Analysing the Tension Between Community-Oriented Language Policy and 'New-Speakerness' in the Case of Irish : Should These Two Approaches Be Considered as Independent or as Two Sides of the Same Coin?

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Should These Two Approaches Be Considered as Independent or as Two Sides of the Same Coin?

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Abstract

The decline of Irish as a community language in the *Gaeltacht* is in contrast with its rise as an L2 in the rest of the country. This research explores the tension between community-oriented language policy, focused on the preservation of native speakers, and 'new speakerness', centred on the production of committed learners, to establish whether these two approaches should be regarded as independent or as complementary. Data were gathered on the basis of census results and a corpus of scientific texts, and a series of interviews was conducted with three experts. The results, supported by a comparison based on the criteria of 'capacity', 'opportunities', and 'desire', suggest that the future of Irish as a living language relies on the existence of both L1 and L2 speakers. Due to ideological differences, community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness' can, however, yield different results and thus favour one particular speaker group. Therefore, they should be combined in a targeted and balanced way.

Keywords: Irish, *Gaeltacht*, new speakers, minority languages, language maintenance and shift

When I looked down from the bridge
Trout were flipping the sky
Into smithereens, the stones
Of the wall warmed me.

Wading green stems, lugs of leaf
That untangle and bruise
(Their tiny gushers of juice)
My toecaps sparkle now

Over the soft fontanel
Of Ireland. I should wear
Hide shoes, the hair next my skin,
For walking this ground:

Wasn't there a spa-well,
Its coping grassy, pendent?
And then the spring issuing
Right across the tarmac.

I'm out to find that village,
Its low sills fragrant
With lady's-smock and celandine,
Marshlights in the summer dark.

Seamus Heaney, *May* (1972)

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introducing the Debate

Languages play a fundamental role in the culture, identity, and functioning of human societies, to the point that states cannot do without a language policy[1] to manage them (Grin and Civico 2018: 30). This is also evidenced by the importance bestowed on the protection of linguistic diversity and minority languages, for instance with the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (Council of Europe 1992). At a time when, according to estimates, a new language is disappearing 'every two weeks or so' (Crystal 2000: 19), such diversity is however in peril. The world is going through a process of globalisation and increased linguistic complexity in which, as stated by Pauwels (2016: 1), new linguistic realities 'best described as highly dynamic, with constantly and rapidly changing language constellations' can be observed. This brings minority language issues and their management to the forefront. The case of Irish – the oldest spoken literary language in Europe (Government of Ireland 2010: 5) and a well-known example of an endangered minority language displaced by English – is no exception.

Irish has long been a subject of particular interest among experts in the fields of sociolinguistics and sociology of language. One particularly significant area of research in this regard is that of language policy and planning, more specifically in terms of language maintenance and shift[2]. Literary and scientific work on the decline of Irish is abundant and many authors have published books and papers on the topic. Some examples include Fishman (1991), who famously discussed Irish as a

[1] In this dissertation, when talking about language policy I refer to Cooper's (1989: 45) definition of language planning: 'deliberate efforts to influence the behavior of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of their language codes'. As explained by Grin (2003: 28), although there are nuances, the boundaries between language planning and language policy are porous. Thus, I will make no distinction between the two terms, unless otherwise noted.
[2] According to Crystal (2000: 17), language shift is 'the conventional term for the gradual or sudden move from the use of one language to another (either by an individual or by a group)'. Conversely, language maintenance is 'the preservation of the use of a group's native language, as a first or even as a second language, where political, social, economic, educational or other pressures threaten or cause (or are perceived to threaten or cause) a decline in the status of the language as a means of communication, a cultural medium, or a symbol of group or national identity' (Nahir 1984: 315).

prominent example of language policy failure, as well as Hindley (1990) and Ó Riagáin (2001). Historically, the efforts made by the state to revive, protect, and promote the Irish language have mostly proven unsuccessful; so much so that the *UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* (Moseley 2010) classifies it as 'definitely endangered', a condition whereby 'children no longer learn the language as a mother tongue in the home'[3]. As a matter of fact, English remains largely dominant across the country and Irish is spoken as a vernacular only by communities in officially-designated areas known as the *Gaeltacht*[4] – which means 'the Irish-speaking population' (O'Rourke and Ramallo 2011: 144) – located mainly in the western, northern, and southern coastal regions (Nic Fhlannchadha and Hickey 2018: 38). Even there, however, the language is being eroded and the shift towards English continues (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007, Péterváry et al. 2014). In addition, as is often the case in minority language contexts, monolingual native speakers of Irish do not exist today (Fishman 2001a: 9, Ó hIfearnáin 2013: 353). Ironically, English-speaking parts of Ireland are called the *Galltacht*, that is 'the foreign language area' (Le Dû 2013: 333). There, Irish is taught at school and people can learn it as an L2[5] (see Section 3.4).

The hegemony of English is not an unusual threat amongst minority languages in general, and it has caused an alteration in the status quo of several linguistic settings. Oft-cited examples include French in Quebec, where language shift towards English was however eventually reversed (Bourhis 2001), and native languages in North America, such as Navajo (Lee and McLaughlin 2001). However, Irish differs from many other minority languages in that its demise followed a rather unconventional path, which has led to a paradoxical situation in which the national, first official language of the Republic of Ireland – a status enshrined in Article 8 of the Irish Constitution (Constitution of Ireland 1937) – is in fact threatened. Irish is thus also

[3] UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (2017) *Interactive Atlas* [online] available from <http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/en/atlasmap.html> [5 July 2020].
[4] According to Brennan and O'Rourke (2019: 134) the term *Gaeltacht* refers to 'regions geopolitically defined as the areas in which Irish has traditionally functioned as a community language'.
[5] In this dissertation, I use the term L1 to refer to what is commonly known as native language or speaker, and L2 to refer to what is generally known as non-native language or speaker (as explained for instance by O'Rourke 2011: 327).

unique due to its language policy history: as illustrated by Ó Riagáin (2001: 195), 'Unlike other minority language situations, in Ireland the state tried to deal with its minority language problem by seeking to re-establish it as a national language'. He also adds that no other European state has addressed such an issue in the same way, although there might be some similarities in the case of Spain. These peculiarities, paired with the will (or lack thereof) to reverse the shift towards English, have led to a series of interesting discussions among scholars and policy-makers as to how Irish should be revived, or at least preserved.

In this context, two major currents of thought can be identified, namely community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness'. The former (which I will detail in Chapter 5) revolves around the promotion of Irish as an intergenerationally transmitted community language. It places the community of native speakers, i.e. the *Gaeltacht*, at the centre of policy efforts and focuses on its needs (see for example Ó Giollagáin 2014a, 2014b). Conversely, the latter stresses the importance of new speakers in the revitalisation process. Typically, new speakers are individuals who have not acquired the minority language at home or in the community, but rather in alternative ways such as through revitalisation programmes, bilingual education or as adult learners (O'Rourke, Pujolar, and Ramallo 2015, see also McLeod and O'Rourke 2015, Darquennes and Soler 2019). In sum, they are non-native speakers of Irish (see Chapter 6 for a detailed description).

1.2 Research Aims

Work on the dynamics between new speakers and other speaker profiles, in particular natives, has been published for several minority languages: for example, Hornsby (2015) has worked on Breton and Yiddish with a focus on the barriers and power differentials between speakers; and Ó hIfearnáin (2015) has looked into the case of Manx, a minority language used by new speakers, but for which no traditional L1 speakers remain. As for Irish, several authors have examined how possible conflicts can arise between native and new speakers around the notions of

authenticity and language ownership during shift (O'Rourke and Walsh 2015, O'Rourke 2011, Nic Fhlannchadha and Hickey 2018 among others). Others have also combined these issues with comparisons between Irish and other minority languages, such as Le Dû (2013) with the case of Breton and O'Rourke and Ramallo (2011) with that of Galician. Nevertheless, with the exception of Hornsby's (2015) article 'The "new" and "traditional" speaker dichotomy: bridging the gap', which focuses on Breton and Yiddish but touches upon the need to find compromises between different speaker categories more generally, there appears to be a gap in the research as far as a direct comparison between community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness' is concerned. As a matter of fact, most previous research focuses chiefly on either one of the two sides or on the speakers themselves. To my knowledge, this is also true in the case of Irish.

The aim of the present dissertation is thus to explore the arguments that both currents of thought put forward in the context of Irish in the Republic of Ireland. More specifically, I will attempt to answer the following question: *should a community-oriented language policy approach and 'new speakerness' be regarded as independent or as two sides of the same coin?* To put it differently, are these approaches mutually exclusive or can (or even should) they be combined for Irish to survive? In this context, my hope is to provide useful insights into Ireland's current sociolinguistic landscape by establishing where the focus of its language policy should be – or, in other words, which one of the two approaches (if any) may be considered the 'best' and why. What exactly is meant by this will become clearer later on in this dissertation. While generalisations are of course difficult, I also hope that my work can offer useful inputs for research on other minority languages that struggle in a globalised world, in which linguistic diversity is put to the test. It is important to note that the focus of this research will be on the Republic of Ireland alone, and that the analysis will therefore not extend to Northern Ireland, where traditional *Gaeltacht* communities are non-existent nowadays, although there are people with a knowledge of the language (Walsh 2011: 36–39).

1.3 Relevance of the Research

The salience of this dissertation lies in the fact that – since the formation of the Republic in 1949 (McDermott 2011: 26–27) – Ireland has been undergoing a process of great social change that also engages trends in language use. Examples of such change can be observed in terms of identity: recent public debates, such as that on the Irish abortion referendum in 2018 (Anon. 2018), have revealed a significant transformation in traditional social patterns. Other relevant areas of renewal are those of migration and economic development, which have radically reshaped the country. This has, for instance, been observed by McCubbin (2010: 457), who states that 'Ireland's ethnolinguistic profile has grown increasingly diverse in recent years as net immigration outpaced net emigration on an annual basis from 1996 until 2008. Immigration during this period was fuelled by rapid economic growth'.

The relevance of these non-linguistic transformations to the issues of language maintenance and shift is clearly illustrated by Ó Flatharta et al. (2009: 37): 'The old certainties of nation, religion and tradition are challenged by the unprecedented mobility of the young and the old. […] Against this backdrop of profound change, the preservation and promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity is a concern for human society at all levels'. Similarly, Mac Giolla Chríost (2012: 1) notes that 'Irish society, north and south, is changing and the status of the Irish language is changing with it'. It is thus essential to understand how Irish language shift can be tackled in this dynamic context, which puts into question what was previously considered 'normal', also in terms of language use. This entails looking into the diversity of speaker profiles and how language policy relates to them.

1.4 Methodology and Structure

As far as methodology is concerned, the present dissertation is divided into two main components: a desk-research part involving the analysis of a corpus of scientific texts for each side of the debate, as well as of official publications and

reports, and an empirical research part involving a series of interviews with three experts in the domain. The latter serves as a complement to the former with the aim to examine the subject more closely and delve deeper into a set of crucial points. More specifically, this dissertation is structured as follows:

- In Chapter 2, I will carry out a historical overview of the Irish language so as to present the key facts and events that caused its decline over time. I will also refer to a number of relevant aspects of Ireland's political history in order to provide the bigger picture, in particular with regard to the Irish revival.

- Chapter 3 will be devoted to a description of the current language policy framework for Irish. Here, I shall detail recent and present-day measures and undertakings, as well as their legal foundations, and address the role of the language in the education system.

- Chapter 4 will provide a glimpse into the challenges that Irish faces today. First, I shall draw a demographic profile of Ireland with an emphasis on data pertaining to the language. Then, I will describe the main issues that emerge from the literature. I will also look at these points against the background of present-day policy goals. Finally, I shall introduce and contextualise the debate between community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness'.

- Chapters 5 and 6 will focus on community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness', respectively. More precisely, I will detail the theoretical anchoring of each approach and the main arguments and recommendations of its advocates, including relevant research findings.

- In Chapter 7, I shall present two interviews conducted with two leading experts representing each side of the debate, namely Professor Conchúr Ó Giollagáin of the University of the Highlands and Islands (community-oriented language policy) and Professor Bernadette O'Rourke of the

University of Glasgow ('new speakerness'). Moreover, I will provide an institutional perspective to allow a comprehensive analysis of the subject and complete the information detailed in the previous chapters and sections. To this effect, I will present an interview with Edel Ní Chorráin, Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Education Services of *Foras na Gaeilge*.

- Chapter 8 will be devoted to an analysis of the debate as outlined in the preceding chapters. Here, I will focus on an assessment of the two approaches and on an analysis of the challenges and opportunities they entail. For this purpose, I will draw a comparison rooted in policy evaluation on the basis of three criteria. I shall attempt to answer my research question and evaluate the possibility of adopting a global approach encompassing both research strands. This will provide a stepping stone towards a discussion on future perspectives.

- Finally, in Chapter 9 I will present the conclusions and summarise the findings of this dissertation. Here, I will also discuss the limitations of my work and the need for further research, as well as possible implications for other minority languages.

1.4.1 Methodology for the Interviews

I conducted the interviews presented in this dissertation via Skype, on the basis of a series of questions that I sent to the respondents a few days in advance. Professor Ó Giollagáin was interviewed on 15 June 2020, Professor O'Rourke on 22 June 2020, and Ms Ní Chorráin on 21 August 2020. I recorded each interview for the purposes of the present dissertation and stored the recordings privately for further reference. Then, I sent each respondent the excerpts containing their own answers, so that they could review and approve them. I did not include a transcript of the interviews in the present dissertation.

The idea of these interviews was not to compare the respondents' reaction to the same set of questions, nor to collect quantitative data. Rather, my aim was to engage in a conversation with the interviewees by using the questions as a starting point, so that they had the opportunity to explain their opinion and comment on it freely. Hence, to delve deeper into the arguments proposed by each side, I adapted every interview by choosing different questions – ten in the case of Professor Ó Giollagáin, eight (plus one extra question) in the interview with Professor O'Rourke, and eight (plus one extra question) in the case of Ms Ní Chorráin[6]. In addition, where I deemed it useful, I included some contrasting arguments to stimulate the discussion on the topic, as well as to find common points and differences.

It goes without saying that these interviews are not intended to be representative of the opinions of all Irish language policy experts. Their purpose is rather to deliver a more detailed interpretation of the situation from the viewpoints of experts who are familiar with the same issue, but see it from different angles. A list of all questions can be found in Annex 1.

[6] The difference in the number of questions is due to time constraints: the first interview took longer than expected, so two questions were removed from the second and the third one in order to ensure correct timing. Where possible, extra questions were then asked spontaneously on the basis of the discussion.

Chapter 2 Historical Backdrop

Before introducing the discussion on the tension between community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness', it is necessary to put the debate into context. The aim of this research is not to provide a detailed analysis of the history of Ireland, nor to focus on Irish language policy exclusively from a historical perspective. In the following paragraphs, I will therefore only discuss the main historical facts linked to the decline of Irish. This will help to better identify and grasp many of the key points and issues that have defined this complex subject up to this day.

2.1 Irish Under British Rule

The Irish language – *Gaeilge* – is an Indo-European language, more precisely a Celtic language belonging to the Goidelic branch, that was brought to Ireland by the Celts between 500 and 300 BCE (Grin and Vaillancourt 1999: 73, Ó Siadhail 1989 cited in Ó Laoire 2005: 255). By the Middle Ages, it served as the primary means of communication on the island (McDermott 2011: 25–26), a position that it preserved even after the arrival of the Vikings and the Anglo-Normans, who brought with them their respective languages (Hindley 1990: 3–4). It was with the English conquest of Ireland in 1603 that Irish began to drastically decline, as the English dismantled the local social, political and cultural institutions and started imposing their imperialist rule through the implementation of 'Anglicisation' policies (Ó Laoire 2005: 255). The outcome was that the status of Irish, compared to that of English, was considerably lowered, thus resulting in a loss of prestige of the local language (McDermott 2011: 26). As noted by Laukaitis (2010: 221), Irish became a 'vernacular of the poor' that was 'in opposition to English authority, progress, and civility'.

This demise was later facilitated by the introduction of the Anglican-controlled National School system in 1831 (Laukaitis 2010: 222). The new school system was

established to provide education to the poor (McDermott 2011: 26), but at the same time it was instrumental in replacing Irish with English by enforcing use of the latter among Irish-speaking pupils, who were punished if they spoke their first language (Darmody and Daly 2015: 15). Consequently, the possibilities for Irish to find domains in which it could prosper and be of practical use were drastically reduced due to its lower prestige, as English had become essential for emigration, education, and politics, as well as for upward social mobility (Ó Laoire 2005: 257). Nic Congáil (2012: 433) points out that Irish speakers were often willing to dissociate themselves from their language since it was linked to poverty, which means that English was consciously embraced by a part of the Irish-speaking population and was preferred to Irish, both because of its social value and because of the economic advantages and opportunities it offered. In this regard, Fishman (1991: 122) notes the 'establishment of a dominant English-speaking class in towns and urban areas which later developed into all-English cities'.

2.2 The Great Famine

British rule and the imposition of English-medium education were not however the sole factors in instigating the shift from Irish to English across most of the island. Another major event served as a catalyst in the process that led Irish to become a threatened minority language[7] in its very own homeland, where it once thrived as the means of communication for the majority of the population: the Great Famine of 1845-1849 – in Irish *Gorta Mór* (Mac Gréil 2009: 38) – further undermined its survival by causing death and emigration (Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Dhonnabháin 2015: 181). According to Hindley (1990: 14–19, who cites the 1841 census and Anderson 1846), in 1841 the total population of Ireland was slightly over

[7] A minority language can be defined in several ways. Here, the criteria used by Grin (1989: 5–8) to refer to Irish and other European minority languages may be taken as a reference: a minority language is spoken by less than 50% of the population in a specific geographical space, it is not a majority language in any other country, it competes with a majority language (from which it is different enough for the two not to be mutually intelligible), and it is spoken by a minority ethnic group (slangs are for instance not included here). In his definition, Grin also excludes extinct and near-extinct languages such as Cornish.

8 million, of which roughly 4 million were Irish speakers[8]. The famine, which was due to the failure of the potato crop for the second year in a row, however caused the death of around 1.5 million people and the emigration of another 1 million (Ó Laoire 2005: 258, Pecnikova and Slatinska 2019: 48)[9]. This event had a devastating effect not only on the country itself, but also on the language's vitality: western Ireland, a rural and economically weaker region where most Irish-speaking communities were located (i.e. today's *Gaeltacht*), suffered the biggest impact. This strongly contributed to the sharp decline in the number of Irish speakers in the heartland, which was supposed to be the stronghold of Irish in what by then had already become a largely English-speaking island. The Great Famine further lowered the prestige of Irish, as English was increasingly associated with wealth, power, and a better future (Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Dhonnabháin 2015: 181).

As a result of the English colonisation and the Great Famine, the number of Irish speakers had plummeted to just over 600,000 by the beginning of the 20th century, a fall that continued in the subsequent years (Hindley 1990: 23, who cites census reports). According to Ó Laoire (2005: 257), by 1911 only 17.6% of the total population was reported to speak Irish. These figures clearly highlight the extent of the decline the language underwent in a very short amount of time, with an astonishing drop during the 19th century in particular. Irish went from being the most widely spoken vernacular on the island to being replaced by English in the majority of life's domains. Paradoxically, the support for the language had, however, started to grow at the end of the 19th century (McDermott 2011: 26). As a matter of fact, although it is true that Irish was on the brink of disappearance, numerous efforts were made early on to change the course of its decline. In this context,

[8] Hindley (1990: 14) explains that the first attempt to record the number of Irish speakers only took place in 1851. Data prior to that year are thus the result of estimates, which means that the figures reported here might be partly inaccurate and should be regarded as an approximation.
[9] *The Great Irish Famine Online* website reports corresponding figures regarding the population in 1841 and the decline caused by the Great Famine. However, it also points out that the results of the 1841 census are understated and that it is believed that more than 8.75 million people lived in Ireland before the Great Famine. See also: Geography Department, University College Cork and Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (n.d.) *The Great Irish Famine Online* [online] available from <https://dahg.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=8de2b863f4454cbf93387dacb5cb8412> [28 July 2020].

Conradh na Gaeilge was one of the main driving forces – if not the primary one – in the revival of Irish.

2.3 *Conradh na Gaeilge* and the Irish Revival

Conradh na Gaeilge (in English, the Gaelic League) was founded in 1893 by Douglas Hyde as an organisation for the preservation of Irish (Laukaitis 2010: 224, McDermott 2011: 26). Its overarching aim was to bring Ireland back to its precolonial state by replacing English with Irish. *Conradh na Gaeilge* was unique in that it was open to all social classes and creeds and it was the first nationalist organisation to include women as well as men (Nic Congáil 2012: 432–433). It therefore embraced people of all social backgrounds. A central notion in *Conradh na Gaeilge*'s ideology was the indissoluble bond between the Irish language and the Irish nation, as stated by Micheal O'Hickey, vice president of the organisation at the time: '[A nation] is the soul, "the very breath", the vivifying principle, the whole atmosphere and environment of a distinctive people… A distinctive language is the surest and most powerful bond of nationality' (O'Hickey 1898 cited in Laukaitis 2010: 225).

This view, strongly inspired by the Herderian notion of language (see for example Crowley 2016: 211–212), therefore revolved around the *need* to preserve Irish and to revive it. *Conradh na Gaeilge*'s agenda was based on a romanticised ideal of 'Irishness', and Irish-speaking communities in the west of Ireland were viewed as a model for a re-Gaelicised Irish nation (Nic Congáil 2012: 434). This ideological foundation led the Leaguers to champion the language maintenance movement between the end of the 19th century and the first part of the 20th century, up until the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922, which marked the beginning of Ireland's independence (Mac Giolla Chríost 2012: 399). Thanks in part to *Conradh na Gaeilge*'s support, the birth of the Free State was shaped by a series of practical undertakings that had a significant effect in enhancing the language's overall status. Four main goals were set, namely: (i) to maintain Irish as a community language in

the *Gaeltacht*, where it was already spoken; (ii) to increase the number of speakers of Irish through the education system; (iii) to promote the use of the language in the public service; and (iv) to implement corpus planning[10] measures (Ó Riagáin 1997 cited in Ó Giollagáin 2014a: 22).

This took the form of concrete actions in various domains. For example, it was declared in the Free State's Constitution that Irish was the country's national language (Ó Laoire 2005: 256), which anchored the status of Irish in law[11]. It is however important to note that English was equally recognised as an official language, according to Article 4 of the Free State's Constitution. The situation was further clarified with the revised Constitution of 1937, *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, which declared Irish as the national and first official language, while English became the second official language. Specific measures were also taken to protect and preserve the *Gaeltacht*: in 1926, *Coimisiún na Gaeltachta* – the body in charge of the review of Irish language policy – defined *Fíor-Ghaeltacht* (the 'true' *Gaeltacht*) all districts in which at least 80% of the population was Irish-speaking, according to the 1911 census. On the other hand, areas in which Irish was spoken by 25-79% of the population were defined *Breac-Ghaeltacht* and were supposed to be gradually included in the *Fíor-Ghaeltacht* (Mac Giolla Chríost 2012: 399–401). In terms of maintenance infrastructure, efforts were made, for instance, to standardise the language and modernise it, to produce official documents and street signage in Irish, and to recruit proficient speakers as civil servants (Ó Riagáin 1992 cited in Mac Giolla Chríost 2012: 400).

The above gives an idea of the change that was underway – predominantly at an institutional level – after Ireland's independence, with policies being implemented

[10] As explained by Pułaczewska (2015: 13), 'Corpus planning changes the resources of a language variety, usually making it more adequate to the needs of communication. Typically, it seeks to eventually increase the uses of a variety by developing its resources – spelling conventions, dictionaries and new lexis, as well as prescribed grammars for certain uses'.

[11] This is a good example of the work undertaken by the government in terms of status planning, which according to Kloss (1969: 81) is concerned with the status of a language in relation to other languages or a national government, and how this position can be heightened or lowered. The status of Irish was considerably improved through its officialisation.

to secure the legal status of Irish and ensure the resumption of its use across the whole country.

2.3.1 The Role of the Education System: a Solution?

Conradh na Gaeilge's huge influence as a language maintenance organisation was particularly evident in the effects it had on the education system. As explained by Laukaitis (2010: 228), to attain its goal of re-Gaelicising Ireland, it considered compulsory Irish as a pillar of its agenda and pushed the newly formed government of the Irish Free State to implement a series of educational reforms that promoted Irish as the national language. Besides working on corpus and status planning measures, the government therefore also engaged significantly with language education planning[12]. The reason for this was that *Conradh na Gaeilge*'s leaders viewed the English-medium National School system as the main cause of the decline of Irish. Therefore, they believed that education could and *should* be the driving force of the reverse process as well. The method of immersion education was therefore adopted, infant classes were taught in Irish, and the teachers of all other classes were required to teach at least one hour of Irish per day (Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Dhonnabháin 2015: 182). A further meaningful step was the introduction of Irish as a compulsory subject for the Leaving Certificate[13] in 1934 (Mac Giolla Chríost 2012: 400).

[12] Grin (2003: 170) distinguishes two types of education planning: acquisition planning and skill development. On the one hand, acquisition planning 'aims to increase the number of users, whether in relative or in absolute terms, […]. Successful acquisition planning results in an increase in the number or proportion of persons who can use the target language *at a given level of competence*, without culling these speakers from lower competence groups'. On the other, skill development 'focuses on increasing the skill level of users, without necessarily increasing the absolute number or percentage of the latter'. Referring to these definitions, it could be said that during the first phase of language policy in Ireland, the government engaged decidedly in acquisition planning, albeit with no solid grounding.

[13] In Ireland, Leaving Certificate examinations are the final examinations of post-primary education. Students sit them when they are 17-18 years of age. See also: Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Staít (State Examinations Commission) (2019) *Description of Certificate Examinations* [online] available from <https://www.examinations.ie/index.php?l=en&mc=ca&sc=sb> [21 April 2020]. I shall further elaborate on the Irish education system in Section 3.4.

However, the aforementioned measures taken by *Conradh na Gaeilge* and the government of the Free State ignored some key facts, which in turn posed a series of problems and, eventually, determined the failure of the policy itself. For example, when it was decided that Irish would be taught for one hour each day to all students in the country, most teachers had no knowledge of the language and less than one quarter of the total population actually spoke it (Atkinson 1969 and Jones 2006 cited in Laukaitis 2010: 231). An essential element for the revival and the maintenance of Irish was therefore missing to begin with, since the newly implemented policies had set an extremely ambitious goal without providing all the tools needed to achieve it. *Conradh na Gaeilge* and the Free State's government thus engaged in a top-down policy that was more concerned with the final objective than with the means to attain it, which resulted in the institutionalised imposition of Irish through the schools as a be-all and end-all. Consequently, the responsibility given to the education system was too much of a burden for it to bear. Grin and Vaillancourt (1999: 74) explain that the Irish State 'failed to implement a full-fledged policy of functioning through the medium of Irish; language promotion, in addition to being confined to the stifling context of schools and a reactionary church, became bureaucratised'.

The above illustrates that education planning alone is not enough in the process of language revival. This is not to say that it is unimportant, but that it has to be included in a broader spectrum of policy action. This point is stressed, for instance, by Ó Flatharta et al. (2009: 5): 'The adoption of various policy measures, even if each of them is reasonable in itself, may not be sufficient to protect and promote the language if due account is not taken of this wider context'.

2.4 A Loss of Momentum

In this context, a further problem in *Conradh na Gaeilge*'s and the state's policy was that the underpinning ideology that fuelled the nationalist aspirations of the organisation did not in fact match reality. The romanticised image of the cultural

and spiritual richness of the heartland – which was to be used as an inspiration, a 'blueprint for the re-Gaelicised nation' – largely ignored the harsh reality of life in those impoverished regions (Nic Congáil 2012: 434–437). As illustrated by Mac Giolla Chríost (2012: 402) and Ó Giollagáin (2014a: 29), the ineffectiveness and the lack of pragmatism in this approach became clear in the subsequent years, which also saw the rise of criticism towards Irish, both as a medium for instruction and as a school subject. Moreover, there was considerable ambiguity as far as the definition of the *Gaeltacht* and its geographical boundaries was concerned (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007: 8). Hence, a change in language policy was deemed necessary to be able to attain the goals that had been set at the time of the foundation of the Free State.

The first government department responsible for the Irish language – *Roinn na Gaeltachta* – was created in 1956 through the *Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act*; and in the same year, thanks to the *Gaeltacht Areas Order, 1956*, the *Gaeltacht* was reshaped in an attempt to better represent reality (Mac Giolla Chríost 2012: 402): *Gaeltacht* areas were designated in the counties of Kerry, Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Cork, and Waterford (Government of Ireland 1956a). Section 2(2) of the *Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act* defined the *Gaeltacht* as follows: 'specified areas, being substantially Irish-speaking areas and areas contiguous thereto which, in the opinion of the Government, ought to be included in the Gaeltacht with a view to preserving and extending the use of Irish as a vernacular language' (Government of Ireland 1956b). Other measures were intended to stimulate the economic development and the industrialisation of the west of Ireland, thus halting emigration from the *Gaeltacht* through the creation of jobs. An agency called *Gaeltarra Éireann* was created with this specific purpose in 1957. However, this did not necessarily benefit the language: on the contrary, it contributed to the Anglicisation process, as high numbers of English-speaking workers flowed into the area and the government's centralised approach did not involve local communities in decision-making (Mac Giolla Chríost 2012: 402–403). More generally, the impact of this demographic transformation on the use of Irish was massive, as it undermined the stability of social networks in these areas:

> The growth in non-agricultural employment had resulted in increases in commuting to and from towns. This, combined with the growth in post-primary education (also centred in the towns), changes in shopping and recreation patterns, and shifts in migration patterns all signified a major transformation of social network patterns which occasioned significant changes in patterns of bilingualism (Ó Riagáin 2001: 208).

In the decades that followed, there was a general disengagement from language policy and the state's stance towards the maintenance of Irish became more lenient: from 1973, students no longer needed a pass in their Irish exam to obtain the Leaving Certificate (Ó Giollagáin 2014a: 28). In the same year, Ireland became a member of the European Economic Community (EEC) – which later became the European Union (EU) – but Irish was the only official language of a member state not to be an official working language of the organisation. In 1974, Irish lost its status as a compulsory subject in the entrance examinations for civil servants. As a result, its relevance decreased in all the areas that had previously been considered pivotal, namely those pertaining to the institutional level of language policy intervention: education, public administration, and the domain of law (Mac Giolla Chríost 2012: 403). This led to a considerable lowering of language revival ambitions, and the aim to restore Irish as the sole language of communication was abandoned. Instead, a more 'practical' approach was chosen, whereby Irish was to be revived as a general means of communication and English was prioritised as an essential skill, a necessity in a predominantly English-speaking country. This was strictly related to the salience of the language at an international level (Coimisiún Um Athbheochan na Gaeilge 1965 cited in Mac Giolla Chríost 2012: 403). Hence, the state's approach to Irish underwent a radical transformation:

> From that point onwards, there has been a slow but progressive shift towards a wholly new legal regime for the Irish language in Ireland. This regime is not predicated upon the realisation of national identity via the language, but rather upon recognising Irish speakers as a minority. In other words, the status of Irish became a matter of the rights of individual speakers rather than an historical question regarding the cultural and political dignity of a nation (Mac Giolla Chríost 2012: 404).

The revivalist spirit of the early 20th century thus gave way to a new, pragmatic approach to language policy, as the nationalist drive sparked by *Conradh na Gaeilge* and the founders of the state vanished along the way. Rationality (in terms of advantages and opportunities provided by English as an international, economically powerful language) prevailed, and it could be argued that Irish found itself in a situation similar to that of the colonisation days.

2.5 The Legacy of the Past

Despite the problems described in the previous sections, the importance of past language policy efforts in Ireland should not be overlooked. In particular, the impact that *Conradh na Gaeilge* had is essential in that it deeply transformed Irish society by instilling a newfound pride in its culture and language. Through policy, the status of Irish was restored and the school system was reconstructed. So whilst in practice the nationalist aspiration of replacing English with Irish was not fulfilled, English's cultural hegemony was weakened (Crowley 2016: 210). Moreover, *Conradh na Gaeilge*'s influence extended far beyond the Irish language revival and profoundly affected Ireland's history as a whole, most notably at a political level: the League's more politicised groups enacted the Easter Rising in 1916, which paved the way to independence through the creation of the Free State a few years later (Nic Congáil 2012: 445).

Nowadays, *Conradh na Gaeilge* remains one of the most important organisations for the promotion of the Irish language and culture, with more than 200 branches around the world and an agenda encompassing a variety of topics and activities such as the protection of the speakers' language rights, Irish language courses, and support for other organisations. As of today, its main goal, according to Section (a)

of its Constitution, is 'to revive the Irish language as the common language in Ireland'[14].

[14] Conradh na Gaeilge (2012) *What is Conradh na Gaeilge?* [online] available from <https://cnag.ie/en/info/conradh-na-gaeilge/whatiscnag.html> [5 April 2020]. The website points out that the English version of the Constitution (from 2012) is currently being updated.

Chapter 3 Present-Day Irish Language Policy

Having touched on a number of crucial historical factors, in the following sections I will move on to an overview of more recent developments. Irish language policy consists of a broad and complex set of instruments that cover a wide range of areas, and it would be impossible to summarise all of them here. Therefore, for the purposes of this research, I will only discuss the most important ones.

3.1 Recent Developments and Current Framework

Although the second half of the 20th century marked a rather negative evolution for language maintenance efforts in Ireland, it should be noted that a number of milestones were reached too. An example is the creation in 1978 of *Bord na Gaeilge*, a state body whose remit was defined in Section 3(1) of the *Bord na Gaeilge Act 1978*: 'The Board shall promote the Irish language and, in particular, its use as a living language and as an ordinary means of communication' (Government of Ireland 1978). Among its activities, *Bord na Gaeilge* offered financial support to the voluntary sector and provided community schemes for the use of Irish (Ó Laoire 2005: 271).

Similarly, in 1980 *Údarás na Gaeltachta* replaced *Gaeltarra Éireann* as the authority with the remit to promote economic growth in *Gaeltacht* areas. This reorganisation was carried out to better represent the local communities in the decision-making process and increase sensitivity to language-related issues. These were elements that had been missing from the approach taken by *Gaeltarra Éireann* up until that point (Mac Giolla Chríost 2012: 405). Today, *Údarás na Gaeltachta* still plays a major role in the economic, social and cultural development of the *Gaeltacht* through funding and the creation of jobs, with the underlying goal of supporting Irish as an intergenerationally transmitted community language[15].

[15] Údarás na Gaeltachta (n.d.) *What we do* [online] available from <https://www.udaras.ie/en/about/what-we-do/> [9 July 2020].

Around the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century in particular, Irish language policy gained new momentum through a series of positive developments. For instance, the *Good Friday Agreement* of 1998 – which was instrumental in foregrounding linguistic human rights in the Irish context (Mac Giolla Chríost 2012: 408–409) – stated the necessity of creating a body for the promotion of the language across the whole island of Ireland. This body was established a year later with the name of *Foras na Gaeilge*, an intergovernmental institution that encourages the use of Irish in both the private and public sectors on the basis of Part III of the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*[16]. *Foras na Gaeilge* replaced *Bord na Gaeilge* (Ó Laoire 2005: 272).

Another important achievement was the *Education Act, 1998*. The goals of this legal document include the following, which are stated in Section 6(i) and 6(j) respectively: 'to contribute to the realisation of national policy and objectives in relation to the extension of bi-lingualism in Irish society and in particular the achievement of a greater use of the Irish language at school and in the community'; as well as 'to contribute to the maintenance of Irish as the primary community language in *Gaeltacht* areas' (Government of Ireland 1998).

In 2003, the *Official Languages Act* was passed with the aim to improve the provision of public services in Irish. This occurs, for example, through language schemes for the provision of services in Irish, which have to be implemented by public bodies[17]. The *Act* also involves a control mechanism: an independent language commissioner (*An Coimisinéir Teanga*) can intervene if the bodies do not respect their commitments towards the use of the language. Moreover, the document declares that all Irish citizens have the right to communicate in English or in Irish with the state (Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Dhonnabháin 2015: 184).

[16] Foras na Gaeilge (2020) *About Foras na Gaeilge* [online] available from <https://www.forasnagaeilge.ie/about/about-foras-na-gaeilge/?lang=en> [14 April 2020].
[17] Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (2020) *Official Languages Act 2003* [online] available from <https://www.chg.gov.ie/gaeltacht/the-irish-language/official-languages-act-2003/#:~:text=The%20Official%20Languages%20Act%202003,services%20through%20the%20Irish%20language.&text=The%20Office%20of%20An%20Coimisin%C3%A9ir,under%20the%20Act%20in%202004> [30 October 2020].

From an international perspective, in 2005 Ireland requested that Irish become an official and working language of the European Union, albeit with a derogation: only certain texts were to be translated into Irish[18]. The language was awarded this status in 2007[19] and, since then, there has been a constant rise in the importance of Irish in the organisation: the volume of translation into Irish has grown exponentially, and by 2022 it is expected that the language will reach full status in the EU, without any derogation[20].

Year	Event
1893	Foundation of *Conradh na Gaeilge*
1922	Formation of the Irish Free State
1926	*Coimisiún na Gaeltachta* defines *Fíor-Ghaeltacht* and *Breac-Ghaeltacht*
1937	The revised Constitution, *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, enters into force
1949	Formation of the Republic of Ireland
1956	The *Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act* and the *Gaeltacht Areas Order, 1956* enter into force; creation of *Roinn na Gaeltachta*
1957	Creation of *Gaeltarra Éireann*
1973	A pass in Irish is no longer required to obtain the Leaving Certificate
1974	Irish is no longer compulsory in the entrance examinations for civil servants
1978	Creation of *Bord na Gaeilge*
1980	Creation of *Údarás na Gaeltachta*, which replaces *Gaeltarra Éireann*
1998	*Good Friday Agreement*; the *Education Act, 1998* enters into force
1999	Creation of *Foras na Gaeilge*, which replaces *Bord na Gaeilge*
2003	The *Official Languages Act* enters into force; creation of a control mechanism through *An Coimisinéir Teanga* (the language commissioner)
2007	Irish becomes an official and working language of the EU

Table 1: A bird's eye view of the main events in Irish language policy up until the early 2000s

[18] European Commission (2020) *The Irish language in the EU: on the way to full status* [online] available from <https://ec.europa.eu/ireland/news/key-eu-policy-areas/the-irish-language-in-the-eu_en> [15 August 2020].
[19] European Union (2020) *EU languages* [online] available from <https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-languages_en> [15 August 2020].
[20] European Commission (2020) *The Irish language in the EU: on the way to full status* [online] available from <https://ec.europa.eu/ireland/news/key-eu-policy-areas/the-irish-language-in-the-eu_en> [15 August 2020].

3.2 The *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030*

The *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* is the official state policy for Irish[21], published by the government in December of 2010[22]. This long-term plan is based on a preliminary report drafted by a team of experts at Fiontar[23], Dublin City University, which was published in 2009. The preliminary report was in turn prepared on the basis of a *Statement for the Irish Language*, a document issued by the government in 2006 and containing 13 objectives for the future of Irish (Ó Flatharta et al. 2009: 3). Various government departments, as well as other bodies and agencies, cooperate within the scope of the *20-Year Strategy*, and the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DCHG)[24] acts as the main coordinator and oversees the overall implementation (Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht 2018: 3). Given that – at the time of writing – this undertaking is exactly halfway through its life cycle and is therefore highly topical, it is useful to break down its central features.

3.2.1 Structure and Goals

The *20-Year Strategy* aims to 'create positive circumstances for greater use by our people of the language ability that they have and for a real increase in that ability over time' (Government of Ireland 2010: 7). This is explained in greater detail in the Fiontar preliminary report with the concepts of 'capacity', 'opportunities', and

[21] Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (2018) *Action Plan 2018-2022* [online] available from <https://www.chg.gov.ie/gaeltacht/20-year-strategy-for-the-irish-language-2010-2030/action-plan-2018-2022/> [5 September 2020].
[22] Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (2015) *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language* [online] available from <https://www.chg.gov.ie/gaeltacht/20-year-strategy-for-the-irish-language-2010-2030/> [5 September 2020].
[23] Fiontar agus Scoil na Gaeilge is an interdisciplinary school linked to Dublin City University (DCU) that offers Irish-medium education programmes. See also: Fiontar & Scoil na Gaeilge (n.d.) *Welcome!* [online] available from <https://www.dcu.ie/fiontar_scoilnagaeilge/english/index.shtml> [15 August 2020].
[24] According to Section 2 of the *Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Alteration of Name of Department and Title of Minister) Order 2020* statutory instrument, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has been renamed as the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media on 30 September 2020 (Government of Ireland 2020).

'attitudes'. 'Capacity' refers to the ability to speak the language, which is developed both formally through the education system and informally at home, within the family. 'Opportunities' refer to the existence of situations in which the language can actually be used – in the case of Irish, this includes arrangements that promote the use of the language in social, economic, and institutional settings. Finally, 'attitudes' (in the sense of positive attitudes to the use of the language) concern the conversion of capacity and opportunities into actual language usage by speakers (i.e. the *will* to speak Irish). The *20-Year Strategy* is thus aimed at increasing capacity, opportunities, and attitudes through a series of measures, with each measure mainly tackling one of those three dimensions (Ó Flatharta et al. 2009: 5–6, see also Grin 2003: 43–44). These measures are divided into nine Areas for Action[25], which include specific practical undertakings: (i) Education; (ii) the Gaeltacht; (iii) Family Transmission of the Language – Early Intervention; (iv) Administration, Services and Community; (v) Media and Technology; (vi) Dictionaries; (vii) Legislation and Status; (viii) Economic Life; and (ix) Cross-Cutting Initiatives (Government of Ireland 2010: 11).

Concretely, the *20-Year Strategy* seeks to attain the following goals (Government of Ireland 2010: 9)[26]:

- increase the number of people with a knowledge of Irish from 1.66 million to 2 million;

[25] The Areas for Action draw on a framework developed by UNESCO, which is not included in the Fiontar report and uses the following nine criteria to assess the vitality of a language: (i) absolute number of speakers; (ii) intergenerational language transmission; (iii) community members' attitudes towards their own language; (iv) shifts in domains of language use; (v) governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use; (vi) type and quality of documentation; (vii) response to new domains and media; (viii) availability of materials for language education and literacy; and (ix) proportion of speakers within the total population (Government of Ireland 2010: 6).

[26] In the original Fiontar DCU report, the goals differ slightly and are detailed as follows: (i) increasing the number of daily speakers of Irish outside the education system from 72,000 to 250,000; (ii) increasing the number of daily speakers of Irish in the *Gaeltacht*; and (iii) increasing the number of people who can use state services in Irish and access Irish-medium television, radio, and print media (Ó Flatharta et al. 2009: 11). According to Ó Giollagáin (2020), this difference in the number of daily speakers is due to an interpretation of the figures, namely on whether daily speakers inside and/or outside the education system are taken into account.

- increase the number of daily speakers outside the education system from 83,000 to 250,000;
- increase the number of daily speakers in the *Gaeltacht* by 25% in overall terms;
- increase the number of people who can use state services in Irish and access Irish-medium television, radio, and print media.

This demonstrates an obvious attempt to define clear, tangible aims. Nevertheless, the targets set by the government are undoubtedly ambitious and challenging considering the complex history of Irish language policy, as I have detailed in the previous chapters and sections. The authors of the Fiontar report explain that for Irish to be used more widely, and so for these goals to be achieved, its use needs to be made 'normal' (Ó Flatharta et al. 2009: 12). As illustrated by Grin (2003: 202–203), this 'normalisation', which translates the Catalan term *normalització*, summarises the three dimensions of capacity, opportunities, and attitudes[27].

From a practical point of view, it should be noted that the *20-Year Strategy* includes measures aimed both at the preservation of Irish in the *Gaeltacht* and at its promotion in the rest of the country. In this context, it focuses on the *Gaeltacht* as 'a distinctive language region, rather than one of bilingualism', but more generally emphasises the advantage offered by English, which is to be 'retained through the development of a bilingual society' (Government of Ireland 2010: 3). This aspect is also included in the Fiontar report: 'Encouraging the strengthening of Irish in light of the established domestic role of English involves a policy of bilingualism since most Irish people's communicative needs are met by English' (Ó Flatharta et al. 2009: 10). Finally, it is worth mentioning that – in contrast to what happened at the outset of Irish language policy during the nationalist phase – a stronger emphasis on the participative role of the speakers is visible in the *20-Year Strategy*, whereby people are encouraged and not forced to use the language: one of the aims listed in the final version is to 'ensure that in public discourse and in public services the use

[27] In his book, Grin uses the term 'desire' instead of 'attitudes' (Grin 2003: 203).

of Irish or English will be, as far as practical, a choice for the citizen to make' (Government of Ireland 2010: 3).

3.2.2 An Update – The *Action Plan 2018-2022*

The main update of the *20-Year Strategy* is provided by the *Action Plan 2018-2022*, which was published in June 2018 by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DCHG) as the result of a consultation process between the stakeholders involved in the *20-Year Strategy*. This plan is aimed at accelerating the implementation of the main policy over the course of a five-year period, thus facilitating the attainment of the objectives in the nine Areas for Action. It also updates the overall strategy by tackling the points that require improvement with a renewed outlook, as well as by evaluating what has already been put into place (Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht 2018: 1–4). The goal of the *Action Plan 2018-2022* is thus to offer 'specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-specific actions'[28].

In the plan, the progress of the *20-Year Strategy* in the years following its implementation is considered generally positive: at the time of the report's publication, there had been almost €350 million of investment through funding by the DCHG alone and numerous goals had been achieved in all Areas for Action (Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht 2018: 14). Some examples include the implementation of the *Gaeltacht Act 2012* (see Section 3.3) and of the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022* (see Section 3.4.1); the creation of 500 jobs per year in the *Gaeltacht* by *Údarás na Gaeltachta*; the development of a language training programme in the public sector; support for businesses and the voluntary sector; various forms of support for families who raise their children in Irish (for example funding schemes, Family Support Centres, the distribution of information for parents); and the implementation of schemes and strategies for the education

[28] Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (2018) *Action Plan 2018-2022* [online] available from <https://www.chg.gov.ie/gaeltacht/20-year-strategy-for-the-irish-language-2010-2030/action-plan-2018-2022/> [5 September 2020].

system and the *Gaeltacht* (Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht 2018: 14–16). However, despite these encouraging results, the plan also draws attention to a worrying trend concerning the number of Irish speakers (Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht 2018: 17), which I will explore in Chapter 4.

3.3 The *Gaeltacht Act 2012*

While the *20-Year Strategy* provides the overarching set of guiding principles for contemporary Irish language policy, the *Gaeltacht Act 2012* is the main legal instrument for the regulation of the language's maintenance today. For this reason it also plays a major role in defining the current situation. The *Gaeltacht Act 2012* is an amended version of the 1956 *Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act* (Ó Giollagáin 2014a: 36–37) and it gives legislative effect to some aspects of the *20-Year Strategy* (Ó Giollagáin 2014a: 25), meaning that the two documents are complementary.

The main innovation of the *Gaeltacht Act 2012* is that it redefines the *Gaeltacht* in a fundamental way, namely on the basis of linguistic criteria instead of considering it a geographical entity, as was previously the case (Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Dhonnabháin 2015: 186). On a practical level, this means that *Gaeltacht* areas are redefined as Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas (see Annex 2 for a map): Section 7(1) of the *Act* prescribes that *Gaeltacht* areas designated under the *Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act 1956* will not lose their status; and Section 7(2)-7(16) states that an Irish language plan (whose aim is to promote the language in several domains of life) needs to be prepared and submitted to *Údarás na Gaeltachta* for an area to be recognised as a Gaeltacht Language Planning Area[29]. The plan, which has to be prepared by an organisation adjacent to or based in the area in question, then needs

[29] 26 Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas in total exist in the counties of Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Kerry, Cork, Waterford, and Meath. See also: Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (2015) *List of the 26 Language Planning Areas and Maps* [online] available from <https://www.chg.gov.ie/gaeltacht/20-year-strategy-for-the-irish-language-2010-2030/language-planning-process/list-of-the-26-language-planning-areas-and-maps/> [8 September 2020].

to be approved by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Government of Ireland 2012). In other words, under this legislation, a *Gaeltacht* community must now demonstrate its ability to put into place measures for the preservation and the promotion of Irish, or it will lose its *Gaeltacht* status. The *Act* also prescribes the creation of Gaeltacht Service Towns, which according to Section 9(1), are towns located in or adjacent to a Gaeltacht Language Planning Area that offer public services for that area, or where commercial, social, and recreational facilities which benefit that *Gaeltacht* area are located (Government of Ireland 2012)[30].

A further important change provided by this legislation is that areas outside the *Gaeltacht* can now also be recognised as official language planning entities: they can be designated as Irish Language Networks if they fulfil certain criteria. According to sections 11(1)-11(3) of the *Act*, an Irish Language Network[31] needs to support the use of the language and implement an Irish language plan prepared with the assistance of *Foras na Gaeilge*[32] (Government of Ireland 2012). The creation of such language planning entities outside the *Gaeltacht* is an important addition to the traditional policy approach in Ireland: it broadens the scope of the efforts by opening the door to a new type of language policy, which goes beyond core *Gaeltacht* communities of native speakers and introduces the concept of learner networks as sociolinguistic settings for the maintenance of the language. This point (and, in a way, the *Act* in general) is highly controversial and there are ongoing debates on whether such an innovation is beneficial or detrimental to the language. The next

[30] At the time of writing, two towns have been nominated Gaeltacht Service Towns, namely Leitir Ceanainn (Co. Donegal) and Daingean Uí Chúis (Co. Kerry) (Ní Chorráin 2020a). The process is however ongoing and 14 more towns have been selected as possible Gaeltacht Service Towns. See also: Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (2019) *Gaeltacht Service Towns* [online] available from <https://www.chg.gov.ie/gaeltacht/20-year-strategy-for-the-irish-language-2010-2030/language-planning-process/gaeltacht-service-towns/> [8 September 2020].

[31] Five areas have been selected to become Irish Language Networks on the island of Ireland, three of which are located in the Republic of Ireland (Ní Chorráin 2020b), more precisely in the counties of Dublin (Clondalkin), Clare (Ennis), and Galway (Loughrea). See also: Government of Ireland (2020) *Irish Language Networks* [online] available from <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/784b0-irish-language-networks/> [8 September 2020].

[32] As also noted by Ó Giollagáin (2014b: 107), the *Gaeltacht Act 2012* thus allocates the main responsibility for language planning in the *Gaeltacht* to *Údarás na Gaeltachta*, while it designates *Foras na Gaeilge* as the main organisation for language planning in the rest of the country. In the case of Gaeltacht Service Towns, which can be located within or outside the *Gaeltacht*, the responsibility is shared between the two bodies depending on where the town is, as detailed in Section 9(5)-9(6) of the *Act* (Government of Ireland 2012).

chapters will expand upon this particular aspect, which lies at the heart of the tension between community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness'.

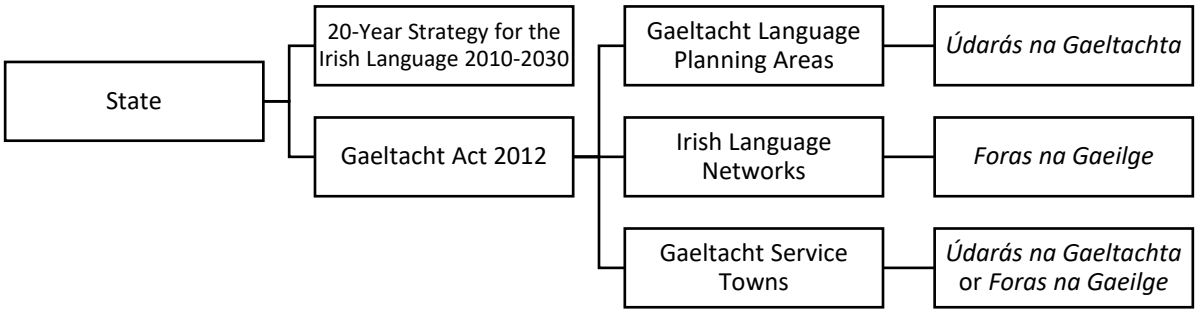

Figure 1: A summary of the Irish language planning mechanism under the *Gaeltacht Act 2012*

3.4 Irish in the Education System Today

Despite the difficulties encountered during the 20th century, the education system continues to play an essential role in the maintenance of Irish, with the language considered a core school subject (Darmody and Daly 2015: vii). In fact, most children are exposed to Irish exclusively in the education system by learning it as a second language (Nic Fhlannchadha and Hickey 2018: 38). Therefore education remains an essential area of intervention for policy-makers and represents a powerful tool in the maintenance of Irish and minority languages in general. Ó Laoire and Harris (2006: 7), for instance, define it as one of the most critical domains in the context of reversing language shift.

Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Dhonnabháin (2015: 186–187) provide a detailed explanation of the Irish education system, which I will briefly summarise for the sake of clarity, as it can be useful in the context of this dissertation. The first level of education in Ireland is that of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), which includes a variety of pre-schools, crèches, etc., and depends on private, community, and voluntary action. Here, children can start to learn Irish in Irish-medium playgroups known as *naíonraí*. The second level is broken down into primary and post-primary education: the former lasts eight years and for most pupils starts at the age of four,

while the latter is divided into a three-year Junior Cycle and a two-year Senior Cycle (which in certain cases can last up to three years). During the Senior Cycle, students are usually between 15 and 18 years of age and can choose one of three programmes: the traditional Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, and the Leaving Certificate Applied, all of which culminate in a final State Examination. In the traditional Leaving Certificate programme, students can choose between more than 30 subjects, five of which are compulsory. Irish is one of them, although – as previously mentioned – since 1973 a pass in the Leaving Certificate examinations is no longer required. Irish is also present in higher education, as some universities offer Irish-medium curriculums and the demand for Irish-medium university programmes is growing (Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Dhonnabháin 2015: 191).

An interesting and unique feature of the Irish school system is that primary and post-primary education are organised on the basis of three different categories: schools can be English-medium, Irish-medium in a *Gaeltacht* region, and Irish-medium in an English-speaking part of the country (Irish immersion schools outside the *Gaeltacht* are known as *Gaelscoileanna*). Even in English-medium schools, L2 Irish is taught as a compulsory subject from the age of 6 to the age of 15 (Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Dhonnabháin 2015: 187). This means that all pupils in Ireland acquire Irish at school in one way or the other, although their ability can vary extensively depending on the type of school they attend (see for example Harris et al. 2006). For instance, English-medium schools in which Irish is taught as an L2 have been reported to yield unsatisfactory results, despite children being taught the language for almost a decade and a total of 1,500 hours (Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Dhonnabháin 2015: 186). As will become clearer later on in this dissertation, this kind of mismatch in speakers' ability is a particularly relevant point in the debate between community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness'.

3.4.1 The *Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022*

As part of the *20-Year Strategy*, the government also implemented the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022*, which 'sets out how the education system will contribute to supporting and promoting the future use of Irish as a living indigenous language in the Gaeltacht' (Department of Education and Skills 2016: 6). More precisely, its goal is to ensure that Irish is used as the medium for communication and instruction in a sufficient number of schools and early years settings, for all school subjects except for languages other than Irish. This is to be achieved, for instance, through increasing the number of schools in the *Gaeltacht* that operate exclusively in Irish – so that pupils can access them more easily – and improving the quality of Irish-medium education in these areas (Department of Education and Skills 2016: 7). Under the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022*, schools in the *Gaeltacht* can apply for the status of Gaeltacht School if they implement a series of language criteria. If they meet the requirements, they are awarded additional resources (Department of Education and Skills 2016: 17–18).

Chapter 4 Current Challenges and Issues

The measures taken by the Irish state, most notably in the institutional domain, are a testament to recent efforts made for the maintenance of Irish; efforts which are certainly not commonplace in the broader context of minority languages, so often left to fend for themselves and – eventually – to vanish. But despite all the work that has been done over the years, Irish still faces multiple challenges and the situation is in many ways far from reassuring. In the following paragraphs, I will detail the current problems in order to complete the general description I have begun in the previous chapters. This will in turn add to the backdrop for the analysis of the debate between community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness'.

4.1 Demographics of a Diverse Ireland

According to the Irish Central Statistics Office (CSO) (2017: 8–15), in 2016 the total population of Ireland was 4,761,865. This figure highlights an increase of 3.8% compared with the 2011 census and confirms the steady population growth that has continued since 1991. However, this increase was generally stronger in the east of Ireland, while in two particular counties – Donegal and Mayo, both located in the west – the population fell (see Annex 3 for a map of Ireland's provinces divided by counties). It is also interesting to note that the distribution of Ireland's population is rather uneven: in 2016, 55.3% of the population was located in Leinster alone, in the east. Furthermore, compared with 2011, the population of urban areas increased by 4.9%, while in rural areas it grew by a mere 2%. In terms of births[33] (63,841 in total), Leinster recorded the highest number by far (36,661), followed by Munster (16,390), Connacht (7,025), and Ulster (3,765 in the counties located in the Republic). As far as the average age of the population is concerned, it should be mentioned that western counties show higher figures. The number of elderly people

[33] Central Statistics Office (2019) *Vital Statistics Annual Report 2016* [online] available from <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-vsar/vitalstatisticsannualreport2016/births2016/> [26 April 2020].

(aged 65 and above) living alone is also mostly higher in the west, with the exception of Dublin city (Central Statistics Office 2017: 21–30). Hence, from a demographic point of view, there is a rather clear difference between eastern and western Ireland. The former is more dynamic, whereas the latter generally evidences features of a rural setting: it is demographically more stagnant in that it is less populated and has an ageing population. This demographic difference between the east and west of Ireland needs to be put into the context of the linguistic differences between the two parts of the country, which I will present in more detail in the following section.

There are also a number of noteworthy aspects with regard to migration and diversity, in particular in light of the social transformation of Ireland that I mentioned in the introduction. For example, the 2016 census (Central Statistics Office 2017: 46–50) indicates that the number of Irish residents born outside the country continued to grow with respect to previous years, with this group accounting for 17.3% of the population in 2016. Ireland is also home to large numbers of foreign citizens, hailing in particular from Poland and the UK, as well as from Lithuania and Romania. Official data indicate that the number of non-Irish nationals fell for the first time since the 2002 census, from 544,357 in 2011 to 535,475 in 2016. Furthermore, for the first time since the 1986-1991 intercensal period, the total net migration was negative, with 22,500 more people leaving the country than arriving (Central Statistics Office 2017: 10). Nevertheless, present-day Ireland is defined by a remarkable degree of diversity: in the year to April 2016, non-Irish immigrants arrived from an impressive 180 countries (Central Statistics Office 2017: 47). Moreover, 612,018 Irish residents spoke a foreign language at home in 2016, a 19% increase from the previous measurements (Central Statistics Office 2017: 54). As pointed out by Ó Laoire (2012: 20), Ireland has moved from being a country of emigration to being an attractive destination for immigrants. These facts give an idea of the complexity and dynamism of the modern Irish ethnocultural and linguistic landscape and, as I shall debate over the course of this dissertation, might pose difficulties as well as provide opportunities for the maintenance of Irish.

4.2 The Irish Language Today – Figures

What is of most relevance for the purpose of this research is the statistical information about the Irish language in particular. In the 2016 census, respondents were asked whether they could speak Irish, which was then followed by a second question on how frequently they used the language. In total, 1,761,420 people were reported to be able to speak Irish (i.e. to have some degree of ability in Irish). This figure equals to a drop of 0.7% compared with 2011 (1,774,437 people). Almost one third of respondents aged between 10 to 19 answered 'no' to the first question (Central Statistics Office 2017: 66).

If daily speakers within the education system are taken into account[34], out of the total number of people who were able to speak Irish only 73,803 claimed to use the language on a daily basis outside the education system (3,382 less than in 2011). There were 111,473 weekly speakers (an increase of 831 compared to 2011), while 586,535 people were reported to speak it less often (26,701 fewer than five years earlier). A particularly interesting finding is that over one quarter of Irish speakers (or 421,274 people) reported that they never spoke Irish outside the education system (Central Statistics Office 2017: 66). If the capacity, opportunities, and attitudes framework used in the Fiontar report for the *20-Year Strategy* is taken as a reference, the fact that such large numbers of respondents have some degree of ability in the language but never use it outside the education system may be interpreted as both worrying and encouraging: on the one hand, it might suggest that people are indeed acquiring Irish (whether at home or at school), which is undoubtedly positive as it shows capacity is being developed; but on the other it could mean that these respondents either choose not to use it or do not have the

[34] These figures reported in the Census 2016 Summary Results include the speakers outside the education system for each category (daily, weekly, etc., as detailed here), plus the daily speakers within the education system who also use the language daily, weekly, etc. (depending on the category considered) outside the education system. For example, the 111,473 weekly speakers are broken down into 104,808 weekly speakers outside the education system only plus 6,665 daily speakers within the education system who also use Irish weekly outside the education system. The same applies to the other categories. See also: Central Statistics Office (2019) *Census 2016 Sapmap Area: State; Theme 3: Irish Language* [online] available from <http://census.cso.ie/sapmap2016/Results.aspx?Geog_Type=S&Geog_Code=S#SAPMAP_T3_300> [23 April 2020].

possibility to do so. At the same time, census data do not provide any information on the level of ability of Irish speakers, which means that those who do not use Irish outside the education system might also simply not be proficient enough to do so. This is a particularly thorny issue that will come up again later on in this dissertation.

	2011	2016
Ability to speak Irish	1,774,437	1,761,420
Daily speakers outside the education system (including daily speakers within)	77,185	73,803
Weekly speakers outside the education system (including daily speakers within)	110,642	111,473
Speakers who use Irish less often outside the education system (including daily speakers within)	613,236	586,535
Speakers who never use Irish outside the education system (including daily speakers within)	438,782	421,274

Table 2: A summary of speaker figures in Ireland in 2011 and 2016 (individuals aged 3 years and over)[35]

Regardless of the reasons for which these speakers of Irish do not actually use the language, it could be argued that they represent a huge untapped potential for its maintenance, especially if compared with the data pertaining to daily or weekly speakers outside the education system. As a matter of fact, if these 'inactive' speakers are excluded, the already fragile Irish-speaking community becomes drastically smaller, given that they make up a considerable portion of total speakers. In this context, Figure 2 below illustrates how the proportion of 'actual' Irish speakers, who use the language on a daily or weekly basis outside the school system, is in fact strikingly low if compared with the percentage of people who use it solely at school. Indeed, the chart highlights that the school system is where most Irish is

[35] Data retrieved from the CSO's website: Central Statistics Office (2020) *EY034: Irish Speakers Aged Three Years and Over 2011 to 2016* [online] available from <https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY034&PLanguage=0> [16 January 2021].

spoken, while people tend to use it less (or not at all) in other domains. This mirrors what I hinted at in Section 3.4 and is in keeping with previous research findings: bilingualism in Ireland – whether it is stable or not – depends more on the production of competent bilinguals through the education system than on the natural reproduction of the Irish-speaking community in other domains (Ó Riagáin 2001: 204).

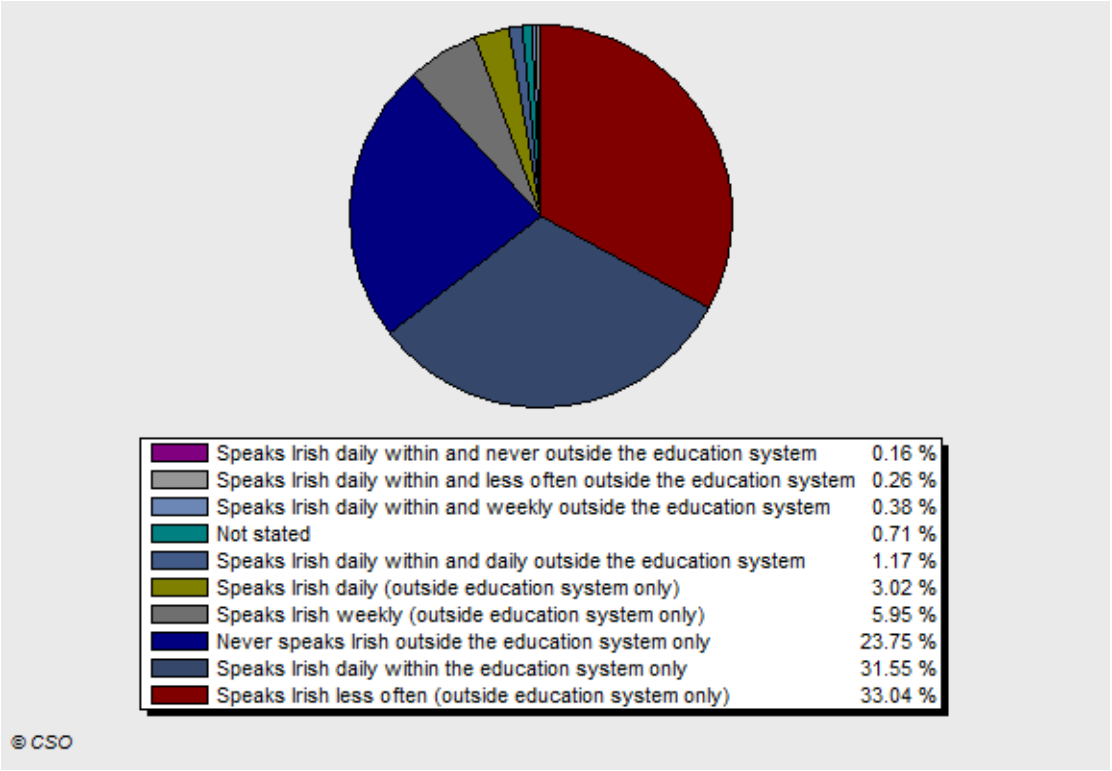

Figure 2: Irish speakers aged 3 years and over by frequency of speaking Irish, 2016[36]. Note that the cohort 'Speaks Irish daily within the education system only' makes up 31.55% of the total

In terms of the geographic distribution of speakers, Figure 3 below shows the percentage of Irish speakers in the Republic by county, while Annex 4 illustrates which areas of Ireland (by electoral division) were home to the largest number of daily Irish speakers in 2016. In light of the demographic information reported in Section 4.1, it becomes clear that the presence of the language remains stronger in

[36] Central Statistics Office (2018) *EY034: Irish Speakers Aged Three Years and Over 2011 to 2016 by Sex, Gaeltacht Areas, Frequency of Speaking Irish and Census Year* [online] available from <https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY034&PLanguage=0> [26 October 2020].

rural settings to this day. Interestingly, both maps show that a considerable proportion of daily Irish speakers also live in the Dublin area, which corresponds to what has already been observed in the past (see for instance Ó Riagáin 2001: 199, Government of Ireland 2010: 25). Indeed, 20.2% of all daily speakers of Irish live in Dublin city and its suburbs[37], although no official *Gaeltacht* area exists there, which suggests that these speakers are for the most part learners who probably use the language in the education system. This coincides with the strong presence of *Gaelscoileanna* in this part of the country (McDermott 2011: 29–30) and reveals somewhat of a paradox in the distribution of speakers.

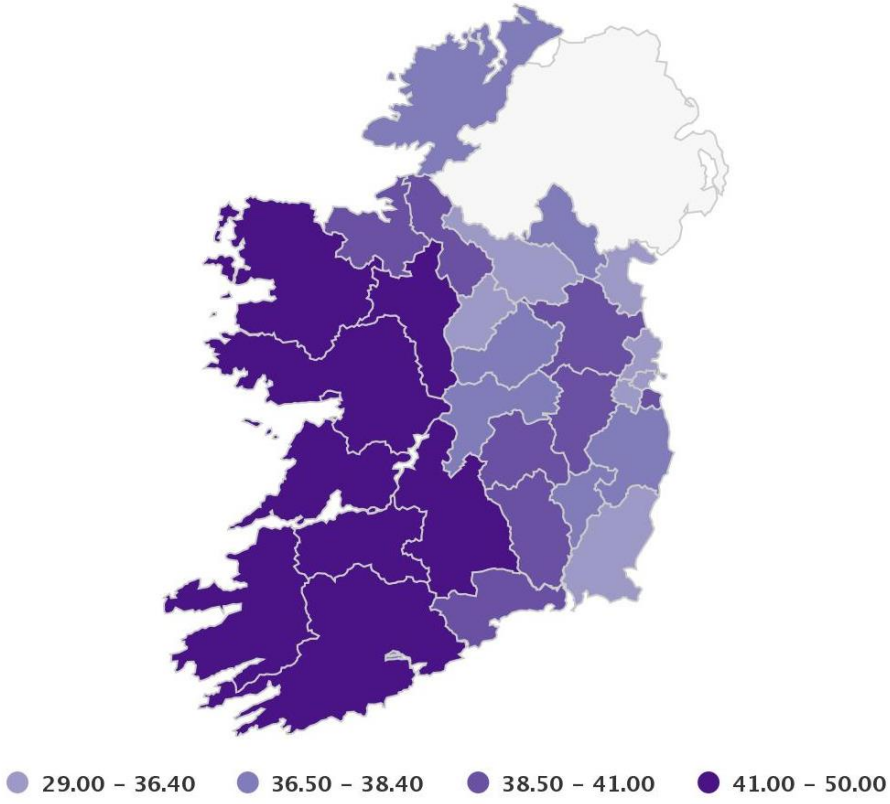

Figure 3: Percentage of Irish speakers (people with some degree of ability in Irish) in each county, 2016[38]. The map clearly shows the gap between the eastern and the western part of Ireland

[37] Central Statistics Office (2019) *Census of Population 2016 – Profile 10 Education, Skills and the Irish Language, Daily speakers* [online] available from <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp10esil/p10esil/ilg/> [25 July 2020].
[38] Central Statistics Office (2019) *Census of Population 2016 – Profile 10 Education, Skills and the Irish Language* [online] available from <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp10esil/p10esil/ilg/> [6 July 2020].

To summarise, what would seem to emerge from this overview is that there is not a lack of people with *some degree of capacity* to use Irish (i.e. Irish speakers *per se*), as the schools appear to produce relatively high numbers of speakers, considering the total population. However, this capacity is for the most part not converted into actual regular use, which becomes apparent when looking at the scant number of people who use Irish on a daily or weekly basis outside the education system. In the Fiontar report for the *20-Year Strategy* (Ó Flatharta et al. 2009: 11), this particular issue is considered of paramount importance: 'The significant gap between those who claim ability to speak and write Irish, and those who actually use it, must be considered the single greatest challenge and opportunity for the nation's language planning'.

	2002	2006	2011	2016
Total population of Ireland	3,750,995	4,057,646	4,370,631	4,569,261
Total Irish speakers	1,570,894	1,656,790	1,774,437	1,761,420
Daily speakers outside the education system (including daily speakers within)	-	72,148	77,185	73,803
Daily speakers outside the education system only	-	53,471	55,554	53,162
Weekly speakers outside the education system (including daily speakers within)	-	102,861	110,642	111,473
Weekly speakers outside the education system only	-	97,089	103,132	104,808

Table 3: Daily and weekly Irish speakers outside the education system (including those who also speak it daily at school) and outside the education system only, compared with the total number of Irish speakers in Ireland and the overall Irish population, 2002-2016. All figures pertain to individuals aged 3 years and over. No information is available for domains of use in 2002[39]

[39] All the data in this table have been retrieved from the CSO's website. A list containing the links for each individual figure can be found in Annex 5. For a general reference, see also: Central Statistics Office (2020) *Central Statistics Office* [online] available from <https://www.cso.ie/en/index.html> [18 September 2020].

Table 3 above offers a bird's eye view of the number of Irish speakers in the country from 2002 to 2016. I have chosen daily and weekly speakers as a reference in that they are the most regular users of the language and thus may be considered the core community of Irish speakers countrywide. I have divided them into speakers outside the education system and speakers outside the education system only, in order to better emphasise the disproportion mentioned earlier.

4.2.1 Speakers in the *Gaeltacht*

As discussed in the previous sections, the *Gaeltacht* is where Irish still functions as a community language. For this reason, these areas represent a particularly delicate aspect of Irish language policy, as it can be argued that the survival of the language in the whole country largely depends on its vitality in the *Gaeltacht* (Ó Flatharta et al. 2009: 8). Therefore it is essential to break down its speaker base and examine it more closely.

Census data (Central Statistics Office 2017: 69) indicate that, in 2016, 27.9% of the 73,803 daily speakers outside the education system lived in the *Gaeltacht* (again, the number of daily speakers includes those who speak it daily outside the education system exclusively and those who speak it daily both within and without the education system). The overall population[40] of the *Gaeltacht* in the same year was 96,090, but only 66.3% of the people living in these areas were reported to be able to speak Irish. Moreover, only 20,586 people claimed to use Irish on a daily basis outside the education system, that is 11.2% less than in the previous census. The data reported here draw a rather telling picture of the reality of Irish language use, as even in the core Irish-speaking areas the national and first official language of Ireland is actually the means of communication of a very small minority. This might sound surprising given that, in the context of a heavily anglicised country, the

[40] Again, data refer to individuals aged 3 years and over. See also: Central Statistics Office (2018) *EY033: Population Aged Three Years and Over and Percentage of Irish Speakers 2011 to 2016 by Age Group, Sex, Gaeltacht Areas, Census Year and Statistic* [online] available from <https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY033&PLanguage=0> [30 April 2020].

Gaeltacht in particular is where Irish is supposed to be the language of daily communication for the vast majority of people.

	2011	2016
Ability to speak Irish	66,238	63,664
Daily speakers outside the education system (including daily speakers within)	23,175	20,586
Weekly speakers outside the education system (including daily speakers within)	6,813	6,284
Speakers who use Irish less often outside the education system (including daily speakers within)	16,244	16,137
Speakers who never use Irish outside the education system (including daily speakers within)	4,682	5,034

Table 4: A summary of speaker figures in the *Gaeltacht* in 2011 and 2016 (individuals aged 3 years and over)[41]

Table 5 below contains the same data as Table 3, although this time for the *Gaeltacht*. These figures are particularly relevant because daily and weekly speakers in the *Gaeltacht* may be regarded as the 'archetypal' Irish speakers due to their high frequency of language use and the fact that they speak Irish in a community setting. Thus, they use it as a social practice instead of as a medium of communication at school only, which might often be the case with daily speakers in the *Galltacht*. Indeed, when referring to Irish as a community language, it is daily and perhaps weekly speakers in the *Gaeltacht* that should be taken into consideration. For this reason, I have again chosen them as a reference to enable a comparison with countrywide data. Again, if individuals who use the language in the education system are excluded, the number of daily speakers in the *Gaeltacht* falls even further

[41] Data retrieved from the CSO's website: Central Statistics Office (2020) *EY034: Irish Speakers Aged Three Years and Over 2011 to 2016* [online] available from <https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY034&PLanguage=0> [16 January 2021].

to just 16,199. The gap between the number of people who use Irish as a community language and the 1,761,420 total speakers in Ireland is thus enormous.

	2002	2006	2011	2016
Total *Gaeltacht* population	86,517	91,862	96,628	96,090
Total Irish speakers in the *Gaeltacht*	62,157	64,265	66,238	63,664
Daily speakers outside the education system (including daily speakers within) in the *Gaeltacht*	-	22,515	23,175	20,586
Daily speakers outside the education system only in the *Gaeltacht*	-	17,687	17,955	16,199
Weekly speakers outside the education system (including daily speakers within) in the *Gaeltacht*	-	6,802	6,813	6,284
Weekly speakers outside the education system only in the *Gaeltacht*	-	6,564	6,531	6,040

Table 5: Daily and weekly Irish speakers outside the education system (including those who also speak it daily at school) and outside the education system only in the *Gaeltacht*, compared with the total number of Irish speakers in the *Gaeltacht* and the overall *Gaeltacht* population, 2002-2016. All figures pertain to individuals aged 3 years and over. No information is available for domains of use in 2002.[42]

The decline highlighted in Table 5 can also be observed in all but two of the individual *Gaeltacht* areas, as shown by Table 6 below, which illustrates how the number of daily speakers changed between 2011 and 2016. It should be noted that the steepest fall was recorded in the areas with the highest number of speakers, and that the drops in speaker numbers are considerably larger than the increases (which are essentially negligible).

[42] All the data in this table have been retrieved from the CSO's website. A list containing the links for each individual figure can be found in Annex 5. For a general reference, see also: Central Statistics Office (2020) *Central Statistics Office* [online] available from <https://www.cso.ie/en/index.html> [18 September 2020].

Gaeltacht Area	*2011*	*2016*	*Actual change 2011-2016*
Cork County	982	872	-110
Donegal County	7,047	5,929	-1,118
Galway City	636	646	10
Galway County	10,085	9,445	-640
Kerry County	2,501	2,049	-452
Mayo County	1,172	895	-277
Meath County	314	283	-31
Waterford County	438	467	29
All Gaeltacht Areas	**23,175**	**20,586**	**-2,589**

Table 6: Daily speakers (aged 3 and over) divided into *Gaeltacht* area, including the speakers who use Irish daily outside the education system only and those who use it daily both within and without the education system, 2011-2016 (table taken from Central Statistics Office 2017: 69)

4.2.2 Summing Up

Compared with the generally positive trend in the overall number of speakers in all of Ireland, figures pertaining to total speakers in *Gaeltacht* areas have remained rather static or have decreased over the years. In the case of daily speakers outside the education system, the numbers have shrunk in the *Gaeltacht* and have remained relatively stable countrywide. Finally, as far as weekly speakers outside the education system are concerned, the evolution has been positive at country level, whereas in the *Gaeltacht* the opposite has occurred. This stresses the complexity of the issue notwithstanding all the efforts at policy level. Most importantly, it further underlines how critical the situation of Irish as a community language is – although from a distance it seems far more widespread and it appears to be a rather 'healthy' minority language, as shown by the remarkable apparatus that has been set up by the state for its maintenance, as well as by the overall number of speakers countrywide. Indeed, from an outsider's point of view, if the total population of the country is taken into consideration, the proportion of people with a knowledge of Irish appears to be rather significant. Yet, these data are deceptive

in that they conceal a troubling sociolinguistic situation that is in stark contrast with the well-established institutional status of the language.

While such numbers allow an insight into the vitality of Irish, it must be borne in mind that they do not provide all the relevant information: as explained by Crystal (2000: 11–12), 'Speaker figures should never be seen in isolation, but always viewed in relation to the community in which they relate'. Thus the data presented here needs to be seen as part of the wider context described in the present dissertation.

4.3 Attitudes Towards the Language and Actual Practice

Although it is a threatened minority language with few community speakers, positive attitudes to Irish are dominant among the Irish population, who generally endorse policy measures for its maintenance, as numerous authors have indicated: for instance, over two thirds of adults in Ireland have been reported to be favourably disposed to the language and 64% believe that Ireland would lose its identity if Irish were to disappear (Darmody and Daly 2015: xi). Similar results were found by Mac Gréil (2009: 7–11), who reports that 40.3% of Irish-born individuals want the language to be revived throughout the country, 52.9% are in favour of its preservation in the *Gaeltacht*, and only 6.7% think it should be discarded. Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Dhonnabháin (2015: 183) also indicate that parents positively support the teaching of Irish at school in both bilingual and Irish-medium education. However, these favourable attitudes are often not matched by the linguistic practice of speakers (as Sections 4.2 and 4.2.1 have in part already demonstrated), an issue that has also been emphasised in several studies on the *Gaeltacht* (Ó hIfearnáin 2013: 350).

Indeed, positive attitudes often remain symbolic and restrict the use of Irish to a tokenistic function instead of a communicative one. This issue is encapsulated in the Irish expression *cúpla focal*, which literally means 'a few words' and is used by speakers who do not master the language but still consider themselves to be members of the Irish-speaking community. In a broader sense, it also translates into

the 'widespread if largely undocumented belief in Ireland that a minimal level of Irish suffices in all circumstances' (Walsh 2012: 13). The *cúpla focal* 'mentality' can also be observed at the institutional level, where it frequently finds a place among civil servants and public bodies despite the existence of the *Official Languages Act 2003*: Walsh (2012: 336) for instance reports that several public bodies commit to training their receptionists so that they can answer with basic greetings in Irish, despite the fact that they will have spent several years studying the language in the education system and should already be familiar with such formalities. He goes on to add: 'It could be argued that […] Irish is a form of window dressing used in very limited quantities as a type of cultural insurance policy for the organisation, but that it has very little real functional importance in the governance of public bodies' (Walsh 2012: 336, see also Walsh and McLeod 2008: 30).

The idea that the proverbial 'few words' of Irish are enough is therefore rather pervasive, not only among speakers but also among the very same institutions that are meant to foster the use of the language and actively promote its maintenance by providing services to the population. Instead, Irish is often used in a tokenistic manner that, as census data would seem to suggest, cannot make up for the lack of 'actual' community use. On the contrary, statistical data indicate that community usage is decreasing (daily and weekly speakers are becoming fewer), while what might be assumed to be a symbolic use of Irish (occasional speakers or those who never use it outside the school) is growing. The latter does however not contribute to the former: increased occasional usage is not leading to increased community usage.

The somewhat paradoxical position of the Irish language, which appears to have more of a symbolic identitarian role than an actual communicative function for a vast majority of its speakers, has been discussed by several authors. For instance, when commenting on the results of Mac Gréil's (2009) study on attitudes, use, and competence, Edwards (2017: 18) talks about the 'favourable but largely passive attitudes towards Irish held by most'. McCubbin (2010: 458) describes the situation as follows: 'The gap between the symbolic and instrumental importance attributed to Irish, while growing, is long-standing. It is reflected in rigorous public debate

about the efficacy and financial cost of promoting a language commonly seen to have already lost its utility'. In a similar vein, Mac Donnacha (2014, para. 9) writes that most young people in the *Gaeltacht*, as well as the majority of people in Ireland, still consider the symbolic functionality of Irish to be important. However, for these young individuals in particular, the communicative functionality of English, which is socially and technologically stronger, has taken over that of Irish.

Thus, there appears to be a strong incongruity between explicit and implicit attitudes to Irish: people, in a sense, do not practice what they preach. A good example of this is provided by a 2004 MORI Ireland study, which reported that 89% of the respondents believe in the importance of promoting Irish for the country as a whole, regardless of their ability to speak it, but that only 39% think speaking it is important to being Irish (Watson 2008 cited in McCubbin 2010: 458). The situation described above raises questions about the role of the language in the identity of present-day Ireland, a complex element of Irish language policy that will emerge again in the following chapters.

4.4 Speakers' Ability in Irish

The lack of Irish usage outside the education system is however not only a question of identity or symbolism, nor simply a matter of practicalities tied to the dominant position of English over the minoritised Irish. Rather, and perhaps more than anything, it is a question of the speakers' ability. As a matter of fact, only a minority of Irish speakers are reported to be proficient (see for example Darmody and Daly 2015: 90). Referring to census data from 2006, Walsh (2012: 335) observes that most people who consider themselves 'speakers' have a passive or limited knowledge of Irish, and that only a small fraction of civil servants achieve high levels of proficiency, as illustrated by the example about simple greetings quoted above. Teachers, who are obviously essential in the production of competent Irish speakers, often lack linguistic proficiency themselves and can thus have a negative effect on some students' abilities as well (Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Dhonnabháin

2015: 190). As I hinted at when discussing statistical data, it is therefore reasonable to assume that sizeable numbers of people do not use the language simply because they do not speak it well enough. This is confirmed by research findings, which show that frequency of use is positively correlated with fluency (Darmody and Daly 2015: 66).

This issue becomes especially relevant in the case of the *Gaeltacht*, where core communities of native speakers would be expected to have a very high level of ability in Irish. I shall deal with this issue in greater detail in Chapter 5, when discussing community-oriented language policy. For now, suffice it to say that research has found that young native speakers of Irish in core *Gaeltacht* communities are often more proficient in English than they are in Irish (Mac Donnacha 2014, paras 7–8, Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007, Péterváry et al. 2014). This is largely due to the considerable number of English speakers in *Gaeltacht* schools, which reinforces the use of English among Irish-speaking pupils (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007: 11). Consequently, these young people do not have sufficient opportunities to use the language in a social setting (Péterváry et al. 2014: 26). A situation of subtractive[43], unidirectional[44] bilingualism has hence become the norm in the *Gaeltacht* (Péterváry et al. 2014: 237).

4.5 The *20-Year Strategy* a Decade Later: a Negative Trend?

With regard to the *20-Year Strategy*, it could be said that the situation is currently evolving both positively and negatively in terms of the stated goals. Aside from a slight drop between 2011 and 2016, there has indeed been a steady increase in the overall number of people with a knowledge of Irish, although the target of two

[43] Subtractive bilingualism refers to a situation of bilingualism that negatively affects an individual or society. It is opposed to additive bilingualism, which is advantageous for the individuals or the society of both languages involved. Bilingualism is often subtractive from the point of view of the minority language (in this case Irish), whereas it is generally additive from the perspective of the majority language (here, English) (Péterváry et al. 2014: 21).
[44] Unidirectional bilingualism describes a situation in which speakers of a minority language must learn the dominant language, but the opposite does not occur (Péterváry et al. 2014: 23).

million speakers remains highly ambitious. Regrettably, the same cannot be said for the number of daily speakers outside the education system. One aim of the *20-Year Strategy* was for this group to increase to 250,000 people; the census results reveal little improvement for now. Similarly, the goal of increasing the number of daily speakers in the *Gaeltacht* by 25% in overall terms would seem to be extremely difficult to attain, since the number of daily speakers outside the education system, as well as outside the education system alone, has not shown any significant signs of growth and has even been decreasing in recent years.

It should nonetheless be noted that the number of people in the *Gaeltacht* who use Irish on a daily basis in the education system alone has grown slightly but consistently: it was 13,982 in 2006[45]; 14,518 in 2011; and 15,087 in 2016[46] (this information is not available for 2002). This again confirms the positive trend recorded in Irish-speaker production within the school system, which is, however, not matched by an increase in community usage. As far as the number of people who can use state services in Irish and access Irish-medium television, radio, and print media is concerned, measures to this end are being implemented and some positive milestones have been set: for example, the introduction of an Irish language training programme in the public sector and the provision of quality services in Irish by the media (Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht 2018: 15).

In light of the issues discussed in this chapter, the position of Irish as a threatened language becomes clearer. It follows that these mismatches between official state policy and reality are by no means immune to criticism, as both the *20-Year Strategy* and the *Gaeltacht Act 2012* have been seen as unclear and excessively symbolic undertakings that merely provide 'a palliative care approach to the sociocultural

[45] Data retrieved from the CSO's website: Central Statistics Office (2018) *CDR36: Irish Speakers Age Three Years and Over by Gaeltacht Areas, Frequency of Speaking Irish outside the Education System, Age Group and Census Year* [online] available from <https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CDR36&PLanguage=0> [24 September 2020].

[46] Data retrieved from the CSO's website: Central Statistics Office (2018) *EY034: Irish Speakers Age Three Years and Over 2011 to 2016 by Sex, Gaeltacht Areas, Frequency of Speaking Irish and Census Year* [online] available from <https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY034&PLanguage=0> [24 September 2020].

demise of Irish' (Ó Giollagáin 2014b: 101). On the other hand, it should be acknowledged that the relatively rapid increase in the number of speakers countrywide indicates that there is a degree of success: the revival of Irish would seem to be underway, in one way or another, at least in certain domains and most notably in the education system. Finally, it is obviously too early to assess the *20-Year Strategy* in a comprehensive way. This brief update only aims to provide the latest data available and show how the situation is evolving. The next census will take place in April of 2022 (after having been postponed for one year due to the COVID-19 pandemic)[47] and will offer a further starting point for analysis. It will also provide more precise data on the use of the language since it will include a new question concerning the level of Irish spoken: respondents will be asked 'How well do you speak Irish?' and will be able to choose between 'Very well', 'Well', and 'Not well'[48].

4.6 Summary of the Challenges

What emerges from the previous sections is that even though it enjoys a high degree of support both among the population and at an institutional level – thanks also to its legal anchoring, its importance in the education system, and the existence of multiple agencies and bodies for its protection and promotion – Irish is in fact under great pressure as a community language (i.e. a language spoken on a daily or weekly basis by a community of speakers) and remains marginal compared to English. It could also be said that the Irish-speaking community is divided into two main groups: native Irish-speaking communities, who mostly live in the *Gaeltacht* and represent an extremely small fraction of the total, and a majority of people who have learnt Irish as a second language in the education system (that is, non-native

[47] See also: Central Statistics Office (n.d.) *Census 2021 Postponement FAQ* [online] available from <https://www.cso.ie/en/census/census2021postponementfaq/> [16 September 2020].
[48] See page 4 of the following document: Central Statistics Office (n.d.) *Census of Population of Ireland, Sunday 18 April 2021* [online] available from <https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/census2021/Census_2021_-_Household_English.pdf> [6 July 2020].

speakers). Census data and research findings indicate that these two groups follow opposite trends in terms of growth and decline: communities of native speakers are shrinking (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007), while learners/new speakers outside the *Gaeltacht* are growing (O'Rourke and Walsh 2015: 63), as evidenced also by the rise in the demand for Irish-medium education (see for instance Government of Ireland 2010: 17, Darmody and Daly 2015: 22). These two speaker profiles do in fact coincide with the two traditional 'branches' of Irish language policy, namely the maintenance of Irish as the native language within the *Gaeltacht* and its revival in the rest of the country (Ó Riagáin 1997 cited in O'Rourke and Walsh 2015: 63).

As I outlined on the basis of the literature, the reasons for the current situation of decline are multiple: they range from historical events and political factors to sociological and demographic transformations. With reference to the previous sections, the main points can be summarised as:

- the overall impact of the British colonisation of Ireland and the Great Famine;
- migration patterns to and from the *Gaeltacht*, strongly related to deteriorating economic conditions as well as past ill-judged (in terms of language policy) economic development measures, especially during the second half of the 20th century;
- positive but passive attitudes to the language, the excessively symbolic role of Irish in people's identity, and the gap between attitudes and linguistic practice;
- the proximity of English – a globally attractive language, especially among younger generations – as the dominant 'Big Brother' (Fishman 2001a: 9);
- unclear goals, superficial policy interventions by the Irish state (see also Chapter 5);

- subtractive and unidirectional bilingualism, as well as a lack of social use of the language among young *Gaeltacht* Irish speakers, which result in lower levels of ability.

4.7 Framing the Debate

In this context, language policy becomes an essential factor in managing an extremely delicate sociolinguistic situation. As a matter of fact, when looking at the highly unbalanced proportion of native speakers and learners of Irish vis-à-vis the decline of the language, one might wonder whether traditional Gaeltacht communities are still worth protecting at all or if focusing on the growing number of new speakers is a more reasonable choice. Conversely, the figures presented above also draw attention to the extent to which the status of Irish as a community language is threatened and thus can serve as a call for urgent action.

It is therefore crucial to identify where the focus of Irish language policy could and should be, what goals it ought to have and how these goals can be achieved. Is Irish language policy intended to revive the language or to preserve it? Where should it be implemented? Who should it target (who are the 'real' Irish speakers today)? What future is desirable for Irish and its speakers, and is it in keeping with current measures? This, as I shall argue, is where the tension between community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness' becomes topical. The following chapters will be devoted to an attempt to answer the aforementioned questions in a discussion about community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness', with the aim of assessing which (if any) approach can be considered more appropriate for the current Irish context and why.

Chapter 5 Community-Oriented Language Policy

5.1 Theoretical Framework

As I mentioned in the introduction, a community-oriented language policy approach focuses on the rights and needs of communities of native speakers. In the case of Irish, this means that the focus is on the *Gaeltacht* and that particular importance is placed on the use of Irish as an intergenerationally transmitted home and community language. Looking at the previous chapters, it can be said that a community-oriented focus means dealing with just a clutch of Irish speakers nowadays. While, to my knowledge, there is no official research group or entity that defines itself as 'community-oriented' following what I have stated above, a number of authors in the Irish context have produced extensive research on the *Gaeltacht* and do align themselves with an ideology centred on its survival, albeit not exclusively (see for example Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007, Ó Giollagáin 2014b, 2014a, Péterváry et al. 2014, Mac Donnacha 2014). Therefore, for the sake of clarity, in the present dissertation I shall refer to them as the community-oriented language policy strand of research. The term is useful in that it lends itself to a comparison with 'new speakerness', which is the product of a perhaps more 'organised' research movement (see Chapter 6 for a detailed explanation).

Since the next chapters will raise a number of issues tied to theoretical notions, before continuing it is worth taking a closer look at the concept of 'native speaker': Ó Giollagáin (2004: 74) defines it as 'a competent speaker of Irish who acquires the language within a familial/communal setting'; similarly, O'Rourke and Ramallo (2011: 152) use the term to refer to 'someone brought up speaking the language in the home and belonging to a speech community which has historical ties with the language'. In a minority language maintenance context, the following definition includes additional elements that can be useful:

> speakers who – following the example of their ancestors – grew up with the minority language, rather strongly identify with that language and the related culture, continue

> to use it wherever and whenever they can, and try to secure its intergenerational transmission under sometimes very difficult conditions through supporting forms of social organization that help to promote the use of the minority language especially in the home-neighbourhood-community nexus (Darquennes and Soler 2019: 477).

For the purposes of my research, I will henceforth refer to the aforementioned definitions, which may be summarised as follows: native speakers are (i) competent speakers who (ii) acquired the language in the home or the community and hence have a historical and sociological tie to the language; (iii) they transmit it to the next generation and actively make an effort to resist shift towards the majority language. As will become clear, not all of these elements are always present, but their coexistence could be regarded as an ideal situation.

Looking at Irish language policy in the past, previous chapters have already illustrated that the preservation of the *Gaeltacht* and of native speakers has traditionally been at the core of the state's aspirations. This emerges for instance from the initial nationalist phase, which looked at *Gaeltacht* communities as a model for a re-Gaelicised country. The importance bestowed on communities of native speakers and on the promotion of Irish as the main communication language in the *Gaeltacht* is also evident in the goals that the state and its agencies declare in their statutes or policy documents: as reported in Section 3.1, this is the case with bodies such as *Údarás na Gaeltachta* or with documents such as the *Education Act 1998* and the Fiontar report for the *20-Year Strategy*. The final version of the *20-Year Strategy* itself strives to 'create a supportive framework and the opportunities in which Irish can be passed on in a natural way within households and communities. This is of special importance in the context of the Gaeltacht' (Government of Ireland 2010: 3). It is nevertheless important to bear in mind that, since the formation of the Free State, it was decided that Irish was to be maintained where communities still existed *and* revived where the majority of the population was English-speaking (Ó Riagáin 1997 cited in O'Rourke and Walsh 2015: 63). The official policy implemented in Ireland was therefore not one-sided, although *Gaeltacht* communities certainly played a significant role in the revival project, especially from an ideological point of view.

From a theoretical standpoint, the emphasis on communities of native speakers is not a recent development and it appears to follow a rather traditional sociolinguistic approach. According to O'Rourke and Pujolar (2013: 48), research on language shift and revitalisation in the context of minority languages such as Irish, Welsh, Basque, etc., has tended to focus chiefly on native and/or heritage communities. Indeed, groups considered threatened and marginalised have usually been deemed the most worthy of protection for the purposes of maintaining and reviving the language (O'Rourke and Pujolar 2013: 52). In terms of theoretical anchoring, community-oriented language policy is essentially based on the foundations laid by Joshua Fishman (1991) in his pioneering work on Reversing Language Shift (RLS):

> historically, *sociolinguists for language revival* have been involved in assessing and promoting language planning efforts devoted to the protection and expansion of communities of minority language speakers. "Native speakers" have generally been at the core of such efforts. Fishman (1991) defines his blueprint for linguistic revival basically as a process of reconstruction of the community of native speakers (O'Rourke, Pujolar, and Ramallo 2015: 11).

For the sake of clarity, I will refer to Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) (Fishman 1991: 395), which is one of the cornerstones of his work on RLS. The GIDS (see Annex 6) is divided into two parts consisting of a total of eight stages (four for each part), which are read from the bottom up and represent different levels of endangerment that need to be overcome for RLS to be successful. The two parts are: (i) RLS to attain diglossia[49] (the lower part, stages 8-5); and (ii) RLS to transcend diglossia, subsequent to its attainment (the upper part, stages 4a-1). As noted by Lagarde (2006: 61–62), the upper half of the GIDS includes top-down policy measures that emanate from the state, while the lower half encompasses aspects of language policy that depend on the natural transmission of the language

[49] Charles Ferguson (1959) used the term diglossia to refer to situations in which two varieties of a language (for instance German and Swiss German in Switzerland) coexist in a community, and each one of them is used in specific contexts. He identified two varieties: a high variety (H) and a low variety (L), which differ for instance in terms of acquisition, function, prestige, grammar, lexicon, etc., among others. As explained by Pauwels (2016: 27–28), the term was later extended to situations of diglossia between two different languages as opposed to varieties of the same language. It is in this context that it needs to be understood in the GIDS.

and on the existence of a speech community (i.e. the basis for bottom-up or grassroots elements of language policy). This means that the lower half of the GIDS is a necessary prerequisite for the implementation of top-down measures in the upper half. In this context, great importance is placed on the intergenerational transmission of the minority language, a process that sits at stage 6 of the GIDS: 'The intergenerational and demographically concentrated home-family-neighborhood: the basis of mother tongue transmission'. All subsequent stages need to be linked back to it for RLS to be successful (Fishman 1991: 398–399). Indeed, Fishman (1991: 113) claims that 'That which is not transmitted cannot be maintained', and that the loss of spontaneous, informal intergenerational transmission in the private sphere can result in the disappearance of native speakers of the threatened language within one generation (Fishman 2001a: 11). The existence of a community of native speakers which is able to reproduce itself is thus of paramount importance in his thought.

With regard to diglossia in RLS theory, in the context of the first four stages of the GIDS, Fishman (1991: 400) highlights the need for a stable bilingual society, in which majority/minority diglossia is achieved and maintained. Thus, the minority language needs to exist in certain domains of use without being displaced. He (1991: 398) also stresses that RLS ultimately depends on the child socialisation nexus; and that threatened languages are poised to disappear if they do not possess a strong community and viable cultural boundaries (Fishman 2001b: 98). These elements, on which I will elaborate in the following sections, are particularly salient in the case of the Gaeltacht and represent crucial notions for a community-oriented perspective.

Fishman's classic work is therefore of obvious relevance to community-oriented language policy. For instance, the transmission of Irish in the home domain (i.e. its intergenerational transmission within the family) is deemed critical to the efforts to maintain Irish within traditional *Gaeltacht* communities. Research has found that in families in which both parents are native speakers of Irish, a 15% slippage in high Irish proficiency occurred in each generation, over the course of three generations. This slippage was, however, more marked in families where only one parent was a

highly proficient speaker or both parents had a lower level of Irish, which led to the conclusion that the home cannot be replaced by the education and community domains as a means for the language's reproduction (Ó Riagáin 1997 cited in Ó hIfearnáin 2013: 350). This is also acknowledged in the *20-Year Strategy*: 'While strengthening the position of the language within our education system is a key focus of this Strategy, the transmission of Irish as a living language within the family and between the generations is critically important' (Government of Ireland 2010: 3). The following sections will help further highlight the ties between Fishman's theory and the work on *Gaeltacht* communities.

5.2 A Community-Oriented Perspective on Current Issues

I shall now attempt to cover the main issues and recommendations from a community-oriented language policy perspective.

5.2.1 A Matter of (Im-)Balance

The *Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht* (*CLS*) (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007) is a valuable reference for a description of the community-oriented language policy approach in that it provides an in-depth analysis of the needs and challenges of native Irish-speaking communities. This study was conducted following the publication of the *Gaeltacht Commission Report 2002*, which stressed the need for research to analyse the decline of Irish in the *Gaeltacht*, an issue that had been brought up a decade earlier by Reg Hindley in his book *The Death of the Irish Language: a Qualified Obituary* (1990) (Ó Giollagáin 2014a: 25). Hindley had drawn a bleak portrait of the language, which anticipated much of the present-day situation.

I have already mentioned that a series of initiatives in the second half of the 20th century aimed at stimulating economic growth in the impoverished *Gaeltacht*

regions resulted in high numbers of English-speaking migrants moving to these areas, thus weakening existing Irish-speaking networks and accelerating language shift. These 'side effects' of linguistically ill-judged development measures significantly contributed to the decline of Irish in the heartland in that they impacted its sociolinguistic structure. As a part of the *CLS*, the authors carried out a *Survey of Young People*, focused on the use of Irish among 965 secondary school students (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007: 3). The survey and other sources referred to in the *CLS* (Ó Giollagáin 2002 and 2005, Mac Donnacha et al. 2005 cited in Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007: 10) confirmed the aforementioned issues and suggested that social and demographic factors are playing a significant role in the demise of Irish in areas where it used to be the dominant language: the *Gaeltacht* is connected to and influenced by networks at a regional, national and international level which have an effect on the composition of these areas. This process is facilitated by the fact that the *Gaeltacht* areas are frequently chosen as a suburban setting in which to settle, meaning that considerable numbers of people who live in the *Gaeltacht* are, in fact, immigrants and thus likely not native speakers of Irish (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007: 10). In the *CLS*, *Gaeltacht* areas are divided into three categories (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007: 13):

- Category A *Gaeltacht* districts (electoral divisions where Irish speakers represent more than 67% of the total population aged 3 and above);
- Category B *Gaeltacht* districts (electoral divisions where Irish speakers represent 44-66% of the total population aged 3 and above);
- Category C *Gaeltacht* districts (electoral divisions where Irish speakers represent less than 44% of the total population aged 3 and above).

The first category includes areas where the use of Irish is stable, if younger generations are excluded. In the case of the second category, English is the dominant language and daily speakers of Irish are restricted to certain age groups, such as younger people who are still in the education system and thus use the language at school. As explained by the authors, this suggests a decline in the communal use of

Irish, though some solid networks of speakers remain. Similar features can be observed in Category C districts, where the majority of the total *Gaeltacht* population resides: in these areas, the community use of Irish is even more marginal, except for some social networks, and language shift is almost complete (Ó Giollagáin 2014a: 32). The authors of the *CLS* indicate that a 67% proportion of active Irish speakers needs to be maintained for Irish to be used as a community language in a sustainable way, which means that most of the *Gaeltacht* is actually sociolinguistically unstable. This is in line with Crystal's (2000: 14) observation that 'It is difficult to see how a community can maintain its identity when its population falls beneath a certain level'. Thus the authors of the *CLS* underline the necessity of managing the demographic composition of the *Gaeltacht* – for instance, through house planning to contain the proportion of English speakers settling in these areas – in order to safeguard the vitality of Irish-speaking communities (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007: 10–12). Again, there is a clear theoretical connection to Fishman's argument regarding the importance of strong native speaker communities.

5.2.2 Bilingualism: a Double-Edged Sword

It goes without saying that the proportion of English speakers in the *Gaeltacht* includes English-speaking parents (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007: 10), who probably raise their children through the medium of English, or only partially through Irish. Hence, large numbers of native speakers of English participate in the education system in core *Gaeltacht* areas together with Irish-speaking pupils, which introduces a further issue pointed out by research belonging to the community-oriented strand of thought:

> one fourth of the school-going population of the contemporary Gaeltacht was born or raised outside the Gaeltacht. When this group is combined with the numbers who live outside Gaeltacht districts but attend Gaeltacht schools and with those who are being raised with English as a home language, 46% of school-going children in the core Gaeltacht areas start school with little or no Irish (Mac Donnacha et al. 2005 cited in Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007: 11).

Research on the *Gaeltacht* has shown that this has a dramatic effect on the vitality of Irish as a language spoken by natives, especially in the socialisation process of younger generations, which is now dominated by English, despite the schools producing speakers with reasonably good ability in Irish. Indeed, as reported in the *CLS*, only a handful of young people in the *Gaeltacht* claim to use Irish to communicate with their peers, namely 9% in total and 24% in Category A districts (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007: 26–27).

Another study, the *Analysis of bilingual competence: language acquisition among young people in the Gaeltacht* (Péterváry et al. 2014), provides further data that underscore the severity of the problem. The study looked at the linguistic abilities of 50 children aged 7-12 (whose home language was Irish exclusively) from a core Category A *Gaeltacht* area, namely Cois Fharraige and South Conamara, in County Galway. This setting was chosen as a 'best case scenario', in that at the time of the study it was the strongest Irish-speaking region left and around 60% of all native speakers of Irish in the *Gaeltacht* lived there (Péterváry et al. 2014: 16–18). The authors found that all children had a higher degree of ability in English and spoke 'reduced Irish' (Péterváry et al. 2014: 236–237). Furthermore, in an evaluation of their abilities, the language level of the pupils with the lowest scores in English was comparable to that of the pupils with the highest scores in Irish: that is to say, the best level of Irish among these children was only as good as the worst level of English. (Péterváry et al. 2014: 212). More generally, Irish-speaking pupils in the *Gaeltacht* have also been reported to have a lower level of ability in Irish – in some measures – than their peers attending *Gaelscoileanna*, Irish immersion schools in the *Galltacht* where most students are native speakers of English (Harris et al. 2006: 159–162).

Hence, there is consistent evidence for a negative correlation 'between the proportion of English speakers in a school and both Irish achievement and bilingual achievement' (Péterváry et al. 2014: 242). The presence of English speakers negatively influences the acquisition of Irish for Irish-speaking pupils, who end up having levels of proficiency that do not correspond to what is normally expected of native speakers (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007: 11). Subtractive and unidirectional

bilingualism, which I have previously hinted at (see Section 4.4), therefore come into play: the social and demographic dynamics in the *Gaeltacht*, as well as the mixed levels of Irish among children attending schools in these areas, have led to a situation in which Irish-English bilingualism creates a huge disadvantage for Irish-speaking children, while it is beneficial for English-speaking pupils. In other words, it is subtractive for the former and additive for the latter: learning Irish can represent a professional advantage for English-speaking pupils and does not impair their ability in their first language; but the acquisition of English damages the abilities of native speakers of Irish in their L1 (Ó Giollagáin 2014c, Péterváry et al. 2014). In practical terms, this takes the form of what Montrul (2008: 21) calls incomplete L1 acquisition: 'some specific properties of the language do not have a chance to reach age-appropriate levels of proficiency after intense exposure to the L2 begins'. Ó Curnáin (2007 cited in Hornsby 2015: 120) describes this phenomenon as the 'lowest common denominator effect', whereby the presence of non-native speakers of Irish affects the ability of native speakers as 'the most extreme instances of reduction or non-traditional usage become prominent', with dismal consequences for the language in the long run.

Through this process of marginalisation, Irish has, in a way, become a stranger in its own land. To solve this issue, community-oriented arguments have emphasised the need for a *Gaeltacht* education system specifically designed to cater to the needs of native Irish speakers in these areas, rather than a situation in which there is no differentiation between learners and natives and the national curriculum is taught in all *Gaeltacht* schools (Ó Giollagáin 2014a: 37–38). With regard to this particular point, the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022* introduced a certain degree of differentiation at primary and Junior Cycle level, with an L1 Irish curriculum for Irish-medium schools and an L2 Irish curriculum for English-medium schools in the *Gaeltacht*. Although this improves the provision of education for native speakers, Irish-medium schools in the *Gaeltacht* remain mixed (Department of Education and Skills 2016: 17 and 33–34). Thus, the problems highlighted in the literature are only solved in part. The authors of the *CLS* conclude that if language use patterns are not to change, it is unlikely that Irish will remain the community and family language in

Category A districts for more than another 15-20 years (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007: 27). Considering that – at the time of writing – 13 years have passed since the publication of the report and census data indicate that the erosion of communities of native speakers is continuing, the situation in the *Gaeltacht* appears to be critical. The forecasts made in the *CLS* have been confirmed over time and, in fact, an update report published, somewhat ironically, solely in Irish in 2015 recorded an acceleration in this pattern of decline[50].

5.2.3 Criticism of Current State Policy

One of the main arguments of the community-oriented approach relates to the lack of effectiveness of current state policy and criticism of the government's attitude in the face of the sociolinguistic emergency in the *Gaeltacht*. This has been illustrated in particular by Conchúr Ó Giollagáin in his two-part article, *Unfirm ground: A re-assessment of language policy in Ireland since Independence* (2014a) and *From revivalist to undertaker: New developments in official policies and attitudes to Ireland's 'First Language'* (2014b). What the author depicts in these two texts is a situation of progressive abandonment of the *Gaeltacht* communities: he argues that the state started to shelve the project of Irish revival in the 1970s, and that now the same is occurring with the maintenance of the language in core Irish-speaking communities, in favour of a symbolic and institutionalised approach that is in reality entirely ineffective and even detrimental to native speakers of Irish (Ó Giollagáin 2014b: 101). He identifies four phases of Irish language policy that define the period from the formation of the Free State to the present day (Ó Giollagáin 2014a: 25):

a) Traditional Revivalism (1922-1960s): the national regeneration of the country was the drive for the revival of Irish in the post-colonial era.

[50] Údarás na Gaeltachta (2015) *Údarás na Gaeltachta publishes Update Report to the Comprehensive Linguistic Study on the Usage of Irish in the Gaeltacht: 2006-2011* [online] available from <https://www.udaras.ie/en/2015/05/28/udaras-na-gaeltachta-publishes-update-report-to-the-comprehensive-linguistic-study-on-the-usage-of-irish-in-the-gaeltacht-2006-2011/> [19 July 2020].

b) Aspirational Bilingualism (1971-1990s): the official stance is that Irish should not interfere with the dominance of English (see also Section 2.4).
c) Minority Survivalism (1990s-2009): Hindley's book leads to research on the *Gaeltacht* crisis. The publication of the *CLS* sheds light on the sociolinguistic collapse in the *Gaeltacht*.
d) Rhetorical Bilingualism (2009-present): the *20-Year Strategy* is drafted and in 2010 the government publishes the final version. Some aspects of the *20-Year Strategy* are put into effect with the *Gaeltacht Act 2012*.

The situation outlined above illustrates that Irish-speaking communities have not always enjoyed a high degree of support, on the contrary: Ó Giollagáin (2014b: 109) explains that, over the years, the state has effectively rid itself of its responsibilities towards the *Gaeltacht* by simply delegating them to its agencies, which often do not have sufficient resources. According to Ó Giollagáin (2014b: 115), this finds full expression in the most recent actions taken by the government, namely the *20-Year Strategy* and the *Gaeltacht Act 2012*, which are considered part of a problematic and merely symbolic 'non-policy': for instance, he argues that the aim of the *Gaeltacht Act 2012* is to 'give institutional support for the marginalization of any remaining collective identity framed in the Irish language in the Irish State': the *Act* re-states previous goals and makes Irish more manageable by relegating it in the institutional domain, which deprives it of its function as a vehicle for identity formation in favour of English (Ó Giollagáin 2014a: 20). From this perspective, the demise of Ireland's first official language has become an uncomfortable issue: a lot needs to be done, but no one is willing to address what could be called the 'Irish-speaking elephant in the room'.

The previously cited lack of clear differentiation between the needs of native speakers and those of learners in the school system can thus be interpreted as a symptom of a generalised problem: Ó Giollagáin (2014b: 107) for instance claims that the amended legislation of 2012 is not a *Gaeltacht* act, but rather an Irish language act that addresses networks of Irish speakers at large (which is particularly relevant in light of the expansion of language planning areas outside the traditional *Gaeltacht*). This embodies what he (2014b: 114) calls an 'L2 discursive

colonization of L1 concerns', which is leading Irish into a heritage model (Ó Giollagáin 2014b: 119) and not providing it with a sound basis for its preservation as a fully-fledged living language, but rather as some sort of symbolic and identitarian feature tied to the country's history. Therefore, from this perspective, the government is essentially keeping Irish in its place while ensuring the dominance of English in all the domains that do actually count; an attitude that is almost certainly condemning the last Irish-speaking communities to oblivion by moving into a 'post-Gaeltacht phase' (Ó Giollagáin 2014b: 112–113).

5.2.4 Main Points

To sum up, in order to preserve native-spoken Irish, a community-oriented approach emphasises the need for concrete action that specifically targets the strongest remaining areas where Irish still functions as a community language. It draws on a 'traditional' theoretical framework of sociolinguistics and underlines the importance of preserving the ethnolinguistic context in which the communal use of the language takes place (Péterváry et al. 2014: 246 write about a 'geographical protection in support of minority-language social vitality'). The idea underpinning this approach is that competent speakers are fundamental for the survival of *Gaeltacht* communities, and that *Gaeltacht* communities are in turn crucial for the survival of the speakers (Ó Giollagáin and Ó Curnáin 2016, para. 3). For this reason, tangible support from the government is required, but this is lacking in the current context.

In practical terms, the main recommendations included in the *CLS* and in the *Analysis of bilingual competence* provide a reference for the measures suggested by this side of the debate. Some examples include the development of an effective *Gaeltacht* education system, the provision of adequate measures for Irish-speaking families (such as support schemes and Family Support Centres), and the development of youth services to strengthen the younger generations' use of Irish in broader society (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007: 43–46). In the context of a community-oriented language

policy it is also argued that English speakers still ought to be given the possibility to learn the language, albeit in a way that does not interfere with the learning of Irish speakers (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007: 30). As I will demonstrate later on, this is a particularly important point.

Chapter 6 'New Speakerness'

6.1 Theoretical Framework

While a community-oriented approach is centred on traditional communities of native speakers, 'new speakerness' takes another approach and places the emphasis on a different group: new speakers. This idea of 'newness' refers to 'the ways of speaking and the social and linguistic practices of speakers which exist outside of the traditional native-speaker communities' (O'Rourke and Pujolar 2013: 56). As I have stated in Chapter 5, compared to community-oriented language policy, 'new speakerness' may be considered a research strand in the strict sense: much of the work in this domain has been done in the framework of the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) Action IS1306 'New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges'. This research network ran from 2013 to 2017 and focused on 'the dynamics involved in becoming a "new speaker" of a language in a multilingual Europe' (*From New Speaker to Speaker: Outcomes, Reflections and Policy Recommentations from COST Action IS1306 on New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges* 2019: 6). Research on new speakers exists for multiple western European minority languages such as Galician (O'Rourke and Nandi 2019), Corsican (Jaffe 2015), Scottish Gaelic (McLeod and O'Rourke 2015), Manx (Ó hIfearnáin 2015), and Irish (O'Rourke and Walsh 2015, Brennan and O'Rourke 2019 among others).

As with native speakers in the previous chapter, I will firstly try to shed some light on the profile of new speakers and establish exactly who belongs to this category. Some authors have pointed out that the notion is fuzzy and that it is at times difficult to define in a satisfactory way who is a new speaker and who is not (for instance Williams 2019: 595). Nevertheless, the literature does provide various explanations and definitions. For example, O'Rourke, Pujolar, and Ramallo (2015: 1) use the term to describe 'individuals with little or no home or community exposure to a minority language but who instead acquire it through immersion or bilingual educational

programs, revitalization projects or as adult language learners'. Hornsby (2015: 108) adds two more elements to the definition, namely that new speakers are favourably disposed to the language in question and sometimes do not originate from the ethno-linguistic group it is tied to. Finally, the website of the COST Action gives the following definition: 'new speakers are multilingual citizens who, by engaging with languages other than their "native" or "national" language(s), need to cross existing social boundaries, re-evaluate their own levels of linguistic competence and creatively (re)structure their social practices to adapt to new and overlapping linguistic spaces'[51].

The new speaker category is thus intentionally not fixed, but rather a fluid and comprehensive one that encompasses a wide range of individuals with different backgrounds and within various settings (Soler and Darquennes 2019: 468, O'Rourke, Pujolar, and Ramallo 2015: 6). It is important to mention that, although they are essentially learners of a minority language, new speakers are often defined on the basis of a number of specific features that set them apart from 'ordinary' learners. For instance, Soler and Darquennes (2019: 468) suggest that, compared to previously formulated notions, such as 'L2' or 'non-native' speakers, talking about 'new speakers' foregrounds the creative possibilities that these individuals may offer instead of highlighting the deficiencies in their ability. Walsh and O'Rourke (2017, para. 5) explain that new speakers stand out because they are committed to using the language regularly, and actively look for opportunities to do so. Writing about the case of Irish, Nic Fhlannchadha and Hickey (2018: 38) consider them 'high-proficiency L2 speakers'. Conversely, other publications include less proficient learners of Irish as well (see for example Brennan and O'Rourke 2019).

Given this wide array of possible definitions, in the present dissertation I will refer to new speakers as they are described by O'Rourke, Pujolar, and Ramallo (2015: 1, see previously cited definition), but I will specifically include only individuals who are strongly committed to the maintenance of Irish and who possess good levels of

[51] The New Speakers Network (n.d.) *About COST Action IS1306 on New Speakers* [online] available from <https://www.nspk.org.uk/about/> [21 July 2020].

proficiency (i.e. good enough to use the language in a variety of situations, as opposed to a *cúpla focal* logic). In other words, I only consider individuals who 'use Irish with fluency, regularity and commitment' (O'Rourke and Walsh 2015: 64) This allows me to set them apart from the generic and perhaps overly simplistic notions of 'non-native speakers' or 'learners'[52]. Summing up the elements above, it is possible to add that the main difference between native and new speakers is that the former have learnt the language in the home or community domains (i.e. they speak it as their L1), while the latter have acquired it in different contexts, in particular at school or in other educational settings (hence, they speak it as an L2). I will use this distinction as a reference in the present dissertation[53].

This initial outline of the object of 'new speakerness' research hints at the fact that – in contrast to the work on communities of native speakers – research in this area follows a less traditional approach and explores new ways of understanding sociolinguistics, in particular as relates to situations of language maintenance and shift. For researchers who subscribe to the 'new speakerness' current of thought, the need for this ideological shift arises from the emergence of new profiles of speakers in a context of globalisation, which is defined by higher mobility of people and new forms of language and communication (O'Rourke, Pujolar, and Ramallo 2015: 2, Coupland 2010 and Blommaert 2010 cited in McLeod and O'Rourke 2015: 153). This enhanced sociolinguistic complexity is frequently a consequence of policies that increased the presence of minority languages in public domains – for example the school system – causing speakers to be less clustered in traditional geographical areas (O'Rourke and Pujolar 2013: 54). This very much applies to the case of Irish: at the time of the formation of the Free State, the language had essentially been wiped out in most of the country; but because of policy interventions, today there are considerable numbers of individuals with some

[52] These two umbrella terms do apply to new speakers, but can for instance also be used to describe German-speaking pupils in a Swiss school who acquire Italian as a school subject, but without the aim of really using it later in their lives. Obviously, just like new speakers, they all fall into the broader L2 speaker category. However, there are fundamental differences in the way they learn the language, in the reasons for its acquisition, as well as in the way they use it. I will thus follow this distinction.

[53] I have anticipated that definitions can pose problems in this context. For this reason, I will avoid further breaking down speaker groups and will focus on these two macro-categories.

degree of ability in it, and most of them live outside of the traditional *Gaeltacht*. Hence, there has been a transformation in patterns of use, which is visible in the high number of L2 speakers in the *Galltacht* and the strong demand for Irish-medium education, for instance.

A central point in 'new speakerness' therefore relates to the need to rethink certain traditional models and approaches – based mainly on Fishman's work – that have by and large shaped and dominated the research and discourse on minority languages: this emerges in the critique of the focus on the home-family-neighbourhood paradigm in the intergenerational transmission process, as it was defined by Fishman in his RLS model. 'New speakerness' questions, for example, the lack of attention granted to other domains and to the wider context (Darquennes and Soler 2019: 477). Such criticism is not exclusive to 'new speakerness' and has already been raised in the past. For instance, Romaine (2006: 443) challenges the role of diglossia in RLS and urges us to rethink 'what it means for a language to be maintained and survive without intergenerational mother tongue transmission'. 'New speakerness' also stresses the fact that complex situations in which people become new speakers by learning and speaking a language outside of the home domain cannot be analysed with the traditional model of decline, centred on the breakdown of the connections between language, place and identity (McLeod and O'Rourke 2015: 153). Similarly, the concepts of 'native speaker' and 'nativeness' are considered problematic, and so too the comparatively little attention paid to new speakers in research on language maintenance and shift (O'Rourke and Pujolar 2013: 48):

> in making traditional native speakers the central focus of scholarly attention, such scholars may, unwittingly perhaps, have ignored the very ethical principles of inclusion that they set out to uphold in the first place, that is, by assigning legitimacy to only some language users and not others (O'Rourke and Pujolar 2013: 52).

In this regard, another important point in the theory underpinning 'new speakerness' is that it questions more traditional approaches focused on native

speaker communities for having a romanticised and essentialist[54] view, which in turn stems from an ethnonationalist perspective on language revival. The latter is manifested in the idea that there is a strong link between native speakers and a specific place, identity and language, which makes them the sole 'authentic' speakers – i.e. their version of the language is the only 'correct' one and they have thus been conferred higher importance in research over the years (O'Rourke, Pujolar, and Ramallo 2015: 7, McLeod and O'Rourke 2015: 152–153). Hence, it can be said that 'new speakerness' represents a step away from more classical interpretations. It attempts to analyse the role of new speakers in the context of language maintenance and shift and strives to take on an innovative perspective to fill a perceived gap in the research. From a theoretical standpoint, it draws on the work of authors such as Bucholtz (2003), who questions the element of nostalgia that has often defined sociolinguistics.

6.2 A 'New Speakerness' Perspective on Current Issues

I will devote the coming sections to an analysis of the most important arguments and recommendations from a 'new speakerness' standpoint.

6.2.1 Numerical Strength and Positive Attitudes

The main points outlined above introduce the idea of 'new speakerness' and provide an explanation as to who new speakers are, especially in the context of a minority language undergoing language shift towards a dominant 'neighbour'. The previous chapters showed that traditional native speakers of Irish are now a minority, which means that L2 speakers (which include new speakers) have become numerically superior. Against this background, O'Rourke and Walsh (2015: 64) make the following point: 'Given that most frequent speakers of Irish outside the

[54] Linguistic essentialism refers to the 'idea of language as fixed and bounded, as a code rather than as a practice and as naturally given or taken for granted' (O'Rourke and Walsh 2015: 66).

education system are not based in the Gaeltacht and therefore unlikely to be traditional native speakers, new speakers can be seen to play an important role in the future of the language'. This is exemplified by the high numbers of Irish speakers in the Dublin area, which was illustrated in Section 4.2. Against this backdrop, the (potential) role of new speakers in the maintenance of Irish becomes clearer: statistical data presented in this dissertation show that the growing number of L2 speakers would so far appear to be the greatest success of current Irish language policy, and it could even be argued that these individuals are essentially keeping the language alive at a national level. After all, despite the crisis in the *Gaeltacht*, census results do reveal considerable numbers of people with an ability to speak Irish, and L2 speakers make up the overwhelming majority of this category.

In this context, new speakers contribute to the maintenance of the minority language in question by consciously functioning as activists and as 'agents of social change' (McLeod and O'Rourke 2015: 169). But what exactly pushes people to become new speakers of a language that even natives are abandoning? Reporting about her study on Corsican language classes, Jaffe (2015: 32–33) for instance writes that non-Corsicans indicated the importance of the language for the participation in the local networks as a motivation to become new speakers, while themes such as identity and heritage were recurrent among Corsicans who decided to take part in immersion classes. As for Irish, O'Rourke and Walsh (2015: 74) also found that motivations can be related to the will to reaffirm an Irish identity. Having an inspirational Irish teacher was also found to contribute to the choice to commit to learning the language (Walsh and O'Rourke 2017, para. 12). Moreover, new speakers' commitment to maintaining a threatened language can occasionally be related to their perception of native speakers, who they may see as unwilling to invest as much in the revival (McLeod and O'Rourke 2015: 169). This may be true in some cases, since *Gaeltacht* speakers have been observed to have contrasting attitudes in terms of intergenerational transmission: they are favourably disposed towards it but do not consistently teach the language to their children (Ó hIfearnáin 2013: 356).

One final aspect that is worth mentioning regarding the potential of new speakers is linked to the acquisition of Irish by immigrants. Although it undoubtedly enhances the linguistic complexity of the country as a consequence of globalisation, the ethnocultural diversity of contemporary Ireland detailed in Section 4.1 should not be overlooked in a 'new speakerness' framework. Indeed, children with an immigration background and immigrant new speakers at large might also provide an opportunity for the growth of the Irish-speaker base. McCubbin (2010) has reported promising findings in this regard, having explored the integration of Irish-speaking immigrants. The speakers he considered were not born or raised in Ireland, did not immigrate to the country before the age of eighteen and often did not have any family connection to the language, but used it daily after having learnt it as a second or subsequent language. His research shows that the acquisition of Irish helps such immigrants to better integrate, partake, and be accepted in Irish-speaking communities, both in the *Gaeltacht* and outside of it, so much so that they frequently claim to possess a Gaelic identity (McCubbin 2010: 462–466). The potential of immigrants is also recognised in the *20-Year Strategy* (Government of Ireland 2010: 16): 'Newly-arrived immigrant children in Ireland will also be afforded the opportunity to participate in all Irish language activities and specific attention will be paid to their language learning needs'. In sum, globalisation certainly poses difficulties with regard to the preservation of Irish, but in a 'new speakerness' context it also opens up new possibilities.

This may lead to the conclusion that new speakers can be important agents of language maintenance: first of all because they are committed to the cause in the sense that they display essential positive attitudes, and secondly because they are – at least in the case of Irish – numerically superior to native speakers. As I stated In Section 5.2.2, pupils enrolled in *Gaelscoileanna* can in some cases have higher levels of ability in Irish compared to their peers in the *Gaeltacht*, which represents a further important argument in favour of 'new speakerness', since there is evidence that the learning of Irish as an L2 can produce competent speakers. It should, however, be mentioned that in the past only around 3% of second language learners of Irish were reported to have 'native speaker ability' in the language (Committee

on Irish Language Attitudes Research 1975, Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin 1984, 1994 cited in O'Rourke 2011: 330). This is in line with more general findings from the field of linguistics, according to which only roughly 5% of second language learners attain a level of competence that can be considered equivalent to that of native speakers (Péterváry et al. 2014: 247). I should also add that data from 2013 indicate that only 15% of adults in the Republic of Ireland tried to learn or improve their Irish (Darmody and Daly 2015: xi), which suggests that there is a considerable gap between actual new speakers and simple learners (as defined in Section 6.1). It is indeed possible to assume that the latter are the majority, also in the light of census data presented earlier. These potential shortcomings of new speakers ought to be kept in mind in the context of language maintenance in particular.

6.2.2 Language Ownership During Shift

As mentioned above, it has been claimed from a 'new speakerness' viewpoint that native speakers have typically been considered more 'authentic' than new speakers and have therefore enjoyed a dominant, privileged position in research on language shift. Issues pertaining to the authenticity of speakers take on particular relevance in the work on the dynamics between new speakers and natives: it has been noted, for instance, that tensions around the ownership of the language can arise and that new speakers can feel delegitimised and excluded, despite their dedication, because their use of Irish is imperfect (O'Rourke 2011). In this regard, Hornsby (2015: 107) writes that variations in three macro-categories, namely accent, lexicon, and grammatical structure, can be sources of perceived (in)authenticity, depending on the speaker (native or non-native). In the case of Irish, new speakers are sometimes called *Gaeilgeoirí* (literally 'Irish speakers'), a term used in a pejorative way to refer to learners (O'Rourke 2011: 336). This harks back to the aforementioned idealisation of the native speaker, based on essentialism, whereby the status of native speakers is defined on the basis of 'inherent and perhaps even inalienable characteristics criterial of membership' due to their cultural or biological ties to the language (Bucholtz 2003: 400).

McCubbin (2010: 460) draws attention to the fact that 'Part of the difficulty in determining ownership and authority is that linguistic boundaries, even in a minority context, do not invariably conform to cultural or ethnic boundaries'. This is especially applicable to the Irish context, where the *Gaeltacht* no longer corresponds to a fully Irish-speaking geographical space and the boundaries between language varieties and speakers have consequently become more fluid. Against this background, advocates of 'new speakerness' show that, through their commitment to the maintenance of the language, new speakers create forms of language use that are authentic in their own right, as explained by Darquennes and Soler (2019: 478):

> new speakers and their linguistic practices do have an impact on the corpus, the status, the prestige as well as the acquisition of the minority language and almost force other members of the minority language community to take their way of using the language and their opinion on the fate of the minority language into account (Darquennes and Soler 2019: 478).

Research in the context of Irish has shown that, although they might admire native speakers and even consider them to be more authentic, new speakers also see themselves as legitimate and 'special' compared to monolingual English speakers (Nic Fhlannchadha and Hickey 2018: 44). Some new speakers of Irish also claim their *right* to legitimacy and recognition by the Irish-speaking community on the basis of the effort they put into learning the language, which means that they identify as activists devoted to the cause of maintaining Irish. Others overtly wish to set themselves apart as a modern, contemporary type of speaker, signalling a rupture with the past and with ideologies centred on natives as the only 'real' speakers. Some of them might even openly claim to speak 'Dublin Irish' and embrace the way in which their variety of the language diverges from traditional ones (O'Rourke and Walsh 2015: 72–78). In other cases, new speakers unconsciously wish to differ from natives, for instance by not sounding like them for fear that others would perceive a shift in their own identity (Hornsby 2015: 111). These examples provide further evidence of the mixed composition of the new speaker category, as well as of the varying motivations and beliefs put forward by its members.

The example of Manx is particularly meaningful in view of the above, since it shows that a language with no native speakers left can actually be kept alive by new speakers who effectively claim its ownership and become the reference for the rest of the non-speaker population (Ó hIfearnáin 2015). According to Ó hIfearnáin, this partly answers the important question of whether a language can exist without intergenerational transmission (and consequently without native speakers). Referring to Manx, O'Rourke, Pujolar, and Ramallo (2015: 13) state that 'linguistic legitimacy and authenticity do not stem from the seemingly intrinsic properties inherent to the languages or its native speakers, but are instead derived from groups which have the ability to construct and claim legitimacy'. O'Rourke and Ramallo (2011: 154) also explain that, although it is unlikely that a language can survive if no native speakers remain, new speakers can re-initiate the intergenerational transmission process in the home and community domains and potentially give rise to a new generation of native speakers. In the case of Irish, which according to research is in the last stages of decline as a community language, such arguments become even more salient, especially when considering future outlooks. In this context, 'new speakerness' emphasises that Irish is not attached by default to traditional communities in the *Gaeltacht*. Instead, it is a product of the people who use it and, in a way, its future lies within the hands of those who assert themselves as speakers in a context of language shift, regardless of their origin.

6.2.3 Language Shift as an Opportunity

The arguments above highlight an interesting trait of the 'new speakerness' ideology: language shift, as problematic as it is for the preservation of traditional Irish-speaking communities, appears to be seen as an opportunity for the regeneration of a minority language through new agents, rather than as a mere symptom of policy failure. In a context of advanced language shift such as that of Irish, it should be noted that a return to a pre-shift condition is impossible: 'a minority language speaking future is inevitably one in which communities of practice have been transformed; they are populated by people with different kinds

of knowledge, acquired through different means than in the past and embedded in new regimes of value' (Jaffe 2015: 24). This would also seem to be confirmed by the results of the *CLS* and its update, and is acknowledged by Ó Giollagáin, who writes about reconstituting 'a functioning core community, *however marginal*' (2014b: 118, my emphasis). Hornsby (2017: 96) also offers an interesting take on this: he writes that whilst having fewer speakers leads to fewer opportunities to use the language, it also means that individuals who use the language are less constrained to community norms. Moreover, he argues that 'language shift is producing new ideological spaces which are available for speakers to renegotiate how they perceive community norms to operate in relation to the minority language they speak'.

'New speakerness' in the case of Irish therefore seems to take the current situation as a starting point for a new way of tackling language shift through a strong grassroots approach, since speakers themselves become the source of language maintenance through their personal commitment. In this regard, recent developments in state policy are deemed positive because they enable this kind of change: Walsh and O'Rourke (2017, para. 14), for example, point out that the *Gaeltacht Act 2012* is the first legislation to recognise the necessity to plan for Irish-speaking networks outside the *Gaeltacht*, even though they do not consider it by any means a perfect solution. The arguments put forward in 'new speakerness' therefore suggest that – given the ongoing decline in the heartland – the growing number of L2 speakers represents an opportunity to maintain the language through different means, namely via networks of new speakers. Even if such networks cannot replicate the use of Irish that is typical of *Gaeltacht* communities, they can bolster the language where it is gaining momentum and thus contribute to its overall maintenance, perhaps by even creating new native speaker profiles that do not follow traditional language use patterns.

6.2.4 Main Points

To sum up, 'new speakerness' could be considered as an attempt to challenge what its advocates deem outdated concepts that no longer apply to reality given the complexity and the diversity of current sociolinguistic landscapes, which are the result of globalisation as well as of language policy itself. Hence, 'new speakerness' supports the idea that new approaches to minority language management are needed. In the case of Irish, this requires adapting to the well-documented disproportion between native and new speakers in Ireland and turning it into an advantage in the current context of decline. New speakers, however, are a broad group whose abilities, level of commitment, and backgrounds can differ significantly, which might pose difficulties from a theoretical point of view. This highlights that not all learners can actually be considered 'real' new speakers as defined in this chapter, and their contributions to language maintenance might well vary as a result. In addition, ideological conflicts can arise between new and other speakers, most notably natives. According to the literature presented above, these conflicts pertain largely to language ownership and to matters of legitimacy, as new speakers strive to assert themselves.

In terms of practical measures for new speakers of Irish, some recommendations made by 'new speakerness' advocates include investigating how these individuals can contribute to the development of the language; assisting motivated learners who want to become new speakers; integrating them into existing networks of speakers; improving their confidence and abilities by creating dedicated spaces for them to use Irish; and promoting positive attitudes towards non-traditional varieties of the language (*From New Speaker to Speaker: Outcomes, Reflections and Policy Recommentations from COST Action IS1306 on New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges* 2019: 52–53). As for native-spoken Irish, it could be argued that a 'new speakerness' ideology involves accepting the demise of the *Gaeltacht* and moving on to a new status quo for the language. Indeed, the literature on 'new speakerness' does not appear to include any particular recommendations for the management of the decline in the *Gaeltacht*. Instead, it

essentially appears to bypass the issue: 'the new speaker label moves away from […] a commitment to "salvaging" the language and "rescuing" native speaker communities toward understanding the systems of meaning surrounding language varieties in different sociolinguistic settings' (*From New Speaker to Speaker: Outcomes, Reflections and Policy Recommentations from COST Action IS1306 on New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges* 2019: 17).

Chapter 7 Interviews

After this general overview of each side of the debate, it is possible to move on to the empirical part of my research, namely the interviews with the experts. In the following sections I shall therefore detail the main findings of these interviews and the points that were discussed. I will present the results in the form of a summary of the most important arguments that emerged. Although I will include personal comments where necessary or useful, in particular to point out similarities and differences, this chapter will be centred on the opinions of the interviewees.

7.1 Community-Oriented Language Policy

In order to provide a more detailed insight into the community-oriented research strand, I conducted an interview with Conchúr Ó Giollagáin (Gaelic Research Professor at the University of the Highlands and Islands in Scotland and academic director of the Soillse research project[55]). The interviewee is a leading *Gaeltacht* expert who has gained extensive experience by studying these communities in detail and living in the *Gaeltacht* for a significant part of his life (Ó Giollagáin 2020). Thus, his view on the decline of Irish as a community language can provide precious insights into the debate.

7.1.1 The *Gaeltacht* as a Sociological Entity

One of the main aims of this interview was to explore the notion of *Gaeltacht* and the way in which these communities relate to the rest of the country. Indeed, given what I have discussed in the previous chapters, these areas have become so fragile that their existence and their status as separate language entities might be

[55] University of the Highlands and Islands (n.d.) *Conchúr Ó Giollagáin* [online] available from <https://pure.uhi.ac.uk/en/persons/conch%C3%BAr-%C3%B3-giollag%C3%A1in> [30 August 2020].

put into question. In other words, it could be contended that there are no longer a *Gaeltacht* and a *Galltacht* in today's Ireland, as language shift towards English has reached a stage where distinguishing between these two groups might no longer be sensible or useful from a language policy and planning point of view. Walsh (2011: 403) for instance explains that the whole country has essentially become a *Breac-Ghaeltacht*. It is thus essential to understand whether there is still a difference between native and new speaker communities and why.

In this context, asked whether the concept of *Gaeltacht* is still viable in the current situation of decline, Ó Giollagáin (2020) argues that there are very few languages that do not exist within a social geography, citing the case of Esperanto as one example. Consequently, he explains that native speakers in the *Gaeltacht* are a highly bilingualised sociological entity, an 'existing social group in a specific social geography, that emerged out of a specific political and historical trajectory' (Ó Giollagáin 2020). In his view, the *Gaeltacht* as a symbolic, formally designated area (see the previously mentioned *Fíor-Ghaeltacht* and *Breac-Ghaeltacht* distinction, which was made in 1926) merely demarcates a geographical space in which a social group already existed. Furthermore, he contends that this social geography is the habitat of Irish-speaking communities and that its erosion will lead to the collapse of the communities themselves. This mirrors the conclusions of the *CLS*, particularly with regard to the maintenance of the 67% threshold of active Irish speakers needed for the viability of the community (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007: 10).

The interviewee thus clearly separates native and new speakers from a theoretical standpoint: he considers them as two distinct speech communities that are rooted in different sociolinguistic environments and who consequently have different needs (see also Ó Giollagáin 2009). This reflects what I illustrated when presenting the community-oriented language policy ideology at large. Hence, in Ó Giollagáin's opinion, not focusing on the decline of the *Gaeltacht* as the core question of Irish language policy today means losing track of the real issue, that is, the collapse of these sociological groups. In the same way, he disputes that questioning the social geography of the *Gaeltacht* means problematising the remaining social context of an *existing*, albeit marginal, speaker group (Ó Giollagáin 2020). This point merges with

his critique of the *Gaeltacht Act 2012*, which he deems neutral from an ethnolinguistic point of view, and flawed because it lacks a 'definition of the Gaeltacht as a linguistic entity' (Ó Giollagáin 2014b: 108).

7.1.2 A Place for New Speakers

A further question that I considered crucial for this interview is how, in a community-oriented approach, new speakers can fit in the broader language policy framework and contribute to the maintenance of Irish. To put it differently: are new speakers necessary at all in a community-oriented approach to minority language maintenance?

Despite what has been reported in the previous section, Ó Giollagáin (2020) states that learners[56] of Irish have always held – and still hold to this day – a crucial role in the preservation of the language. He argues that new speakers' requirements have in fact never been left out of Irish language policy endeavours, in that the state has focused on both native speakers and learners from the very beginning, as I also reported in the previous chapters of this dissertation. Therefore, the interviewee asserts that both dimensions and the way they interact need to be taken into account, and underlines that the decline of the language in the heartland is not a reason to downplay the success in the production of learners over the years, which requires a huge amount of effort from the learners themselves and is enabled by the education system. Citing research data, he says, for instance, that for every native speaker of Irish there are around ten reasonably competent learners, a significant result compared to other minority languages. He also mentions that several other languages disappeared as a consequence of colonisation or more recent effects of globalisation, whereas Irish still exists today (Ó Giollagáin 2020).

The potential of new speakers is therefore not ruled out from a community-oriented perspective, on the contrary, and the production of learners through the schools is

[56] The interviewee sometimes used 'new speaker' and 'learner' interchangeably.

deemed a success: Ó Giollagáin (2020) describes the Irish education system as 'one of the most elaborate second language development mechanisms in the world'. This point is of great importance in that both speaker groups are recognised as relevant in their own right for the vitality of the language, which confirms a founding principle of Irish language policy that had been established at the very beginning of the revival project, at the dawn of the 20th century.

7.1.3 A Critique of 'New Speakerness'

However, from an ideological angle, the interviewee also questions the potential of new speakers as agents of revival, which he argues is overstated. A first point of contention in the debate thus becomes clear: in his opinion, 'new speakerness' makes these networks of learners look stronger than they actually are, since they are in fact highly dependent on institutional backing and would falter if that support were to be removed. This point would seem to align with the data reported earlier in this dissertation: a very large proportion of L2 speakers use the language exclusively within the education system, an institutional setting *par excellence* that does not, by itself, guarantee the vitality of Irish in everyday life. Irish spoken only in a classroom is certainly positive, but it is an expression of state-supported, symbolic language use among learners, as opposed to the much-needed communicative use in a communal setting, which research has proved to be missing. Indeed, it could be claimed that schools generate a highly circumscribed use of Irish and tie it to a given set of activities, which is arguably somewhat artificial as a result.

Ó Giollagáin (2020) also argues that 'new speakerness' draws on a discursivist[57] rhetoric: he says it is a current of thought propped up by an institutionalised, English-speaking middle-class that is out of touch with the reality of the crisis in the *Gaeltacht*, but has the power to dominate the argument and impose its own views through the very same institutions in which it is rooted (state bodies, universities,

[57] The interviewee defines discursivism as the use of a position of influence to put forward a certain point of view (Ó Giollagáin 2020).

etc.), thus amplifying the actual weight of existing new speaker networks. In this context, he argues that there is a widespread lack of empathy for a collapsing social group among the English-speaking middle class, which possesses the social prestige to monopolise the debates around the preservation of the Irish language, but is unfamiliar with the struggles that *Gaeltacht* communities face on a daily basis. He also adds that this often coincides with a sense of entitlement, whereby learners demand recognition simply because they have made the effort to learn Irish. This point aligns with some of the opinions put forward by new speakers of Irish, as reported in Section 6.2.2. Ó Giollagáin's criticism indicates that, from a community-oriented perspective, the issue is not with the existence of new speakers *per se*, but rather with their ideological and discursive dominance over powerless communities of native speakers in mainstream debates. In other words, from this angle the support for the *Gaeltacht* is jettisoned by the state in favour of a learner-centred ideology simply because learners have the power to *ask* for it.

Ó Giollagáin (2020) thus makes the point that although it positively stimulates the learning of Irish as an L2 – which he considers an essential component of the revival project – 'new speakerness' can in fact be detrimental to both native speakers *and* learners: the former lack the social prestige to assert themselves at an institutional level and do not enjoy the same degree of support as new speakers (see also Ó Giollagáin 2014b, 2014a); while the latter are given a false sense of security that conceals the decline of Irish among its core community of speakers, as the use of the language becomes increasingly symbolic. In his view, this can raise questions about the epistemological anchoring of 'new speakerness' and the current state of official policy, which he deems naïve and detached from reality and society (Ó Giollagáin 2020).

He argues that what is needed instead is a way to integrate learners of Irish of all backgrounds (Irish-medium education, summer colleges, adult learners, etc.) into social networks and help them become more competent and confident, and at the same time implement realistic language planning initiatives to support the threatened *Gaeltacht* communities. In his view, official language policy in Ireland should be more realistic as far as official goals are concerned, in particular with

regard to the aims of the *20-Year Strategy*, and the decline in the *Gaeltacht* needs to be addressed more directly and not downplayed. In conclusion, Ó Giollagáin (2020) strongly makes the case that communities of native speakers are necessary to keep the language alive: they cannot be replaced by networks of learners precisely because both learners and native speakers are equally needed to ensure the vitality of a minority language. He also adds that the absence of competent speakers who can act as a reference for learners can be problematic during the minority language acquisition process. This might appear to cast doubt on the ability of a language to reproduce itself without native speakers, as in the case of Manx.

7.1.4 Symbolism: One Half of the Solution?

The issues discussed above lead to another important point that I sought to explore during the interview: the symbolic relevance of Irish. Previous chapters have clearly illustrated that symbolism and the Irish language go hand in hand: Irish was revived through and because of its symbolic value in the first place, since it became a means for the formation of a national identity as Ireland gradually gained independence. But how does such symbolism pertain to the Irish language in a context of modernity, defined by deep and rapid sociological and linguistic change?

Asked about the role of Irish in the identity of present-day Ireland, Ó Giollagáin (2020) explains that it is entirely possible to feel Irish without speaking the language, in that identity is formed through socio-political and historical processes. At the same time, he confirms that Irish itself is important to the people, but actually speaking it is not; and that the symbolic need that the language fulfils is decreasing compared to the past. In his view, people are pleased when others speak it, but they are often not willing to take on the challenge of learning it themselves to the extent of being able to use it as a communicative cultural tool. The need to transform positive attitudes into social practice has already been discussed as an underlying challenge in Irish language policy over the years, and indeed it highlights the existence of a considerable potential that remains untapped, however, an issue that

can, for instance, be linked to the number of speakers who never use Irish outside the education system. The interview thus confirms the existence of this problem and identifies it as an inhibiting factor for the maintenance of Irish.

As argued by Ó Giollagáin (2020) in the interview, Irish language policy has not been successful in this particular aspect and he posits that perhaps there would have been better results had communities of native speakers been given more attention: he contends that for Irish to be strengthened as a vernacular, leadership is needed and this is not possible when leaders themselves promote a symbolic use of the language. In his opinion, the emphasis on symbolism is a way to ignore the marginal presence of learner networks and the decline of the *Gaeltacht*, which is damaging for the language's vitality. Furthermore, he underlines that all societies need two elements to exist, namely symbolism and social practices: symbolism alone might be important to the people, but it does not provide a solid grounding for the transmission of a threatened minority language. Ó Giollagáin's point is supported by research and statistical data, which clearly show that social practices are largely missing in the case of Irish today; an issue that is substantially contributing to the decline of the language.

7.1.5 Tension Between Speakers: Myth or Fact?

A further topic for discussion that was raised during the interview is related to the notions of ownership, legitimacy, authenticity, and authority. I explained above that these concepts are an important component of much of the literature on new speakers, which sets out to explore how power plays between various categories of speakers unfold. In Chapter 6, special attention was given to the fact that, from a 'new speakerness' point of view, native speakers have historically had a discursive dominance over new speakers in debates on minority language maintenance and shift, which has caused them to be cast as the only 'real' speakers of the minority language in question. Moreover, studies in the context of 'new speakerness' have found that native speakers sometimes prefer not to use Irish with

learners, which can lead to frustration among the latter since they are positively disposed to the language and its use (see for instance O'Rourke 2011, Nic Fhlannchadha and Hickey 2018). The notion of *Gaeilgeoir* can also be linked to these findings, which reveal underlying frictions between groups of speakers.

Ó Giollagáin (2020) however challenges this stance: he suggests that most of this perceived hostility is actually not tied to identity, but rather to the level of Irish attained by new speakers. He reports that speakers of a language tend to be more disposed to use it with people who have a high degree of competence in that language and come from a similar geographic background. So, the most important factor is communicative pragmatism, i.e. whether new speakers are proficient enough to hold a conversation with natives, or whether the latter need to switch to English. In his view, communicative function and group identity hence need to be seen as two distinct elements, although some degree of in-group/out-group tension might still manifest itself in the contact between native and new speakers. Indeed, he believes that new speakers – frequently hailing from middle-class urban areas in the *Galltacht* – do bring an outsider's perspective when they interact with the *Gaeltacht* people. However, he contends that this type of conflict can arise in any other setting and is not particular to Irish (Ó Giollagáin 2020). This view is thus in contrast with that expressed in much of the literature on 'new speakerness'.

Moreover, the interviewee adds that the new speaker ideological emphasis on notions of ownership, legitimacy, authenticity, and authority can have a negative impact on the existence of *Gaeltacht* communities: these concepts are used by 'new speakerness' advocates to influence power dynamics and thus increase their control of the debate, which conversely further disempowers traditional communities. This fits in the discursivist logic that Ó Giollagáin associates with 'new speakerness' and underscores how ideological questions can influence the condition of the language. To this extent, he explains that 'new-speakerness' is ideologically implicated in the discursive processes which are obfuscating the social process of language shift in the *Gaeltacht*. Put bluntly, 'new speakerness' is now an aspect of language shift. In this regard, he also states that communities of native speakers perceive the discursive dominance of new speakers vis-à-vis the demise of the *Gaeltacht* as

negative (Ó Giollagáin 2020). This would seem to suggest that the tension between community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness' has an ideological root, but also penetrates into the speakers' attitudes, although not necessarily in matters linked purely to the use of the language itself.

7.1.6 Approaching Collapse

Looking to the future, Ó Giollagáin (2020) is clear about the trajectory that Irish as a community language is following: he reiterates that the decline is continuing at a faster pace and language shift will soon be complete, as the predictions made in the *CLS* are now becoming reality. In his view, it is safe to say that the *Gaeltacht* will soon collapse following the forecasts detailed in the research and that policy for Irish will soon move on to a heritage-based model. He argues that 'public policy for Irish is dead' (Ó Giollagáin 2020), since the support to reverse the sociolinguistic collapse of the *Gaeltacht* is not provided by the state, which now merely holds a symbolic stance. This mirrors his critique of official policy – made in the literature – which in his view is designed with a 'built-in obsolescence' (Ó Giollagáin 2014b: 118) which justifies the abandonment of the *Gaeltacht*. He is of the view that the government has effectively unloaded its responsibilities on the communities themselves, not standing in their way but at the same time not providing the state-backed structures needed for a task of this magnitude. The result is that the voices of traditional Irish-speaking communities are overshadowed by a policy of indifference that they cannot influence because they are not given access to the tools to face their demise, as the top-down element of policy is now missing altogether (Ó Giollagáin 2020).

The interviewee goes on to talk about a 'perfect storm' for the survival of Irish as a community language, caused by the current non-policy for the *Gaeltacht* and the general post-*Gaeltacht* approach to Irish promoted by the state – whereby a rhetoric based on symbolism is encouraged by the dominant English-speaking middle class – as well as by the discursive hegemony of new speakers. According to him, all of

this gives the illusion that there is an easy way out of a deep sociological problem. As far as solutions are concerned, he stresses the need to separate language policy efforts aimed at learners and those aimed at native speakers, something which the state has so far failed to do, and suggests the creation by the state of an emergency commission comprised of high-powered politicians and civil servants, informed by academics who are familiar with the *Gaeltacht*'s struggle. He argues that such a commission would need to be able to provide leadership instead of delegating resources to powerless committees (Ó Giollagáin 2020).

7.2 'New Speakerness'

In line with the procedure followed for the community-oriented language policy approach, I conducted an interview with Bernadette O'Rourke (Professor of Sociolinguistics and Hispanic Studies at the University of Glasgow and Chair of the COST Action IS1306 'New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges' between 2013 and 2017) in order to go into greater depth on a number of issues related to the 'new speakerness' research strand. 'New speakerness' is one of Professor O'Rourke's main areas of specialisation, one on which she has published extensively in the context of various European minority languages, such as Irish, Galician, and Scottish Gaelic[58].

7.2.1 The Activist Role of New Speakers

The potential offered by new speakers has been stressed on the basis of their numerical strength, positive attitudes, and contribution as possible re-initiators of intergenerational transmission (see Chapter 6). The discussion with Professor O'Rourke provides further insights into this matter, in particular as to how new

[58] University of Glasgow (n.d.) *Professor Bernadette O'Rourke* [online] available from <https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/mlc/staff/bernadetteorourke/#publications,researchreportsorpapers,editedbooks,booksections,articles,researchinterests> [30 August 2020].

speakers have come to be such a powerful force in the revival movement and why they choose to learn Irish.

As the literature also shows (see Section 6.1), O'Rourke (2020) points out the fact that new speakers are a product of language policy: historical factors are behind the birth of the new speaker profile, as the state aimed to produce Irish speakers through the education system during the nationalist revival phase. By doing so, it expanded the language outside of its heartland in the *Gaeltacht* and developed it in what was a chiefly middle-class anglophone setting, which resulted in the significant presence of L2 speakers that can be seen nowadays. In terms of revival movements, she explains that the English speakers who historically took part in them were activists who possessed the social capital to engage in this type of issue, and who would be considered new speakers today. She also adds that, although the revival did not provide the expected results, the success in this approach was that it generated positive attitudes in the population and laid the foundations for all subsequent policy efforts. This led to a generation of speakers acquiring the language, and although English still dominated the socialisation process outside of the home, it pushed some people or certain sectors of the population to form networks of new speakers. Drawing a comparison with Scotland, the interviewee posits that without such efforts in the past, today Irish might find itself in a situation similar to that of Scottish Gaelic, whose number of speakers is even lower[59].

As for the present, according to O'Rourke (2020) research shows that there are specific moments in individuals' lifetimes in which they may decide to take up Irish in an activist way and form networks of new speakers. Younger people frequently do so during their teenage years; while others commit to Irish afterwards, for example when they go to university or start a family and need to decide the language in which they want to raise their children. The reasons indicated by O'Rourke (and in part already reported in this dissertation) are linked to sentimentality towards

[59] According to a recent study conducted by a team of researchers at the University of the Highlands and Islands, only around 11,000 habitual speakers of Gaelic remain today (as reported in the press for instance by Carrell 2020, para. 3). While this figure does not refer to new speakers, it gives an idea of the difference between the two languages and underscores the overall importance of past efforts for the revival of Irish.

the language, to the wish to pass it on to younger generations, and to a manifestation of identity, which sometimes takes the form of a reaction to global trends. In the latter case, these individuals strive to construct an identity that counteracts what they perceive to be the disempowering effects of globalisation. Interestingly, native speakers can sometimes lack this type of activist drive, as the interviewee explains: people in Irish-speaking communities do not always question whether they should be speaking Irish because to them it is just an ordinary part of the community, which results in a lesser activist attitude compared to that of some new speakers (O'Rourke 2020). This may be linked to what has been observed by Ó hIfearnáin (2014: 33), who notes that communities experiencing language shift are frequently not aware of the fact that their language is disappearing until after the shift is well underway. New speakers therefore stand out as a grassroots movement that gained momentum as a result of policy action and became dominant somewhat accidentally: the language seems to have been revived in a radically different way compared to the initial plans of the state, but some degree of success is apparent regardless.

7.2.2 Speech Community and Native Speaker: Outdated Concepts?

The first interview foregrounds a number of ideological differences between the two approaches analysed here. One such difference, namely that regarding the status of the *Gaeltacht* as a separate sociological entity, is of paramount importance in this debate. Therefore, I sought to further explore it in the second interview, this time from a 'new speakerness' perspective.

One major issue emerges in this context: the existence of blurred boundaries between speakers. O'Rourke (2020) stresses that the native/non-native divide is something that has been created artificially. She affirms that the notion of 'speech community' is rigid and excessively rooted in a geographical space and a particular moment in time, which can be linked to the critique – made in 'new speakerness' – of linguistic essentialism and the romantic notion of native speaker. In her view, instead of talking about *a* speech community, different communities of practice and

networks of speakers should be considered, as this enables a better description of a fluid reality by taking into account various speech repertoires produced in different contexts across time and space.

This also echoes the previously mentioned critique of the categorisation of speakers, a crucial point in 'new speakerness'. Indeed, O'Rourke argues that defining native speakers in the *Gaeltacht* poses a series of difficulties in relation to the criteria that make a speaker of Irish 'native': for instance, the concept of 'native speaker' draws on the idea that ability in a language is innate and strongly geographically rooted. Furthermore, people can have multiple mother tongues or learn a language to different levels of ability and still be considered speakers (O'Rourke 2020). When looking at the *Gaeltacht*, a highly bilingualized group in which individuals generally have varying levels of ability in Irish, these arguments are particularly relevant: the mixed background of *Gaeltacht* speakers exemplifies how difficult it is – both theoretically and at a practical level with policy measures – to categorise certain groups of speakers as native (or non-native, for that matter) and cater to their heterogeneous needs. The case that rigid definitions of speaker categories might actually hamper the goal of preserving the language, rather than contribute to its attainment, therefore reflects the complex reality of Irish speaker profiles.

While the concept of 'new speaker' has also been criticised for being excessively vague, O'Rourke (2020) acknowledges the ambiguity of the term and emphasises that in the framework of the COST network, considerable time was devoted to questioning the concept of 'speakerness' as opposed to 'new speaker': the broader notion of 'speaker' was considered as a possible term to be used, but the idea was eventually discarded as it prevents a more precise focus on the matter. Such a position appears to highlight the need to regard all users of the language as part of a continuum, which effectively removes the more rigid separation between native and new speakers deemed essential in the community-oriented strand of research. Here, a significant ideological difference between 'new speakerness' and community-oriented language policy becomes clear.

7.2.3 A Place for Native Speakers

Consequently, I found it important to address how native speakers of Irish fit into a 'new speakerness' framework for language policy. This is especially relevant given the aforementioned differences in the conceptualisation of the *Gaeltacht* as a sociological entity. What is the role of native speakers if the *Gaeltacht* is no longer a realistic representation of reality? Do native speakers exist at all, at this point?

First of all, it is important to note that, similarly to what emerges in the interview on community-oriented language policy, the discussion with O'Rourke (2020) reveals that 'new speakerness' does not deny the importance of native speakers of Irish, nor does it prioritise new speaker networks over *Gaeltacht* communities. Rather, the aim of 'new speakerness' is to cover a strand of research that has received little attention in the past, although the importance of the socio-economic development of rural native speaker communities should not be downgraded. So, it should be noted that also from a 'new speakerness' perspective the tension does not seem to relate to the role of speakers themselves, but rather to an ideological debate between two currents of thought. As a matter of fact, the critique of traditional approaches to language maintenance and shift made in 'new speakerness' is not directed at native speaker communities *per se*, but at a 'native speaker ideology' that – in the interviewee's words – permeates people's way of thinking about language: the one language-one nation idea (i.e. language as something very territorial) deemed reductive and limitative because speaker profiles are much more diverse than traditional labelling can express, and boundaries between languages are not as clear-cut as people are often brought up to believe (O'Rourke 2020).

O'Rourke (2020) cites an additional argument for the importance of native speakers in 'new speakerness', stating that in their activist role, new speakers often share the concerns about the crisis in the *Gaeltacht* and consider the state's interventions excessively bland and ineffective: many of them regularly visit the *Gaeltacht* – of which they frequently are a product because they have spent a considerable amount of time there – and can exert pressure on the government so that it will do more for Irish. She also makes the point that these learners of Irish often look at *Gaeltacht*

communities as a model and would aspire to be native speakers themselves. In line with the data cited previously, O'Rourke indicates that two thirds of the Irish population have a positive attitude towards Irish and are favourable to the government providing funding for it. As she sees it, there has always been strong resistance, even among non-Irish speakers, against initiatives to remove Irish from the school curriculum, which once again proves that people are overwhelmingly supportive of Irish and that the *Gaeltacht* is indeed important to new speakers too. She also discusses the fact that keeping native speaker communities isolated, as happened for instance during the nationalist revival phase, is not beneficial to them as there is a lack of community engagement in a top-down approach: native speakers are 'museified' (as explained by Choay 2011 cited in O'Rourke and Pujolar 2013: 53) and the language is transformed into some sort of intangible heritage, as opposed to something living.

O'Rourke (2020) thus stresses that 'it is not a matter of either or' and that the idea according to which native and new speakers are fighting for the same resources is a misconception that emerges from the artificial separation of speaker groups first set up by their framing of language policy, which brings about an institutionalised tension. She argues that such categories could be removed altogether, and that instead it would make more sense to talk about 'the Irish-speaking community' and what it means to be an Irish speaker today, regardless of where in Ireland speakers are based. In this context, she adds that work needs to be done to find ways to create connections between different speaker groups at policy level. In her view, *Gaeltacht* communities also need to be empowered as a social group (for example through socioeconomic development), a question that is not linguistic in itself. This final argument partly coincides with what is mentioned by Ó Giollagáin in the first interview and shows that there is consensus on the matter.

7.2.4 Can Irish Exist Without Native Speakers?

Two of the main takeaways from the conversation with Ó Giollagáin (2020) are that a language cannot survive without a community of native speakers and that networks of new speakers are too fragile and dispersed to replace *Gaeltacht* communities. Therefore, the question of whether a minority language such as Irish can continue to exist without a community of native speakers – that is, exclusively through new speakers (or L2 speakers in general) – is among the most salient ones in the debate. For this reason, I considered it essential to include it in the second interview.

O'Rourke (2020) partly shares Ó Giollagáin's view but stresses that the matter is highly contentious. For instance, she cites Manx as a case of successful language revival in the absence of native speakers (see also Section 6.2.2). As for Irish, she points out that the existence of native speaker communities themselves is disputable in the present context of decline: even within the *Gaeltacht*, finding Irish speakers to communicate with can be an arduous task and the situation in the heartland is now displaying features of the 'networked use of language that can be observed outside the *Gaeltacht*' (O'Rourke 2020), as speakers have become too dispersed. It follows that it is certainly not unrealistic to say that both traditional communities and new speaker networks are fragile and even suffer from the same type of problems, although for slightly different reasons: the two speaker profiles do at times overlap, with common traits outnumbering differences.

Nonetheless, O'Rourke (2020) acknowledges that the main weakness of new speaker networks is that they are frequently unstable: for instance, she says that while there are as many Irish speakers in Dublin as there are in the *Gaeltacht*, they are not concentrated in specific areas; and although networks might be formed, it can be very difficult to maintain them. This echoes previous research findings: Ó Riagáin (2001: 202) writes that networks of speakers in the *Galltacht* 'are dispersed and weakly established and are very vulnerable to the loss of members over time as they are not sufficiently large or vibrant enough to easily attract and retain replacements'. He also adds that 'the ability of Irish-speaking networks to reproduce

themselves is limited by their distribution, number and size in an English-speaking environment'. Asked about the existence of quantitative studies on new speaker networks, O'Rourke (2020) explains that comprehensive data do not exist and there is a need for research to understand how these networks are formed, how they lose or gain momentum, and what factors help sustain them. Such research, she says, would provide useful knowledge if the Irish government were to look at new models for language policy and planning. Hence, it could be said that 'new speakerness' is still a developing strand of research that requires a deeper analysis of some issues to be fully suitable from a policy point of view, which is something that Williams (2019: 604–605) has also drawn attention to.

Nevertheless, O'Rourke (2020) also asserts that these networks do exist and do generate a sense of community tied to a group of people and activities: they are formed by highly committed individuals who make a lifestyle choice that requires a huge effort (for instance by enrolling their children in *Gaelscoileanna*), which sets them apart from native speakers for whom Irish is the norm. Thus, again, there is a strong emphasis on the activist attitude of committed new speakers as a key factor in the minority language maintenance process. As for the frailty of new speaker networks, it is also interesting to note that other plausible solutions are taken into consideration to adapt to the difficulties of the present-day situation. Online communities of speakers are an example for this and are mentioned both by O'Rourke during the interview and by the government in the *20-Year Strategy*: 'Fostering the creation of youth culture and identity, and their appropriate Irish language forms, involves providing opportunities for its natural use and creating ICT mediated networks of speakers' (Government of Ireland 2010: 12). Given current circumstances and the major role played by technology in people's lives, this might help tackle some of the problems tied to the geographical distribution of speakers and create the conditions for the existence of some form of networks of language use.

7.2.5 Finding a Way Through the *Cúpla Focal*

I have already devoted considerable space to speakers' attitudes towards the language, which – to cite Edwards (2017: 22) – are broadly positive but defined by 'passive goodwill'. Moreover, I have discussed how speakers often do not reach a high level of proficiency in Irish. In light of this, it is again important to look at how positive attitudes can be converted into active (as opposed to symbolic) use of the language, and most importantly what impact a limited use of Irish (both in terms of *how often* and *how well* the language is used) can have on the vitality of the language in a context in which learners are the vast majority of speakers.

While the first interview highlights the downsides of symbolism, 'new speakerness' sees it in a more positive light. For example, asked whether accepting tokenistic instances of language use can be problematic since it entails the absence of a clear benchmark or standard for Irish, O'Rourke (2020) makes the case that in the current context of rapid decline it should be asked whether it is useful to exclude a part of Irish speakers simply on the grounds that they are lacking competences. In her opinion, this mindset can leave out potential speakers, in particular due to the fact that some people with limited Irish might decide to invest in the language later on in their life and become committed new speakers. Moreover, within the broad and varying spectrum of new speaker profiles, some individuals live certain parts of their lives through Irish (for instance, they take part in conversation groups and other social activities through the language) even if they do not possess a high level of competence. In her view, because it has become so difficult to get people to speak the language, an inclusive approach to language revitalisation is needed and all levels of ability should be encouraged and welcomed, even if they are not perfect. Therefore, she argues that it depends on whether the state is willing to invest in this type of speakers or not, and on whether the ultimate goal is to increase the number of speakers or just accept the decline. It should nevertheless be mentioned that the literature on new speakers does not deny the potential difficulties associated with a symbolic or 'incomplete' use of the language (see for example Brennan and O'Rourke 2019: 141–142).

Commenting on the lack of societal use of Irish, O'Rourke (2020) indicates that since it is possible to survive in Ireland without speaking Irish, individuals who use it daily or weekly do so for reasons other than mere necessity; but even if many people in the country would like the language to survive, it does not mean that they will actually speak it. In her opinion, various reasons can contribute to the absence of language use, including the lack of confidence of some speakers as well as insufficient opportunities to speak Irish with others. In this context, she argues that opportunities need to be created so that social spaces for willing speakers (such as Irish language centres) exist. Taking into consideration what has been analysed so far, it could be said that this might apply to both native and new speakers, given that the insufficient social density of Irish speakers is a problem both in the *Gaeltacht* and outside of it. In the interview, O'Rourke (2020) makes another point that also emerged in the conversation with Ó Giollagáin, namely that the state has so far failed to make the language necessary for its people, thus decreasing the potential for its use. She cites the exception of civil servant jobs, which required Irish early on and thus bestowed an economic value on it.

7.2.6 Areas of Development

O'Rourke (2020) thus outlines a number of areas that will need to be further developed in the coming years. She contends, for instance, that research needs to be done around the *Gaelscoil* movement, which is gaining momentum but remains a highly institutionalised domain. In particular, she argues that what happens after school – i.e. how opportunities for the use of Irish outside of the Irish-medium education domain can be created – needs to be analysed in greater detail. In her view, the *Gaelscoil* movement is a high-potential domain in that pressure can be exerted on the state through demand for Irish-medium education. Discussing future outlooks, she underlines a positive development, namely the recent creation by the state of recognised Irish Language Networks (see Section 3.3). However, she contends that the government is not taking sufficient responsibility in language policy, as it is delegating it to individual speakers and groups, who often act on a

voluntary basis. She argues that language policy for Irish needs to be provided as a public good, which requires greater involvement by the state, and not mere funding.

7.3 An Institutional Perspective

Edel Ní Chorráin, Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Education Services of *Foras na Gaeilge*, was the third and final interviewee for this research. She has extensive experience in Irish-medium education, a domain in which she has also held responsibilities at *Foras na Gaeilge* since 2017[60]. Given that the previous two interviews provide a chiefly academic point of view, I deemed it useful to include an official stance on the debate as well, since language policy is ultimately decided and implemented by the Irish State and its bodies. This interview therefore complements the other two and enables a comprehensive analysis of the subject; in particular with regard to how new speakers and traditional *Gaeltacht* communities can be linked in current official policy. It should be kept in mind that – under the *Gaeltacht Act 2012* – *Foras na Gaeilge* is responsible mainly for language planning for learners, for instance for Gaeltacht Service Towns outside the *Gaeltacht* and Irish Language Networks. This interview therefore offers insights into the learner component of official policy in particular, and how it relates to traditional *Gaeltacht* communities.

7.3.1 Learners and The State: an Easy Way Out?

Official language policy for the *Gaeltacht* has been heavily criticised over the years. Such criticism has been raised by community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness' advocates alike, although the former are more vocal about the matter. The effectiveness of present-day policy instruments has been called into

[60] Foras na Gaeilge (2020) *Edel Ní Chorráin starts as Foras na Gaeilge Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Education Services* [online] available from <https://www.forasnagaeilge.ie/edel-ni-chorrain-starts-foras-na-gaeilge-deputy-chief-executivedirector-education-services/?lang=en> [30 August 2020].

question and the government's stance has essentially been regarded as too soft, as previous chapters illustrate. For this reason, I thought it essential to look at how the state and its agencies believe *Gaeltacht* communities can be included in official policy, and whether promoting the development of learners is merely an easy way out of the decline of the *Gaeltacht*.

The first two interviews emphasised the importance of having both learners and native speakers in the language maintenance project, a point that is also confirmed by Ní Chorráin (2020b): she underlines that it is not a matter of either or, but rather of finding a way to ensure that both groups of speakers can work hand in hand. She also stresses that the *Gaeltacht* will play an essential role in the maintenance of Irish in the years to come, in that supporting networks of learners is not an alternative to bolstering native speaker communities, which need basic provisions in Irish (childcare services, post-primary education, etc.) for their survival. However, in contrast to arguments made in the other interviews, she also remains more cautious with regard to the extent of the decline of said communities. While agreeing that, in the past, Irish language policy has been excessively symbolic and insufficient in terms of community support, she draws attention to the fact that the effectiveness of current measures might still need some time to become fully visible and reach community level, as several measures are only now coming into force. In her opinion, progress is actually being made despite the discouraging census results, and although the 2022 census will probably reveal a continuation of the decline, the following one could draw a more positive picture of the **s**ituation as far as the *Gaeltacht* is concerned. Her outlook is therefore more optimistic, as she underlines that present-day policy (in particular the *Action Plan 2018-2022*) is more effective than past measures, because unlike previous, symbolic efforts, it is based on specific goals.

For example, among the most important successes of the *20-Year Strategy*, she mentions that for the first time a *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* has been introduced, which ensures that Irish is indeed the language of schools in these areas, while in the past the majority of such schools were bilingual at best. As the interviewee sees it, this has so far yielded encouraging results. With regard to the arguments made in

the literature review (in particular concerning the detrimental effects of bilingualism), it is, however, useful to mention that one important issue tied to the education system is yet to be fully addressed by the state, namely the lack of differentiation between native speakers and learners in *Gaeltacht* schools (in other words, the absence of a 'true' *Gaeltacht* education system, since L1 and L2 children still attend the same schools with the same national curriculum). Asked about the possibility of this changing in the coming years, Ní Chorráin (2020b) explains that the curriculum might at some point be updated for *Gaeltacht* schools and Irish-medium schools (note that the latter are designed for native speakers of English) to have more distinct features to focus on, but that such changes would require time. Referring to this particular problem, however, Ní Chorráin (2020b) explains that the collaboration between *Gaeltacht* schools and *gaelscoileanna* is growing and resources are being made available. This, she contends, is facilitated by the fact that there is actually little difference between these two school categories.

The interviewee also explains that the government is now funding parent groups in the *Gaeltacht* with the aim of creating an environment for children to use Irish outside the home and school domains, a measure that is definitely needed to tackle the lack of socialisation in Irish among young speakers. Moreover, she draws a comparison with Northern Ireland, where Irish is not a mandatory school subject and speaker figures are thus far smaller: she argues that although it may not be perfect, the education system in the Republic is substantially contributing to the preservation of the language by teaching it as a compulsory subject. She adds that many families still raise their children through Irish and enrol them in Irish-medium schools, which ensures that younger generations can use Irish as their first language at least in certain domains of life. Ní Chorráin (2020b) believes that this phenomenon will grow in the future, which will help the language survive as new generations of native speakers are born to new speaker parents.

7.3.2 Language Planning Outside the *Gaeltacht*

In Section 3.3 I outlined that the government is now expanding language planning areas for Irish beyond the *Gaeltacht* with Irish Language Networks and Gaeltacht Service Towns. This feature of the *Gaeltacht Act 2012* is considered a positive evolution by 'new speakerness' advocates (Walsh and O'Rourke 2017, para. 14, O'Rourke 2020), but it is criticised by the community-oriented strand of the research because it seeks to bolster the presence of Irish countrywide, and not in the *Gaeltacht* specifically, which means that learners and native speakers are assimilated into one group (Ó Giollagáin 2014b: 107; Ó Giollagáin 2020). In my opinion, it was therefore appropriate to add an official perspective on these recent measures to get a glimpse of the future trajectory of Irish language policy.

Ní Chorráin (2020b) highlights a series of positive aspects of these planning entities outside the *Gaeltacht*. For instance, she illustrates that native speakers who moved outside the *Gaeltacht*, for example in the greater Dublin area, often live in Irish Language Networks, which give them the possibility to conduct their lives through Irish even if they no longer are in the *Gaeltacht*. Moreover, these areas are home to people who have gone through Irish-medium education, so it is reasonable to assume that they are also inhabited by new speakers who have attained good levels of proficiency. As suggested by the interviewee, this ensures that a social environment for the use of Irish as a living language is created and maintained and that young people can use Irish outside of the home or the classroom, for instance by attending Irish-medium after-school activities. Gaeltacht Service Towns also play a part by creating the opportunity for people to access services in Irish (such as healthcare or education) that previously required travelling to English-speaking areas. So, *Gaeltacht* areas can also benefit from these recent developments.

Therefore, according to Ní Chorráin (2020b), the focus of language policy in Ireland outside of the *Gaeltacht* should now be on the aforementioned planning entities, with the intention of progressively expanding them so as to strengthen the use of the language as an ordinary means of communication. She also states that, given the positive steps made with the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education*, it is now important to

put into place a policy to support the education system in the *Galltacht*, for instance to better assist teachers in English-medium schools. Hence, as far as official policy outside the traditional *Gaeltacht* is concerned, the emphasis would appear to be placed on fostering communities of speakers. These measures seem to draw on a *Gaeltacht* idea of community: Ní Chorráin (2020b) explains that, by establishing Irish Language Networks, *Foras na Gaeilge* supports the creation of geographically-rooted sociological entities. This is done through support measures such as the *Scéim Pobal Gaeilge* scheme. This scheme, which has been running for over ten years and is regularly updated (Ní Chorráin 2020a), funds a 'network of community-based Irish language development officers' with 'facilitation and networking duties'[61]. Ní Chorráin (2020b) illustrates that the government is thus intervening at community level and exploiting the potential offered by areas outside the *Gaeltacht* where the language is being developed, but previously had no institutional backing. Essentially, the idea is to create safe havens for Irish and its speakers outside the traditional language planning areas.

Consequently, despite the presence of native speakers in such communities, the state's approach would appear to rely largely on learners. Asked whether this might be detrimental for the language in the long term, since there is evidence that new speakers or learners in general often do not possess sufficient levels of Irish, Ní Chorráin (2020b) says she recognises the challenge. She affirms that the levels attained by these speakers are often not enough for them to live their life through Irish. In her opinion, this is something that will need to be monitored over the coming years to ensure that a good standard of Irish is preserved, and that speakers' abilities do not fall below a certain threshold needed to sustain the language. She is hopeful that language competence will be boosted naturally once Irish Language Networks are fully functional, and adds that it will be essential to motivate people to improve their Irish instead of simply increasing their exposure to the language at school. Thus, Ní Chorráin hopes for a certain standard of Irish to be maintained, while acknowledging the fact that the language is evolving and its boundaries are

[61] See also: Foras na Gaeilge (2020) *Scéim Pobal Gaeilge* [online] available from <https://www.forasnagaeilge.ie/sceim-pobal-gaeilge-2016-2020/?lang=en> [8 September 2020].

now more porous, with speakers becoming increasingly accepting of variation. Addressing the frailty of Irish-speaking networks, Ní Chorráin (2020b) emphasises that the loss of committed individuals in small geographic settings can have dramatic consequences on the vitality of the language in the area. She therefore states that community development will be key to ensure the resilience of Irish Language Networks.

7.3.3 Bilingualism as a Guiding Principle

Previous chapters and sections have highlighted that bilingualism remains a contentious aspect of Irish language policy. While the benefits of speaking multiple languages are widely known and need not be reiterated here – they are for instance a recurring theme of the *20-Year Strategy* (Government of Ireland 2010) – research on the *Gaeltacht* has shed light on the flip side of bilingualism, which has been proved to be detrimental for the survival of a minority language such as Irish. Therefore, in the interview I sought to address whether bilingualism can hinder the development of learner networks outside the *Gaeltacht*, given its dire consequences for the language level of native speakers. Indeed, it could be argued that developing a minority language (which struggles to survive even among its native speakers) in an environment comprising largely of learners – however committed – could result in English remaining dominant and Irish being relegated to certain domains, which would basically reproduce many of the current problems.

In this context, Ní Chorráin (2020b) affirms that it is necessary to be realistic and that English will always be a part of Ireland. Instead of discouraging the use of English, she says that the focus should be on finding ways to support life in a bilingual society. As a relevant example, Ní Chorráin cites the case of younger generations, who predominantly use English: in her opinion, the goal should be to ensure that they possess good levels of Irish and that they can later raise their children through it, not that they avoid English altogether. Thus, she concludes, the aim ought to be to support Irish in a chiefly English-speaking environment and

foster positive attitudes to the minority language. From this point of view, bilingualism needs to be embraced, especially given the impossibility of dialling down the presence of English.

7.3.4 What Is Needed for Success

As for the elements that are needed for the success of Irish language policy, Ní Chorráin (2020b) mentions that clear guidance will be essential both in the *Gaeltacht* and in the rest of the country, particularly as relates to the education system. There is also a need for an increase in resources, she says, stressing that budget restrictions are perhaps the greatest challenge *Foras na Gaeilge* has to face: the organisation runs over twenty schemes that back a variety of endeavours, all of which are highly dependent on funding. However, the budget has been either frozen or reduced since the 2008 crisis, which clearly represents an obstacle to the proper implementation of existing and planned measures.

She also names three high-potential areas that could be decisive in strengthening Irish in the coming years: further developing communities outside the *Gaeltacht*; making Irish-medium education available where there is demand by increasing the number of schools that teach using Irish; and fostering positive attitudes among the population (particularly younger generations). Ní Chorráin (2020b) also mentions that more has to be done to ensure that the whole Irish-speaking community works together: tensions between speakers of different dialects need to be put to the side, as they hinder the overall goal of preserving Irish. Similarly, the efforts made by learners to acquire Irish should not be dismissed by native speakers, but rather encouraged. As a matter of fact, the interviewee argues that the presence of large numbers of learners can positively affect native speakers in the *Gaeltacht*, in that it shows that the language is still valuable, which can in turn motivate *Gaeltacht* communities not to give up on using it.

Chapter 8 Deconstructing the Debate

So far I have discussed several features of Irish language policy and of the debate between community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness'. First, I sketched out an overview of the Irish language and summarised the key facts of its decline from a historical standpoint. I then presented the current framework of Irish language policy (legislation, official bodies, measures, etc.) and used both statistical and research results to detail the main challenges. I also examined community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness' on the basis of the literature. The interviews with the experts subsequently enabled me to delve deeper into both research strands and investigate how they relate to each other. Moreover, the inclusion of a state agency's point of view completed the data gathered earlier with an institutional opinion on the matter. It is now time to further analyse the debate by comparing and assessing community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness'. In this chapter I shall thus step away from the perhaps more descriptive approach I have followed so far and provide my personal opinion. I will do so on the basis of a theoretical policy analysis framework, while taking into consideration both the general context presented in this dissertation and the findings of the interviews.

8.1 Features of an Ideological Tension

The interviews provide an insight into different perspectives on the same issue, which shows that while the decline of Irish might be universally acknowledged, it is in fact experienced in multiple ways. This is also exemplified by the contrasting circumstances of the two main speaker groups that make up the Irish-speaking community, that is, native speakers and a variety of learners (including new speakers as defined in Chapter 6). While the former are experiencing a sociolinguistic crisis that, according to scientific evidence, is leading to their collapse, the latter are seemingly thriving under current circumstances, as a strong

emphasis is put on the teaching of Irish as an L2 and a symbolic degree of knowledge is often deemed sufficient by speakers (or rather is generally accepted).

With this in mind, both the literature and the interviews reveal a degree of consensus around the way in which policy should tackle the maintenance of Irish in light of the current situation. Indeed, the interviewees agree on a number of points, arguably the most important one being the necessity of having a place for both native and new speakers in the revival project and finding ways to make them work together more closely for the survival of Irish in the long term. So, it is possible to conclude fairly confidently that no particular group of speakers should be prioritised over the other. Rather, for Irish language maintenance to succeed, both groups must be assisted in parallel. This is a step forward in answering the question on which this dissertation is based: should community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness' be regarded as a dichotomy, or rather as two complementary approaches? Another issue that comes up frequently is the ineffectiveness of past measures targeting the *Gaeltacht*, as well as the failure to make Irish *necessary* as opposed to simply desirable in an English-speaking setting. There also appears to be consensus regarding the need to develop speakers' ability, especially in the context of new speakers of Irish as agents of language maintenance, as opposed to simple 'learners' in the traditional sense.

The discussion and interviews do reveal some level of conflict as well, though not necessarily among speakers themselves: as the interviews show, the tension is rather ideological and institutionalised. Some of the points of contention that emerge are tied to fundamental theoretical notions and ways of conceptualising reality. A good example of this is the 'new speakerness' strand's rejection of the native speaker category as a monolithic concept: do native speakers as a separate entity even exist at this point, or do they just represent one end of a continuum? A 'new speakerness' stance would seem to suggest that the latter is true, while a community-oriented approach is centred on the opposing view. Contrasting outlooks on this type of issue embody the quandary as to whether the *Gaeltacht* and its speakers represent a separate sociological entity, a question which is crucial for the future of Irish. For instance, it can raise questions such as on what grounds

someone can be considered an Irish speaker to begin with, and whether native speakers in the traditional sociolinguistic sense are needed for the survival of a minority language. Should language policy still target the *Gaeltacht* as the main engine for the intergenerational transmission of Irish? Or are new speakers capable of taking on this task instead? Is intergenerational transmission absolutely necessary at all? As the interviewees' answers have highlighted, for Irish to survive, from a community-oriented perspective, it has to remain an intergenerationally transmitted community language, whereas the 'new speakerness' approach is more open to other scenarios of language regeneration through new actors, with the revival of Manx as a key example.

Another element of the conversations with the interviewees pertains to power or, in other words, to the discursive dominance of the mainstream debate as a consequence of class issues that date back to the early days of language policy in the country. Ireland is still economically, demographically, and linguistically divided between east and west, with power (whether cultural, political or economic) residing in the former, and this is also reflected in language policy: new speakers possess stronger social capital than traditional speakers simply by virtue of their middle-class origin, as highlighted by Ó Giollagáin (2020). Thus, in a sense, non-native speakers still lead the revival movement in a way that is not dissimilar to the early days of language policy.

The points discussed above raise an important issue: while the two strands may well agree that both native and new speakers are necessary for the overall goal of maintaining Irish, the debate between community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness' does have a substantial impact on the overall condition of the language since it involves power dynamics which can dictate the approach taken to language maintenance. For instance, the overall approach could place greater emphasis on one particular group of speakers, or particular policy measures might only benefit one category of speaker. Since research informs politics and policy, this debate has implications at a societal level. Consequently, an analysis of the tension between the two research strands presented here calls for an assessment of what language policy is meant to do in the case of Irish today. Fundamental questions

need to be asked again, such as who ought to be targeted by policy, why, and how. The fragmentation of the speaker community demands that the allocation of resources devoted to language policy be given renewed consideration (for instance grants for the promotion of the use of Irish in Irish-speaking families, or funding for *Gaelscoileanna* in the *Galltacht*). It also requires assessing how the Irish-speaking community can be brought together as a single entity, while still ensuring that individual needs are not overlooked.

Against this background, in the following sections I shall construct my analysis on the assumption that both native and new speakers are necessary (in line with what emerged in the interviews). Although I will make a number of direct comparisons between the approaches to stress what I deem to be the pros and cons of each approach, my overall goal here is therefore not to claim that policy should focus exclusively on either native or new speakers (or learners in general), but rather to assess how each current of thought can positively or negatively impact the future of Irish; as well as how both points of view can feed into each other. I will also proceed from the assumption that – in spite of the crisis in the *Gaeltacht* – the preservation of Irish as an intergenerationally transmitted community language is currently still one of the government's aims, as detailed in the *20-Year Strategy* (Government of Ireland 2010). In the analysis, I will refer largely to the literature quoted in the rest of the dissertation.

8.2 A Possible Benchmark for Comparison

In order to compare the two approaches in the current situation of language shift, I suggest employing the three criteria used by Grin (2003), which I have already introduced and explained in Section 3.2.1: 'capacity', 'opportunities', and 'desire'. According to Grin (2003: 43–44), these criteria – all of which are necessary, but not sufficient on their own – are prerequisites that every language needs for its survival; and in the case of minority languages, it is the responsibility of the state to make sure that they exist. The reason why I have chosen them as a starting point to

compare community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness' is that they are sufficiently generic but at the same time allow an analysis that encompasses most of the problematic points I have discussed so far. Moreover, they encapsulate the goals of the *20-Year Strategy*, thus enabling the use of a common benchmark. My intention here is not to compare two or more particular policy measures, nor to carry out a comprehensive policy analysis. This would require quantitative data (for example regarding the costs of measures) that lie outside the scope of this research. Rather, I will attempt to use the notions of 'capacity', 'opportunities', and 'desire' to clarify the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. This, I hope, will provide a stepping stone towards further discussions, in particular as far as a possible combination of community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness' is concerned.

8.2.1 Capacity

Capacity is a complicated issue for Irish language policy, as a wide variety of levels exist among all speaker categories and it is difficult to make general assumptions about the ability of Irish speakers at large. The first area of intervention that springs to mind in this context is the education system: here capacity is developed through acquisition planning (increasing the number of speakers) and skill development (increasing their ability) (Grin 2003: 170). However, what census data and the literature indicate is that success so far seems to lie more in the former than the latter: while overall speaker numbers grow, their ability does not necessarily follow suit – in other words, quantity does not automatically ensure quality. I reported in Section 6.2.1 that learners in particular, who are a product of the education system, are generally not proficient enough to be compared with fluent native speakers, although they can have higher abilities in certain aspects of the language. Nevertheless, abilities in Irish need to be enhanced in overall terms, as even native speakers' competence decreases from one generation to the next.

Looking back, schools have always played a critical role in the revival of Irish, although more recent maintenance efforts have taken into account a broader scope of elements compared to the first language policy phase. While an improvement is clear – the language has become less institutionalised, as shown for instance by the *20-Year Strategy* – significant steps forward still need to be made. The ideal scenario would be one in which schools bear a lesser burden of the education planning process and become 'providers' of abilities that complement the language reproduction process outside the education system. That is to say, social interaction in Irish would need to be enhanced to a sufficient level for schools to do the skill development part, while speakers themselves would function as agents for acquisition planning through intergenerational transmission. As a matter of fact, previous chapters show that a major problem with the school system today is that it is often *the sole* means through which individuals acquire and use Irish, instead of being *one* element of an interconnected system. This is obviously true for learners in general, but native speakers clearly struggle to develop their L1 outside the school and the home as well.

An essential question in the relationship between capacity and the debate on community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness' is *what level of ability* is considered necessary for the language to be sustainable. Deciding when an individual's competence is 'good enough' is undoubtedly a challenging task. Ultimately, it is an arbitrary decision based only in part on objective criteria. Nonetheless, as explained by Grin (2003: 43), evidence suggests that for capacity to be effective, fluency is also required. This implies that not all levels of competence can be expected to substantially contribute to the maintenance of a threatened language, and this aligns with the opinion expressed for instance by Ní Chorráin (2020b) in the interview. It also corresponds to the arguments put forward by the community-oriented strand of research, which maintains that it is necessary to improve the dwindling abilities of native speakers, while still promoting the learning of Irish as an L2 among the rest of the population. This is essential because without a core group of native speakers who are *able* to use Irish naturally, the language as a vernacular will be lost (see for example Péterváry et al. 2014).

'New speakerness', on the other hand, takes a perhaps more inclusive stance and breaks the barriers pertaining to abilities by placing speakers on a continuum, which often encompasses individuals who only possess the *cúpla focal*. This might make sense from a practical point of view since low speaker numbers certainly do not justify a picky attitude. However, in light of current issues, in my opinion it could be detrimental to the future of Irish. What I mean is that accepting all levels of ability as a basis for the regeneration of the language could entail favouring acquisition planning and neglecting skill development, given that only a small part of learners are actual new speakers as defined in Chapter 6: the overarching objective would be to bolster the number of speakers – irrespective of their competences – whereas the overall level of ability would stagnate, which could in turn result in the flattening of the standard for Irish.

In other words, total speaker numbers would keep on growing, but the increase would be due to higher numbers of low-competence speakers who use the language occasionally or only at school. Current trends would therefore be replicated and the general level of fluency would deteriorate, as more speakers would not use the language frequently enough (I refer here to the positive correlation between frequency of use and ability, as shown by Darmody and Daly 2015: 66). Thus, only a partial regeneration of Irish would occur. Even if the *Gaeltacht* were to be supported at the same time (which is not ruled out in a 'new speakerness' framework), I would argue that it is difficult to imagine how this could contribute to the maintenance of Irish as a language of everyday use – even more so if some form of community use in Irish Language Networks is targeted to compensate for the loss of native speakers. In such a scenario, it could thus be argued that reinforcing speaker numbers of a language would not necessarily mean maintaining it, if it comes at the expense of the overall standard of the language.

It is nevertheless true that 'new speakerness' emphasises the idea of a regeneration of the language through new actors, which a priori implies its transformation from traditional to 'post-traditional varieties' (Nic Fhlannchadha and Hickey 2018: 49). These post-traditional varieties are seen as a '*re*-embodiment of the language through models of language and speakerhood that are not dependent on alignment

with existing speaker models, but which give "new speakers" recognition as linguistic models in and of themselves' (O'Rourke, Pujolar, and Ramallo 2015: 10). This point therefore remains contentious: a full acceptance of such new varieties would probably remove the issue of a standard for Irish altogether (i.e. producing low-competence speakers would not be seen as a hindrance to the maintenance of the language); but might also involve jettisoning the idea of creating sound networks for Irish as a community language of sorts in the *Galltacht* for the reasons I have illustrated above.

Of course, the ideal situation would be to have large numbers of highly proficient learners (or even better, proficient and committed new speakers) to complement the support of the *Gaeltacht*, but currently this does not seem to be the case, as I reported in Section 6.2.1. Thus, significant efforts are needed to increase the ability of L2 speakers if they are to become agents for the regeneration of Irish. Looking at the *Gaeltacht*, while it is true that native speakers also struggle to learn the language, they grew up speaking it 'naturally' in the home and could therefore be expected to become at least *potentially* more proficient than new speakers (especially if they are provided the right conditions for their skill development, as I shall illustrate later). This has for instance been explained by Montrul (2008: 19), who writes that, compared to native speakers, L2 speakers who acquire the language as adults generally do so in an incomplete way. Consequently, their level of ability rarely matches that attained by monolingual children. Moreover, as reported by Ó hIfearnáin (2013: 355), L1 speakers who learnt Irish at home from highly proficient parents are the ones who are more likely to use it and transmit it to their own children.

This is not to say that speakers with little competence should be discouraged from learning the language. On the contrary, natives are numerically so scarce that it is essential to encourage the acquisition of Irish at all levels, both within and outside the *Gaeltacht*. Yet, precisely because native speakers are on the brink of collapse (and learners are not), I believe that the priority should still be to improve the abilities of existing speakers who have a sufficient level of fluency, so that they can fully function through Irish and have better chances to pass it on to the next

generation. In my view, this includes supporting natives as well as highly proficient new speakers and learners – the issue is not so much about authenticity as it is about creating the conditions for the language to remain usable for its speakers. Simply put, not setting a certain standard of Irish as a maintenance goal could be problematic. In my opinion, placing the focus on the *cúpla focal* or a slightly superior level of ability is not a realistic solution and will not suffice to generate community use of Irish, and given that so many people struggle to reach proficiency today, it is unlikely that this will change in the future. More resources should thus be devoted to the assistance of high-potential speakers who can contribute to the regeneration of the language. To put it in another way, speakers with low levels of ability participate in the maintenance of Irish but cannot be expected to play the role of native or highly proficient L2 speakers.

Research on 'new speakerness' has shown that some new speakers consider making an effort to learn the language more important than speaking it fluently (O'Rourke and Walsh 2015: 75). Clearly, motivation is of great significance. However, I would contend that this type of attitude could result in a tokenisation of the language, which would be alive on paper but not in practice, since speakers would likely still turn to English for most daily activities simply because their Irish would not be good enough. For example, they might use English for formal communication because they lack domain-specific vocabulary. Thus I would argue that, in terms of capacity, the focus now needs to be on skill development rather than on acquisition planning, which already yields remarkably positive results. The question here is whether the goal is to produce large numbers of semi-proficient and non-proficient speakers or, conversely, to ensure that perhaps fewer, but better and more 'reliable' speakers exist. Generally speaking, it could perhaps be said that 'new speakerness' could produce the former result, while community-oriented language policy the latter.

8.2.1.1 A Word on Current Measures

Looking at practical undertakings, the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* is undoubtedly a step in the right direction and shows an effort being made by the government for the preservation of native-spoken Irish, in that it can positively impact the skill development of native speakers by focusing more on their needs. At primary and Junior Cycle level, the introduction of an L1 curriculum for Irish-medium *Gaeltacht* schools and an L2 curriculum for English-medium *Gaeltacht* schools (Department of Education and Skills 2016: 33) provides some differentiation. Nevertheless, it could be claimed that it is not sufficient given the strong evidence of the reduced acquisition of Irish among young people in the *Gaeltacht*. Other measures are needed in such a critical situation. Most importantly, the model of total-immersion education described in the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* addresses both L1 and L2 speakers (Department of Education and Skills 2016: 17). This means that even if there is an L1 curriculum, officially recognised *Gaeltacht* schools remain mixed, which hardly solves the underlying issue of subtractive bilingualism highlighted in the *CLS* and in the *Analysis of bilingual competence*. Therefore, I would argue that the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* is problematic for two reasons: the first being that it probably comes too late, as evidenced by the rapid decline in the *Gaeltacht*; and the second being that a clear distinction between *Gaeltacht* schools and *Gaelscoileanna*, as well as between native speakers and learners *in* Irish-medium *Gaeltacht* schools, is yet to be made.

As mentioned in the interview section, Ní Chorráin (2020b) argues that there is not a huge difference between *Gaeltacht* schools and Irish-medium schools. While this is undoubtedly true from a teaching and learning perspective, it ignores a key point that is made in the literature on communities, namely that the socialisation process linked to schools is not limited to class hours. Ó Giollagáin and Ó Curnáin (2017, paras 9–11) for instance point out that the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* is still not clear as to how learners of Irish are to be integrated into *Gaeltacht* Irish-medium schools. Instead, they say, it only focuses on improving the teaching of the language. Not distinguishing between native speakers and learners fails to address this particular aspect and renders education-related measures less effective. On the

basis of the information gathered in the interviews, it appears, however, that this issue will not be tackled anytime soon.

The necessity of differentiating between the requirements of native and new speakers has nonetheless been invoked in other minority language contexts as well, and is not unique to Irish. For instance, French-dominant and English-dominant pupils are separated during their early schooling years in several French-medium schools in Ontario, Canada (Mougeon and Beniak 1994 cited in Hickey 2002: 1314). In the case of Welsh, there has been criticism of the fact that many native speakers of Welsh in secondary schools are being provided a learner-oriented education, which hinders their progression (Estyn, Education and Lifelong Learning Committee 2002: 6–7). Referring to the latter example, Hornsby (2015: 120) comments that the needs of native speakers are overshadowed by the overall goal of increasing the number of new speakers, a remark that in my opinion can very much be applied to the Irish context as well. Thus, there is evidence from different national contexts in support of the need to differentiate between native speakers and learners by implementing two separate education models, at least in early education. As for Irish, Hickey (2002: 1314) suggests that even a partial separation of L1 and L2 speakers in immersion education (for example for certain activities) could result in native speakers using the language more. There are nevertheless hurdles that have to be overcome in order for this to happen: in the *Gaeltacht*, the number of children is sometimes not sufficient to allow a separation of the pupils, although some attempts have been made in the *naíonraí* (preschools) setting (Hickey 2002: 1314). Resources and funding likely represent another significant challenge, as the interview with Ní Chorráin (2020b) suggests.

8.2.2 Opportunities

Acquiring a language makes little sense if there are no opportunities to use it in daily life. This is especially true when speakers make a huge effort to learn it, as in the case of a minority language such as Irish. Thus, since abilities decrease if a

language is not used for long periods (Mac Donnacha 2000: 19), creating such opportunities is essential to ensure that the school system is utilised to its full potential. The interview with O'Rourke (2020) (see in particular Section 7.2.5) brought up the scarcity of opportunities to use Irish: there is a lack of social spaces for willing speakers who want to use the language, and even native speakers in the *Gaeltacht* frequently have to travel long distances to find other speakers. If this lack of opportunities is linked to the disproportion between people who have some degree of ability in Irish and those who actually make regular use of it, it is reasonable to claim that some of these individuals are able and willing to use Irish, but simply do not have the chance to do so in their daily life (see for example Darmody and Daly 2015: x).

The state acknowledges this problem, as exemplified by the creation of Gaeltacht Service Towns, which are aimed at making the use of Irish possible in situations where it formerly was not (or at least not in a way that was convenient for people residing in the *Gaeltacht*). Irish Language Networks fill a similar gap for non-native speakers, as they are designed to create a social context for the use of the language in areas other than the *Gaeltacht*, in places where there are, however, some competent and motivated speakers. Other mechanisms targeting the creation of opportunities have been in place for a while. For example, the *Official Languages Act 2003* sets a legal constraint for public bodies, which have to communicate in Irish if a citizen demands it. Grassroots initiatives also play an important role. For instance, Ó hIfearnáin (2013: 362–364) illustrates the case of the *Tús Maith*, a programme that provides support for parents who raise their children through Irish: activities in Irish (such as playgroups or cooking classes) are regularly organised to allow children to use the language more often, and Irish-speaking mothers visit other households to assist parents who struggle to bring up their children in the minority language. The programme receives public funding but is implemented by the community itself.

Yet the use of Irish remains weak in the social context compared to its dominant neighbour, as research findings and census data illustrate. An additional issue is that even where opportunities exist, they are not always of good quality. This is for

instance illustrated by the low level of Irish competence of some civil servants, an issue that I have mentioned earlier, citing Walsh (2012). Therefore it is important to make sure that Irish speakers have the possibility to use the language in everyday life and to do so in a way that is actually useful for them. Clearly, the influence of English and its pervasiveness in the life of Irish speakers is an enormous hurdle in this context. This is exemplified by the negative impact that English has on competence development among L1 speakers of Irish in the *Gaeltacht*. I would also contend that opportunities are strongly related to capacity: in order to use a language in several domains, it is necessary to be proficient enough to do so. At the same time, to become proficient it is necessary to practice the language with other speakers and use it regularly for various activities (not only at school or at home, but also at the supermarket, at the doctor's, at work, for leisure activities, with friends, etc.).

As far as the tension between community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness' is concerned, I believe it is difficult to truly compare the two approaches on the basis of the 'opportunities' criterion in that each current of thought is essentially focused on one group of speakers, but the presence of Irish in the societal domain has become so scarce in both cases that all speakers need opportunities to use it more often. Looking at the previous sections and chapters, I would perhaps argue that the main area of contention here is whether native speakers and learners are given equal opportunities to use the language. As an example, it is again possible to refer to the issue of subtractive bilingualism, which has been proved to be highly detrimental to the survival of the *Gaeltacht*, as L1 speakers of Irish struggle to use their first language in the societal domain: the lack of balanced bilingualism creates problems that extend outside the schools and affect the use of native-spoken Irish as a whole. As a result, if speakers are not able to speak the language proficiently, they cannot take advantage of the already rare opportunities to use it.

Péterváry et al. (2014: 245) explain that the state is neglecting its responsibilities towards the *Gaeltacht* because it fails to preserve the social density of Irish speakers, which is obviously essential for language use. This is problematic because, as

explained in the context of governance by Peters (2001 cited in Cardinal and Hudon 2001: 4), it is impossible to ensure public accountability if the state is not involved in the process through support. For this reason, I would argue that while some opportunities to use Irish do exist, native speakers are perhaps not given all the necessary prerequisites to actually capitalise on them. On the other hand, learners (who it should be remembered are *not* the collapsing component of the Irish-speaking community) seem to be better off in current policy, and census results are not the only indicators for this: for instance, they experience an additive form of bilingualism (see Section 5.2.2) and more generally benefit from the existence of the *Gaeltacht*, where they can improve their language skills. Moreover, the state has clearly shown its intention to cater to the needs of non-native speakers of Irish and make use of the abilities produced in the education system as a resource for the survival of the language: Irish Language Networks bring a *Gaeltacht* idea of community to learners to establish an officially recognised social context for the use of Irish, which was formerly basically inexistent and entirely dependent on the personal choices of individuals.

Regarding the latter example, I believe this development should be welcomed because it creates better chances for learners to actually improve their skills and progressively move from the *cúpla focal* (or any other level acquired at school) to a higher degree of ability. It provides much-needed opportunities for the social use of the language, as far as practicable in an English-speaking setting. Learners cannot be expected to become agents for the maintenance of the language without this type of official support, just as native speakers cannot do without the help of the state. However, I would argue that the efforts made for learners are not matched by proportionally effective measures in the *Gaeltacht*, as the decline of native-spoken Irish would seem to indicate: the fact that native speakers already have a state-supported setting for the use of Irish does not mean that it is sufficient. Thus, the priorities set by the government are at times unclear or in contradiction with the overall goal of preserving the language both among L1 *and* L2 speakers. This situation reflects the issue of learner discursive dominance raised by Ó Giollagáin (2020).

To return to the comparison between the two approaches, it is hard to assess where the advantages and the drawbacks lie. Both speaker groups need more opportunities to use the language, as was also argued in the interviews, and so action must be taken in both contexts. Therefore I would not say that one approach is more suited than the other. Rather, what matters is how, for whom, and on what basis opportunities are made available, which in my opinion is also a moral question. For example, O'Rourke and Walsh (2015: 77) mention that the *Gaeltacht* functions as a 'language-learning site for people who wish to improve their Irish': this is undoubtedly positive, but at the same time it could be contended that learners benefit from a context for language use (or, to use the criteria referred to in this chapter, an 'opportunity') at the expense of native speakers. This is stressed by Ó Giollagáin (2009, para. 18), who writes that learners 'cannot both use the native-speaking community as an acquisition resource and then fail to provide the language planning supports necessary for the continuation of Irish as a community language'. Thus, I would conclude that what matters most is that access to opportunities is evenly balanced and does not favour any speaker group in particular, which is arguably not always the case at present.

8.2.3 Desire

While capacity and opportunities are tied to areas of intervention that policy-makers have significant control over, desire is perhaps a more elusive criterion in that – ultimately – it depends on the speakers themselves. As history has shown in the case of Irish, it is possible to improve a language's status among the population by stimulating positive attitudes towards it and making sure that there is no stigma around using it. However, it is not possible to force individuals to speak a language – at least not in a democratic society – even if it is threatened and some consider it 'the right thing to do'. As stated by Grin (2003: 85), policy measures need to be chosen 'in a way that they actually engage actual and potential users', rather than ignoring the role of the actors through the implementation of top-down measures. This becomes particularly evident when looking at the initial phase of language

policy in Ireland, during which speakers' needs were not taken into consideration and the focus was on the language alone.

The interviews and the literature show that the state failed to make Irish necessary in the past, although positive attitudes to the language are now dominant. This indicates that the Irish people do not *need* the language, but they more often than not *want* it. However, it would seem that the extent to which they desire Irish is frequently not sufficient because even the existence of capacities and opportunities, which are more developed than for many other minority languages, is not a guarantee for its use (once again, I refer to the speakers who have a knowledge of Irish but never use it, or only do so rarely). Hence, given that there is no necessity to speak the language, there has to be a *very* strong will to do so. Indeed, it could be said that being favourably disposed, as the Irish people have repeatedly proved to be, is unfortunately not sufficient: it does not translate into actual use of the language and, I will argue, could be interpreted as a sign of general indulgence with regard to the decline of Irish, both by the state and by some speakers.

This also echoes the idea first introduced by Marschak (1965; cited in Grin 1989: 2) and rooted in micro-economic theory, according to which people can *choose* whether to use a language to obtain a given result. Since it is entirely possible to be in favour of something without actually investing in it (for instance, a speaker might enjoy Irish being spoken in Ireland but does not really need it personally, as English is generally enough for them), Marschak's argument is very much relevant. Thus, while Irish can certainly not be forced upon people and sufficient freedom of choice needs to be granted to the speakers, for the sake of language maintenance, they arguably need to be made to feel more strongly about the importance of actually using Irish.

Turning to the debate between community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness', the issue of desire can be linked to that of symbolism, a topic addressed extensively in previous chapters. Symbolism might be regarded as a side-effect of the positive but somewhat abulic attitude to Irish: not everyone is able or willing to put the effort needed into the acquisition and the frequent use of Irish,

which suggests that symbolism is perhaps an easier solution. The *cúpla focal* can be a comfortable way of expressing an Irish identity and an attachment to the Irish culture without the 'inconveniences' of having to learn the language to a proficient level. With regard to learners in particular, this state of affairs can be linked to the generally accepted belief that speakers of the majority language rarely learn the threatened language to truly significant levels of proficiency because it offers few advantages compared to their L1 (Fishman 2001a: 9).

Therefore, considering the allure of a global language such as English, it is likely that many learners of Irish consciously embrace a mentality whereby Irish functions as a secondary language and nothing more, which in turn impacts their competences. This can cause Irish to turn into an expression of an identitarian *Sehnsucht*, a shrine for a long-gone past, instead of a language of societal practice, a role that is filled by English instead. For these reasons, it could also be argued that in today's modern, dynamic Ireland, people are content with the symbolic position of Irish because it provides them with the right amount of identitarian sentiment, while they can still enjoy the 'perks' of speaking a globally powerful language. Moreover, English is perhaps perceived by some as more suitable for a country that has undergone significant change in recent years and is radically different compared to the past.

It is precisely in the context of symbolism that a comparison between 'new speakerness' and community-oriented language policy can be particularly interesting in terms of the notion of 'desire'. Clearly, both strands aim to promote the use of Irish, not just its image. Yet they can have a different impact on the way the language is used or perceived by people. For instance, looking at a community-oriented approach, an excessive focus on native-spoken Irish and on the *Gaeltacht*, in light of the ongoing decline, might give the impression that non-native speakers are unimportant. This could have a detrimental effect, for learners need to be willing to acquire Irish and contribute to its maintenance since they represent a majority and, in some cases, can be strongly driven by the cause. An approach focusing on the *Gaeltacht* would simply not be sufficient on its own, as demonstrated by the previous chapters. For this reason, it is important that learners are not considered

inferior to natives, an argument that can be linked to the idea of authenticity as it is expressed in 'new speakerness'.

In other words, if learners feel delegitimised, their desire will decrease rather than grow, hampering their ambition to become proficient new speakers who can contribute to the regeneration of the language. In my opinion, this point could be seen as a weakness of the community-oriented approach, because even if focusing the discourse on the *Gaeltacht* does not rule out the importance of learners, it can give them a sense of inferiority that would be counterproductive. The fact that some new speakers have been reported to feel excluded from the language community (see Section 6.2.2) is emblematic of this. To put it bluntly, it is essential not to portray native speakers as some sort of exclusive elite, despite the undeniable severity of the crisis in the *Gaeltacht*. Similarly, native-spoken Irish should not be depicted as an idealised version of the language that is out of touch with the majority of the population: learners (and in particular committed new speakers) are part of the Irish-speaking community in the same way that native speakers are; they simply play a different role in the revival of the language. For these reasons, their efforts need to be recognised: while the crisis in the *Gaeltacht* is undoubtedly the main issue at the moment, the growing number of learners is one part of the solution.

Looking at 'new speakerness', the previous chapters have shown that it is a substantially grassroots approach, which therefore relies heavily on people's desire: new speakers themselves differ from ordinary learners thanks to their strong commitment. The fact that they are sometimes even more actively involved in the preservation of the language than native speakers is also a good example of the importance of fostering positive attitudes outside of the *Gaeltacht*. If networks of new speakers were to progressively grow (ideally together with the overall capacity of speakers), desire could in turn generate desire. That is to say that greater exposure to motivated, proficient new speakers could create greater desire among learners to commit to attaining a higher level of ability, which would be beneficial to the language in general since it might gain greater visibility and eventually become necessary in a wider range of domains. More people can support it if they are encouraged to learn it, which also ensures that the state's commitment is

maintained. On the other hand, one major weakness of this approach is that relying on motivated learners does not guarantee that they will actually become new speakers who live their life through Irish, an issue I hinted at in Section 6.2.1 when discussing the gap between new speakers and learners. Smith-Christmas and Ó Murchadha (2018: 284) underline that many of those who engage with initiatives for reversing language shift and who show positive attitudes still do not become habitual users of the language.

For this reason, I believe it is important to distinguish between language *users* and language *activists*: is there a way to know which learners will become committed and competent new speakers and which will just support Irish without speaking it? Probably not, since it depends on people's individual commitment, which might even fluctuate over time for any number of reasons. This suggests that little is still known about new speakers and how they can contribute to the overall maintenance of a minority language: they remain volatile in that their participation in language maintenance efforts is subject almost exclusively to desire, which is difficult to control as it largely relates to personal choices. Thus, it will be essential to ensure that high numbers of learners become committed new speakers, as activists are clearly not enough if Irish is to remain a living language. The same could be said for native speakers in the *Gaeltacht*, who have been reported to sometimes take the language for granted. Nonetheless, compared to most learners, they already learn Irish as an L1 and in some cases use it daily in a communal context, which I believe removes part of the difficulties that I have associated with learners.

Another issue that is worth pointing out relates back to capacity. A scenario in which learners are numerically superior to 'real' new speakers (who are able to use Irish relatively fluently) could exacerbate an existing symbolism that is devoid of actual language use by placing *the idea* of speaking Irish above the actual practice of speaking it, and thus conveying the feeling that a lot is being done with relatively little effort. As pointed out by Ó Giollagáin (2020) in the interview, this would mean losing track of the main issue (the decline of Irish as a vernacular). While it may be convenient and easy to maintain Irish in a symbolic function, I believe that symbolism is not sufficient in itself and simply sugars the pill of language death for

Irish as a vernacular. Referring to the role of symbolism in the nationalist phase, Crowley (2016: 214) posits that the role of Irish as a vehicle for identity might have contributed to the lack of actual linguistic practice because it rested on an idea of identity that was outdated and conservative. Similarly, I would argue that a 'modern' version of such symbolism would be equally detrimental: tokenising the language is useless if speakers do not start using it spontaneously and extensively. For this reason, if Irish is to be a 'fully-fledged modern European language', as the government (2010: 3) claims it is, then considerable work ought to be done to change its patterns of use in the *Gaeltacht* and outside of it, so that it can, at least in part, actually function as such on par with other languages in Europe. Otherwise, even its full status in the EU will represent a hollow, symbolic attempt to preserve a defunct language.

Yet, none of this should by any means be interpreted as an argument against English speakers' learning of the language: as all interviewees have stressed, both speaker profiles are necessary for language maintenance to be effective. Rather, what I mean here is that large numbers of new speakers (as defined in Chapter 6) need to be committed to the preservation of Irish, since learners in the general sense are not sufficient, as the current situation already demonstrates. This, in my opinion, is where 'new speakerness' could be considered problematic: if only a fraction of learners go on to become speakers who live at least some parts of their life through Irish, then current trends might simply be reproduced while Irish as a vernacular dies out. Again, what I am arguing here needs to be seen against the backdrop of the assumption that the aim is still for Irish to survive as a community language. Even in the *Galltacht*, official policy does not regard Irish as a mere school subject, but rather as something that can play an active role in people's lives, as shown for example by the idea of Irish Language Networks.

8.3 New Speakers and the State

Looking at the current situation, an interesting aspect that I believe becomes clear at this point is that, compared to a community-oriented approach, 'new speakerness' seems to be more in tune with the state's current policy. While the importance of the *Gaeltacht* and its preservation are never denied by the government, the idea of fostering the presence of the language among learners appears to have gained traction in official policy, despite the decline of native-spoken Irish. Learners have always been an integral part of the revival project, but it could be said that their relevance has increased when compared to the past as they are now granted official recognition by the state. 'New speakerness' is compatible with this approach in that it supports a renewal of Irish language policy through new actors. For instance, Irish Language Networks essentially coincide with the idea of new speaker networks, which means that new speakers can clearly benefit from this type of language planning entity. Thus, in a way, it appears that the state is already promoting a 'new speakerness' type of policy under the *Gaeltacht Act 2012*.

Against this background, it could be said that although neither 'new speakerness' nor current official policy deny the importance of Irish as a community language in the *Gaeltacht*, they do not really contribute to the creation of the conditions needed for its survival. In fact, 'new speakerness' essentially bypasses the issue altogether, and from a community-oriented perspective it could be argued that 'new speakerness' conveniently feeds into the policy implemented by the government because it builds the framework for an easier solution to an uncomfortable problem (as argued also by Ó Giollagáin 2020). Even if the claim that the state is determined to abandon native-spoken Irish (Ó Giollagáin 2014a, 2014b) is open to dispute, it is true that the possibility of revitalising the language in an alternative way, through learners instead of communities of native speakers, enables the state to intervene where it has historically yielded the best results: in the education system. For the government, embracing an ideology based on learners would not only be more practical from a language policy and planning angle, but it would very likely ensure a considerably higher degree of success in the longer term.

Given the positive trend of growth in the number of learners, as well as the repeatedly observed positive attitudes among the population at large, it could be contended that, by continuing the promotion of Irish as an L2 with a symbolic role in an English-speaking country, the state will be able to claim that its approach is succeeding in keeping Irish alive. Such a claim to success would arguably represent some welcome relief for the government after facing years of criticism for its language policy failings. Hence, this is perhaps where Ó Giollagáin's (2020) arguments are most plausible: moving the focus away from moribund – yet existing – communities, in a context where learners are already dominant and enjoy not only support but also success in economic and demographic terms, means giving the state an opportunity to loosen its commitments to the *Gaeltacht* entirely. In my view, this would be unfair from a language rights stance.

At the same time, it is undeniable that the ongoing decline of the *Gaeltacht* calls for new solutions and approaches to the problem. Whether 'new speakerness' provides an adequate response is of course a matter of opinion, but at least it offers an alternative approach to an issue that the state has been grappling with unsuccessfully for around a century. Moreover, it attempts to tackle language shift by taking advantage of an existing potential: sizeable numbers of individuals who have more or less satisfactory levels of Irish, but do not speak it often enough. Given the circumstances, it could be argued that placing more emphasis on this category of speakers is – paradoxically – sensible for the same reasons why it is not: insisting on an area of strength is, in a way, entirely logical, although as I have previously stated it might entail pushing for a complete abandonment of the *Gaeltacht* at an institutional level, at least implicitly.

Therefore, it could be argued that 'new speakers are better than no speakers': a situation in which L2 speakers are dominant may not be the *ideal* solution, but it is already a reality and it is probably the only *possible* solution at this point to ensure that the language lives on somehow. Indeed, one could even contend that there is no choice: statistical data and research findings are clear about the pace at which native speaker communities are disappearing, which might also imply that it is too late to save them. Finding ways of making networks of new speakers denser and more

stable as well as ensuring that they can reproduce themselves through intergenerational transmission and societal use might represent an invaluable opportunity for the language. However, I believe that this should not justify the abandonment of the *Gaeltacht*, a problem that has repeatedly been brought up in the research and that requires urgent intervention.

8.4 Towards a Solution

In the following sections, I will attempt to outline my thoughts on the debate on the basis of my analysis, with a view to finding a possible solution.

8.4.1 What Irish(es) Should Be Saved?

The interviews and the analysis highlight that the whole debate could eventually come down to one question: is the goal to save the *Gaeltacht* or to save Irish? Even if both options are variations of the same overarching issue, they entail very different consequences. As a matter of fact, the question could be rephrased as follows: *what kind* of Irish language should policy aim to maintain? A community-oriented approach focuses on the impending demise of *Gaeltacht* communities and attempts to find solutions to halt or slow down this process. Consequently, particular attention is placed on the language as an intergenerationally transmitted means of communication in everyday life, within a sociolinguistic group. 'New speakerness', on the other hand, looks at how the potential provided by committed learners can be used to regenerate the language in new ways. In such a framework, the language is not expected to exist in the 'traditional' *Gaeltacht* sense, but rather to change and survive in different forms. The speakers define the language, and not vice-versa. Thus, what 'new speakerness' and community-oriented language policy do is provide different solutions to the same problem. Choosing which approach is more suitable for each criterion in the comparison (in particular in the case of 'capacity' and 'desire') largely depends on what the final goal is.

For example, 'new speakerness' is significantly more accepting of a symbolic and 'reduced' (in the sense of low capacity) use of the language, even if it entails abandoning more 'complete' traditional ways of speaking. This is not seen as negative, but rather as an acceptable consequence of past events that have led Irish to become the minority language it is today. As Romaine (2006: 454) puts it, the past cannot be reversed; rather, the processes that have caused a language to become minoritised are renegotiated. She (2006: 465) also argues that intergenerational transmission ought to be separated from the notion of language maintenance, and that many minority languages 'will cease being grounded in continuity of practice, and instead become primary vehicles for the articulation of identity'. In this view, Irish is *already* being successfully maintained through the production of L2 speakers who use it in new contexts and new ways, and it is in fact only declining as a traditional community language (that is to say, the revival is succeeding, albeit not as initially envisaged). In sum, such a view of Irish language policy would seem to entail settling for a less ambitious idea of what the language ought to be in the future, as well as a certain degree of acceptance of the decline of the *Gaeltacht*. This goes hand in hand with the creation of new opportunities for Irish.

While a community-oriented approach does not necessarily aim to restore the past, the idea of focusing on existing (but threatened) communities is more oriented towards a preservation of the language as it is, rather than on its maintenance as it is becoming. The views expressed by the advocates of this current of thought are rooted in the necessity of having a *Gaeltacht* for the language to survive as a community language, rather than as an identitarian feature in a primarily English-speaking environment. Thus, the symbolic use of Irish is not deemed sufficient. For example, Mac Donnacha (2014, paras 13–17) writes that 'the existence of a language in some form does not, of itself, make it a living language': in his opinion, a living language needs be the dominant language of most or all of the community's social networks, and the community of speakers who uses it as such must be able to reproduce itself through intergenerational transmission. In his view, it is therefore clear that the disintegration of the *Gaeltacht* would coincide with the *sociolinguistic* death of Irish, regardless of the situation in the rest of the country.

Hence, identifying which one of the two approaches is more suitable depends on what the aims are for the future of Irish. The language does not necessarily need a geographical *Gaeltacht* to exist in *some* form – the very existence of new speakers proves this to be true – nor does it need native or highly proficient community speakers, as current census data demonstrate. Nonetheless, Irish without a *Gaeltacht* is likely going to look much different compared to native-spoken Irish as it has traditionally been known, and this cannot be disregarded in the context of language policy. In view of the discussion presented in this dissertation, it could for instance be stated that the general level of competence among speakers would be lower, and that the communicative function of Irish might be largely lost in favour of a tokenistic one. Summing up, it is possible to say that while a community-oriented approach is designed to maintain the language, 'new speakerness' transforms it.

Clearly, maintenance and transformation are not the same thing. It follows that placing greater emphasis on the production of learners than on the maintenance of existing communities would entail accepting a radical transformation of the language and effectively losing something, though something else might be gained. Conversely, ignoring the diversity of the Irish-speaking population by excessively focusing on the *Gaeltacht* might imply alienating a majority of the speakers today in the face of a faltering native speaker community. Indeed, the language has *already* drastically changed.

8.4.2 Choosing a Direction: the Role of Policy Analysis

Technically, both solutions could thus be considered perfectly appropriate for the preservation of the language, depending on what type of Irish (level of capacity, domains of use, function, etc.) is aimed at. In my analysis, I proceed from the assumption that, as stated in official policy documents, the goal is to preserve Irish as a community language in the *Gaeltacht*, rather than to increase the number of learners only. But it does not necessarily have to be this way: both outcomes

described above could be absolutely acceptable and logical as long as they coherently fit in a wider plan for the future of the language. It is a matter of trade-offs and of deciding what needs to be prioritised and why.

This is an essential point, for it brings me back to one of the questions I set out to answer with the present research: which approach, if any, is better suited for the current Irish sociolinguistic context? While I hope that the information and the analyses presented in the previous chapters provide an insight into the decline of Irish and how the aforementioned research strands suggest dealing with it, it is important to bear in mind that there is not, in absolute terms, a 'best' solution. Here I draw on the policy analysis framework outlined by Grin (2003), according to which language policy analysis itself cannot determine what is 'best'. It simply is a tool for the assessment of the situation, whereas the actual *choices* (for example, what policy should be implemented and why) are a political matter. Grin (2003: 95) explains that the evaluation of policies occurs '"downstream" from the political debate'. In other words, it is up to the Irish government to decide what should actually be done with the country's first official language. Policy merely indicates *how* certain outcomes can be attained, but it does not provide an objective framework that illustrates what should be done from a moral standpoint. Therefore, what is 'best' depends on a series of factors that are not necessarily sociolinguistic, but rather political. Such political decisions also need to follow a democratic process, as explained by Grin (2003: 89), thus the will of the Irish people should guide the government's decisions. In other words, if the Irish people were, for instance, content with a symbolic function for the language, then symbolism would be an appropriate goal.

Although I do not focus on a comprehensive policy analysis in this dissertation, the points made above can also be applied to the tension between community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness', in that a comparison can only point out the strengths and weaknesses of each approach and provide knowledge for decisions that fall outside the scope of policy analysis itself. Given that the two approaches produce substantially different results, it is nevertheless important to consider the drawbacks I have illustrated in the comparison. This is especially true since 'all

policies, in that they modify reality, create winners and losers' (Grin 2003: 25). Here, winners and losers might be native speakers or learners, depending on what type of policy measures are implemented for the preservation of the language (and thus on what approach the government chooses as a guideline). Indeed, although all interviewees agree on the necessity of fostering the growth of both native speakers and learners (or new speakers), it is still possible to favour or place greater attention on one speaker group in particular, as I have illustrated before.

8.4.3 Two Sides of the Same Coin?

So far, I have addressed the differences between community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness', which might appear to be a dichotomy. The fact that these two approaches differ in the way they tackle the problem of Irish language shift does not, however, mean that they should be considered incompatible. On the contrary, I believe that they ought to be seen as complementary (and not interchangeable) precisely due to their differences: if both speaker groups are needed for the survival of Irish, as the interviews have shown, then efforts for their preservation need to be made by implementing measures to support them both equally. This is also encapsulated in the idea that native and new speakers have different needs and require different types of policy interventions (see for example Ó Giollagáin 2009, Ó Giollagáin 2014b: 111, Hornsby 2015: 120).

For this reason, the very fact that two speaker groups exist implies that both approaches should be combined to cater to their diverse needs. Thus, community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness' should not be regarded as mutually exclusive. If anything, they can be combined to effectively function as two sides of the same coin, or as two pieces of the same puzzle, just as native speakers and learners are two components of the wider Irish-speaking community. I would argue that the two approaches *have* to interact as such given the current situation, and the solution might be integrating some of the theoretical features and goals that each side puts forward, either regionally or nationally – or both. For instance, even

though it is increasingly difficult to apply classic sociolinguistic theory to present-day minority language settings, there is no reason to remove backing for traditional communities simply because they are not as different from learners as they used to be. Similarly, it is entirely possible to be more accepting of and even encourage new language varieties among learners, who represent the bulk of the speaker community, while still trying to preserve traditional speakers and assisting them in reproducing themselves and the language. Both native speakers and learners (including new speakers) need to be regarded as legitimate and authentic; they simply differ by virtue of their sociolinguistic profile. They do, however, need each other mutually for their respective survival, which depends on a delicate balance in language policy.

Thus, as a possible solution, I would suggest a strictly community-oriented language policy be implemented in the *Gaeltacht* while a 'new speakerness' approach is pursued in the *Galltacht*, where it is more sensible to think of Irish as a secondary language and identity in a chiefly anglophone setting. This follows the two-pronged policy implemented by the state from the very beginning, as well as the idea of adopting an individualistic approach to the speech community, sketched out in a more general context by Hornsby (2015: 120–122). While it is not an innovative concept in itself, from a theoretical viewpoint it makes it possible to build a bridge between the two approaches and thus combine the best of both worlds. Consequently, I believe it is necessary to distinguish between native and non-native speakers as a first step (according to a community-oriented ideology), so that policy can target each group in a tailored way.

8.4.3.1 Implications for the *Gaeltacht*

More concretely, this would mean implementing effective and realistic policy measures for the *Gaeltacht* and all future remaining native speakers, however scant they might be. Indeed, while there is strong evidence that native-spoken Irish is in dire straits, the language still exists: there are between 16,000 and slightly over

20,000 daily speakers, depending on the criteria considered, a situation that is more encouraging than that of Scottish Gaelic, for example. Obviously, the difference between native and non-native speakers is becoming smaller as the decline progresses, which might be an argument for an abandonment of a *Gaeltacht* policy in favour of a more general policy for all Irish speakers. However, research on the *Gaeltacht* demonstrates that the crisis in these areas is itself caused by a lack of appropriate measures, which I believe shows that the situation might still be improved, or at least contained, if urgent action is taken. In other words, it cannot be said that native-spoken Irish no longer exists or is not worth saving anymore if potentially beneficial measures are simply not being implemented. Moreover, as I have pointed out numerous times, the support for the *Gaeltacht* and for Irish as a community language is among the aims of current official policy. Failing to comply with such commitments would mean falling short of the obligations the government has towards its citizens; not forgetting that support for the *Gaeltacht* is still very strong among the population (see Section 4.3).

Hence, there is a need for greater effectiveness of the policy measures targeting these particular areas. Whether current plans will enable this, and progress will be made, will only become clear with time. Nonetheless, I would argue that the state ought to be more balanced in its commitment towards native speakers and the broad learner group, as the results of current policy evidence a clear need for intervention in the *Gaeltacht* more than outside of it. New speakers should remain one part of the language maintenance project, not its sole component, and the *Gaeltacht* needs to be given sufficient support to function as a viable language planning entity since it cannot be expected to survive on its own. If one speaker group is foregrounded, the survival of the language as a whole is at stake, precisely because, as the interviews highlighted, both native speakers and learners are needed. In this regard, I believe the following points need to be taken into account to ensure that the commitment towards the *Gaeltacht* is renewed:

- Generally speaking, native speakers of Irish need to be empowered and have their voices heard.

- Following Ó Giollagáin's (2020) suggestions (see Section 7.1.6), an emergency commission for the *Gaeltacht* needs to be established.
- As reported in the literature, a *Gaeltacht* education system should be developed to help native speakers attain a sufficient level to use the language in a wider range of domains, as well as to pass it on to the following generations at a high level of fluency. This would also provide more opportunities to use Irish in a social context. To this effect, the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022* is a huge improvement, but it does not solve the issue of subtractive bilingualism because L1 and L2 speakers still attend the same schools. It could therefore be useful to separate native speakers and learners in an immersion education context for certain activities. This would give L1 pupils the chance to use the language among themselves, while still creating situations in which L1 and L2 children can interact and grow together as speakers.
- Measures targeting the *Gaeltacht* as a sociological entity need to be prioritised: native speakers ought to be regarded as distinct from learners, in line with the literature, given that they have different needs.
- Language planning agencies need to be allocated sufficient funding to successfully assist the *Gaeltacht*. As reported by Grin (2003: 26), evidence suggests that the costs associated with the maintenance of diversity – which is positively correlated with welfare – are generally relatively low. Thus it would also make sense to invest more in the maintenance of native-spoken Irish.
- A monolingual *Gaeltacht* is of course neither a reasonable nor a realistic objective at this point. The goal should instead be to establish a context of balanced bilingualism in which English does not displace Irish early on among young speakers. A symbolic use of the language should be avoided in the *Gaeltacht*. Instead, bolstering its use as a vernacular among L1 speakers is crucial, especially among younger generations.
- The goals in terms of speaker numbers should be more in keeping with the reality of the sociological crisis described in the research. There is a

mismatch between the situation in the *Gaeltacht* and official objectives in the *20-Year Strategy*, which appear to be excessively ambitious under current circumstances.

- Greater transparency is needed concerning the decline of native-spoken Irish: the public needs to be aware of the urgency of the situation, which should not be sugar-coated with the positive results obtained among L2 speakers. While positive achievements undoubtedly need to be highlighted, this should not distract from the seriousness of the issue.
- The *Gaeltacht* will also have to be supported in matters other than language: for example, the economic development of these areas will continue to be crucial to ensure their demographic stability, as recommended in the *CLS*.

My suggestions are not intended to be precise policy recommendations, but rather starting points to tackle the main issues I believe emerged over the course of this research. Detailed, practical measures for the *Gaeltacht* have already been illustrated in the *CLS* (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007) and in the *Analysis of bilingual competence* (Péterváry et al. 2014).

8.4.3.2 Implications for the *Galltacht*

At the same time, it is important to tap the potential offered by the growing number of learners and the education system, whose benefits are boosted by widespread positive attitudes towards the language and a still strong sense of identity attached to it. Bolstering the presence of Irish in the *Galltacht* is not only sensible, but also essential: even if the *Gaeltacht* were to be supported more effectively in the near future, the presence of native speakers would still be fragile in overall terms and L2 speakers would continue to make up the vast majority of Irish speakers. Therefore they also need support so that they can increasingly contribute to the language maintenance project and complement the efforts in the *Gaeltacht*.

In this context, a 'new speakerness' approach is suitable in that it seeks to find alternative ways for the language to survive. This is now facilitated by the establishment of Irish Language Networks, which are meant to provide a context for language use among non-native speakers. The implementation of a policy for the education system in the *Galltacht* is also among the priorities of the state, as explained by Ní Chorráin (2020b). These measures, combined with other factors such as the growing demand for Irish-medium education, represent a solid basis for the support of the language among learners, who it is hoped will also become more proficient and use Irish with greater frequency. In this context, the distinct role of non-native speakers as fully legitimate language maintenance actors emerges and needs to be acknowledged: not only do they participate in the formation, use, and development of the language; they also dominate it. Simply because of this, they need to be considered as complementary in modern Irish language use. There is no reason not to do so and it probably would cause more harm than good not to.

Thus, in view of the crisis in the *Gaeltacht*, it is reasonable to think that learners will gain in importance for the overall preservation of Irish. Against this background, it is also clear that Irish language policy today has to be set up in such a way that does not ignore the presence of English in Ireland, which is undeniably strong and is more than likely not going to diminish in any way at this point; if anything, it might even grow in influence. 'New speakerness' therefore provides an adequate response in a learner context, in that it embraces an idea of Irish spoken as a secondary language, while English retains the function of main vernacular in a globalised and dynamic sociolinguistic context. With this in mind, I believe the following points will require particular attention in the future:

- It would be absurd to expect Irish to replace English in the *Galltacht*. Thus, a symbolic or reduced use of Irish should not be stigmatised here. The promotion of positive attitudes should continue, and all levels of ability ought to be encouraged.
- Nevertheless, it will be fundamental to make sure that a sufficiently high number of learners become committed and competent new speakers: even

in a *Galltacht* context, the distinction between language users and language activists will be crucial to ensure that Irish actually gains momentum as a living language amongst learners, instead of undergoing a process of what might be metaphorically called 'linguistic taxidermy'. This will be the first step to initiate – at least to some extent – intergenerational transmission outside of the *Gaeltacht*, as suggested in the literature on 'new speakerness'.

- Policy for learners should therefore now focus primarily on skill development rather than on acquisition planning. In terms of contribution to the maintenance of the language, the production of learners is not as urgent as the improvement of their capacity to use Irish.
- Efforts for the promotion of L2 Irish should be designed specifically to cater to the needs of non-native speakers, so as to obtain the best possible results (the aforementioned policy for the education system in the *Galltacht* is a good example for this).
- Measures for learner development should be conceived in a way that does not hamper the maintenance of the *Gaeltacht*, which is currently the most threatened component of the Irish-speaking community. Indeed, although both learners and native speakers are essential, the former are increasing while the latter are rapidly disappearing.
- New speakers remain a relatively unexplored category. For this reason, further research on networks of new speakers will have to be undertaken to better understand how they are formed, maintained, and expanded. This may fit into the monitoring process of Irish Language Networks as a way to improve their development.
- As in the case of native speakers, sufficient funding will have to be allocated to language planning organisations to maximise the effects of policy measures.
- Learner varieties of the language should be considered just as legitimate as native speaker varieties. Endemic conflicts in a minority language community are counterproductive.

Again, my suggestions are not meant to serve as precise policy recommendations. Instead, they provide a summary of the areas of intervention that I consider crucial.

8.5 Future Perspectives: Irish Speakers in a Post-*Gaeltacht* Era?

Looking to the future, two possible scenarios might be imagined on the basis of this research: Irish will survive as a community language in the *Gaeltacht*, sustained by a growth in the number of speakers outside of it; or the *Gaeltacht* will collapse and no traditional Irish speakers will remain. Research on the *Gaeltacht* indicates that – in the current situation – the second scenario is to be expected. If urgent action is not taken to contain language shift in core Irish-speaking communities, current trends will continue until the eventual collapse forecast in the *CLS* becomes reality. Outlooks might of course vary: the effectiveness of current measures might become visible in the coming census results, as posited by Ní Chorráin (2020b), and speaker numbers in the *Gaeltacht* might thus increase or at least stop diminishing.

However, if predictions made in the literature on the *Gaeltacht* do materialise, Irish language policy will move into what Ó Giollagáin (2014b: 119) calls a heritage model, in which symbolism is the dominant trait of language use. In this case, Irish would find itself in a strongly unbalanced situation in which one of the two groups that have been described as necessary for its survival – namely native speakers and learners – would be absent altogether. Against this background, a 'new speakerness' model – and only that – would be left: the existence of the language would depend essentially on learners alone. Due to the heterogeneity of the learner category and to the relative newness of certain measures such as the creation of Irish Language Networks, as well as to the still volatile notion of new speaker, it is difficult to forecast exactly to what extent it will be possible to retain a communicative function in a nationwide L2 setting (and to perhaps reinitiate intergenerational transmission). There are, however, encouraging examples, such as that of Manx,

which might be replicated in Ireland through the education system and positive attitudes to the language.

Still, data presented earlier stress the need for caution in this regard: considerable work would need to be done for significant numbers of speakers to contribute in a substantial way to the language maintenance cause, even if ambitions were to be lowered in line with a 'new speakerness' framework. Such a scenario might see the emergence of what could be called, for the sake of convenience, post-*Gaeltacht* speakers (following the concept of 'post-*Gaeltacht*' used by Ó Giollagáin 2014b: 112–113): a hybrid and diverse speaker profile encompassing varying degrees of commitment and abilities tied to individual choices or sociolinguistic backgrounds, who speaks the language in a post-*Gaeltacht* era. These speakers may or may not be 'true' new speakers, and as such may or may not actively contribute to the maintenance of Irish as a living language (instead of a mere school subject). To live up to current policy commitments, the challenge will therefore be two-fold: on the one hand, the decline of the communities will need to be slowed down as much as possible through a realistic and democratic language policy approach; while on the other, sustainable networks of new speakers will have to be developed for a credible strategy of renovation of the language, lest it become a mere heritage feature in all respects.

Nevertheless, as the interviews also highlighted, the fact that Irish is still spoken by a community of native speakers and by a remarkable number of learners is in itself extraordinary, considering the language's tumultuous history and the incredible pressure it has been subjected to over the course of its existence. Today, it has to deal with an influential and globally hegemonic neighbour that also threatens other minority languages in different contexts. For this reason, the current situation should not be seen as a failure in itself, although there is room for improvement, as the literature and the interviews indicate. Moreover, while the state is clearly responsible for the promotion of the Irish language, given that it has both the power and the duty to set up a mechanism for its maintenance, it would not be fair to blame all the difficulties on the government.

Parts of this dissertation have dealt with concepts such as language ownership, or different categories of speakers that at times appear to be in contrast with each other. I would argue that a language belongs to everyone who is willing to contribute to its survival, and that the responsibility towards it is therefore also shared. A joint effort is needed. As Mac Donnacha (2014, para. 13) puts it, 'The only thing you can do with a language ultimately is use it or not use it'. It is thus up to all parties involved to decide whether and how Irish should be part of the country's future. All Irish speakers share an identity and make up a minority language community that needs to withstand the pressure of a globally dominant neighbour at a delicate time of globalisation. As the interviews revealed, this is a time for dialogue – not division – among speakers of Irish, academics, and policy-makers.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

In this final chapter, I will draw the conclusions of my research and summarise the main findings, as well as their overall implications.

9.1 Concluding Remarks

In my research, I set out to analyse the tension between community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness' in the case of Irish. Specifically, my goal was to determine whether the two approaches should be regarded as independent or as two sides of the same coin.

In the first part of this dissertation, I started by sketching out the principal historical facts behind the decline of the Irish language, as well as its revival from the late 19th century onwards. Then, I moved on to the current language policy situation in the Republic of Ireland, with a description of the policy documents that guide contemporary language maintenance endeavours: the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* and the *Gaeltacht Act 2012*. Subsequently, I outlined the issues that define Irish today, with particular attention to the demographic profile of the Irish-speaking community and to other thorny issues, such as symbolic attitudes and low levels of ability. I then introduced the debate between community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness'. In the second part of my work, I reported the results of the interviews with three experts and identified potential points of contention between the two research strands. Lastly, I compared community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness' on the basis of the criteria of capacity, opportunities, and desire. I assessed them in view of the current policy situation to find possible compromises to the debate, in particular through a combination of the two approaches.

With regards to the data presented in the previous chapters, and bearing in mind the research objectives set at the beginning of this dissertation, I believe it is possible to conclude that community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness' should be considered as two complementary approaches that tackle the same overarching issue from two different angles. Indeed, although the analysis and the interviews highlight a series of underlying ideological differences, the two research strands are not mutually exclusive and rather offer potential solutions to different features of the decline. The nuanced and multi-faceted nature of the language today specifically calls for a combination of the two currents of thought for its survival as a community language and its simultaneous growth as an L2 among non-native speakers of various levels. Concretely, I believe a solution could be to implement a strictly community-oriented approach in the *Gaeltacht* and a 'new speakerness' approach in the *Galltacht*. This implicates distinguishing between L1 and L2 speakers, but does not rule out a greater degree of flexibility among the latter.

This is necessary because an unbalanced approach to Irish language maintenance (i.e. excessive focus on either category of speaker) could result in the failure to preserve Irish over the next generations. This is exemplified by some of the downsides of current state policy, which is implicitly aligned towards symbolism and the production of L2 speakers (following a 'new speakerness' logic) rather than focusing on bolstering both speaker categories, which this research has shown to be equally indispensable. It would be entirely acceptable to shift the focus on learners completely and accept the demise of the *Gaeltacht*, as language policy does not necessarily have to engage in the preservation of disintegrating traditional minority language communities (although, personally, I would argue that it definitely should). Nonetheless, official goals would need to change accordingly.

This type of debate might become increasingly important with the disappearance of minority languages all over the world at the hands of globalisation. For this reason, I hope that the results of this research and the issue they describe can be of use in the context of other languages. For example, in situations similar to that of Irish, where L2 speakers have already outnumbered native speakers or might soon do so. Analysing the dynamics between these two speaker groups could be useful to create

knowledge about individual minority language cases and how measures for their preservation can be fine-tuned. It could also help establish whether the goal should always be to find balance or if focusing exclusively on one group is the most appropriate solution in some cases.

9.2 Limitations and Need for Further Research

With the present dissertation, I hope to have been able to provide a basic theoretical footing for the analysis and the comparison of a community-oriented language policy and 'new speakerness'. Nonetheless, I believe a number of limitations and issues that require further research should be pointed out.

First of all, to gain deeper insights into the subject, it would be useful to carry out a comprehensive policy analysis, for example by comparing two or more specific policy measures for each approach. This lies outside the scope of my research for technical reasons (data availability and collection), but would provide useful quantitative information to complement the chiefly qualitative work I have attempted to present. Another point that needs to be deepened pertains to new speakers: more detailed information would be beneficial to understand how their number can be increased and maintained. Similarly, the impact of Irish Language Networks and Gaeltacht Service Towns will have to be monitored over the course of the next years. Thus, a re-assessment of the situation might be useful after the publication of the next two census results. I should also note that a sizeable quantity of work has been published on Irish language policy and it would be simply impossible to summarise it all. In my research I have tried to select the most relevant references, although many more could have been chosen. Lastly, it should be kept in mind that although I have done my best to answer the question on which this dissertation is based, my analysis is based on an external point of view, since I am neither Irish nor an Irish speaker.

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Annexes

Annex 1 – Interview Questions

Interview Questions – Professor Conchúr Ó Giollagáin (Monday 15 June 2020)[62]

1. 'New-speakerness' advocates claim that focusing solely on communities of native speakers in the context of language maintenance and shift causes them to become 'museified' and static, and that the focus should be on the speakers themselves rather than on a pure, 'authentic' version of the language. Is this claim reasonable? In contrast, why is it still worth it to protect these 'authentic' communities in Ireland despite all the odds being against them? And Is it fair and ethical, given the difficulties they have encountered in the past and still encounter nowadays?

2. Is there room for new speakers in a community-oriented language policy approach? If so, how could they play a part in strengthening Irish as a community language in the *Gaeltacht* and ensuring its sustainability in the future?

3. Research and census results show that the overall production of Irish speakers through the educations system is rather successful. Generally speaking, people also claim to have a positive attitude towards the language and are willing to contribute to its maintenance. This would however seem to be at odds with the very limited use of Irish in the public sphere. Could it be that today having a (good) knowledge of the language or actively using it is no longer perceived as necessary to 'feel Irish'? What is the role of the Irish language in Irish identity today? Is a tokenistic use sufficient for most people,

[62] Questions 9 and 10 were not specifically related to the debate but were asked to answer personal queries pertaining to the research.

not only from a practical point of view but also in terms of identity (as in the idea of *cúpla focal*)?

4. Is it possible that English already fulfils the communicative needs of native speakers of Irish – perhaps more than Irish does – and that the maintenance of the language is thus not always desirable for the speakers themselves? Are the rise in the overall number of people with an ability to speak Irish and the decline in the use of Irish as a community language signs that a symbolic use is *preferred* to a community use?

5. Are geographical constraints an outdated concept for Irish language policy, given the high degree of socio-cultural and demographic change that has taken place over the last decades? Is the idea of *Gaeltacht* still viable from a policy point of view?

6. The *Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht* states that without a change to language use patterns, Irish is unlikely to remain the predominant community and family language in core *Gaeltacht* areas for more than another 15-20 years. Has anything changed over the past 13 years, since the study was published? Is the process of language shift continuing at the same pace? Did policy interventions (for example the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language*) lead to any improvements, despite the excessively lenient and superficial stance taken by the Irish State with the *Gaeltacht Act 2012* and the *20-Year Strategy* itself?

7. The idea that a change in language policy is necessary is central in 'new-speakerness': globalisation and the post-shift conditions that define minority language settings such as Ireland push towards the need to rethink traditional language policy models; and new forms of minority languages should be embraced since it is impossible to return to pre-shift conditions. Would Irish have a future as a language spoken by new speakers and

learners, without a core cultural and geographical community like the *Gaeltacht*?

8. Is it too late to save the *Gaeltacht* and to preserve Irish as a community language, at least in some areas?

9. In the final version of the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language*, one of the goals is to increase the number of daily speakers outside the education system from 83,000 to 250,000. This however differs from what had been indicated in the Fiontar DCU report, in which the goal was to increase the number of daily speakers outside the education system from 72,000 to 250,000. The Fiontar report includes the actual figures reported by the CSO (72,148 daily speakers according to the 2006 census). Why is there such a difference?

10. The *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language* included plans for the creation of an Irish Language and Gaeltacht Authority (*Údarás na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta*), which was to serve as the main implementation agency. However, it appears that this body has never been established, although according to the *20-Year Strategy* the legislation should have been prepared in 2011. Why is that?

Interview Questions – Professor Bernadette O'Rourke (Monday 22 June 2020)

1. Research has shown that couples of non-native Irish speakers are often committed to raising their children with Irish as a household language, and the demand for Irish-medium education has grown over the last years. What pushes new speakers to become active players in the maintenance of Irish? Are they more involved than native speakers, or do the latter simply have

fewer possibilities to act due to their deteriorating social condition and the lack of State support?

2. Are the concepts of 'speech community' and 'native speaker community' still viable in the case of Irish today?

3. The literature reports that new speakers create new instances of language use in a time of rapid social change. This makes them 'authentic' and 'legitimate' speakers in their own right, who can create new communities with a sense of identity. Is there a potential for them to replace communities of native speakers of Irish in the long term – given the trend of language shift in the *Gaeltacht* – or will native speakers and a community-oriented approach always be necessary? In other words, are networks of new speakers alone sound enough to resist in a sociolinguistic environment in which even native speakers struggle?

4. A central notion in 'new-speakerness' is that focusing on a 'pure' and 'authentic' version of the language is not a solution for its maintenance and excludes new speakers. Instead, speakers should be set on a continuum: they should define which criteria are necessary to qualify as a new speaker and what version of the minority language is 'acceptable'. Therefore, the concept of new speaker seems to remain fuzzy as there is no clear benchmark for language competence. Is it possible to maintain something that is not clearly defined?

5. Although it has been reported that new speakers can be more proficient than natives, the term 'new speaker' also encompasses people who use the language symbolically or have very limited language skills. Therefore, 'new-speakerness' might automatically involve settling for a lower level of ability among speakers in general, with lower ambitions as an overarching policy goal. Is this a viable solution for the future of Irish? Can a symbolic or partial knowledge of a language ensure its survival, for example in domains where a

higher competence is needed for the language to be actively chosen and used in place of English?

6. Research and census results show that the Irish education system is rather successful in the production of competent speakers. However, the societal use of the language appears to remain weak: people have the ability to speak the language but do not use it. In what way can 'new-speakerness' help change this situation and increase the usage of Irish in the social sphere, considering that there is no guarantee that new speakers will indeed actively use the language?

7. 'New-speakerness' is based on the need to adapt language policy to a changing sociolinguistic environment. In this context, it has been written that excessive focus on communities of native speakers leads to their 'museification' because policy tends to be centred on the language rather than on its speakers. It could however be argued that focusing on new speakers instead leads to the 'museification' of the language through its tokenisation. Is this claim reasonable?

8. The change of focus in Irish language policy from traditional communities in the *Gaeltacht* to new speakers might be seen as problematic in terms of linguistic rights of native speakers, who are experiencing a social crisis and have effectively been abandoned by the State as far as policy measures are concerned. Should new speakers be the priority of Irish language policy? What are the ethical implications for the native speakers?

Extra question: Where do you see Irish language policy and the Irish language go over the next years?

Interview Questions – Edel Ní Chorráin, *Foras na Gaeilge* (Friday 21 August 2020)

1. Official Irish language policy has been criticised for being excessively symbolic and mild, as well as for lacking commitment to the preservation of *Gaeltacht* communities. What is the role of such communities in the revival project today? Should new speakers be considered a priority, given the current situation in the *Gaeltacht*?

2. The decline of *Gaeltacht* communities is accelerating, and research indicates that they will soon disappear. Against this backdrop, what direction will Irish language policy take in the coming years? Will communities – albeit likely extremely marginal – and their reconstitution still be a focus of attention, or will there be a complete switch to a system based on learner networks?

3. Given the reported ineffectiveness of current measures such as the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language* and the *Gaeltacht Act 2012*, is the implementation of new policy instruments targeting the *Gaeltacht* in particular a possibility?

4. From an institutional perspective, what are the main obstacles and difficulties in the implementation of effective measures aimed at ensuring the existence of Irish-speaking communities as a geographically rooted sociological entity?

5. Which areas of Irish language policy have the highest potential for the future development of Irish? Which ones, on the other hand, require improvement?

6. *Foras na Gaeilge*'s work spans a wide range of sub-domains and encompasses both native speaker communities and networks of learners, although the focus is mainly on language planning for learners. Which measures in

particular are currently yielding the best results in terms of maintenance of Irish?

7. You have a background in Irish-medium education and are now responsible for education matters at *Foras na Gaeilge*, too. Given your experience in this field, what do you think new speakers of Irish can bring to the larger Irish-speaking community and to the future of the language?

8. Networks of new speakers are often described as highly committed to the language maintenance cause, but at the same time they have been reported to be small, fragile and dispersed, an issue that also applies to declining *Gaeltacht* communities. If learners are to become the only Irish speakers in the future, in what ways can language policy ensure that they become more sound and 'reliable' as language maintenance groups and that they do not end up falling apart like *Gaeltacht* communities?

Extra question: Is the strong presence of English going to hinder the development of learner networks, given that it is so damaging even for the *Gaeltacht*?

Annex 2 – Map of the Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas

The boundaries of the Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas, as defined in the *Gaeltacht Act 2012*[63]

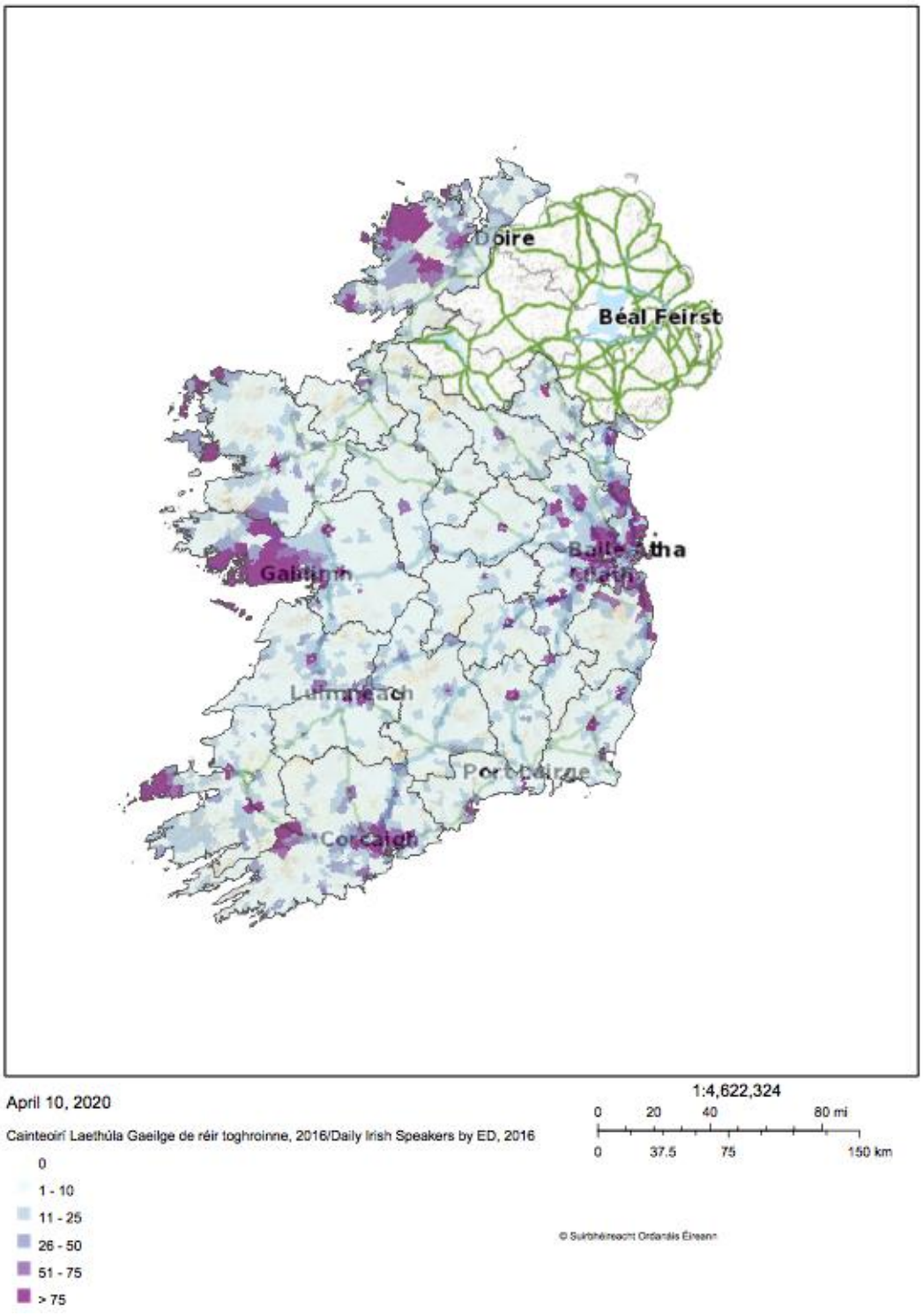
[63] Census 2016 Open Data Site (23 June 2017) *Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas Boundaries Generalised to 50m* [online] available from <https://census2016.geohive.ie/maps/edit?content=geohive%3A%3Agaeltacht-language-planning-area-boundaries-generalised-to-50m> [27 October 2020].

Annex 3 – Map of Ireland's Provinces, Divided by Counties

The four provinces of Ireland, divided by counties (it should be kept in mind that Ulster includes Northern Ireland as well as the counties of Donegal, Cavan, and Monaghan, which are part of the Republic of Ireland). Leinster, where the capital Dublin is located, accounts for more than half of the population of the Republic of Ireland[64]

[64] The map was taken from the following online article: Family Tree Magazine (n.d.) *Plotting Your Irish Roots: An Irish Counties Map* [online] available from <https://www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/irish-counties-map/> [14 April 2020].

Annex 4 – Map of the Concentration of Daily Irish Speakers



The concentration of daily Irish speakers by electoral division in 2016[65]

[65] Central Statistics Office (n.d.) *Oideachas Scileanna agus an Ghaeilge/Education Skills and the Irish Language* [online] available from <http://census.cso.ie/p10map51/> [10 April 2020].

Annex 5 – Links to Statistical Data in Table 3 and Table 5

Links for the data presented in Table 3 (information pertaining to the Irish State as a whole)

1. Total population
    - 2002: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=BDR28&Planguage=0
    - 2006: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CDR32&Planguage=0
    - 2011: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CD943&PLanguage=0
    - 2016: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY033&PLanguage=0

2. Total Irish speakers
    - 2002: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=BDR28&Planguage=0
    - 2006: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CDR32&Planguage=0
    - 2011: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CD943&PLanguage=0

- 2016: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY034&PLanguage=0

3. Daily speakers outside the education system (including daily speakers within)
    - 2002 (data not available): https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/censussampleform2002.pdf
    - 2006: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=C0924&PLanguage=0 (53,471 speakers) combined with https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/saveselections.asp (18,677 speakers). See also: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CD936&PLanguage=0
    - 2011: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CD936&PLanguage=0
    - 2016: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY034&PLanguage=0

4. Daily speakers outside the education system only
    - 2002 (data not available): https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/censussampleform2002.pdf
    - 2006: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=C0924&PLanguage=0

- 2011: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY034&PLanguage=0
- 2016: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY034&PLanguage=0

5. Weekly speakers outside the education system (including daily speakers within)
    - 2002 (data not available): https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/censussampleform2002.pdf
    - 2006: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=C0924&PLanguage=0 (97,089 speakers) combined with https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CDR34&Planguage=0 (5,772 speakers). See also: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CD936&PLanguage=0
    - 2011: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CD936&PLanguage=0
    - 2016: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY034&PLanguage=0

6. Weekly speakers outside the education system only
    - 2002 (data not available): https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/censussampleform2002.pdf

- 2006: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=C0924&PLanguage=0
- 2011: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY034&PLanguage=0
- 2016: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY034&PLanguage=0

Links for the data presented in Table 5 (information pertaining to the *Gaeltacht*)

1. Total *Gaeltacht* population
    - 2002: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=B1108&Planguage=0
    - 2006: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CDR35&Planguage=0
    - 2011: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CD946&PLanguage=0
    - 2016: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY033&PLanguage=0

2. Total Irish speakers in the *Gaeltacht*
    - 2002: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=B1108&Planguage=0
    - 2006: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CDR35&Planguage=0
    - 2011: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CD946&PLanguage=0
    - 2016: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY034&PLanguage=0

3. Daily speakers outside the education system (including daily speakers within) in the *Gaeltacht*
    - 2002 (data not available): https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/censussampleform2002.pdf
    - 2006: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CDR36&Planguage=0 (17,687 speakers) combined with https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=C0932&Planguage=0 (4,828 speakers)
    - 2011: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CD964&PLanguage=0 (17,955 speakers) combined with https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CD965&PLanguage=0 (5,220 speakers)

- 2016: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY034&PLanguage=0

4. Daily speakers outside the education system only in the *Gaeltacht*
    - 2002 (data not available): https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/censussampleform2002.pdf
    - 2006: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CDR36&Planguage=0
    - 2011: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CD964&PLanguage=0
    - 2016: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY034&PLanguage=0

5. Weekly speakers outside the education system (including daily speakers within) in the *Gaeltacht*
    - 2002 (data not available): https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/censussampleform2002.pdf
    - 2006: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CDR36&Planguage=0 (6,564 speakers) combined with https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=C0932&Planguage=0 (238 speakers)

- 2011: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CD964&PLanguage=0 (6,531 speakers) combined with https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CD965&PLanguage=0 (282 speakers)
- 2016: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY034&PLanguage=0

6. Weekly speakers outside the education system only in the *Gaeltacht*
    - 2002 (data not available): https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/censussampleform2002.pdf
    - 2006: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CDR36&Planguage=0
    - 2011: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CD964&PLanguage=0
    - 2016: https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY034&PLanguage=0

Annex 6 – The Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale

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)*

Fishman's GIDS as it is presented in *Reversing Language Shift* (Fishman 1991: 395)[66]

[66] Xish refers to the language away from which the shift is occurring (here Irish), while Xmen are the members of the community with which the language is traditionally associated; Yish is a more powerful language that offers greater opportunities (here English), and Ymen are the members of the community with which it is associated (Fishman 1991: 11–16). XSL stands for Xish as a second language (see for example Azurmendi, Bachoc, and Zabaleta 2001: 250).