

2008

# Young People and Minority Languages: Language use outside the classroom

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**Please note**

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(Council for Irish-medium Education) website [www.comhairle.org](http://www.comhairle.org)



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# Preface

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is endeavouring to achieve a number of things with the publishing of this summary of a research report on “Young People and Minority Languages: Language Use Outside the Classroom”.

1. We want to support those involved in Irish-language youth activities by giving them guidance on some of the issues that are important if the youth activities and the structures are to succeed in increasing the use of Irish among young people.
2. We want to provide guidance to those charged with policy making in the institutions that deal with youth structures, north and south, in relation to the requirements of Irish-language communities when youth structures are being considered for them.
3. We want to provide guidance and material for reflection for Irish-language organisations to enhance their efforts in respect of young Irish speakers; and
4. We want to encourage further research into the issue of use of Irish among young Irish speakers, particularly among young people in Irish-medium education.

It is widely recognised that immersion of itself can only take children a certain distance on the journey of functional bilingualism. It is the most effective method of additional-language acquisition, and it is the most effective method in developing the habit of additional-language use in certain settings. Nevertheless, immersion, of itself, will not create Irish speaking families or communities, if other support structures do not exist to provide opportunities for using Irish, opportunities which will develop the habitual use of Irish among young people.

It is clear from the small amount of research that has been published internationally on this issue, that youth activities and structures are insufficient on their own to develop the habit of using an additional language in young people; frequently the majority language, which is the young people’s first language, is the language that prevails, if certain conditions are not in place.

This short report is a summary of a fuller piece of research which examined the available research internationally on this issue. The main research, sought to adapt that which may be learned from the international research to the Irish-language situation. This summary is a shortened version of the main findings of the original research.

In the north there now are over 600 pupils in the final two years of their primary education and over 600 in post-primary education in Belfast, Armagh and Derry. If these young people are to develop the habit of using Irish outside their schools, opportunities must be provided for them so that they can meet in an environment that will encourage them to use the Irish they have acquired in school. These opportunities must promote the use of Irish, encourage it, and they must be opportunities that young people will be prepared to avail of.

We hope that this research will initiate discussion among those developing the Irish language, that it will encourage further research, and, in the absence of that, that it will provide guidance to those who have taken upon themselves the responsibility for providing opportunities for using Irish for our young people.

# Content

TABLE OF CONTENT	Pgs
1. Introduction	1
2. Some key findings	2
3. Sociological Approaches to the Study of Adolescent Social and Linguistic Behaviour	3 - 4
4. Republic of Ireland	5 - 6
5. Wales	7 - 8
6. Catalonia and the Basque Region	9 - 10
7. Northern Ireland	11 - 12
8. Discussion and Recommendations	13 - 14

# Chapter One - Introduction

## HISTORY OF PROJECT

In November 2006, a research team led by Professor Pádraig ÓRiagáin, Centre for Language and Communication Studies, Trinity College, Dublin, began an investigation into the socio-linguistic impacts of after-school activities of adolescents attending second level schools in which:

- (a) they were being taught through a second language and
- (b) where this school language was also a minority language within the relevant political jurisdiction.

The research was commissioned by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (the Council for Irish-medium Education) in partnership with Iontaobhas ULTACH (the cross-community Irish language development body). The final report was completed in August 2007.

## BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

The teenage years are a crucial period in the evolution of attitudes towards a minority language and the experience of young people at this stage can lead to either their continued use of the language or the erosion and eventual loss of language skills. Research shows that the majority of non-Gaeltacht school-going bilinguals do not continue their use of Irish once they leave school. This is, therefore, a matter of great concern to those responsible for Irish language policy.

Within the study, particular attention was given to the role of local social networks among adolescents as well as the wider external processes that might impact upon a language community.

The aims of the study were:

1. To identify and assess the effect of after school activity in minority languages across a range of societies with regard to the willingness to use the language and language use outside of formal school contexts;
2. Where the evidence was available, to identify best practice;
3. To assess the value of after school activities in relation to the willingness to use language, language use and favourable disposition towards the language among 11–18 year olds in the after school setting in Northern Ireland;
4. To recommend the best possible model(s) to be used in Northern Ireland, and best practice, to encourage the continued use of Irish among teenagers outside the formal school context.

## METHODOLOGY

The research programme encompassed:

- (a) A review, from the perspective of language planning requirements, of applied social network analysis in the social policy field including that which related to young people;
  - (b) A review of research literature, especially social network-related research, pertaining to after school use of Irish (as well as Welsh, Catalan, Basque and the Valencian and Balearic situation);
  - (c) A sociolinguistic profile of 11–18 year old Irish speakers in Northern Ireland;
  - (d) An evaluation of the policy approaches that have tried to influence the nature, scale or location of after school activities in order to achieve specific language policy goals;
  - (e) Recommendations based on the strategies which have either proved their worth and/or appear most promising.
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## Chapter Two - Some key findings

- Although minority language communities may be successful in increasing the number of children in immersion language education programmes and in developing high standards in written skills, there is a concern that 'social' use of the language in out of school contexts is not developing satisfactorily.
- The non-school setting is a vital consideration in the formation of sustainable Irish-speaking networks.
- Research shows that parents who use Irish within the home have an important influence upon the use of language both at home and outside the family.
- The socio-economic background of students, the length of time they spend in education and their orientation towards either university or employment as their next career move, is a factor in the use of language within social networks outside the school environment.
- Girls are less well catered for than boys in terms of access to out of school activities where Irish is used.
- Linkages between schools and the working environment are important. Several research studies have shown that language use in the workplace is as important in the development of Irish-speaking networks among young adults, as Irish-medium schools are for younger students.
- Structured after-school activities are believed to have a role linking the school to the out of school context, thus strengthening the Irish-speaking peer networks formed in school.
- Due to the relatively small numbers of young people in Irish-medium education it may be necessary to involve adolescents from other schools in community-based activities, for example, those schools which teach Irish as a subject.

# Chapter Three - Sociological Approaches to the Study of Adolescent Social & Linguistic Behaviour

## Pádraig Ó Riagáin

### INFLUENCES UPON DEVELOPMENT – ADULTS OR PEERS

Until the 1960s most theories dealing with the development of children and young people stressed the influence of adults upon their behaviour with little attention paid to the effects of interaction between young people themselves. Recognising the narrowness of this approach and within a post-war context where young people spent longer in school, researchers turned their attention to the importance of peer influences upon development. The work of J Coleman (1961), for example, emphasised the formation of a peer culture which was distinct from and independent from the influence of parents. It was suggested that adolescents had separated themselves off from adult society and were 'encapsulated inside a distinct culture with its own values and codes of conduct that adults could not readily penetrate (Youniss, 1994).

### A VARIETY OF INFLUENCES

However, over time, studies demonstrated that behavioural influences are many and varied. In countries with a strong history of clearly defined class boundaries, such as Britain, for example, social class has been consistently identified as a major factor in relation to how teenagers form groups and in the USA, ethnicity (Mexican, Asian etc) has been shown to be a key factor.

The importance of the totality of social relationships in the lives of adolescents led researchers to examine the significant people in the social networks of this group and to see how these had a bearing on behaviour. Bo's (1996) study of 174 Norwegian fifteen and sixteen year olds found that the social networks of adults and offspring overlapped and that the most intimate zone of the network of adolescents was made up of core family with some selected best friends and extended family members. Bo suggested that a small personal network which is rather 'closed' is much less conducive to personal growth than one which is more open and diverse. Further study demonstrated that the educational level of parents and the number of non-kin adults in the social networks of adolescents were factors which related positively to school performance, lower absenteeism and better adjusted social behaviour.

### THE EFFECT OF THE SOCIAL NETWORK

With regard to the influence of the social network upon language development and use, a study by Milroy (1980) based upon research carried out in working class areas of Belfast showed that the closer ties there are between individuals in a community the more likely they are to adopt their own norms of linguistic behaviour and to maintain them. Where structures become less dense individuals become more susceptible to influence from wider language patterns. This generally happens with changes in socioeconomic position.

### LINGUISTIC CHANGE AND INNOVATION

Kerswill & Williams (2000) examined the role that the social networks of adolescents play in the introduction of new language patterns. They found that the nature of language use is related to differing developmental stages and to changes in the young person's orientation to other people and the process of peer group formation. The predominance of the peer group in 'middle' adolescence, for example, is associated with a preference for non-standard speech. Their work demonstrated that linguistic change was related to the ease with which social networks were created within communities. They found that close knit networks resist the adoption of change unless change comes via an 'insider' who has links elsewhere and that it is the young people with the social resources and contacts who lead in language innovation.

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## COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Other studies have engaged with a 'communities of practice' model which is characterised by regular mutual interaction, involvement in a joint enterprise and the sharing of repertoires (including linguistic resources). The key idea of 'communities of practice' is that 'by virtue of their engaging over time in their endeavour, participants in groups develop ways of doing things together' (Eckert & Connell-Giner, 1997). Eckert found in 1989 that in a study carried out in several Detroit high schools, language use and development were linked to the wider social and economic environment. Middle class students were found to be school-oriented and preparing for college, whereas working class students tended towards taking up employment immediately after high school graduation. It was found that the differing orientations of these two groups resulted in the adoption of differing vernacular forms and linguistic practices.

## THE EMERGENCE OF THEMES

Although the study of adolescent social and linguistic behaviour is still being developed, some themes are emerging including the importance of social class, ethnicity, the broad context within which they live and the influence of top-down institutional pressures. The age of the individual is also a factor as is the importance of interaction with parents and other adults. The educational benefits that can flow to young people from the community provision of structured recreational activities has also been noted in research (Cottrell, 1996).

## Chapter Four - Republic of Ireland

Pádraig Ó Riagáin

Very little directly relevant research has been carried out in the Republic of Ireland. There are only two examples which attempt to map the social networks of research participants in quantifiable detail. One of these was conducted in the Gaeltacht areas in 1973–4, and the second was undertaken in Galway city in 1998. Neither deal specifically with the age group relevant to this study, although the second example focused upon 18–35 year olds.

There are a small number of other studies which used the social network concept in a less rigorous fashion to examine language patterns in different segments within social networks e.g. family, relatives, friends, work associates etc. Of these, the most useful and relevant in the present context is a 1979 study of families and children attending all-Irish primary schools in the Dublin area. Several large scale national surveys have included a few limited questions about contexts within which respondents use Irish.

Generally speaking, respondents in the above studies have been drawn from the adult population, but despite these limitations, the studies in total provide some useful insights which are applicable in an assessment of the use of Irish in the social networks of adolescents.

### NATIONAL SURVEYS

There were three national surveys conducted in 1973, 1983 and 1993 respectively. In 1973, just under two thirds of the sample claimed that 'people in my circle just don't use Irish at all'; in 1983 and 1993 the proportion had risen to just over three quarters indicating a decline in use. All three surveys contained a large number of questions about the use of Irish, ranging from general conversation to a variety of contexts, such as the home, the workplace, religious services, the mass media, social and recreational activities. Between one-sixth and one-fifth of the sample said that they had used Irish 'often' or 'several times' since leaving school. However, when asked the more specific question about their use of Irish in the preceding week, the proportions were halved to about 10%. In 1993, respondents reported that Irish (in the preceding week) had been used with relatives (52%), friends (46%) and work associates (23%).

There is a predictable relationship between levels of ability to speak Irish and its use in conversation. In 1973 when asked about the degree to which they used Irish outside of school in their school years, the rate of usage varied with the exposure to Irish in school.

### THE CILAR NETWORK STUDY (GAELTACHT) 1973

In 1973 social network research was conducted in the Kerry, Galway and Donegal Gaeltacht areas, a 'core' and 'peripheral' area being chosen in each case. Twenty adults were interviewed at length in relation to the co-workers, family members and neighbours with whom they were in contact. Questions about language use, commitment and ability were asked. It was found that the language of choice had a clear relationship with the length of acquaintance with others. Respondents in the peripheral areas had twice the proportion of members from locally accessible English speaking areas within their networks and ability accounted for a greater degree of variation in Irish speaking. Speaking Irish was seen as a function of the intimacy of their social relationships. In Gaeltacht areas, status differences were recognisable controlling factors in language choice. Higher status in terms of age, job seniority or social standing was seen to be a characteristic of persons who could set the tone of the language interactions.

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In the age group between leaving school and going to university or taking a job, i.e. 16–23 years, commitment to Irish usage was seen to have taken a sharp drop. This may indicate that English is viewed as a means of status and mobility while Irish is associated with places and circumstances from which young people in these communities may be trying to extricate themselves.

#### THE (GALWAY) SOCIAL NETWORK STUDY 1997

A wider European study carried out in 1997 addressed Irish usage within the social networks of 21 young people in the 18–36 age range in Galway. It was found that only 17% of network members spoke Irish with the respondents at least 50% of the time. Maintenance of use of Irish was found to be related to language use at work but where spouses and housemates did not speak Irish less usage of the language was reported. Negative impacts include moving from a home where at least some family members had high levels of ability to one where people had low ability and moving from an area where Irish is generally spoken to one where no Irish is spoken. In summary, native Irish speakers were significantly more successful in both maintaining a high proportion of Irish speakers in their networks (despite migrating to the city in all cases) and in using Irish with them. Moderate ability bilinguals, on the other hand, had relatively few Irish speakers in their networks and spoke little Irish within them. Therefore, the capacity of the educational system to produce bilinguals with a high level of competence is a critical factor for future developmental success.

#### ALL-IRISH SCHOOL FAMILIES (DUBLIN) 1979

This study involved ten all-Irish primary schools in the Dublin area. 110 mothers were interviewed in order to gauge the frequency and density of language use before and after children attended the relevant schools. It was found that prior to school involvement there was marked parental unwillingness to establish bilingualism in the home but that attendance at school had been a determinant in increased language use.

With regard to use of Irish outside the home, 78% reported that, apart from school-related contacts, they and/or their husbands would meet what they described as 'Irish speakers' at some stage or other; 56% of these encounters were deemed to be recreational activities and 40% casual neighbourhood meetings.

The findings also pointed to a very positive link between contact with and attendance at all-Irish schools and the growth of networks of friends who used Irish. This also held true for the children.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Although the sources reviewed provide limited information about language use among 12–18 year olds, three general points stand out from the findings.

Firstly, there is a strong relationship between ability levels in Irish and social use of the language. It is only those who have significantly high levels of ability in Irish who also report high levels of Irish usage within their networks.

Secondly, there is nearly always some organised, institutional basis underpinning the network, especially in non-Gaeltacht areas. For young adults in Galway it is the work environment, for parents and pupils it is the school. Only in core Gaeltacht areas is Irish language use institutionalised within the community.

Thirdly, for speakers of moderate competence, the presence of Irish speakers in their networks is an incidental outcome, conditioned by the operation of other social processes. There is a marked relationship between social class and use of Irish and the spatial distribution of Irish / English bilinguals varies with the class character of residential areas.

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# Chapter Five - Social Network Research in Wales

Glyn Williams

Over the past century, the Welsh language has been in decline both numerically and in percentage terms. In 1901, approximately a million people, 50% of the population of Wales, were Welsh speaking but by 2001 this figure had declined to 21% of the population, around half a million in number. However, the 2001 census also showed a significant increase in the incidence of Welsh speakers within the younger age groups, especially those aged between 5–9 years, and also the 10–14 years and 15–19 age groups. The dramatic increase experienced in 2001 has been attributed partly to the increased role of Welsh within the National Curriculum, where it is a core subject studied by all children in Wales between 7–16 years of age in Welsh-medium education and a foundation subject for pupils in other schools in Wales. Welsh is also used as the main teaching medium in 448 primary schools in Wales and 54 secondary schools are defined as Welsh language secondary schools.

A limited number of relevant research studies have been carried out since the 1960s. They have addressed:

- Concerns about the institutionalisation of language use which is believed to occur at an early age;
- The relationship between young Welsh speakers and differing formal and informal groups, ventures and partnerships within the public and voluntary sector (in Gwynedd);
- The factors motivating parents to send their children to Welsh medium schools at a time when the language was regarded as a means of social mobility;
- The relationship between language, industrial decline and the emergence of nationalism;
- Language use and its relationship to social institutions (Evas and Williams (1997)).

The work carried out by Evas and Williams (563 respondents across three communities) found that use of the Welsh language largely depended upon language density; the existence of non-Welsh-medium high schools isolating pupils from Welsh language networks. The main threat to the language was perceived as being related to the substantial in-migration from outside Wales. A recent university dissertation (Hodges, 2006) found that the use of Welsh after leaving school was limited and that even siblings raised within Welsh speaking homes tended to interact together through the medium of English, while using Welsh with their parents. The main context for the use of Welsh was employment, especially among those employed by the Welsh Assembly.

## SOCIAL NETWORK STUDIES

In a comparative study (Williams and Williams 1998) involving Ireland, the Basque Country, Galicia and Catalonia, research on the transition from school to work and the consequent influence on use of Welsh was carried out in the county of Gwynedd where all primary school education in the public sector involves the immersion of children in Welsh and a general transition to bilingual teaching by the time the child is eleven. At secondary level, the choices are Welsh medium, English medium or bilingual (where there is streaming related to competence in Welsh). The main conclusions drawn were that there was a very grave danger that the substantial investment that was made in teaching Welsh would go to waste if the Welsh language 'learner' did not find employment where the working environment focused upon the use of Welsh. In such cases, there was an intensification of the Welsh language network and a significant improvement in the Welsh language competence of the employee.

The Welsh Language Board conducted a study in 2006 which explored the networks of twenty four 13–17 year olds in each of 14 localities, amounting to a sample of 336. Participants were selected on the basis of the Welsh language competence of their families and divided on the basis of those who had or had not had a Welsh medium primary education. There was a focus on both peer group and community-wide interaction.

It was found that in communities where the incidence of Welsh language competence was high and where there was limited in-migration, there was considerable pressure to use the language from the peer group, the community and local institutions. There were also distinctive language groups and communities where the use of either Welsh or English may be dominant or co-existing in parallel and there are localities where the Welsh language group is rapidly becoming assimilated into a context where English is the predominant language. In the latter case, the school is regarded as the primary agency of Welsh language use and the peer group uses virtually no Welsh even among those whose home language is Welsh. This tends to happen in locations where there has been a significant influx of in-migrants in recent years.

### IMPLICATIONS OF THE WELSH EXPERIENCE FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

If the experience of the Welsh cases reviewed are applied to Ireland then it seems clear that, left to their own devices, peer group networks of speakers who acquired Irish as a second language are unlikely to use it and that some form of direct intervention is essential. While mindful of the need to assess every local situation individually in order to set relevant priorities that fit local circumstances, the Welsh recommendations outlined below might prove useful for Northern Ireland (where 'Welsh' could be substituted by 'Irish').

- Maintaining and increasing the number of families who use Welsh at home;
- Maintaining and increasing the number of schools who use Welsh as the main or only means of education and administration;
- Introducing an element of language awareness education to the 'Personal and Social Education' curriculum;
- Developing appropriate training for youth workers and others on inclusive approaches to Welsh language use;
- Providing opportunities for young people to socialise in Welsh outside of school;
- Introducing liaison youth workers to promote Welsh both in the community and at school;
- Increasing the number of significant institutions that reinforce the use of Welsh in the community;
- Increasing the visual status and the social value of Welsh in the community.

# Chapter Six - Catalonia and the Basque Region

F. Xavier Vila i Moreno

Spain is a country of many languages and dialects. Catalan is spoken along the eastern coast - Catalonia, Valencia and the Balearic islands. Basque is spoken in the Basque region of North Central Spain and the adjoining region of South Western France. Use of the languages, education policy and integration within administrative structures have developed differently across the geographic areas. Research relevant to this report is to be found in census surveys and general sociological studies of adolescents.

In broad terms, both Catalan and Basque were subordinated languages for many decades in that, for political reasons, both languages were banned from official domains and speakers of both languages were expected to switch to the state language (Spanish, also known as Castilian) within many interpersonal and institutional situations. After Franco's death (1975) and the adoption of a democratic Spanish constitution (1978), policies were developed to spread the use of each language and much attention was given to language-in-education issues. However, while both languages gained ground within the education system, in formal spheres and in the mass media and increasing numbers of people, especially young people, could be described as competent bilinguals, there was little evidence of significant growth in the interpersonal use of either Catalan or Basque.

In seeking an explanation, some researchers pointed to the negative associations of these languages with particular institutions and social groups. It was argued, for example, that for many native Castilian speaking young people, Catalan had become associated with school and, in some way, with local authorities (Pujolar (1996)). Catalan was presented as a language lacking social and stylistic variation whereas Castilian appeared to offer, at least for urban, lower class teenagers, a greater potential for wider social use. It has also been argued that the young generation were losing some sentimental connection with the language, and that speaking Catalan was no longer seen as an anti-dictatorial symbol.

By the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, new data about language use and competence provided further information about the language behaviour of young people. This endorsed the view that increase in language competence among adolescents had not translated into more widespread use of Catalan or Basque.

## STRUCTURAL CHANGE

Up to the 1960s, and in spite of regional differences, the majority of Catalan speakers in most of Catalonia and the Balearic Islands had socialised in rather homogeneous linguistic environments where Catalan was the sole everyday language of interpersonal communication, while Castilian was the language of public administration as well as the language of growing numbers of immigrants. In addition, language 'shift' was influenced by the mass media which brought more Castilian into private homes and by growing numbers of Castilian speakers who moved into the Catalan language area intermingling with the locals. In comparison with those born in the 1940s and 50s and in spite of the growing presence of Catalan in schools, children born during the 1970s to the 1990s grew up in environments where Castilian was much more widespread, became familiar with that language earlier and better than their parents, and had many more Castilian speaking classmates sitting next to them in school. Young speakers of Catalan and Basque found themselves minorities within their own territories. It is evident that the minority languages are used for interpersonal communication only in schools with a significant percentage of Catalan and Basque native speakers; even more, only in schools where these speakers form a clear majority are Castilian speakers inclined towards the use of Catalan or Basque with their peers.

## COMPETENCE ISSUES

Research has shown that although schools in both areas have successfully promoted language competence, they may have paid too much attention to promoting the standard language and to developing written skills at the expense of teaching the interpersonal skills which might underpin longterm language revitalisation. For language spread to be more effective, Catalan and Basque need to be incorporated more into activities unconnected with education.

## INITIATIVES TO ENCOURAGE THE INTERPERSONAL USE OF LANGUAGE

Approaches designed to encourage interpersonal use of Catalan and Basque have included:

### *Raising language awareness*

This involved spreading favourable messages through campaigns which aim to raise awareness of the need to protect and use languages if they are to be saved, keeping in mind the need to communicate appropriately with young people.

### *Promoting the language beyond the classroom*

Organising concerts, festivals, linguistic competitions, summer camps, trips, meetings between different schools, writing letters to students living in Catalan-speaking villages, visiting Catalan villages and markets, watching Catalan films and TV programmes and staying with Basque families, promoting use of colloquial language and face-to-face and Internet chatting. Placing students in businesses and workplaces where they can interact in the language and establishing classes for new immigrants has been another strategy.

### *Promoting language through events and products relevant to young people*

Encouraging the writing of lyrics for songs, participation in the preparation and broadcasting of local radio programmes and involvement in TB, theatre, cinema, magazine production, reading and photography workshops or competitions.

### *Networking*

Recent initiatives include programmes to facilitate the arrival and integration of foreign students and 'partnering' between native speakers and learners who meet for at least 10 weeks in order to practice the language. Mixed groups have also been formed to provide a similar context for interaction.

## CONCLUSIONS FOR CATALAN AND BASQUE

For both languages there is a marked discrepancy between the formal use of language in educational settings and its use as a means of informal communication among adolescent peers. Excessive dependence on official bodies - either the school itself, or other official institutions - may turn young people against the language and it is suggested that in addressing young people, language promoters should try to ensure that they avoid patronising or paternalistic positions in order to attract their target audience.

# Chapter Seven - Northern Ireland

## Pádraig Ó Riagáin

The estimates of the percentage of Irish speakers in Northern Ireland provided by census and surveys range between 10% (Census 2001) and 18% (Social Mobility Survey 1996). Only 1–2% of the population claim to be completely fluent and the majority of those claiming an ability to speak Irish have only partial or limited fluency in the language. All surveys have shown a very strong relationship between the religious affiliation of respondents and their ability to speak Irish. The overwhelming majority of Irish speakers in Northern Ireland belong to the Catholic tradition. However, social practice of Irish is constrained by the fact that only 15% of Catholics know more than a few simple sentences of the language. There is a strong relationship between education and Irish and Irish speakers tend to come from the higher ranking occupational groups.

### QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Research published in 1991 (Gabrielle Maguire, *Our Own Language: An Irish Initiative*) which was carried out before the foundation of Irish-medium secondary schools, focused upon an Irish immersion primary school located in the Irish-speaking community on Belfast's Shaw Road. It demonstrated that:

- The recreational activities of children attending the Irish-medium primary school were based within the Irish speaking community and were associated with school friends. However, as the pupils grew older there was a general shift towards English due to the dearth of Irish-medium leisure activities for this age group.
- Leisure activities for teenagers, such as the local sports clubs, youth clubs, discos etc were largely part of an English speaking environment.
- The association between the English language and the adolescent peer culture was related to the type of subjects discussed with peers, e.g. bilinguals considered English to be a more suitable or appropriate medium for certain conversation topics (e.g. romantic relationships) and Irish was deemed 'inappropriate'.
- The shift among older adolescents towards English had the effect of exposing their younger siblings to a higher degree of English use.

Kevin Mc Cafferty's study *Ethnicity and Language Change: English in (London) Derry, Northern Ireland (2001)* which explored the effect of ethnicity on English language dialect formation showed that young people are segregated in terms of geography, community and activity and that there is a clear linguistic divide between the two communities. It was found that Protestants tend to lead in the adoption of language innovations from other parts of the country, resulting in a linguistic divergence away from the city's majority Catholic population.

### QUANTITATIVE STUDIES

Beginning in 1998 and carried out annually, the *Northern Ireland Life and Times Surveys* aim to 'put on record the attitudes, values and beliefs of the people of Northern Ireland to a wide range of social policy issues'. Included is a section entitled *Young Life and Times Surveys* which contains pertinent information to this study in relation to the social behaviour of adolescents. In 2006, 16–18 year olds were asked: 'How many close friends do you have, friends you could talk to if you were in some kind of trouble?' In reply, the vast majority (76%) of adolescents in the sample claimed to have between two and ten 'close' friends. Within this total, similar proportions reported having two to three close friends (22%), four to five (28%) and six to ten (26%).

These findings are in keeping with international research concerning the size of adolescent peer groups. The 2003 survey had shown that more than half of the adolescents surveyed saw their friends every day and a majority reported that their friends lived within close geographic proximity. Sports and hobby clubs were the most popular activity for the peer group.

## RESULTS OF PILOT SURVEY

As a special initiative of this present research, a small exploratory study (145 completed questionnaires) was carried out with a sample of pupils from three Irish-medium secondary schools in an effort to obtain basic information about Irish language use with parents, siblings, relations, visitors to the home, friends outside the home and in various activities and organisations. Background variables included gender, age, distance from school, ability to speak Irish and contact with other school pupils. About one third of the sample claimed that Irish was used as much as English in their homes; 27% said that no Irish was spoken at home. With regard to participation in conversations in which Irish was spoken 58% cited siblings, 30% parents and 20% other adults.

In response to the question 'What language do you normally use when talking to your friends outside of school?', nearly half (47%) said that English was the normal language used and a further 27% said that 'mostly' English was used. Thus, only about a quarter claimed to use Irish in normal conversations and, of these, most claimed to use Irish and English in equal proportions rather than exclusive use of Irish. There was very little difference between boys and girls in this respect. The variable that correlated most strongly with use of Irish among friends, however, is the reported level of home use of Irish. Of those who report use of Irish in their homes at least half the time, 51% report the same level of Irish language use with their friends. But of those who report that English is mostly or always used in their home, only 17% claimed to use Irish with their friends. Roughly the same proportion (32%) of survey participants took part in activities or organisations in which Irish was used, as spoke Irish with their friends (27%). However, they were not the same group of respondents. Only about 10% of the sample used Irish at intensive levels with friends and also participated in Irish-using activities and organisations. The activities most frequently mentioned where Irish was used were sports (48%), school-related (34%), youth clubs (27%) and Irish language organisations (27%).

Unlike informal use of Irish among friends, participation rates in organised Irish-using activities were marked by some striking differences among the sample, for example, boys (42%) were considerably more likely to be involved than girls (20%). This is primarily due to the lower participation of girls in sports activities in which Irish is used, compared to boys. However, girls (43%) were more likely than boys (23%) to be involved in youth clubs and in Irish language organisations.

Respondents who did not report involvement in activities or organisations in which Irish was used were asked for the reason for their non-involvement. About 30% of this group said that they had no interest in such activities. However, the majority of this group (65%) claimed that the reason for non-participation was that there were no such activities in their areas. It is useful to note that if the participation of the young Irish speakers was in keeping with the figure for involvement in activities and organisations cited within the *Young Life and Times Surveys*, then 66% of the sample would be likely participants. This is twice the proportion who reported themselves in the research (32%) as taking part in Irish-using activities.

## Chapter Eight - Discussion and Conclusions

Although the minority language communities surveyed in earlier chapters (Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Wales, Catalonia, the Basque Region) differ considerably from each other, they all share a common concern with the problem at the heart of this report. All of these communities have managed to increase the numbers of children in immersion education programmes. These pupils do not generally speak the minority language as their mother tongue and many, in fact, have no knowledge whatsoever of the minority language when they begin school or preschool. All of the available evidence suggests that these schools and programmes have been very successful in bringing their pupils to high levels of fluency in the minority language, although it is a second language for most of them. However, there is a shared concern that this acquired competence in the target language is not leading to similar rates of increase in the pupils' social use of the language.

School settings generally serve as the place where friendships are formed, whereas non-school settings serve as the context for cementing these relationships. Therefore, the non-school context is a vital consideration if the ultimate objective is the formation of sustainable Irish-speaking networks. Although there is a need to carry out more specific research in relation to this issue, the material reviewed in this report point to a number of relevant factors.

### NUMBERS AND THRESHOLDS

Nearly all of the studies referred to in this report, point to the differences between situations in which minority speakers are in a local majority, and those in which they are not. Glynn Williams (Chapter 4) notes that 'the greater the density of Welsh speakers in the social network, the greater the opportunity and tendency for the associated network members to use Welsh' and similarities are found in Ireland when comparing the use of Irish within the core Gaeltacht areas and those areas which are peripheral to them. The observations point to the importance of 'critical mass' in terms of numbers of speakers. Just as Irish-medium schools require a certain number of participating families within their catchment areas to become and remain viable, so too do all of those many organisations and activities which use Irish. However, given the scale of the Irish-medium sector in Northern Ireland, it is debatable whether it contains sufficient numbers for the development of community-based, as distinct from school-based activities. Policy interventions of this type may, therefore, have to incorporate adolescents from other schools, for example those which teach Irish as a subject.

### USE OF IRISH IN THE HOME

Research shows that adults have an important influence upon the functioning of adolescent peer groups. Bo's study (Chapter 2) found that the most intimate zone of the social networks of adolescents was made up of the core family and some selected best friends and extended family members. The pilot survey (Chapter 6) showed that those pupils who reported a higher than average ration of Irish language usage in their homes, were also far more likely to report higher than average use of Irish with their friends.

### THE 'COMPETENCE' ISSUE

Research has shown that language use outside of school is related to the ability to use the language within non-school contexts. When the home is an active partner in the language socialisation process, the quality of language learning may differ from those who rely on the school alone. Professor Vila (Chapter 5) pointed out that the pupils coming from homes in which Catalan/Basque is absent may not - despite immersion education - have 'the linguistic skills (lexical, stylistic etc) that allow for informal, interpersonal language use among peers'.

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He wonders if schools 'may have paid too much attention to promoting the standard language, to develop written language skills...' and calls for a reconsideration of the competence issue, even in immersion schools.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The social class of students and the length of time that they spend in education has been found through research to have a bearing upon whether or not they decide to study Irish. The tendency to use Irish outside of school is also influenced by such factors. The orientation of students towards different sectors within the labour market, for example the choice of university or immediate employment after school has been found to be relevant for linguistic practice (see Chapter 2). The socio-economic background of pupils and their relation to the labour market need to be considered when addressing the formation of Irish-speaking social networks outside the school environment.

## SOME POSSIBILITIES FOR POLICY INTERVENTION

Structured after-school activities are believed to have a role linking the school to the out of school context, and thus strengthening the Irish-speaking peer networks formed in school. The importance of forming friendships outside of the school environment is an important step in the 'socialisation' of adolescents and provides an informal context where appropriate linguistic skills can be developed and maintained over time.

## CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, when considering future government policy and provision in Northern Ireland, in order to maximise the potential for success, it is argued that policy, structures and activities should address the following:

- Notwithstanding the popular tendency to think of 'youth culture' as something quite distinct and separate from mainstream society, research has repeatedly shown that adults (parents and significant others) continue to have an important influence on young people's language practice;
- All studies reviewed in the present report have emphasised that the language of the home is a core factor in every context. Therefore, even in a policy strategy that focuses on language use in the social networks of adolescents, it is important that support is given to their families;
- As regards non-school activities and organisations, viability thresholds, or critical mass considerations are important planning considerations. At the local level, it may be important to exploit the combined potential of Irish-medium and English-medium pupils;
- Age and gender factors are equally important. The survey conducted as part of the present study showed clearly that girls and older adolescents are not as well supported with organised Irish-using activities as their male and younger counterparts;
- Linkages between schools and the labour market are particularly important. Several research studies have shown that language use in the workplace is as important in encouraging and maintaining Irish-speaking networks among young adults, as Irish-medium schools are for the younger students.

## THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

It is recommended that in future studies the strength of sharing research on an international basis should be maintained in order to avoid the problems of duplication and fragmentation of research effort.

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