brand bilinguals as intellectually deficient (see above). These tests were conducted in English, using mean scores that have been standardised for monolingual English speaking pupils.<sup>27</sup> Even though these institutional practices have been identified in the Swann Report as being discriminatory towards bilinguals, nothing has been done to rectify the situation.

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<sup>24</sup> Alan Bullock: Bullock Report. London: HMSO 1975  
[<http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/bullock/>].

<sup>25</sup> Jill Bourne: Doing ‘what Comes Naturally’: How the Discourses and Routines of Teachers’ Practice Constrain Opportunities for Bilingual Support in UK Primary Schools. In: *Language and Education* 15, no. 4 (2001), p. 250-268; Thompson, Policy for Language Education in England: Does Less Mean More?, p.83-103.

<sup>26</sup> (see also Anderson, Kenner, and Gregory 2008, p. 183-202).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

It should be noted that many worthy initiatives have been undertaken locally to raise awareness about the importance of minority/community languages, both socially and economically, for the development of UK society. For seven years, the ILEA (Inner London Education Authority) offered many languages within both primary and secondary school, including South Asian languages, Arabic, Chinese, Greek and Turkish, with inspection and advisory support for all languages.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, the ILEA was discontinued in 1989, representing another setback in the multilingual movement.

More recently, in 2002, the Nuffield Languages Inquiry published its final report. One of the main findings was that the UK, which like Ireland is fortunate to speak a global language, cannot rely on English alone in a competitive global arena.<sup>29</sup> The report highlighted the fact that, in spite of its well established and increasingly multilingual population, England still had no overarching policy for language education. In 2003, moreover, the teaching of languages was removed from the national curriculum and languages were made optional for students over 14. Since then, it is probably no wonder that a similar downward trend in the demand for foreign language study has been well documented over the years by the National Centre for Languages, CILT, as there appears to be no value associated with linguistic skills at an official level.<sup>30</sup>

To address the downward trend, the Routes into Languages Programme, a consortium between several universities, was set up recently to encourage more students to study languages at third level, with various awareness-raising activities. The Report published in 2008 highlighted the need to diversify language provision, harnessing the native language skills of ethnic groups (i.e. community languages) and enabling them to build upon this linguistic competence by providing appropriate pathways throughout primary, secondary and third level education.<sup>31</sup> It will be many years before these initiatives will have any impact on the deficit in UK language skills, as evidenced in recent reports.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ming Tsow: Community Languages in Britain. In: Bilingualism and Languages Network 2, no. 5 (1992).

<sup>29</sup> Department for Education and Skills (DfES), now Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF), Languages for all: Languages for Life. A Strategy for England. 2002, accessed on October 8, 2012 [[http://www.cilt.org.uk/home/policy/language\\_strategies.aspx](http://www.cilt.org.uk/home/policy/language_strategies.aspx)].

<sup>30</sup> CILT: Language Trends 2009: Final Report, accessed October 7, 2012 [[http://www.cilt.org.uk/home/research\\_and\\_statistics/language\\_trends\\_surveys/secondary/2009.aspx](http://www.cilt.org.uk/home/research_and_statistics/language_trends_surveys/secondary/2009.aspx)].

<sup>31</sup> Joanna McPake and Itesh Sashdev: Community Languages in Higher Education: Towards Realising the Potential. [[https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/downloads/community\\_languages.pdf](https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/downloads/community_languages.pdf)]: CETL, 2008.

<sup>32</sup> Teresa Tinsley: Languages: The State of the Nation. The Demand and Supply of Language Skills in the UK. London: British Academy, 2013.

The same could be said about the inclusion of languages as a mandatory component of the primary school curriculum from 2014. While this is a step in the right direction, it will be many years before its true impact is felt at second and third level. The debate surrounding which languages should be studied remains unresolved, as the linguistic capital of certain languages appears to be greater than others.<sup>33</sup> What is significant is that the earlier policy decision to remove mandatory foreign language learning for second level students over the age of 14 may now be reversed.

Closer to home, the recent launch of the new Language Strategy for Northern Ireland has given renewed impetus to the role which language plays in an increasingly multilingual society.<sup>34</sup> The Strategy maps a way forward for the inclusion of all languages, both indigenous and immigrant, in a society that is not only tolerant of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, but also thrives in that diversity.

### **Canada – Pressure Cooker?**

And yet the experience of other anglophone societies with longer histories of immigration than Ireland isn't all negative: Canada is a case in point. Comparisons between Ireland and Canada, both of which are dyadic states, have already been drawn by previous scholars.<sup>35</sup> Unlike Ireland, however, cultural diversity has been part of the fabric of Canadian society since the late nineteenth century and the consistent flow of immigration from many different ethnic groups has been a feature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>36</sup> What distinguishes Canada from both the United States and the United Kingdom is the existence of an official Policy of Multiculturalism since the early 1970s and the belief that this explicit policy would form the basis of a more just society. The 'multiculturalism within a bilingual framework' policy put forward by the Canadian Prime Minister in 1971 was not without critics: some feared that assimilation enforced by a national policy might lead to a so-called 'pressure cooker' scenario.<sup>37</sup> However, surveys carried out in recent decades show that there is generally a good level of tolerance and respect for cultural diversity among Canadians. Moreover, Canada's economy has managed to sustain its performance, in spite of the global recession

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<sup>33</sup> Jim Anderson, Charmian Kenner and Eve Gregory: The National Languages Strategy in the UK: Are Minority Languages Still on the Margins? In: Helot and De Mejia, *Forging Multilingual Spaces*, p.183-202.

<sup>34</sup> John Gillespie, David Johnston and Ailbhe O Corrain: Languages for the Future: Northern Ireland Languages Strategy: Bangor: DENI/LLAS, 2012.

<sup>35</sup> Spolsky, *Language Policy*; Martin Howard (ed.): Language Issues in Canada: Multidisciplinary Perspectives Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007.

<sup>36</sup> John Edwards (ed.): Language in Canada. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

which has adversely affected most other anglophone countries. This would seem to suggest that explicit Language Policy is both reflective of the sociolinguistic reality and instrumental in sustaining economic development.

In this context, it is worth mentioning a grass-roots initiative, the so-called immersion programmes. Introduced in the 1960s, they were primarily experimental in nature and went on to be recognised internationally as a best practice model. The main aim of these programmes was to produce bilingual and bicultural children, without any loss of achievement. While many were initially sceptical about educating children through a second language, the subsequent success of this approach reassured the critics.<sup>38</sup> Once established, these immersion schools received considerable funding from the Canadian government to promote research, thus giving official recognition to this educational resource. Since their inception in 1965, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of French Immersion Schools, with many studies highlighting the benefits of immersion programmes for cognitive and interpersonal development.<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, the emergence of these programmes coincides with the introduction of the Gaelscoileanna in the Republic of Ireland (see below) in the 1960s. Another common feature of both movements is the fact that this type of education is optional, with parents choosing to send their children to these schools. This positive experience demonstrates how early intervention in the school cycle, with organised exposure to two languages, can have a positive effect on both interpersonal and academic development of the child at a personal level, and promote tolerance and respect for cultural diversity at a societal level.

### **The unique situation in Ireland**

Scholars in the field of Irish language revival have often looked towards Canada as a role model for successful language policy.<sup>40</sup> While all these case studies from other anglophone societies are most valuable for Irish policymakers as they reflect on how best to chart a way forward, Ireland's sociolinguistic history is unique and indeed complex. The fact that the history of the Irish revival and maintenance has frequently been quoted as an example of Language Policy failure militates against current efforts to raise and come to grips with

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<sup>38</sup> Howard, *Language Issues in Canada: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*.

<sup>39</sup> Baker, *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*.

<sup>40</sup> William Mackey and Jan van Ek: *Language Policy in Canada and Ireland: Syllabus Design in Second Language Teaching*. Dublin: Bord na Gaeilge, 1982.

policy issues. Indeed, it may well be that negative attitudes towards language learning *per se* at grass roots level are inextricably bound up with the history of subtractive bilingualism.

The existence of an explicit Language Policy does not necessarily lead to success in the maintenance of languages which may be in jeopardy. Many scholars have examined the apparent lack of success of language maintenance in Ireland, despite many years of top down, government-led language management, in an effort to establish what went wrong.<sup>41</sup> The early revivalists of the late 1900s emphasised the need for bilingualism where Irish and English could co-exist side by side; it was never their aim to replace English with Irish. A close examination of their writings also reveals a belief that school alone would not succeed in reviving the language. The approach adopted by the new Irish state from 1922 onwards appears to have lost sight of the goals of the early revivalists and gradually become more associated with Irish monolingualism and less with societal bilingualism. The main agent for revival would be education and it was believed that schools would be main platform for the new policy of revitalisation.

The failure of the government-led campaign to revive the Irish language is well documented by scholars in the field. In spite of various financial incentives offered to schools and communities who used the medium of Irish, this top-down policy is generally regarded as being flawed, in that it singled out the education system as being the sole vehicle of revival. The aim of this policy was to gradually replace English with Irish, an approach which has a lot in common with the monolingual mindset described above. Indeed, this outlook was not unique to the new Irish state, but is characteristic of many European nation states during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>42</sup> In this vision of nationhood, school was perceived as the ideal setting in which to impose the notion of the linguistically homogenous state on the people.

Nonetheless, an important turning point for Irish-medium schools occurred in the seventies when the numbers attending the government-led all-Irish schools reached an all-time low (1% of total population). Around this time, the Gaelscoileanna movement was initiated by parents who wished to see their children have the benefit of a bilingual education and it is

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<sup>41</sup> Reg Hindley: *The Death of the Irish Language*. London: Routledge, 1990; Liam MacMathúna: Thirty Years a-Floundering? Official Policy and Community use of Irish in the Republic of Ireland 1956-1986. In: Birgit Bramsbäck (ed.): *Homage to Ireland: Aspects of Culture, Literature and Language*. Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1990; Muiris O'Laoire: Language use and Language Attitudes in Ireland. In: Lasagabaster, D. and Huguet A. (eds.): *Language Use and Attitudes*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2007, p. 164-184.

<sup>42</sup> Bernadette O'Rourke: 'Negotiating Multilingualism in an Irish Primary School Context'. In: Christine Helot and Muiris O'Laoire (eds.): *Language Policy for the Multilingual Classroom: Pedagogy of the Possible*, 1st ed. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2011, p. 107-127.

generally believed that it was a grassroots, bottom-up initiative, as distinct from the top-down, policy-driven Irish-medium schools which had prevailed hitherto.<sup>43</sup>

Since then, the Gaelscoileanna have grown in popularity, and, even though there are huge challenges facing teachers in these schools, statistics show that this grass-roots initiative has succeeded in increasing the numbers of children outside the Gaeltacht who are being educated in a bilingual Irish/English environment.<sup>44</sup> Recent statistics show that there are 16 times as many Irish-medium primary schools on the island of Ireland since the first Gaelscoileanna were set up in the early seventies, while there are 8 times as many Irish-medium second level schools. While some are sceptical about the impact this movement is having/might have on the revival of the Irish language, it is believed that the demand for Irish-medium schools is associated with the perceived cognitive and intercultural benefits of bilingual education in general.<sup>45</sup>

While the failure of this policy in the early years of the newly established Republic is well documented, the Gaelscoileanna movement shows signs for optimism. In spite of everything, Irish is not classified as an endangered language on the *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* index.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, according to the Fishman's model (the so-called 'graded intergenerational disruption scale'), Irish is at the mid-point on the scale of 1 to 8: i.e. the language is used in *some* pre-school and compulsory elementary school education. As already mentioned above, the initial failure to revitalise Irish was mostly attributed to the concentration on school alone as the main agent of change. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the growing popularity of the Gaelscoileanna is channelled through the schools; what differentiates it from earlier efforts is that it is parent-led from the bottom up.

The difference between the early approach and the approach from 1922 onwards could be advanced as an example of additive and subtractive bilingualism: additive bilingualism refers to a positive scenario where two languages/cultures co-exist without posing a threat to each other; subtractive bilingualism is a negative scenario where one language/culture seeks to

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<sup>43</sup> Padraig O'Riagain: *Language Policy and Social Reproduction: Ireland 1893-1993*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

<sup>44</sup> Maria Coady and Muiris O'Laoire: Mismatches in Language Policy and Practice in Education: The Case of Gaelscoileanna in the Republic of Ireland. In: *Language Policy* 1 (2002), p. 143-158.

<sup>45</sup> Gaelscoileanna Teo: accessed June 7, 2012  
<http://www.gaelscoileanna.ie/about/statistics/?lang=ie&PHPSESSID=e7a1e65c37c5761d50f29aa6e9a2a7b0> .

<sup>46</sup> Paul Lewis: *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, Sixteenth Edition. Dallas, Tex.: SIL International, accessed 7. 6. 2012 at <http://www.Ethnologue.com/web.Asp>, 16th ed. Dallas, Tex.: SIL International, 2009; De Swaan, *Words of the World*.

supplant the other, thereby posing a significant threat.<sup>47</sup> Top-down policies which inadvertently promote monolingualism and a subtractive bilingual environment can lead to antagonism and distrust between linguistic communities. The battle for linguistic space which was waged for many years between English and Irish might have been averted, had policymakers of early decades of the new Republic paid heed to the original vision put forward by the early revivalists. Promoting positive attitudes towards bilingualism from an early stage in the educational cycle could play a pivotal role in the cognitive and social development of Irish citizens, if we avoid some of the negative scenarios listed throughout this article.

In the absence of an overarching, all-inclusive Language Policy, some worrying trends have emerged in the new multilingual playing field in which Irish schools find themselves. The linguistic rights of immigrant groups are not explicitly endorsed at an official level, and as a result, some children are being excluded from Irish language instruction, on the basis that they might be overburdened with having to acquire both English and Irish.<sup>48</sup> Surely there is a strong case to be made for including them, as the acquisition of the national language of Ireland would undoubtedly facilitate their integration into Irish society and enrich their understanding of Ireland's unique cultural heritage.

### **No need for policy: the Global Language System**

The reticence of some scholars in relation to Language Policy should not be ignored in the investigation of what might work best for Ireland. De Swann's insights are a case in point. He puts forward a model of the global language system which illustrates a complex network of language use worldwide.<sup>49</sup> The speakers of 6,000 different languages could not communicate, were it not for some form of plurilingualism. Mutually unintelligible languages are connected by plurilingual speakers. The majority of languages worldwide are peripheral, used only for spoken communication locally. The speakers of peripheral languages tend to acquire the same second language, as it increases their capacity to communicate with more speakers. While de Swaan's model is essentially circular, it is also hierarchical. He estimates that there are approximately 100 languages occupying a central position in the global language system; those at the centre are at the top of the hierarchy.

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<sup>47</sup> Baker, *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*.

<sup>48</sup> O'Rourke, 'Negotiating Multilingualism', p. 107-127.

<sup>49</sup> De Swaan, *Words of the World*.

The basis of de Swaan's model relies on economic concepts, as languages are perceived as hypercollective goods. Choosing to learn a language is an investment; the more users, the greater the investment. De Swaan estimates the worth or value of a language in terms of its Q-value. This gives an indication of its prevalence (the number of people within a language community who speak it) and its centrality (the number of people knowing another language who can use it to communicate). E.g., German has the most native speakers within Europe, so that its prevalence is high, but English, with fewer native speakers, has the most second language speakers, which makes its centrality high. This notion is quite popular in language economics and has been used to explain the decline of minority languages on the one hand, and the spread of dominant languages on the other. It distinguishes language as a good from other goods, in that the more people use it, the more valuable it becomes. Nonetheless, as Grin points out, this notion has its limitations, in that it defines language as *a tool for communication* alone, while it is generally believed by most sociolinguists that language occupies a much more complex space in society than this.<sup>50</sup>

De Swaan uses this model to explain the global shift towards English, which, he maintains, is a blind process. Globalisation raises the system level at which Q-values are calculated to the top of the hierarchy, where English is the obvious choice. Spolsky maintains that de Swaan's model of the global language system provides a stronger explanation of the diffusion of a world language than Phillipson's conspiracy theory does.<sup>51</sup> He calls into question the metaphor of the endangered species so prevalent in some contemporary studies.<sup>52</sup>

Nonetheless, while de Swaan's model goes further in describing how English spread and how market forces operate on the linguistic playing field, it fails to put forward any vision as to how languages can be managed in order to avoid inequalities and injustice occurring between various linguistic communities. De Swaan's model appears to suggest that, regardless of what policy makers might do or say, English will continue to spread.

De Swann has accused those who campaign for endangered or minority languages of linguistic sentimentalism. He has dismissed EU plurilingual ideals and goals as much ado about nothing. Individual choices about language cannot be managed or policed. He puts

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<sup>50</sup> Francois Grin: 'Economic Considerations in Language Policy'. In: Thomas Ricento (ed.): *Introduction to Language Policy*, 5th ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 2009.

<sup>51</sup> Spolsky, *Language Policy*.

<sup>52</sup> Abram de Swaan: Endangered Languages, Sociolinguistics, and Linguistic Sentimentalism. In: *European Review* 12/4 (2004), p. 567-580.



forward quite a convincing case against intervention in the linguistic market place, and argues that market forces on the linguistic playing field are best left alone.

However, while de Swann's model offers quite a plausible explanation for the rise of English, it fails to put forward any vision as to how multilingual societies might strive towards equality and justice. His laissez-faire approach, while purporting to be liberal and non-invasive, is reminiscent of the earlier mindset which prevailed among the founding fathers in the USA while the Declaration of Independence was being written: i.e. the best policy is no policy, language issues are best left alone. The consequence in both cases is that an implicit policy upholds the status quo of the dominant global language, English, with the minority and endangered languages at the bottom. History has shown that a 'no policy' policy can have devastating effects on both the cultural and economic development of societies.

As already noted earlier, Ireland's experience with multilingualism is relatively short; nonetheless, best practice examples from other more established multilingual societies, not necessarily anglophone, can be drawn upon. Nancy Hornberger argues in favour of language policy which acknowledges the rise of English and embraces its sociolinguistic benefits.<sup>53</sup> She draws on empirical data from India, Singapore and South Africa in order to illustrate how English can be incorporated into classroom practices, without necessarily undermining indigenous languages. She notes that the 'linguistic capital' of English is evident in all three societies, with parents demanding that their children should be empowered with it.

All three countries have chosen a language policy based on a different idea of nationalism from Euro-American models. Unlike the 'one language-one nation' ideal, the official policies of India, South Africa and Singapore recognise multiple languages as representative of the nation. Hornberger highlights the tension which arises between processes of globalisation and school linguistic practice: on the one hand, the rising demand among parents for their children to be equipped with the linguistic capital of English; on the other, the challenge of mobilising the child's mother tongue as a resource. The goal is to make sustainable additive bilingualism the main educational outcome, by creating a space which acknowledges and respects linguistic and cultural diversity.

In conclusion, Hornberger argues that it is not globalisation in itself which has had detrimental effects on the societies of lesser-used languages, but the inequitable distribution

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<sup>53</sup> Nancy Hornberger: Multilingual Language Policy and School Linguistic Practice: Globalization and English-Language Teaching in India, Singapore and South Africa. In: *Compare*, 38 (2008).

of its benefits. With the global spread of English, she argues in favour of equitable access for all to the linguistic capital it represents. She believes that this can be done from a very early stage in the educational cycle, without undermining indigenous languages. Her vision is reminiscent of that put forward by the English Plus lobbyists (see above); yes, linguistic minorities need English in today's globalised economy, but not at the expense of their own native languages. She acknowledges that there are huge challenges to be met in relation to teacher training, pedagogy and curriculum, before this goal can be met.

Interestingly, a recent project carried out in the Republic of Ireland in 2007 represents a significant effort to realise the goals outlined in Hornberger's vision of the multilingual classroom.<sup>54</sup> The aim of the project was to harness the native languages of immigrant children as a means of raising awareness about multilingualism. The project, which was carried out in a primary school in the inner city of Dublin, lasted two years. It challenged the traditional approach to language teaching, which is primarily monolingual. It emerged that some parents of immigrant children had previously been discouraged from speaking their native languages to their children, as it was perceived as an obstacle to their acquisition of English as a second language. However, as a result of this project, those minority languages were seen as a resource, rather than an impediment, and this had a positive impact on the overall learning experience of all children.

## **Conclusion**

There are undoubtedly huge challenges to be faced for Irish policymakers in charting a way forward. Hopefully, this investigation has succeeded in shedding light on some of the main issues, as it would appear that explicit Language Policy is indeed necessary in multilingual societies. Redefining the role which Ireland's heritage language should play within the context of an overarching all-inclusive Language Policy should be at the top of the agenda. The evidence examined from various anglophone societies suggests that in the absence of policy, discriminatory practices towards ethnic minorities tend to emerge, and economic performance is adversely affected. De Swann's arguments in favour of a laissez-faire, liberal approach to individual linguistic choices pale in significance when compared with the list of examples of worst practice cited throughout this article, examples of precisely what can happen in a subtractive bilingual environment. When left to market forces, without policy intervention, there is a tendency to uphold the status quo of the dominant linguistic group,

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<sup>54</sup> O'Rourke, 'Negotiating Multilingualism', p. 107-127.

and the weaker minority groups are either marginalised or unfairly treated. The injustices which can emerge as a result of de Swaan's hierarchical Global Language System are certainly not ones which should form the fabric of the new Ireland with its increasingly multilingual/multicultural population. Moreover, policy is certainly necessary to address Ireland's appalling lack of language skills, so that it can compete more effectively on the global market place. At this crucial crossroads, Ireland can still avoid the pitfalls of other anglophone societies and look more towards the European ideal of plurilingualism in paving the way for a brighter, more prosperous future for all of its citizens.