



## Irish Language Revival Policies in Education

Immersion education and adult  
education as a link to intergenerational  
language transmission

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## Abstract

Minority language revitalization efforts are usually centred around the implementation of educational efforts in order to generate new speakers. Fishman's research on RLS shows that an overreliance on education as the key factor in RLS efforts is dangerous as it does not guarantee the intergenerational transmission of the language. This study aims to highlight two alternative educational strategies that could help with securing intergenerational language transmission: immersion education and the education and advising of parents and adults. Building on existing work on RLS efforts in Ireland, the main question in this thesis is: based on the example of Modern Irish in the Republic of Ireland, how can RLS efforts in education help minoritized language communities achieve intergenerational language transmission? This shall be done through a qualitative analysis of data gathered from governmental reports and academic studies of the position of the Irish language in schools and society, as well as the educational strategies and goals of language support efforts. The data gathered from these reports and studies with best practices from the theorists will be analysed in order to see if they coincide. What can be concluded is that immersion education and adult education have potential in securing intergenerational language transmission, but they have to be implemented on a large enough scale in order to be fully effective. Moreover, they are just a small fragment of a larger set of initiatives in RLS policy making and the education system should not be the only responsible actor in the revival of Irish.

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## Section 1

## 1. Introduction

"A language is in danger when its speakers cease to use it, use it in an increasingly reduced number of communicative domains, and cease to pass it on from one generation to the next" (UNESCO, 2003, p. 2). This quotation, taken from a report composed by UNESCO, describes the dangerous situation in which many languages currently find themselves. The extinction of languages is accompanied by a great loss of culture and history (UNESCO, 2003). Why is it then that one third of the world's languages is not represented in educational institutions located within their accompanying speech communities (Ó Laoire & Harris, 2006)? To counter this problem, many governments, institutions, scholars and other parties dedicate their attention to making policies and starting initiatives aimed at saving these threatened languages. Areas of action can include promoting the language in media, on the work floor, in education or other places where society comes together and communicates with each other, but success in all of these does not guarantee a revival of the language.

Language revitalisation involves restoring vitality and securing intergenerational language transmission (Ó Laoire & Harris, 2006). This is the situation wherein language is naturally being transmitted from one generation to another (Fishman, 1990). In order for a language to be vital again, its people have to actively engage in its use and be willing to pass it on to younger generations. It is a process which involves both maintenance efforts and active restoration efforts. One of the main focus areas of many minority language situations is the domain of education. Part of this is due to the school's socialisation process: Schools are key agencies in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of the next generation (Ó Laoire & Harris, 2006). Another reason is due to the government having direct control over this domain, e.g. through funding projects.

This thesis primarily builds on the theory on *Reversing Language Shift* (or RLS) as described by Joshua Fishman (1990, 1991, 2001), which will be presented in the next section. His theory emphasises the importance of intergenerational language transmission in all RLS efforts. Fishman also warns against an overreliance on educational efforts as the sole solution to successful language revival, and as evidence he points to the example of Irish, where the usefulness of education in producing regular speakers has been proven to be limited as only a tiny proportion of learners hand it on to their children later in life (Fishman, 1990, 1991a; see also Darmody & Daly, 2015). However, educational measures are being applied in various forms and to varying degrees, and are often not solely applied in the traditional classroom setting. This thesis highlights two different approaches to educational RLS efforts.

To examine this, the focus of this research will be on the situation of Irish in the Republic of Ireland. The scope of this research is not to examine how effective RLS efforts in Ireland have been so far, but rather to shine a light on the complex situation in which the Irish language now is, and which policies are being applied to stimulate the use of it. To further examine this, two alternative schooling policies will be looked at: immersion education and adult education. Instead of only taking Irish as a separate subject in school, students in immersion education study the normal curriculum, but entirely through the medium of Irish. Adult education includes both the teaching of the minority language to adults and advising parents on how to raise their children in an Irish-speaking environment.

This research aims to answer the following research question: based on the example of Modern Irish in the Republic of Ireland, how can RLS efforts in education help minoritized language communities achieve intergenerational language transmission? More specifically, how can immersion education and adult education contribute to the successful transmission of the Irish language between generations of Irish speakers? The next section will present the theoretical framework on which this thesis is built. This section is followed by the method and an introduction to and analysis of the situation of Irish in Ireland. This thesis ends with a conclusion and suggestions for further research.

## Section 2

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. Joshua Fishman

A term closely tied to the domain of minority languages, more specifically minority language status planning, is *Reversing Language Shift* (in short RLS). One of the first researchers to bring this term into use was Joshua Fishman. In short, the term can best be defined as following: "Xish modernisation that is in the spirit of and under the aegis of Xishness as defined by 'Xmen-with-Xish'" (Fishman, 1990, p. 9). In other words, RLS efforts are focused on the premise that cultures are constantly changing and their goal is not to put a halt to these changes, but rather to ensure that their cultural system will not be overpowered or made lesser (in any form or way) by other cultural systems. Change will therefore not be stopped, but rather modified into a form that provokes consciousness about the process and that protects a certain culture and language, as well as limiting the negative effects of an opposing culture that introduces said change. The goal per se is not to achieve independent statehood, but rather to strengthen the threatened language and to foster cultural autonomy and intergenerational continuity through self-initiated efforts (Fishman, 2001). This is a tricky task to attain as there is no guarantee that RLS efforts will eventually lead to preservation, revival or revitalization (Fishman, 1990).

To tackle this issue, Fishman has designed an eight-stage model that analyses the phases of RLS efforts and can serve as a planning theory for language planning practitioners (Fishman, 1990). This model is better called the *Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale* (or GIDS) (Fishman, 1991b, 2001).

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Stages of reversing language shift: severity of intergenerational dislocation  
(read from the bottom up)

1. Education, work sphere, mass media and governmental operations at higher and nationwide levels.
2. Local/regional mass media and governmental services.
3. The local/regional (i.e. non-neighborhood) work sphere, both among Xmen and among Ymen.
- 4b. Public schools for Xish children, offering some instruction via Xish, but substantially under Yish curricular and staffing control.
- 4a. Schools in lieu of compulsory education and substantially under Xish curricular and staffing control.

II. *RLS to transcend diglossia, subsequent to its attainment*

5. Schools for literacy acquisition, for the old and for the young, and not in lieu of compulsory education.
6. The intergenerational and demographically concentrated home-family-neighborhood: the basis of mother tongue transmission.
7. Cultural interaction in Xish primarily involving the community-based older generation.
8. Reconstructing Xish and adult acquisition of XSL.

I. *RLS to attain diglossia (assuming prior ideological clarification)*

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*Figure 1: The Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (Fishman, 2002, p. 53)*

The subdivision of planning theory into a graded scale has to do with two factors: 1. it draws attention to crucial issues in a step-by-step manner, and 2. it constantly reminds practitioners of the importance of intergenerational continuity (Fishman, 1990). This second factor is of most utmost importance here and shall be dealt with later. The scale is roughly divided into two halves: stages 8 to 5, or rather the 'weak side' of RLS, and stages 4 to 1, or the 'strong side' of RLS. The first half generally does not involve too many costs and can in most cases be executed in a self-regulating manner, whereas the second half often requires intergroup cooperation (Fishman, 1990). The table above should be read from the bottom up when looking at revitalization, beginning with the weak side and progressing towards the strong side (Fishman, 2001).

Fishman's RLS theory and the GIDS scale are constructed around the central importance of intergenerational continuity. This term encompasses the phenomenon of language being naturally transmitted from one generation to another, so that language is not merely statically preserved, but so that in the future it can also serve as a first language of a new generation of speakers (Fishman, 2001). Alongside the importance of the family-domain, an emphasis is also laid on the neighbourhood and the community (Fishman, 1990). He argues that many RLS efforts fail, because this stage is often bypassed and these domains are not given enough emphasis (Fishman, 1990; Hill, 1994). Constructing RLS efforts around the idea of intergenerational language transmission could thus provide a stronger base altogether, but there is little research done in this field as resources are scarce and RLS efforts are generally carried out by minorities (Fishman, 1990; Spolsky, 2012).

## **2.2. Bernard Spolsky**

Following up on the idea of intergenerational language transmission of minority languages are the works of Bernard Spolsky (1995, 2008, 2009, 2012). Spolsky spent a great deal of time studying the interrelationship between various domains of language use, and the complex sociolinguistic issues that are inevitably tied to these relationships. In his studies, Spolsky mentions several examples of domains, such as the state, the family, media, education, and religion (Spolsky, 2012). Within each domain there are different participants, each with their own beliefs about language and how to act. When researching a linguistic phenomenon, like minority language planning, the researcher has to keep in mind the characteristics of these domains, because they influence each other in many ways, as well as exerting internal influence. Intergenerational language transmission, or as Spolsky often refers to it as 'the family domain', is being influenced by all the other domains, just as it is influencing them (Spolsky, 2012). This mutual influence of various domains is critical in the context of this thesis because it tells us more about the broader milieu in which RLS efforts are being organized. In order to facilitate useful policy making, one has to keep in mind all the possible influences and factors within the domain in which policies are being planned, as well as those domains that could possibly exert influence.

## **2.3. Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977)**

Another theoretical framework within this field of research is that by Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977). This theory is aimed at describing and understanding the mutual relationship between language, ethnicity and intergroup relations. Intergroup relations are influenced by a number of variables that make up the climate in which these relations exist and can be structurally analysed. These variables are further explained by Giles, Bourhis and Taylor in a taxonomy, which forms the first part of their theory. Variables can be roughly divided into three categories: status, demography and institutional support. A positive support on all three levels can stimulate an ethnolinguistic group's vitality. Groups with high vitality are more likely to survive in intergroup contexts (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977). While the theory is originally constructed as a framework for ethnolinguistic groups, it may well be extended to the domain of minority language speaker groups as those, too, are defined by linguistic variables. Fishman (1990) even states that the languages in RLS efforts can be seen as symbols that are part of a larger set of various other symbols that constitute ethnolinguistic persistence. Moreover, both focus on the study of human

behaviour, and it is by this study that culture, whether it be linguistic or any other form, can be maintained and protected (Fishman, 1990). This is important because educational efforts are considered to be on the strong side of RLS as described in the GIDS and require intergroup cooperation to be successful. The taxonomy by Giles, Bourhis and Taylor could provide more insight in how to effectively attain this.

#### **2.4. Education**

As mentioned in the introduction, an overreliance on education as the key factor in RLS efforts is dangerous. Education is often offered with the goal of operating as the sole medium of support for threatened languages. Fishman roughly distinguishes between two types of schools in the GIDS: 1. Type 4a schools that operate relatively independent under Xish curriculum, and 2. Type 4b public schools that operate substantially under Yish curriculum, but still offer some Xish instruction (Fishman, 1990, 1991b). The biggest issue remains that school programmes wherein minority languages are taught as a subject only generally do not produce highly competent speakers (Ó Riagáin, 2001). A possible solution to this problem is immersion education, wherein a child is fully exposed to the target language in an immersion programme, providing the child with enough input in different conversational settings to acquire said target language (Ó Duibhir, 2019).

However, if the same language is not first acquired at home, then education as the prime instructor has a challenging task ahead. It is then up to the school to act as the link in intergenerational continuity, whereas this will only produce more speakers of whom the threatened language will be the second language. Educating adults and advising parents could contribute to solve this problem. It has been proven that the linguistic resources and attitudes of parents influence the child's extent of bilingualism and proficiency in the minority language (Ó Riagáin, 1997; Darmody & Daly, 2015; Parsons & Lyddy, 2016). Schooling can therefore only be successfully operated by not only focussing on the proficiency of students, but also keeping in mind the whole range of causes and influences, such as the family domain and the community.

#### **2.5. RLS and Ireland**

The combination of the abovementioned three theories presents a solid starting point when investigating RLS efforts. Using Fishman's theory, one can investigate the various stages of language revival, always keeping in the idea of intergenerational language transmission. The ideas of Spolsky and the taxonomy from Giles, Bourhis and Taylor illustrate the broader milieu in which RLS efforts are being designed and applied. Fishman himself has dedicated two chapters in his books on the case of Irish. The first, written in 1991, describes the historical background of Irish in Ireland and the efforts undertaken then, categorized under the various stages from the GIDS. The response to this chapter was written in 2001 by Ó Riagáin and published in Fishman's second book. In this chapter, Ó Riagáin presents an overview of Irish language production at the end of the twentieth century. He outlines the various social and economic changes within Ireland in the twentieth century, that have led to minority policy making decisions throughout these years. These will be summarized and investigated below in section 4.

## Section 3

### 3. Method

Using Fishman's theoretical framework on intergenerational language transmission and its importance in RLS efforts, a qualitative analysis is made for the case of the Irish language in the Republic of Ireland. Within this analysis, the focus lies on RLS efforts in education and how intergenerational language transmission is embedded within these efforts. The Irish government has commissioned reports on the current status of the language, alongside a strategic plan for the future. Relevant information on the topic of education is gathered from these reports and an outline of the current situation is made: what is the current status of the language and what plans concerning education are being made by the Irish government to promote this status?

Following that is an analysis of two educational strategies: immersion education, and educating adults and advising parents, in Ireland. These efforts are examined using Fishman's theory on RLS and previous studies on the case of the Irish language. The analysis ends with the answering of the research question, as well as some concluding remarks and suggestions for further research.

## Section 4

### 4. Ireland now and in the future

The Irish language in the Republic of Ireland can be seen as a special case when it comes to RLS efforts and attitudes. It is one of the few cases where the state is one of the primary institutions committed to protecting and stimulating the use of the Irish language (Fishman, 1991a). The state offers financial support to initiatives aimed at promoting the minority language (Darmody & Daly, 2015). Moreover, it has declared Irish as the national and first official language. In addition to the state, there are other institutions and groups who dedicate their efforts to preserving and promoting the use of Irish. *Foras na Gaeilge* is the public body responsible for the promotion of Irish for both North and South Ireland. Their tasks consist of supporting and undertaking RLS efforts, encouraging the use of the language in all forms, and for educational efforts in particular, supporting Irish-medium education and teaching of the language (Foras na Gaeilge, 2016). As Fishman (1991b) states in his hypothesis on minority language maintenance, domains of language use should be created and sustained wherein a family or speech community has the opportunity to use the minority language. Therefore, this section aims to make an outline of the state of the Irish language in the Republic of Ireland through speaker numbers and Governmental reports, as well as the plans for the future of the language.

#### 4.1. Speaker numbers

Every 5 years, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) carries out a census of the Irish population, counting every person living in Ireland on a particular date, as well as including questions about personal characteristics, such as occupation, religion, sex, and, most relevant for this chapter, language ability and language use. The last census was carried out in April 2016, in which 1,761,420 persons replied 'yes' to being able to speak Irish (39.8% of the population). Compared to the 2011 census, this is a decrease of 13,017 persons or 0.7%. The number of persons responding 'yes' to being able to speak Irish is further divided into five different groups of frequency of use: never speaking the language (418,420 in 2016), only speaking it in educational settings (558,608), speaking it less often than weekly (586,535) speaking it weekly (111,473), and speaking Irish daily (73,803) (Central Statistics Office, 2020). Of the entire population of Ireland, therefore, only 4.2% speak the language on a daily basis (Central Statistics Office, 2017).

In 2016, 63,664 persons living in the Gaeltacht areas indicated they could speak Irish (66.3% of the total population in these areas), of which 20,586 persons indicated they speak it on a daily basis (21.4% of the total population in these areas) (Central Statistics Office, 2017). Compared to the numbers of 2011, a decrease of 2.2% of the total number of speakers and a decrease of 2.6% of daily speakers can be seen.

While the census gives a general impression of the number of Irish speakers, as well as fluctuation over time, it lacks an in-depth analysis on topics such as proficiency. As Fishman himself notes in his chapter on the Irish language: "Such matters are always difficult to estimate, particularly when self-estimates are involved..." (Fishman, 1991a, p. 127). It is therefore difficult to determine if RLS efforts have had any influence at all on speaker numbers, based on census data alone. However, it is not within the scope of this research to determine the effectiveness of RLS efforts over time. Census data does provide a general impression of the amount of Irish speakers in Ireland and the various speaker groups to which RLS efforts must be coordinated.

#### 4.2. Ireland's goals

Based on the outcome of the census, the Irish government makes plans on how it will provide services for the coming years. Language-related issues and policies have been documented in various strategic policy documents, of which two shall be discussed here. The first of these is the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030. In this report, the objectives and approaches for the Irish language are outlined in nine areas of action. The main objective is to strengthen the

knowledge and use of Irish as a community language within a bilingual society. The headline goal within this objective is to have two million speakers of Irish at the end of the twenty year plan, of which 250,000 use the language on a daily basis. Within the Strategy, the focus lies on educational efforts, but the importance of natural language transmission within the family and between generations is strongly emphasized, by paying special attention to improving out-of-school usage and promoting adult education. The Strategy includes various plans in regards to education, like stimulating Irish-medium education on all levels and throughout the country, teacher education, and providing schools with new text books and learning aids (Department of Education and Skills, 2013).

In Fishman's theory on effective RLS efforts, he emphasizes the premise that efforts should be focused on strengthening the position of the language through self-initiated efforts (Fishman, 2001). This is a point that is also acknowledged in the Strategy, as their main aim is to strengthen the position of Irish as a community language within a bilingual society. The Irish Government recognises the advantages of fluency in English and does not wish to suppress the use of English, but rather create an environment in which English and Irish can be used equally (Department of Education and Skills, 2013).

The second relevant document is the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022. This Policy sets out a plan on how to organize the education system in the Gaeltacht areas, in order to preserve these areas as the heart of Irish-speaking communities. The plans have been devised to supplement the 20-Year Strategy and are to be executed in a phased manner over the given years. Both the 20-Year Strategy and the Policy recognize the importance of the Gaeltacht areas as an irreplaceable resource for those who wish to learn Irish and for those who wish to speak it freely. The main objective of the Policy is to ensure the availability of Irish-medium education in the Gaeltacht areas by increasing the proportion of schools and early-years' settings where Irish is the medium of instruction (Department of Education and Skills, 2016).

Gaeltacht areas and the East require a different approach to policy making. Gaeltacht policy is mentioned by Fishman (1991) as an important point of critique. In his chapter on Ireland he states: 'The need for 'emergency rescue operations in the still remaining Irish-speaking Gaeltachts' is mentioned increasingly, but no consensus on exactly what to do now, different and better than all the many things that have been tried before, has been arrived at.' (Fishman, 1991, p. 126). Community networks within the Gaeltacht are weakening due to changes in both the Gaeltacht areas itself and the East. Policy-making must be adjusted to the circumstances in the Gaeltacht, but even policies aimed at stimulating Irish in the East must always keep the Gaeltacht in mind (Ó hIfearnáin, 2008). The Policy on Gaeltacht Education aims to bring more clarity into this issue by taking the Gaeltacht as a special point of attention and recognizing its unique status.

## Section 5

## 5. Two approaches to educational RLS efforts

In the previous section, the current state of Irish in the Republic of Ireland has been described. Having introduced Fishman's and other relevant theories, as well as having discussed the state of affairs of Irish in Ireland, we are in a position to combine the two to look at two examples of how exactly intergenerational language transmission is incorporated in educational RLS efforts. Two solutions to RLS issues shall be presented: Immersion education and adult education. This analysis is not the first of its kind, as various scholars have dealt with describing the Irish situation. This section will therefore be based on the works of Fishman and supplemented with research by other researchers from the field.

### 5.1. Immersion education

In the Republic of Ireland, Irish is taught as a core subject in the curriculum in primary and secondary level education. As mentioned before, an overreliance on education as the sole solution to RLS is dangerous (Fishman, 1991a, Darmody & Daly, 2015). Within the classroom setting, immersion-education might provide more positive results. Immersion schools are Irish-medium (mainly primary) schools located in urban areas throughout the country. They are established under national school policies, but with an independent board of management (Ó Duibhir, 2019). Students study the regular curriculum through the Irish language. Immersion education is becoming increasingly popular both in the Gaeltacht and in the rest of the country (Darmody & Daly, 2015). In the school year 2018/2019, 45,568 students (7,633 in the Gaeltacht and 37,935 outside of the Gaeltacht) were enrolled in immersion primary institutions (Department of Education and Skills, 2019b). This is 8% of the total number of students in primary institutions (567,772 in 2018/2019) (Department of Education and Skills, 2019a). For immersion post-primary institutions the number of students was 16,874 students (6,888 in the Gaeltacht and 9,986 outside of the Gaeltacht) (Department of Education and Skills, 2019b). This is 4.6% of the total number of students in post-primary institutions (362,899 in 2018/2019) (Department of Education and Skills, 2019a). Both the 20-Year Plan and the Policy for Gaeltacht Education recognize the importance of immersion education as a key factor in promoting language acquisition and sustaining natural language use (Department of Education and Skills, 2013, 2016). The number of immersion-schools, also known as *Gaelscoileanna*, has steadily risen from 6.4% in 2000 to 8.1% over the total in 2018/19 and according to the 20-Year Plan, the government will continue to stimulate this growth for the coming years as long as there is demand (Department of Education and Skills, 2013; Gaeloideachas, 2020). In 2019, 2 new *Gaelscoileanna* were established (Gaeloideachas, 2020).

Even before going to an immersion school, young children can opt for Irish-medium playgroups or pre-schools, better known as *naónraí*. These pre-schools prepare children for the next step in their Irish development and education through play under the guidance of qualified staff (Gaeloideachas, 2019). *Naónraí* are becoming increasingly popular, as 64% out of 160 establishments now have waiting lists. In the school year 2018/2019, 4980 children attended *naónraí* (4.6% of the total number of children in pre-school institutions) (Gaeloideachas, 2020). Interestingly, only 3% of children attending *naónraí* speak Irish at home, meaning that the vast majority of children come from an English-speaking home (Gaeloideachas, 2020). Additionally, the success of *naónraí* has contributed to the increasing demand of immersion primary and post-primary schools (Ó Duibhir, 2019).

Murtagh (2007) found that immersion-education in Irish-medium schools seems to have positive outcomes for students, as they reported having a greater desire to use, learn and speak Irish, as well as having higher levels of proficiency in the language (Murtagh, 2007; Darmody & Daly, 2015). The trajectory sets a high expectation for students, as they are expected to achieve native-like ability as the school years progress. While challenging, many students appear to be

successful in acquiring basic literacy and conversational skills, albeit with grammatical inaccuracies (Ó Duibhir, 2019). More importantly, Irish-immersion education does not come at a cost of English language development. Studies have shown that immersion students score well on both first-language and second-language tasks, and neither come at a 'cost' of each other (Parsons & Lyddy, 2016).

Another advantage of immersion education compared to Irish-subject education is that children are exposed to different language settings outside of the classroom. Children are expected to communicate in Irish in all communicative domains in the school, including the playground and communication with teachers, which creates a more diverse climate for both input and output (Ó Duibhir, 2019). Moreover, Murtagh (2007) found that students who attended an all-Irish school were more willing to participate in Irish-speaking networks as adults than their peers who attended an English-speaking school. In the same study, Murtagh (2007) found that all immersion students engaged in at least some out-of-school use of the language and 68.8% of this group replied to having substantial opportunities to use the language with friends or family. This positive outcome is supported by the fact that in immersion education positive parental attitudes towards the Irish language are reinforced by the school ethos (Darmody & Daly, 2015).

## **5.2. Educating adults and advising parents**

Educational RLS efforts should not only be focused on teaching the younger generations, but they should also consider aiming their efforts at helping parents and adults, both in language learning and supporting the education of their children. At present, parents can receive help in various ways from various institutions and organizations that operate on differing scales. Adult language learning is one of the areas for action in education described in the 20-Year Strategy. The goal is to create more opportunities for adults interested in the Irish language. It aims to do this by providing government-funded Irish language courses free of charge for all levels (Department of Education and Skills, 2013). These courses are currently being provided by various organizations and institutions throughout the country.

Extra support for parents is included as a point of attention in the Policy of Gaeltacht Education. The Policy aims to communicate the value of Irish and the benefits of Irish-medium education to parents, to assure them that they are making the right decision by sending their children to Irish-medium schools. Too often, parents lack knowledge of the benefits of speaking Irish at home and in educational settings. It is therefore necessary that authorities take action to support Irish as a community language (Ó hIfearnáin, 2007). To successfully implement this idea, the Policy aims to communicate with various stakeholders (e.g. parents, students, and schools, as well as Government departments and State agencies) in order to make sure all are involved in promoting the value of Irish learning and education (Department of Education and Skills, 2016). The majority of people in Ireland recognize the importance of sustaining the language, however, there exists a sizable minority who do not share this attitude (Darmody & Daly, 2015).

Ó Riagáin (2001) describes the situation of home bilingualism in his chapter on Ireland. He states that home bilingualism is in most cases derived from two situations: bilingual output of the schools and Irish-speaking homes. The first describes the situation in which parents learned Irish at school. The latter describes the small minority of families of which Irish has traditionally been the home language. However, a third situation may seem to play a minor role in the stimulation of home bilingualism. This third group consists of adults, who have had neither an Irish language home background nor a strong acquisition during their school years, but nevertheless choose to send their children to Irish-medium schools. Why this group converts to using Irish is not entirely clear from research (possibly due to marriage). However small, this third group possesses some capacity to produce new speakers of Irish (Ó Riagáin, 2001). When a sufficiently large body of parents send out their children to Irish-medium schools, the school itself becomes a network that connects Irish speakers with each other. The basic aim of teaching children the Irish language is then extended to one that creates communities, while also recruiting new members. It is the challenge then to secure the output of these new school and home networks into a more permanent state (Ó Riagáin, 2001).

An example of parental advice is the Gaeltacht-located initiative of *Tús Maith* (literally meaning 'a good start'). *Tús Maith* is a community-driven initiative, focused on giving advice and support to parents raising their children as Irish speakers in the Gaeltacht region of Corca Dhuibhne (County Kerry) (Ó hIfearnáin, 2013; *Tús Maith*, 2020). They organize various activities, ranging from socialisation activities to home visits, where 'visitors' help parents in various ways in the household, depending on the amount of Irish spoken in the home. Help can include heightening the awareness of Irish-medium services, such as schools and nursery homes, or bringing parents and children into contact with other parents raising their children through the medium of Irish. In the case of more strongly Irish-speaking families, home visits can consist of helping around the house while talking through the medium of Irish. The initial focus of *Tús Maith* was to help parents raising children in a bilingual setting, but in the future, it aims to shift its focus more directly to Irish-only families. It has reached this conclusion through its own experiences and community feedback, but it does not give a specific reason for this shift (Ó hIfearnáin, 2013).

## Section 6

## 6. Analysis

In the previous sections, we have seen that there exists a strong interrelationship between education, the state, and the community and family. They all influence each other in one way or the other and all influence the way decisions about policies to maintain the language are being made. It is these variables that shape the position in which the Irish language is currently and more importantly, these variables influence the way the Irish government shapes its policies. Without understanding this broader situation, relevant policy making becomes a task that is difficult and probably impossible to attain. Therefore, what can be said is that domains do not operate within a vacuum and success in one domain does not guarantee success in others, nor does it secure a healthy position for the minority language (Ó Riagáin, 2001). This thought is in line with the ideas of Fishman (1990, 1991, 2001), Spolsky (2008, 2009, 2012), and the taxonomy constructed by Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977). In order to facilitate useful policy-making, a clear understanding of the situation of the minority language is needed, as well as an understanding of society as a whole. As Ó Riagáin (2001) concludes in his chapter on Ireland in Fishman's book, Ireland has undergone many socioeconomic changes throughout the years, which require the need for constant readjusting of policies and a narrow cooperation between relevant parties. Besides changes over time, variation between places should also be kept in mind. The language situation in the Gaeltacht areas is vastly different from that in the East, and thus calls for two different policies. Only when local interaction systems and wider socioeconomic systems are linked to each other, can policy interventions be construed and applied more effectively (Ó Riagáin, 2001). This thought is in line with the ideas of Spolsky as it calls to attention the different belief systems of participants in the accompanying domain. Inhabitants of the Gaeltacht have their own beliefs about the use and organization of language, just as inhabitants of the East have. Positive language development requires consensus between these two participants on the practice and implementation of RLS efforts (Ó hIfearnáin, 2008).

The policies set up by the government give a promising impression for the future. The two documents are both primarily aimed at improving the domain of education, but are tailored for different geographical areas in Ireland, which, as has been described in the previous paragraph, is a positive strategy. Moreover, both documents handle a multifaceted approach, that focuses on improving the position of the Irish language in various layers of Irish society. This multifaceted approach is needed when tackling RLS issues, as they do not operate in a vacuum, but are inevitably tied to wider social, economic and linguistic issues (Spolsky, 2012). The largest emphasis is laid on improving educational efforts, a factor that Fishman is rather wary of. However, educational efforts are not solely aimed at stimulating the teaching of the Irish language, the scope reaches beyond just that. It also aims to improve the language situation for adults and teachers, as well as having an approach tailored to the needs of the different geographical areas in Ireland.

However, the implementation of these strategies remains to be seen. Necessary steps have been slow so far and the government has been criticized for lacking the will and resources to implement the various strategies to their full capacity (Ó Cuirreáin, 2014; Ó Duibhir, 2019). Moreover, the efforts in the policies are initiated and controlled by the government. This is out of step with Fishman's outlook on RLS efforts, as he pleads for a strengthening of the language through self-initiated efforts. Community-driven initiatives like *Tús Maith* fit better into this description, but they are by far outnumbered by government-driven efforts. Another issue is the fact that the largest emphasis is still on stimulating educational efforts. Education and the school are often still seen as the most important instances for language revitalization, which results in those often bearing the entire language planning agenda (Ó Laoire & Harris, 2006). However, if a language is to attain the status of a vital, living language, its use has to be extended to domains like the community and everyday life. More situations in which to use the language have to be

created, alongside a larger growing group of peers to interact with (Thomas & Roberts, 2011; Ó Duibhir, 2019).

Immersion education appears to help with this problem by providing students a total language experience in an educational setting. Students in immersion education reported to have very positive attitudes towards the Irish language and greater desire to speak it (Murtagh, 2007; Darmody & Daly, 2015; Ó Duibhir, 2019). Overall, students have very good communicative competence. However, students often preserve grammatical inaccuracies in their language use. This is a well-known problem in immersion programmes elsewhere, as there is often little exposure to the immersion language outside of the school property (Ó Duibhir, 2019). This can be improved by organizing cultural community events that stimulate the use of Irish. Research on Irish immersion schools has shown that immersion schools are often more willing to organize these types of activities, because students often see this as a motivation to improve and use their Irish (Ó Duibhir et al., 2017).

Due to these reasons, immersion education appears like a very effective approach for creating new speakers. However, the extent to which it is currently implemented is not yet sufficient enough. Even though the growth of the number of immersion institutions is stimulated by the government, this number has to be high enough in order to really have an impact on speaker numbers. This is currently not the case, as only 8% of primary school students and 4.6% of post-primary students attend immersion institutions (Department of Education and Skills, 2019a, 2019b). These numbers would have to be increased considerably in order to have any effect at all on the use of Irish as a community language. In addition, immersion institutions are primarily located in urban areas, whereas the Gaeltacht is largely rural. As a result, the geographic concentration of Irish speaking communities is at a risk of not being dense enough. Both the numbers of institutions and the geographical distribution of these institutions can hinder successful implementation of immersion education as a pawn in revitalizing the Irish language, when they are not implemented on a high enough scale.

Advising parents helps to resolve part of this issue as students' backgrounds influence their willingness to use Irish in and outside the school system (Ó Riagáin, 1997; Darmody & Daly, 2015; Parsons & Lyddy, 2016; Ó Duibhir et al., 2017). Bringing up children in Irish in an environment that is largely dominated by the English language is challenging. By communicating with parents and assuring them of the benefits of speaking Irish at home and in educational settings, the transmission of the language is better assured. When enough parents send out their children to Irish-medium schools, the school itself becomes a network that connects Irish speakers with each other. The school then acts as both an educational setting and one that creates communities (Ó Riagáin, 1997). This view can be linked to the theory of Spolsky as described in the theoretical framework. As mentioned, each domain (family, education, etc.) has its own participants and beliefs, which all influence the way in which these domains operate in relation to other domains. By assuring parents of the benefits of a bilingual raising, their beliefs on certain languages within the family domain are altered from a negative view to a positive one, which in turn can lead to a more secure position for intergenerational language transmission and a positive influence of the family domain on that of education (Spolsky, 2009, 2012). As described in the previous section, the group of parents who have had neither an Irish language home background nor a strong acquisition during their school years, but who nevertheless choose to send their children to Irish-medium schools, have some capacity of producing new speakers. Initiatives such as *Tús Maith*, whose aim it is to advise parents about such choices, are all the more important in this process. Their decision to only cater to the needs of Irish-only families could potentially be harmful in the case of language revival in a bilingual society, as it would make it more difficult for new speakers of Irish to join the community.

## Section 7

### 7. Conclusion

This thesis has investigated how immersion education and adult education can contribute to the successful transmission of language between generations of speakers of a threatened language. This has been illustrated by looking at the situation of Irish in the Republic of Ireland. In this final section, the research question as stated in the introduction will be answered, as well as giving suggestions for further research.

#### 7.1. Answering the main question

In section 4, the current state of the Irish language has been described, as well as the government's plans for the future. Section 5 discussed two educational strategies that could help with securing the intergenerational transmission of the Irish language. These two sections have been analysed in section 6. This data has been gathered to answer the main question as phrased in the introduction: based on the example of Modern Irish in the Republic of Ireland, how can RLS efforts in education help minoritized language communities achieve intergenerational language transmission? More specifically, how can immersion education and adult education contribute to the successful transmission of the Irish language between generations of Irish speakers?

The combination of both immersion education and adult education provides a stronger base altogether when attempting to assure the intergenerational transmission of a threatened language. The first step, promoting the use of the language at home by advising both adults and parents, ensures that children take the acquired home language with them to school and relieves some of the pressure of schools having to act as the prime instructor of the language. The task is then up to Irish-immersion institutions to facilitate a rich language environment in which the student can continue to develop his or her language skills. As students who attend an all-Irish school are more willing to actively use the language and to participate in Irish-speaking networks as adults, this would stimulate the intergenerational transmission of the language and the building of new communities (Murtagh, 2007; Darmody & Daly, 2015).

#### 7.2. Moving forward

While immersion education and adult education have been shown to make interesting contributions when looking at the application of strategic RLS efforts in education, they are just a small fragment of a larger set of initiatives in RLS policy making. The education system should not be the only responsible actor in the revival of Irish. RLS efforts should always have a broader aim and focus on multiple domains, instead of putting all the pressure on the education system. Policies themselves do not operate independently and are always reliant on the milieu they exist in. This thought is in line with the ideas of Spolsky and Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977) about handling a multifaceted approach in minority language revitalization efforts. Further research is necessary to investigate how other RLS initiatives in different domains stimulate the idea of intergenerational language transmission and how these relate to the measures discussed in this analysis.

Additionally, this analysis has not taken into account the effectiveness of said measures. In order to do this, relevant data has to be gathered regarding speaker numbers and fluctuation over time. While the census on the Irish language gives a general impression of the status of the language, the data comes from self-estimated answers. It is therefore not reliable enough to use in determining fluctuation in speaker numbers over time. Moreover, it is very difficult to determine whether there has been any improvement in regards to speaker numbers due to RLS efforts, as this would involve accurate numbers and subsequently an analysis on causes. It is crucial to know more about how language evolves longitudinally under the influence of alternative policy making. The Irish language has long been, and will most likely always be, in competition with English. Some might say it is a surprise that the Irish language is still extant. However, necessary steps have to

be taken in order to stimulate its vitality. With the strategic implementation of tailor-made RLS policies the Irish language might just reach its goal of two million speakers by 2030.

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