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Contemporary Gaelic language revival efforts in the English- speaking world



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Contemporary Gaelic language revival efforts in the English-speaking world

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PhD Dissertation
Abstract

Nagy Levente

Contemporary Gaelic language revival efforts in the English-speaking world

The challenges faced by minority languages in the contemporary linguistic landscape have been a relevant topic for several years. With global languages claiming an increasing share of speakers, smaller, community-based languages have been neglected in favour of the lingua franca (Skutnabb-Kangas 1997, 2017). The research aims to present several possible ways in which this linguistic exposure can be transformed into a potential boon for language education and maintenance in smaller languages, rather than being a hinderance, based on new methods utilizing commonly consumed media as a medium to achieve increased language usage and recognition (Skogerbø 2001, Sapir 2005,2006, Pietikäinen et al. 2010). Based on results, the research can provide potential applications of hitherto unrelated aspects (speaker attitudes, views on language) as a means to improve language retention and revitalization methods, mostly used in a workshop fashion.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, minority languages, language maintenance, language revival, Gaelic Language Plan

Doktori értekezés

Kivonat

Nagy Levente

Kortárs gael nyelvi újjáélesztési erőfeszítések az angol nyelvű világban

A kisebbségi nyelvek előtt álló kihívások a kortárs nyelvi környezetben már évek óta releváns témát jelentenek. Mivel a globális nyelvek egyre nagyobb arányban igénylik a beszélőket, a kisebb, közösségi alapú nyelveket elhanyagolták a lingua franca javára (Skutnabb-Kangas 1997, 2017). A kutatás célja, hogy bemutassa azokat a lehetséges módokat, amelyekkel ez a nyelvi kitettség a kisebb nyelvek nyelvi oktatásának és fenntartásának potenciális előnyévé alakítható, ahelyett, hogy hátráltatná, az általánosan fogyasztott médiumokat médiumként használó új módszerek alapján, amelyek a nyelvhasználat és -felismerés fokozását célozzák (Skogerbø 2001, Sapir 2005, 2006, Pietikäinen et al. 2010). Az eredmények alapján a kutatás potenciális alkalmazásokat kínálhat eddig egymással nem összefüggő szempontok (beszélői attitűdök, nyelvvel kapcsolatos nézetek) számára a nyelvmegtartás és -revitalizációs módszerek javítása érdekében, amelyeket többnyire műhelymunkák keretében alkalmaznak.

Kulcsszavak: szociolingvisztika, kisebbségi nyelvek, nyelvmegőrzés, nyelvújjáélesztés, Gael Nyelvi Terv

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSO – Central Statistics Office

GIDS - GIDS

GLP – Gaelic Language Plan

NI – Northern Ireland

ROI – Republic of Ireland

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The history of Gaelic languages

In an effort to establish the presently unfolding situation and general details surrounding the state(s) of the Gaelic (Goidelic) languages - Irish (Irish Gaelic), Scottish Gaelic, and Manx - and their relationship to other Celtic languages, the first prudent step is to examine the heavily intertwined history of these languages, and by extension, their peoples and cultures. It is important to note that for the earlier parts of the paper, focus will be shifting between Irish and Scottish Gaelic, this serving as a historical foundation, as it is difficult to differentiate between the origins of these languages. Establishing the first point on this timeline, Emperor Claudius' invasion in AD 43–44 is an early instance of the Celtic languages of Britain - particularly the Brythonic varieties - coming under the authority and influence of a dominant imperial language and culture. This, however was not a wholly negative event for the language in question, as research concerning Roman Britain has suggested that instead of engulfing the already existing language groups and scenarios, there was a much larger degree of bilingualism than one might initially assume from the time period.

A key indicator in this regard is found in two different periods. During the time of the invasion, the native inhabitants spoke a Celtic language (Woodcock, 2016). Notably however, after the Roman Empire had started to diminish in power at the beginning of the 5th century AD, and subsequently the province of Britannia no longer existed, the Celtic language was still very much present, in sharp contrast to the general assumption that it would disappear after centuries of Latin. Other factors also suggest that Britain as a whole was not as “Roman” as other contemporary provinces in the empire. One of the most notable findings is related to the number, or rather, the lack of Roman inscriptions from this era, especially when compared to the unusually large military presence that the empire deployed for a region of its size. Further research has suggested that Celtic and Latin were by no means isolated from one another, not only implying that a large number of Britain's population were bilingual, but also the fact that Celtic was by no means a “weak” language – otherwise Latin would have been the dominant language in the region (Woodcock, 2016). It is worth noting that this phenomenon, namely

bilingualism in the Roman province, proves that despite the attempts to subjugate them, the Gaelic languages had remained active and present in the Middle Ages.

One long-standing interpretive axis is the Highland–Lowland divide, a heuristic used in modern historiography to describe medieval sociolinguistic and cultural contrasts in Scotland. A frequently cited passage comes from John of Fordun's *Chronica Gentis Scotorum* (mid–late 14th c.):

The character of the Scottish Gaelic however varies according to the difference in language. For they have two languages, namely the Scottish language and the Teutonic language. The people who speak the Teutonic language occupy the coastal and lowland regions, while those who speak the Scottish language live in the mountainous regions and outer isles. The coastal people (maritima gens) are docile and civilised, trustworthy, long-suffering and courteous, decent in their dress, polite and peaceable, devout in their worship, but always ready to resist injuries threatened by their enemies.

The island or mountain people however are fierce and untameable, uncouth and unpleasant, much given to theft, fond of doing nothing, but their minds are quick to learn, and cunning. They are strikingly handsome in appearance, but their clothing is unsightly. They are always hostile and savage not only towards the people and language of England, but also towards their fellow Scottish Gaelic because of the difference in language. They are however loyal and obedient to the king and kingdom, and they are easily made to submit to the laws, if rule is exerted over them.

For clarity in what follows, Scottish Gaelic (Gàidhlig) refers to the Celtic language historically spoken in the Highlands and Islands, while Scots refers to the Germanic Lowland variety; these are distinct languages. Building on the Roman-era bilingualism outlined above, the Medieval period marks a shift from contact to sociolinguistic stratification between a Gaelic-speaking Highlands and a Scots-speaking Lowlands. During the Middle Ages, Scottish Gaelic speakers were often perceived negatively by the non-Gaelic speaking population, particularly those in the Lowlands of Scotland. This perception was largely influenced by cultural and linguistic differences (MacGregor, 2009). MacGregor (2009) goes into great detail regarding this issue, explaining that Gaelic speakers were seen as "alien," and this view was a result of the substantial linguistic divide between the Gaelic-speaking Highlands and the Scots-speaking Lowlands. This divide fostered a sense of otherness and contributed to negative stereotypes and prejudices against Gaelic speakers during that period - this negative perception was not just based on linguistic differences but also involved cultural and political aspects. The Gaelic-speaking Highlanders were often portrayed as barbaric and backward by the Lowland inhabitants. Historians also link Lowland portrayals to differing social structures and slower

uptake of Lowland-style feudal relations in the Highlands, which was more established in the Lowlands. Furthermore, the Highlanders' adherence to older forms of social organization and their perceived lack of civility were used to justify these negative stereotypes. This complex interplay of linguistic, cultural, and political factors contributed to a deep-seated division and mutual mistrust between the Gaelic Highlanders and the Scots-speaking Lowlanders. As such, it was a rather arduous task to find common ground both linguistically and socially, even within overlapping communities of speakers. This pervasive negative stereotype led to a marginalization of the Gaelic language and culture. The cultural and linguistic divide between the Gaelic-speaking Highlands and the Scots-speaking Lowlands contributed to the gradual erosion of the status and prestige of Gaelic. This marginalization was not only social but also political, as the power centres of medieval Scotland were predominantly in the Lowlands, where Scottish Gaelic and later English became the dominant languages. Over time, this marginalization had a profound effect on the Gaelic language, leading to its decline in many areas of Scotland. The political and cultural dominance of the Lowlands, coupled with the negative stereotypes of Gaelic speakers, meant that Gaelic was increasingly seen as a language of the periphery, associated with a lack of civility and progress. This situation entailed the further decline of Gaelic in the centuries that followed, especially as Scotland underwent significant political, social, and economic changes. (MacGregor, 2009)

The legacy of these medieval attitudes towards Gaelic and its speakers has had a lasting impact. This impact is evident in the continued struggle for the recognition and revitalization of the Irish and Scottish Gaelic language in modern times. Contemporary Gaelic speakers often grapple with the historical baggage of being associated with a marginalized language and culture. This includes dealing with ongoing issues of linguistic and cultural identity, as well as efforts to revive and sustain Gaelic in a predominantly English-speaking world. The historical perceptions and treatment of Gaelic have contributed to its current status as a minority language, influencing both the cultural consciousness of Gaelic speakers and the policies aimed at supporting the Gaelic language and culture in Scotland today. Therefore, understanding this historical context is crucial for comprehending the challenges faced by Gaelic speakers in the contemporary era, as well as for informing the efforts to preserve and promote Gaelic language and culture.

The concept of the "Scottish Cringe," as explained by Beveridge and Turnbull (1989), highlights a perceived lack of confidence among Scottish Gaelic in their self-governance capabilities. This idea suggests a deep-rooted psychological feeling of inferiority among

Scottish Gaelic, influenced by their relationship with England, where they are seen as subordinate and reliant on English support. Carol Craig, (2003), argued that this self-deprecation among Scottish Gaelic breeds a sense of unease in their cultural identity. Bourdieu's 1979 concept of "habitus" further explains this phenomenon, describing how people can become resigned to their social circumstances, feeling that resistance is futile due to their conditioned expectations aligning with their perceived social limitations.

Beveridge and Turnbull, drawing on Franz Fanon's 1967 work, compare Scotland's situation to that of "self-colonized" Third World countries. Through Fanon's lens, the process of "Inferiorism" is seen where a native population internalizes the dominant culture or narrative of the colonizer, often at the cost of their own indigenous culture. This dynamic, as Fanon argued, involves altering a culture's history to reflect the colonizer's perspective. Supporting this view, Billy Kay highlights the neglect of Scottish history in education prior to the 1707 Act of Union, suggesting a suppression of pre-Union history in line with Fanon's concept of Inferiorism. This neglect has been so ingrained in the Scottish mindset that Ash in 1980 referred to it as the "strange death of Scottish history," indicating a people disconnected from their historical narrative. Beveridge and Turnbull, in 1989, used Fanon's idea of Inferiorism to describe how historical neglect of Scottish culture has led to a deeply ingrained sense of subordination within the Scottish psyche. This concept aligns with Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence. The disregard of their own history by some Scottish Gaelic perpetuates a mindset where they view their history as concluded, leading to a lack of ambition for independent nationhood and an acceptance of their cultural alienation.

A significant aspect of this cultural inferiority in Scotland is the evolution of its language. Until the seventeenth century, Scottish Gaelic was the prevalent national language across all social strata and was used in administration, legal documentation, and even in royal courts, as highlighted by Hoffman in 1996. This era saw no perceived inferiority in the use of Scottish Gaelic. However, the Protestant Reformation, occurring first in England in the 1520s and later in Scotland in 1559, marked a shift where Scotland began to culturally align more with England. In this period, figures like Winzet and Kennedy criticized Protestant Reformers for introducing what they saw as theological errors from Germany through England, often conveyed in English. By the seventeenth century, the perception of Scottish Gaelic changed, especially among the middle classes, who started to see it as inferior and associated with the less educated working class. The translation of the Bible into English in 1561, but not into Scottish Gaelic, further diminished the prestige of the Scottish Gaelic language. Additionally,

the Union of Crowns in 1603, which made James VI of Scotland also James I of England, and shifted the royal court to London, led to English becoming the language of royal affairs. This shift further eroded the status of the Scottish Gaelic language. King James's move to London in the early 1600s led to a significant cultural shift in Scotland. The Scottish elite, seeking to emulate their English counterparts, left Scotland culturally isolated, as noted by Hoffman (1996). Bourdieu's sociological perspective from 1979 sheds light on how language plays a key role in cultural subordination. In Scotland, the idea that everyone has the right to speak and be heard, a concept Bourdieu termed 'linguistic communism', is challenged by the preferential treatment of English over Scottish Gaelic. Scottish Gaelic, according to Bourdieu's (1979) framework, does not enjoy the same communicative rights as English, placing its speakers at a disadvantage in various social arenas like politics and religion. The proposal by Councillors Callum Campbell and Danny Gibson during the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum to replace the Scottish Saltire with the Union Jack at Stirling council's headquarters is another example of what could be interpreted as cultural 'self-hatred', aligning with Fanon's theory of Inferiorism . This phenomenon suggests that the Scottish people are not only complicit in their cultural subordination but actively participate in it. The 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum's outcome, seen as a manifestation of the 'Scottish Cringe', represents a reluctance among Scottish Gaelic to embrace independence. Paulo Freire (1972, pg. 47) encapsulates this situation: *the oppressed, having internalized the oppressor's image, fear the freedom they have the opportunity to reclaim.*

Historically, both the Irish and the Scottish Gaelic languages have experienced prolonged periods of linguistic and cultural oppression, frequently enacted through deliberate political and social policies aimed at marginalizing Gaelic speakers. In Ireland, the suppression intensified significantly under the English colonization, notably following the Penal Laws of the 17th and 18th centuries, which severely restricted Gaelic culture and its educational transmission (Crowley, 2000). These policies persisted into the 19th century, and became especially evident after the introduction of compulsory English-language education, designed explicitly to diminish Irish's prevalence and perceived utility (Ó hÍfearnáin, 2015). Consequently, a negative stigma was systematically attached to the Gaelic language, marking it as synonymous with poverty, backwardness, and social immobility, thereby accelerating its decline in both public and private spheres (Walsh, 2012).

In Scotland, a similar narrative unfolded as Scottish Gaelic faced comparable marginalization, deeply influenced by socio-political dynamics between Gaelic-speaking Highlanders and

Scots-speaking Lowlanders. This mattered because language mapped onto power: administrative, urban, and educational centres were concentrated in the Scots-speaking Lowlands, which amplified negative stereotypes about Highland Gaelic and institutionalized them through schooling and governance. Historical depictions frequently cast Gaelic Highlanders as culturally inferior, barbaric, and resistant to social progress, reinforcing stereotypes and prejudices deeply ingrained within the Scottish psyche (MacGregor, 2009). Legislative actions such as the Scotland Education Act of 1872 further institutionalized these biases, mandating education in English while actively discouraging - and in some instances punishing - the use of Gaelic within the educational system (McLeod, 2001). These systemic acts significantly undermined Gaelic's social prestige and fostered cultural alienation among speakers. From a theoretical standpoint, these historical practices exemplify Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic violence, wherein cultural dominance is maintained subtly through internalized and socially reinforced structures rather than through overt coercion alone. Gaelic speakers internalized the perception of their language and culture as inferior, unintentionally participating in their own cultural marginalization (Oliver, 2005). Moreover, Franz Fanon's (1967) notion of cultural inferiorism similarly articulates how colonial or dominant groups instil in oppressed populations a perception of intrinsic inferiority, effectively eroding cultural identity and self-worth. These frameworks are particularly applicable to understanding the persistent psychological and cultural barriers that contemporary Gaelic revitalization initiatives encounter (Dunmore, 2019). Therefore, appreciating these historical precedents is essential to the ongoing Gaelic revival movements today. Efforts are not only focused on linguistic restoration but also on addressing deep-seated socio-cultural stigmas inherited from centuries of systematic oppression. Recognizing the historical context provides language revivalists with essential insights necessary for effectively dismantling residual prejudices, promoting cultural pride, and ultimately achieving sustainable language restoration (Ó Giollagáin, Caimbeul, 2020).

In the context of the modern, contemporary world, notions surrounding the usage and acquisition of languages have become ever-more prevalent in their importance and understanding. Whilst increased global exposure through modern technology can generally be viewed as a net positive, one must also be conscientious of the negative impacts that such advancements can have on the individual and societal level, as many areas are exceedingly vulnerable to outside influence and change in this regard, even more so if the area in question is already in a state of neglect or decline (Nagy, Hortobágyi, 2022). The contemporary

sociolinguistic landscape of Irish and Scottish Gaelic presents a compelling yet complex picture, reflective of the intertwined legacies of historical marginalization and modern revival efforts. Despite concerted efforts aimed at linguistic revitalization, both Irish and Scottish Gaelic currently occupy a challenging position in predominantly English-speaking environments, where perceptions, rates of usage, and institutional support significantly influence their sustainability. Irish represents a unique case of linguistic revival, being both constitutionally recognized and institutionally supported by the Republic of Ireland. Despite significant legislative protections and the establishment of Irish-medium educational institutions (Gaelscoileanna), usage rates remain uneven across demographic and geographic lines (Ó Giollagáin, Charlton, 2015). According to Ireland's CSO (2016), while approximately 39.8% of the Irish population reported the ability to speak Irish, only a small fraction, about 4%, indicated daily use outside the education system, primarily concentrated in designated Gaeltacht regions. This considerable disparity underscores a persistent gap between policy-driven revival initiatives and practical language use, suggesting that while the symbolic prestige of the Irish language remains unchanged, its pragmatic role in everyday communication is severely limited (Walsh, McLeod, 2008).

Moreover, public perceptions of Irish vary significantly, with attitudes frequently reflecting an appreciation of cultural heritage rather than communicative utility (Ó Riagáin, 2007). Surveys consistently demonstrate favourable attitudes toward Irish as a marker of national identity; however, these sentiments rarely translate into increased functional usage. Despite extensive institutional promotion, particularly within the educational sector and the public media, the limited transition from classroom proficiency to community-based, habitual use poses ongoing challenges to the viability of Irish as a vibrant community language (Walsh, 2012). Comparatively, Scottish Gaelic faces an even more precarious situation, partly due to lower levels of governmental and institutional support, coupled with historically entrenched negative attitudes. According to the 2011 Census, only approximately 1.1% of the Scottish population reported Gaelic-speaking ability, highlighting significant attrition compared to earlier periods (National Records of Scotland, 2015). Language use remains concentrated in specific regions, notably the Western Isles, Skye, and select areas of the Highlands. Despite Scotland's Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, which aimed to secure equal respect for Gaelic alongside English, the number of habitual Gaelic speakers continues to decline steadily (MacKinnon, 2010).

Public attitudes toward Scottish Gaelic illustrate significant complexity. While recent initiatives by Scottish authorities, including the establishment of Gaelic-medium education and broadcasting (BBC Alba), have enhanced the visibility and perceived cultural legitimacy of Gaelic, it still struggles against persistent societal stigmas linking Gaelic with economic disadvantage or cultural obsolescence (Dunmore, 2019). Consequently, contemporary Gaelic speakers often experience linguistic insecurity, stemming from societal expectations that prioritize English fluency for socio-economic advancement (McEwan-Fujita, 2010). Furthermore, the phenomenon of symbolic promotion versus practical abandonment - a condition where individuals verbally support Gaelic preservation but refrain from personal linguistic engagement - complicates Gaelic revitalization strategies. The public's ambivalence toward actual Gaelic use in personal and professional contexts underscores a critical tension between cultural aspiration and linguistic reality (Oliver, 2005). This disjunction poses significant challenges for language planners and activists, who must reconcile aspirational cultural nationalism with effective, grassroots revitalization strategies (Ó Giollagáin, Caimbeul, 2020). Notably, both Irish and Scottish Gaelic share common challenges arising from the omnipresence of English. Globalization and modern technology further complicate efforts of linguistic revival, frequently positioning English as the dominant language of economic mobility, technological advancement, and global interconnectedness (Crystal, 2003). Within this broader context, revitalization initiatives must grapple not merely with historical stigmas but also with contemporary economic and social pressures that strongly favour linguistic conformity to English. This reality necessitates innovative approaches that integrate linguistic revival with broader socio-economic incentives, fostering sustainable environments in which Gaelic languages can flourish practically rather than symbolically (Fishman, 1991).

Ultimately, the contemporary state of Irish and Scottish Gaelic demonstrates that linguistic revival cannot rely solely upon top-down policy or educational measures. For enduring revitalization to succeed, there must be authentic, community-driven engagement fostering genuine communicative use within everyday life. Understanding and addressing these complexities - the interplay between historical legacies, contemporary attitudes, institutional support, and the practical utility of language - remain essential for effective revitalization of both Irish and Scottish Gaelic within their respective communities and beyond.

1.2 Research rationale

Problem statement

While both Irish and Scottish Gaelic share common historical roots and face similar challenges as minoritized Celtic languages, this dissertation places its emphasis on Irish due to its significantly broader presence in the contemporary sociolinguistic landscape. Irish receives more extensive media coverage, has a more robust institutional support structure, and enjoys greater visibility in educational policy, digital applications, and public discourse. Furthermore, recent political developments - particularly post-Brexit nationalist sentiment - have contributed to a renewed interest in Irish as a symbol of cultural identity and resistance. Compared to Scottish Gaelic, the Irish revival has seen more measurable gains in public engagement, intergenerational transmission, and grassroots initiatives, making it a particularly relevant case for examining modern language revitalization efforts.

Despite centuries of sociopolitical marginalization, Irish has persisted as a symbol of cultural and national identity on the island of Ireland. Its survival has been underpinned not only by grassroots efforts but also by sustained top-down policies that have formally endorsed its presence in education, public administration, and media. However, the actual use and societal function of the language have not always aligned with these symbolic gestures. A long-standing concern in the field of sociolinguistics and language policy is whether Irish has functioned more as a “trophy language” - a celebrated emblem of national heritage and identity with limited practical use - than as a fully integrated, living means of communication. This dissertation seeks to investigate whether Irish has begun to transcend this “trophy” status in the contemporary sociolinguistic landscape. The question is particularly pertinent in the context of recent shifts in policy, education, and digital engagement, all of which offer both new challenges and novel opportunities for the language. Has the Gaelic revival effort, after more than a century of various state-led and community-driven initiatives, begun to yield a tangible change in language use, status, and transmission? Or does Irish remain primarily a performative symbol, maintained institutionally yet not widely practiced in everyday life?

A variety of indicators - such as census data, attitudes toward Irish in educational settings, the emergence of “new speakers,” and the role of digital platforms - offer conflicting perspectives. On the one hand, the increased visibility of Irish in digital spaces and policy documents suggests a revitalized interest and engagement. On the other hand, the persistent gap between passive knowledge and active usage, especially among younger generations, raises doubts about the depth of this revitalization. Furthermore, the language’s practical viability in

professional and informal domains remains contested, particularly outside designated Gaeltacht areas. By analyzing these tensions, this study aims to contribute to a clearer understanding of Irish's evolving status. It interrogates whether symbolic capital is now being transformed into functional use, or whether Irish continues to be preserved largely for its ideological and cultural significance. In doing so, the research not only addresses a central issue in Irish language policy but also engages with broader questions concerning the revitalization of minority languages in postcolonial and globalized contexts.

Research objectives

The overarching aim of this study is to trace the evolution of Irish's sociolinguistic position and public perception, with a particular focus on contemporary developments in language ideologies, usage trends, and policy initiatives. By grounding the investigation in longitudinal data and comparative insights from both past and present sources, the research seeks to determine whether a tangible upward shift has occurred in the status of Irish - from a marginalized "trophy language" to a revitalized symbol of cultural identity and everyday utility. A primary objective is to establish a reliable baseline for interpreting the past sociolinguistic position of Irish. Drawing on statistical sources such as census reports, language attitude surveys, and earlier revitalization critiques, this study aims to chart the trajectory of the language through the post-independence era, through the stagnation of the mid-to-late 20th century, and into the resurgence seen in recent decades. These historical benchmarks provide the necessary backdrop for evaluating current developments in a meaningful context. Beyond merely tracing historical change, this study explicitly sets out to demonstrate that present-day trends indicate a substantial and accelerating improvement in both the public perception and actual usage of Irish. These changes are measured not only through increased policy support or educational expansion, but also through more subtle sociolinguistic markers such as shifting attitudes, increased digital engagement, and the emergence of "new speakers" who adopt Irish as part of their linguistic identity despite not being raised in traditional Gaeltacht environments.

To that end, the study formulates the following specific research objectives:

- To assess how Irish has historically been positioned within the Irish society and language policy;
- To identify key phases of stagnation, decline, or symbolic containment (e.g., its role as a "trophy language");

- To compile and analyze contemporary data that reflect recent gains in speaker numbers, language education, and cultural engagement;
- To evaluate whether these developments are indicative of a durable, community-rooted language revitalization effort;
- To examine whether public attitudes and identity-related associations with Irish have measurably improved in recent decades.

In achieving these goals, the research does not aim to deliver a monolithic verdict on the language's current health. Instead, it offers a data-driven contribution to the broader discourse on minority language revitalization - positioning Irish as a case study that might reflect both the challenges and the growing possibilities facing minoritized languages in modern, multilingual states.

Research questions

The present study is guided by three central research questions, each oriented toward understanding the evolving sociolinguistic and ideological landscape surrounding the Irish language in 21st-century Ireland. These questions aim to uncover not only how language usage patterns may be changing across generations, but also to explore the origins of this shift - whether it is primarily driven by institutional efforts or emerging organically through grassroots engagement - and to determine the symbolic and affective power of national identity in motivating Irish language use and learning.

1. Is there a generational shift for Irish speakers?

This question investigates whether younger generations in Ireland are adopting, learning, or engaging with the Irish language in different ways compared to their elders. Numerous sources have suggested an increased interest in the language among younger speakers, including those outside of Gaeltacht regions (e.g., Duolingo data, CSO 2022, Moriarty 2015). The study explores if this reflects a wider shift in linguistic habitus and communicative practices, and whether such patterns indicate a revival in intergenerational transmission or a symbolic shift toward language as a marker of cultural capital rather than native fluency.

2. Is this shift grassroots or institutional?

This question aims to disentangle the primary drivers of Irish language revitalization efforts. On the one hand, significant legislative and educational investments (e.g., the Official Languages Acts, the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language, the growth of Irish-medium

schooling) suggest strong top-down support. On the other hand, the rise of informal online communities, cultural events, and self-led learning platforms indicate increasing bottom-up interest. The research evaluates whether institutional initiatives have been the catalyst for the language's renewed relevance, or if the institutional framework is instead responding to independently growing grassroots movements.

3. How much of a role does a nationalistic, self-identifying movement play?

Irish has long been associated with nationalist discourses, especially during the independence and early post-colonial periods. However, the contemporary revival appears less overtly political and more focused on identity, belonging, and cultural authenticity (Nic Fhlannchadha, Ó Ceallaigh, 2021; O'Rourke, Walsh, 2020). This question investigates whether the renewed interest in Irish is part of a modern rearticulation of national identity - one that is decoupled from traditional nationalism - or whether latent nationalist sentiments still underpin linguistic choices. Particular attention is given to whether the language functions as a unifying symbol in the face of globalization and Anglophone dominance, especially among digital and diasporic communities.

Together, these questions frame a complex inquiry into the mechanisms and meanings behind Irish's contemporary resurgence. They allow the study to go beyond simple demographic or institutional analysis, and instead uncover the nuanced sociolinguistic, psychological, and ideological factors that define the Irish language's current role in society.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Language revival methods

When examining approaches taken to revive Gaelic, a dominant example is that of Irish in Belfast – a language that was spoken natively in parts of Northern Ireland up until the 1950s, but then slowly it disappeared from this area in the following years. By 1965 there were approximately 36 families still using the language for everyday conversations in Belfast, with the addition of 5 reported young couples choosing to adapt their families to Irish, including raising their children with Irish as their L1. None of them were native speakers, and almost all of them learned the language as a passion project in adulthood. Their collective efforts resulted in an Irish-medium primary school being established in 1971 (Maguire, 1991). Over the years the school developed steadily and eventually attracted children from other parts of the city, whose parents were language learners of Irish. As the popularity of the Irish medium education grew, an additional Irish-medium primary school was established in 1987, with two more secondary schools and a number of nurseries having been set up in the following years; this surge was accompanied by a large number of Irish language evening classes for adults, which were run by volunteers all throughout Northern Ireland in an effort to keep up with the demands (Mac Póilin, 1997). A vibrant programme of cultural and social events regarding Irish has also developed in later years, and an Irish language daily newspaper was printed from 1984 to 2008, with a modernized online version still being published to this day. There have been short daily Irish language broadcasts on BBC Radio Ulster since 1986 (Maguire, 1991) and an Irish language community radio station, Raidió Fáilte, was launched in 2002. Subsequently, a new Irish-speaking community has been re-established in areas of Belfast and Northern Ireland. Maguire (1991) and Hindley (1990) argue that the revival of Irish in Northern Ireland has not been as successful as some enthusiasts claim, nor that it has much relevance or provides much hope for Irish as a whole – this viewpoint supports the notion proposed by Carnie (1995), who regards Irish as a sort of consolation prize – despite official recognition, and status, the actual usage of the language falls very short of expected numbers. In the Republic of Ireland, Irish is an official language, has been a compulsory subject in Ireland’s schools since 1922 and its mastery is required for a number of positions in civil service. Despite these points however, only a minority of those who study Irish in schools become fluent, and many have negative

impressions of the language (Hindley, 1990). As indicated by contemporary census data discussed in previous paragraphs, this lack of everyday language usage is still a major problem for language revitalization efforts. Moreover, since the initial wave of Irish-medium education schools, the number of institutions has grown rapidly and there are now over 200 so called *Gaelscoileanna* (Irish-medium schools) throughout Ireland. However, despite the promising numbers, many such schools were started by local families as small-scale projects and have since then faced numerous difficulties in securing official recognition and funding (Ó Néill, 2013).

In the following paragraphs, several other examples will be presented as examples of other notable language revitalization efforts. In North America, a place where most of the indigenous languages are vulnerable, endangered or already close to language death, there are revival movements for many of them (Zepeda and Hill, 1991). In many cases Native American languages are well in their terminal stages of decline by the time language revival efforts begin, especially that generational exchange has ceased, most or all of their speakers are elderly, or even if the language is present, it is restricted to fringe cases of usage. In more concise terms, they have reached stage 7 or 8 of Fishman's 1991 GIDS (Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale, hereinafter GIDS) (qtd. in Lewis and Simons, 2010) or fall under the endangered classification according to the UNESCO criteria (UNESCO, 2003).

In areas near Montreal, the Mohawk language lost more than half of its speakers during the mid-1900s, and as such, cross-generational exchanges all but disappeared from the speaker base. During the 1970s Mohawk lessons were first introduced in local schools, and Mohawk-medium education began in its earliest manifestation towards the end of the decade. In contemporary times, roughly half of the community send their children to Mohawk-medium education institutions, alongside which the parents are required to sign an agreement to participate in activities organised by the institution and are actively encouraged to speak the language at home with their children, while also being offered courses to learn the language themselves, should they not speak it (Williams, 2013). Thanks to these efforts and initiatives, Mohawk is now considered a viable language, despite its small speaker base (Williams, 2013).

It is prudent to include the Canadian Métis case as well, since the community's emblematic language, Michif - a mixed code combining French nominal patterns with Cree verbal morphology - offers a clear comparative to the Inari Sámi and Māori examples. Métis

revitalization likewise centers on community ownership, explicit acceptance of internal varietal diversity, and family/early-childhood language-nest practices that rebuild everyday use in the domains Fishman identifies at GIDS Stages 6–7 (Bakker, 1997).

Another example of a vulnerable language is Cornish, which largely disappeared as a communal language towards the end of the 18th century. When the Cornish revival began at the start of the 20 century, the revived language was based on fragments of Late Cornish, which had been based on surviving documents or remained in people's memories, alongside Middle Cornish literature, and words borrowed from or modelled on Welsh and Breton. No recordings exist of native Cornish speakers, so the pronunciation of the revived versions of Cornish had to be reconstructed based on surviving texts (Hicks, 2005). According to MacKinnon (2000), today Cornish boasts no more than a few hundred active speakers, plus several thousand people with some knowledge of the language; it is taught in some limited capacity in schools and in language classes for adults; people are writing poetry, songs, short stories and novels in Cornish, and there are regular, short radio broadcasts in the language. One of the biggest setbacks of the Cornish language revival effort is the presence of multiple variations of the language, with Common Cornish, as the most widely spoken and studied (Hicks, 2005).

Immersion education for children is used to a different extent in many language revivals and revitalisations processes. In New Zealand, for example, hundreds of language nests are used as a contemporary example of the workshop-based approach to revitalization, where young children are immersed in the Māori language (King, 2001). In some revitalization efforts, the programmes are not exclusively aimed at younger generations but are also inclusive towards adult speakers as well. An example of this lies in the Basque country, where the language is still relatively strong, therefore it is possible for civil servants to spend a year or two learning the language while on full pay – if the speakers achieve fluency after their studies, all their tuition fees are refunded. There are also numerous small gatherings of adults with shared linguistic interests, who meet regularly and speak Basque as often as they can. Such groups are usually spearheaded by one or two native speakers, who volunteer to spend time helping learners to improve their language skills. Thanks to these and other initiatives and language efforts, the speaker base of the language has been steadily gaining more and more traction. Another major factor in the successful implementation of the Basque revitalisation efforts is linked to the willingness of the people to invest money in the language, not just for education,

but also for general language infrastructure such as signs, product labels, and so on (Hualde, 2007).

2.2. Joshua Fishman's (1991) GIDS

Joshua Fishman's *Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages* (1991) remains a cornerstone of contemporary sociolinguistic theory, particularly in the domain of language planning and revitalization. His introduction of the *GIDS* provides a diagnostic tool to assess the severity of language endangerment and offers a structured model for guiding efforts to reverse language decline. The *GIDS* is predicated on the understanding that intergenerational transmission - the act of parents teaching their children to speak a minority language in naturalistic, everyday contexts - is the essential cornerstone of language survival. Institutional support, while beneficial, is viewed as secondary to the informal, community-based domains in which language use is most robust and enduring (Fishman, 1991).

The *GIDS* system introduced by Fishman (1991) has cemented itself as the baseline method for examining and establishing parameters in conjunction with linguistic decline and maintenance efforts. His work focuses specifically on the important role of intergenerational transmission as one of the biggest factors in the maintenance of a language as he directly links the lack of this phenomena to the eventual decline and disappearance of languages. *GIDS* is not singularly focused on the transmission on an individual scale, but rather it is also concerned with societal-level matters, such as the societal and institutional choices and decisions that influence the individual level by extension. One of the biggest societal factors in this regard is the areas and spaces in which a particular language is used. Fishman argues that these "domains of use" are essentially the building blocks from which language can adapt and evolve onto a broader scale in terms of usage, therefore if these domains were to decline in number, or disappear altogether, the language would be impacted as well. The domains in question involve an amount of participants, a location, and a general topic that is in close conjunction with the particular language. These elements serve to cement the usage of one specific language in a given scenario, providing further ground for the language to develop and maintain an active speaker base. By association, if these usage domains start to experience erosion or decline, the associated areas will then be exposed to a degree of language shift, as the target language will no longer be considered useful in the usage scenario, eventually spiralling into irrelevancy.

When evaluating the condition and strength of languages, the *GIDS* primarily emphasizes the extent of disruption rather than the degree of preservation. Analysts can interpret the scale by starting at the level with the least disruption (Level 1) and proceeding downwards until they identify the level of disruption that characterizes the situation they are examining. Typically,

the trend for marginalized language communities is a downward trajectory on the scale, with each stage described in terms of the loss of language use (functions, domains) and speakers. Fishman notes that the majority of marginalized communities are situated at Level 6.

In the context of Irish and Scottish Gaelic, the GIDS framework serves as a vital analytical lens. Despite varying degrees of institutional support and public visibility, both languages continue to struggle with the fundamental issue Fishman identified: the lack of secure and sustained intergenerational transmission within the home. For instance, in Ireland, although Irish holds the status of the first official language and is a mandatory subject in schools, its use as a community language is confined largely to the shrinking Gaeltacht regions. Census data has repeatedly demonstrated that outside of education, Irish is infrequently spoken on a daily basis (Central Statistics Office, 2016). While students often achieve a degree of literacy in Irish, many fail to reach active spoken fluency, and fewer still maintain regular use into adulthood. According to GIDS criteria, such a scenario suggests that the language may reside around Stage 6 in most of Ireland, and closer to Stage 3 or 4 in Gaeltacht areas where media, education, and community life converge.

Scottish Gaelic, while experiencing a revival in visibility - through policies like the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, the expansion of Gaelic-medium education, and the growth of Gaelic broadcasting - remains fragile in terms of speaker numbers and intergenerational use. Census data from 2011 indicated that only around 1.1% of Scotland's population had any ability in Gaelic, with most fluent speakers concentrated in the Western Isles and parts of the Highlands (National Records of Scotland, 2015). While these figures point to a moderate institutional presence (perhaps aligning with GIDS Stage 4 or 5 in policy terms), Fishman would argue that the community and familial use necessary to stabilize language shift has not been adequately reestablished. In fact, as Dunmore (2019) notes, even among those receiving Gaelic-medium education, the language is often not carried over into home or social life, thereby stalling the advancement up the GIDS ladder.

Fishman's insights also elucidate a persistent mismatch in Gaelic language planning between top-down policy initiatives and bottom-up sociolinguistic realities. Governments and advocacy organizations frequently prioritize visibility, legal status, or curricular inclusion - elements located at Stages 2 and 1 of GIDS - without ensuring that Stage 6 (intergenerational home use) and Stage 7 (community-level engagement) are sufficiently addressed. This sequencing can create what Fishman called "premature institutionalization" - a condition in which a language

is celebrated symbolically or administratively but lacks the foundational vernacular base that sustains everyday relevance and transmission (Fishman, 1991). In the Gaelic contexts, this often manifests as high levels of passive support or national pride in the language without a corresponding increase in active, habitual speakers. Indeed, symbolic or performative support may mask the deeper structural issues afflicting language use. As MacKinnon (2010) and McLeod (2001) have both documented, public attitudes toward Scottish Gaelic have warmed in recent years, and yet this attitudinal shift has not led to significant growth in speaker populations. The same pattern is visible in Ireland, where favourable sentiment toward Irish as a cultural artifact or national symbol remains high, but everyday practical use remains low. GIDS offers a framework for diagnosing this disjunction by highlighting that movement toward revitalization must proceed gradually through each stage, rather than attempting to skip over foundational sociolinguistic processes. Moreover, GIDS is uniquely valuable in that it accommodates both the horizontal and the vertical dimensions of language planning. Horizontally, the model considers how different speech communities might occupy different stages simultaneously within the same national context. For instance, Gaelic-speaking communities in the Outer Hebrides may have good Stage 6 or 5 activity, while urban learners in Glasgow might still operate at Stage 8 or 7, where no organic intergenerational transmission occurs. Vertically, GIDS emphasizes a cumulative process, wherein the strengthening of a lower stage (such as neighbourhood usage or peer-to-peer communication) forms the necessary basis for success at higher stages like media, governance, or higher education.

Additionally, Fishman's framework complements contemporary critiques about the limitations of institutional language policies that focus disproportionately on visibility without fostering use. Scholars such as Ó Giollagáin and Caimbeul (2020) have argued that in Scotland, Gaelic policy is often oriented toward symbolic equality with English, rather than fostering sociolinguistic conditions in which Gaelic use becomes viable in ordinary life. This critique is fundamentally consonant with Fishman's assertion that the primary locus of language maintenance lies not in the symbolic apparatus of the state, but in the micro-level interactions of families, neighbours, and peer networks. The GIDS model also serves as a counterbalance to overly optimistic interpretations of census data or educational enrolment figures. It shifts the emphasis from numerical counts of speakers toward the qualitative context in which the language is used. A language with tens of thousands of speakers may still be at risk if those speakers are geographically dispersed, linguistically isolated, or socially constrained from

using the language in daily life. In this regard, GIDS provides a more nuanced understanding of linguistic vitality than models that rely solely on speaker numbers or media presence.

One must also consider the role of policy discourse and how it interacts with different GIDS stages. Fishman warned that a central obstacle to reversing language shift is the tendency for institutions and policy-makers to frame revitalization in terms that prioritize measurable, institutional achievements - such as the number of language learners, the quantity of Gaelic signage, or hours of television broadcast - over more difficult-to-quantify but fundamentally essential goals like habitual use in domestic and community settings. This form of misalignment, which McLeod (2006) refers to as “policy-performance gaps,” is particularly relevant to the Gaelic contexts, where considerable symbolic effort has not necessarily translated into lived linguistic practice. In Ireland, for example, government policy frequently touts the status of Irish as a national language and supports its presence in civil service, broadcasting, and education. Yet, the GIDS model makes clear that such visibility at Stage 2 or 1 offers little if home use (Stage 6) and community use (Stage 5) remain stagnant or continue to decline. In fact, as Fishman (1991) emphasized, institutional support introduced without a solid vernacular base may create the illusion of vitality while leaving the deeper patterns of language shift untouched. This “illusion of progress” can be detrimental, as it redirects resources and attention away from community-based efforts and grassroots support systems.

Moreover, the reliance on institutional structures can sometimes produce unintended linguistic hierarchies. In both Irish and Scottish Gaelic contexts, native speakers and fluent users emerging from community-based environments may find themselves displaced by second-language speakers who are more formally educated in the language but disconnected from its vernacular traditions. Dunmore (2020) identifies this phenomenon in Scotland, where Gaelic-medium educated individuals often become the face of Gaelic revitalization initiatives, while older native speakers - particularly those from traditional heartland areas - feel sidelined or culturally marginalized. This tension between “new speakers” and “native speakers” is increasingly recognized as a challenge for language policy, one that GIDS indirectly anticipates by emphasizing intergenerational community transmission as the most authentic and durable form of language maintenance. The GIDS model is also a useful lens through which to interpret the role of educational systems in language revitalization. Gaelic-medium education in both Scotland and Ireland has expanded significantly in recent decades and is often held up as a major success of language policy. However, Fishman’s analysis cautions against assuming that schooling alone can reverse language shift. Education systems, while vital for promoting

literacy and standardization, do not inherently ensure that the language will be used outside the classroom. This is particularly problematic when immersion is limited to early education, with minimal reinforcement in home or social settings. Ó hIfearnáin (2015) notes that in many Irish-medium schools, even students who become fluent may not continue using Irish in adulthood, especially if their social networks are predominantly anglophone. Fishman's framework thus encourages a critical re-evaluation of educational strategies. Rather than viewing schools as the primary engines of revitalization, he positions them as supportive mechanisms that must be embedded within a broader network of informal, familial, and communal usage. This perspective resonates strongly with research from Irish and Scottish contexts that indicates a lack of continuity between institutional learning and real-world application. In essence, GIDS invites scholars and policymakers to ask not only whether students are learning the language, but whether they are living the language.

Another area where the GIDS model proves particularly insightful is in the distinction between instrumental and integrative motivation for language use. Fishman observed that minority languages often face an uphill battle in societies where the dominant language (e.g., English) offers overwhelming advantages in employment, education, and media. Under such conditions, the minority language is typically relegated to symbolic or ceremonial functions. In the case of Irish, this is evident in the performative use of the language during national holidays, state ceremonies, or official documents, rather than in spontaneous, day-to-day communication. Scottish Gaelic, similarly, is often invoked as a marker of cultural identity or regional pride but is less commonly spoken outside structured domains. This symbolic valorisation, while not without merit, can mask the deeper issue that Fishman warned against: the displacement of language from its natural, interpersonal contexts. When a language survives only as a symbol, it ceases to function as a means of authentic communication. The GIDS model allows researchers to detect these signs of symbolic overcompensation and to redirect attention to the everyday, often invisible practices that sustain language vitality. It also encourages a recognition of linguistic domains - the specific contexts in which languages are spoken - and insists that revitalization efforts must expand the range and diversity of these domains if they are to succeed long-term.

Fishman's analysis is also sensitive to the question of community agency. One of the central messages of *Reversing Language Shift* is that no amount of institutional support can substitute for grassroots engagement. Language survival ultimately depends on the willingness and ability of communities to prioritize the minority language in their own lives. This insight is

particularly relevant in the Gaelic-speaking world, where top-down language policy often overshadows or marginalizes community-led initiatives. Scholars such as Ó Giollagáin and Caimbeul (2020) argue that revitalization strategies in Scotland frequently lack adequate consultation with Gaelic-speaking communities themselves, resulting in policies that are misaligned with local needs and experiences. Fishman's work thus acts as a corrective, insisting that the most effective language planning must be rooted in, and accountable to, the communities whose language it seeks to preserve. By foregrounding the role of community, family, and informal networks, GIDS provides a framework that is not only diagnostic but also ethically grounded. It challenges linguists, educators, and policymakers to think beyond metrics and institutional benchmarks and to focus instead on the lived realities of speakers. In doing so, Fishman articulates a model of revitalization that is both practical and aspirational - one that demands incremental progress and contextual sensitivity but also envisions the possibility of reversing even the most advanced stages of language loss when social conditions are conducive. A further strength of Fishman's framework lies in its flexibility across time and context. While GIDS was developed in the early 1990s, its conceptual relevance has endured, partly because it avoids prescribing rigid, one-size-fits-all solutions. Instead, the model promotes a context-sensitive understanding of language shift, accounting for cultural, geographical, demographic, and political variability. In the Gaelic contexts, this adaptability is critical. Irish and Scottish Gaelic revitalization efforts exist within markedly different political structures, with distinct legal statuses, levels of public support, and institutional frameworks. Fishman's model accommodates this complexity by allowing language planners to position communities within different stages and to develop contextually appropriate interventions that reflect local linguistic ecologies rather than national policy aspirations alone. This flexible architecture has encouraged scholars to adapt and expand the GIDS model into various derivatives. Notably, Lewis and Simons (2010) developed the Expanded GIDS (EGIDS), which includes 13 stages and offers a finer-grained diagnostic tool used by Ethnologue and other language vitality metrics. Although Fishman himself acknowledged that numerical refinements were helpful, his original emphasis on the importance of informal intergenerational transmission and community cohesion remains foundational. The expanded models tend to confirm rather than depart from this central principle. The continued use of GIDS in academic research and policy evaluation speaks to its methodological clarity and theoretical resilience. Researchers across endangered language communities - both within and beyond the Gaelic-speaking world - regularly employ GIDS to assess progress, identify weaknesses, and articulate clear priorities. In this sense, Fishman's work has provided a lingua franca for sociolinguists

and language activists alike: a shared framework for diagnosing linguistic health and formulating coherent strategies. Yet perhaps the most enduring contribution of Fishman's theory is its refusal to surrender to fatalism. Writing at a time when many considered language death an inevitable by-product of modernization, Fishman countered with a vision of incremental, community-rooted revival. His work demonstrated that language shift is not irreversible if addressed methodically and ethically. For Gaelic revival efforts, which have often fluctuated between idealism and institutional stagnation, this reminder is invaluable. It urges activists and scholars to remain attuned to the daily habits, social norms, and interpersonal choices that ultimately determine whether a language lives or dies.

Fishman's GIDS model provides more than a framework for classification; it offers a roadmap for action and a philosophical foundation for revitalization grounded in realism and respect for community agency. For Irish and Scottish Gaelic, both situated at complex intersections of cultural pride, symbolic state support, and declining vernacular usage, the GIDS remains a critical lens through which to understand past missteps, current stagnation, and future possibilities. As revitalization continues to evolve, Fishman's insights offer a necessary corrective: that the heart of language survival lies not in law or school, but in the lived experiences of speakers, in the bonds between generations, and in the choice - conscious or unconscious - to make a language present in everyday life.

2.3. Language maintenance strategies and methods

Language maintenance refers to the array of strategies, processes, and interventions designed to sustain and stabilize the use of a language within a community over time, particularly in the face of dominant-language pressure or sociopolitical marginalization. While language revitalization typically deals with reversing language decline or bringing a moribund language back into active use, language maintenance assumes a more proactive stance, aiming to preserve and consolidate linguistic vitality where it still exists. Methodologically, language maintenance encompasses a wide range of activities and principles, from informal community practices to formalized educational, legal, and technological interventions. Its underlying logic is to prevent language shift - defined as the gradual abandonment of one language in favour of another - by fortifying the functional and symbolic role of the minority language across social domains.

A central tenet of language maintenance is domain support, a concept popularized by Fishman (1991), who argued that languages thrive when they are used in multiple, functionally

significant areas of life, such as the home, school, workplace, religious practice, and media. The more domains in which a language is used, the more resilient it becomes to attrition. This is especially true of intergenerational transmission within families and communities, which Fishman identified as the most critical site for long-term sustainability. Language maintenance efforts, therefore, often prioritize ensuring that minority languages are not merely taught, but actively used in daily life, and passed on to children as a living vernacular. Another foundational principle is the reinforcement of positive language attitudes. Sociolinguistic research has shown that speakers' perceptions of their language - its prestige, utility, and cultural worth - have a direct impact on usage patterns (Baker, 1992). Language maintenance initiatives thus frequently incorporate ideological work: promoting pride in linguistic heritage, challenging internalized stigmas, and normalizing public use of the language. These efforts are particularly important in postcolonial or minoritized contexts, where the historical devaluation of a language has often led to speakers abandoning it not out of lack of competence, but because of shame, fear, or perceived irrelevance (Grenoble, Whaley, 2006). Language maintenance also involves structured support in formal institutions, particularly education. While Fishman cautioned against placing too much faith in institutional domains disconnected from grassroots use, education remains a key pillar of maintenance when aligned with community goals. Bilingual and immersion models, where students receive substantial portions of their education through the minority language, have proven particularly effective. These models support both language acquisition and the development of subject-specific vocabulary, increasing the language's capacity to serve modern communicative functions (Hornberger, 2008). Importantly, effective educational maintenance strategies require continuity across age groups, from early childhood through secondary and even tertiary education, to avoid attrition as learners age out of language programs. Another key methodological consideration is access to linguistic infrastructure. This includes not only the availability of teaching materials and trained educators but also access to books, media, digital tools, and social spaces where the language is actively used. Maintenance requires creating opportunities for speakers to use the language meaningfully and regularly, outside the classroom or ceremonial settings. This principle aligns with Wenger's (1998) theory of "communities of practice," which holds that language is best maintained when speakers engage in shared activities that naturally require communication in the minority language. These communities, whether formal or informal, generate the social cohesion and practical contexts necessary for language use to feel both normal and necessary. Technological integration has become increasingly central to modern language maintenance strategies. Digital tools, mobile applications, social media, and online content creation have

allowed minority languages to gain visibility and accessibility at an unprecedented scale. However, the effectiveness of such tools depends heavily on community engagement and contextual relevance. Language apps or automated translation tools may offer exposure, but without integration into the lived realities of speakers - such as peer communication, local content production, and community events - their utility may remain superficial (Cunliffe, Morris, Prys, 2013). Thus, the methodological challenge lies not merely in creating technological resources but in embedding them within community-driven language practices.

Language maintenance is inherently a political act. Policy frameworks, legal recognition, and public funding all shape the conditions under which minority languages survive or decline. While top-down support alone cannot ensure maintenance, the absence of institutional recognition can exacerbate marginalization and reduce the perceived legitimacy of the language in public life. Scholars such as Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) have long emphasized that linguistic rights and educational equity are foundational to any sustainable language maintenance effort. Policy must therefore be responsive, community-informed, and designed not only to protect language but to enable its everyday use across all layers of society. What emerges from this overview is that language maintenance methodology is not a single strategy but a constellation of overlapping practices that must be carefully coordinated and adapted to local realities. It is fundamentally interdisciplinary, drawing from sociolinguistics, education, cultural studies, political theory, and community development. Successful maintenance depends on the alignment of bottom-up vitality with top-down support, on ideological renewal as much as pedagogical technique, and on embedding language in the lived experiences of its speakers. This complexity is precisely what makes language maintenance both challenging and urgently necessary in an era of accelerating linguistic homogenization.

2.3.1. Approaches and attitudes toward minority languages

The revitalization of minority languages such as Irish requires a multifaceted and context-sensitive approach that balances grassroots engagement with institutional support. While no single model guarantees success, research has consistently emphasized the importance of integrating multiple strategies - educational immersion, policy support, community-based initiatives, technological tools, and cultural reinforcement - to create a sustainable linguistic environment (Fishman, 1991; Grenoble, Whaley, 2006). Irish, despite being constitutionally enshrined as Ireland's first official language, remains under pressure due to the dominance of English across most domains of public and private life. Although state policies have promoted the language through education and broadcasting, concerns persist about the declining vitality

of Irish in Gaeltacht areas and the gap between symbolic support and daily usage (Ó hIfearnáin, 2015; Ó Giollagáin, Charlton, 2015). A core feature of effective revitalization involves fostering genuine intergenerational transmission and ensuring that the language is not just taught but also used within natural, everyday contexts. This principle underscores the value of community-driven efforts, such as language nests and informal workshops, which have seen success in other minority language contexts and are increasingly discussed in Irish policy circles (Pasanen, 2015). Simultaneously, Irish-medium schools (Gaelscoileanna) and partial immersion programs play a significant role in equipping new generations with linguistic competence, though these gains risk being undermined without broader societal reinforcement (Harris, 2008). Technological interventions - ranging from mobile language apps to Irish-language media platforms - offer additional avenues for exposure and practice, but require meaningful integration with cultural and social life to affect long-term behavioural change (Cunliffe, Morris, Prys, 2013).

Ultimately, language revitalization must be situated within a broader framework of language planning that is inclusive, community-informed, and adaptable to shifting sociolinguistic realities (Nagy, Hortobágyi 2022). Irish's revitalization efforts illustrate both the potential and the limits of state-led models, reaffirming the importance of aligning policy goals with grassroots linguistic ecologies. Rather than focusing solely on institutional prestige or symbolic representation, minority language approaches must prioritize lived use, cultural legitimacy, and the everyday communicative value of the language to those it seeks to serve (Walsh, McLeod, 2008).

2.3.2. Communal efforts in revitalization

Community-based efforts have long been recognized as a foundational pillar of successful language revitalization, particularly in contexts where top-down policies have struggled to reach the most critical domains of linguistic transmission: the home, the neighbourhood, and informal peer networks. In the case of Irish, while state-sponsored interventions - such as educational reforms and official status recognition - have undoubtedly elevated the visibility of the language, the most enduring and meaningful use of Irish often stems from grassroots initiatives driven by communities themselves. These efforts work to embed the language in the lived experiences of speakers and to restore its role as a medium of everyday social interaction, especially in Gaeltacht regions where the vernacular base has eroded over time (Ó Giollagáin et al., 2007).

One of the most significant advantages of community-led revitalization is its capacity to foster localized ownership of the language (Nagy, Hortobágyi 2022). This principle is visible in various Irish-speaking networks that have emerged independently of institutional frameworks, often responding to the specific linguistic and cultural needs of their members. Such initiatives include community cooperatives, cultural festivals, language cafés, and conversation circles (*ciorcail chomhrá*), which provide low-pressure environments for both fluent speakers and learners to engage with the language. These spaces help recontextualize Irish as a living vernacular rather than a subject of formal study, thereby counteracting the impression - common among younger generations - that Irish is relevant only within academic or ceremonial settings (Walsh, 2012).

In Gaeltacht areas, community activism has often been focused on preserving not only the language, but also the social fabric that sustains it. Local organizations, such as *Údarás na Gaeltachta* and community development groups, have played instrumental roles in creating employment, housing, and social infrastructure that supports continued residence in Irish-speaking areas. This socio-economic dimension is crucial: research shows that language maintenance correlates strongly with population stability, local autonomy, and a sense of cultural cohesion (Mac Donnacha et al., 2005). Without viable local economies or support for young families, the risk of linguistic retreat - even in areas where Irish is nominally dominant - remains high. Community language planning, therefore, must be understood as inextricably linked to broader issues of rural sustainability and socio-economic justice.

Outside the Gaeltacht, the proliferation of urban Irish-speaking communities has become a notable trend in the last two decades. These “new speaker” populations, often composed of graduates of Irish-medium schools and adult learners, have been proactive in creating new Irish-language networks within urban environments such as Dublin, Belfast, and Galway. Organizations such as *Conradh na Gaeilge*, *An Droichead*, and *Glór na nGael* have supported the development of urban Irish-language centres, early childcare facilities, and cultural programming that extend the social utility of Irish beyond traditional rural domains (Kallen, 2012). The emergence of these communities demonstrates the flexibility and adaptability of Irish as a living language, capable of thriving in modern, pluralistic contexts when given sufficient infrastructural and ideological support. Crucially, community-based initiatives often excel in cultivating positive language ideologies, which are essential to overcoming the psychological effects of historical marginalization. Unlike institutional interventions, which may be perceived as top-down or symbolic, grassroots efforts are frequently driven by intrinsic

motivation, cultural pride, and a desire for genuine linguistic inclusion (Nagy, Hortobágyi 2022). This has been especially evident in campaigns such as *Gaillimh le Gaeilge*, which promotes Irish in the business and tourism sectors of Galway City, and *Raidió na Life*, which offers a platform for contemporary, youth-oriented Irish-language broadcasting. These projects not only increase the visibility of Irish but also challenge prevailing stereotypes that frame the language as outdated or irrelevant to modern life (Watson, 2003). Moreover, community efforts are often more agile and responsive to emergent needs. They can experiment with formats and outreach strategies that institutional bodies might avoid due to bureaucratic limitations or political constraints. Examples include pop-up Gaeltachts - informal Irish-speaking meetups often organized via social media - that allow speakers to reclaim public space for the language in a spontaneous and participatory manner. These gatherings have spread beyond Ireland and are now common in diaspora communities as well, exemplifying how Irish-language revitalization has expanded its geographic and demographic scope through grassroots mobilization (Ó Murchadha, 2018).

2.4. Non-Gaelic related language revitalization endeavours

The following section will focus on a number of related revitalization cases from a global perspective: the cases for Inari Sámi in Finland, Māori in New Zealand, and Métis in Canada all share the same overarching similarities. These languages have been preserved, and are continuing to be preserved due to a deliberate focus on community oriented language efforts, as opposed to relying on large-scale, institutional methods.

The revitalization of Inari Sámi (often also referred to as Sámi hereafter), one of the most endangered branches of the Sámi languages spoken in Finland, provides a compelling model for understanding how language maintenance can be driven by grassroots community action rather than top-down institutional reform. In the early 1990s, the number of fluent speakers of Inari Sámi had dwindled to fewer than 300, a result of decades of language shift induced by assimilationist educational policies, internalized linguistic stigmatization, and socio-economic marginalization. Unlike other minority languages that turned primarily to the state for intervention, the revitalization of Inari Sámi was initiated and sustained predominantly by community members, particularly younger generations who took ownership of linguistic and cultural continuity. A key feature of the Inari Sámi strategy was the implementation of language nests - early-childhood immersion programs based on the model pioneered by the Māori in New Zealand. These nests, known locally as *kielipesät*, provide full immersion environments where children interact daily with fluent adult speakers, often elders within the community. Importantly, the language nests do not treat language learning as an abstract, curricular activity but as a natural part of everyday life - learning through play, storytelling, meals, and caregiving. This model effectively reestablishes the organic family- and community-based transmission that Fishman (1991) identified as the cornerstone of successful language revival. The nests thus re-situate Inari Sámi in the domestic domain, laying a foundation for long-term intergenerational transmission and a sense of linguistic normalcy among children.

Another important component has been the development of culturally grounded language workshops and informal education initiatives designed not only to teach the language but also to re-embed it within traditional Sámi practices. These include storytelling circles, handicraft and joik (traditional Sámi singing) workshops, and seasonal gatherings that emphasize the connection between language and lived experience. Such programs foster holistic linguistic competence by embedding vocabulary acquisition and syntactic fluency within culturally

meaningful contexts. This kind of experiential learning reinforces the language's status not merely as a communicative tool but also as an expression of identity, worldview, and heritage. Inari Sámi revitalization has also embraced modern technological tools, particularly to reach younger generations and those outside traditional Sámi geographic areas. The community has developed online dictionaries, mobile applications, digital learning environments, and interactive games, often designed by Sámi developers in collaboration with linguists and educators. This locally-driven technological innovation avoids the common pitfall of creating digital resources without cultural specificity. Instead, it aligns technological modernity with cultural continuity, allowing digital platforms to serve as extensions of traditional practice rather than replacements for it.

What is particularly striking about the Inari Sámi case is the way it has re-centred agency within the community itself. Rather than waiting for comprehensive state support - which, while not absent, was initially limited - activists, parents, and cultural leaders devised practical solutions rooted in the everyday realities of their language community. The result has been not only a measurable increase in the number of fluent speakers but also a dramatic shift in the perception of the language's viability. In the early 1990s, Inari Sámi was largely considered doomed to extinction within a generation; today, it is one of the few endangered European languages to have reversed its trajectory in a statistically and culturally significant way. This transformation occurred without large-scale institutional overhaul, national legislation, or substantial public funding, but instead through a coordinated, internally-motivated effort to return the language to its natural domains of use.

The implications of the Inari Sámi model are significant for Gaelic contexts. Both Irish and Scottish Gaelic have experienced substantial institutional engagement - schooling systems, legislative acts, and media channels have been developed and maintained to varying degrees. However, as numerous scholars have noted (e.g., Ó Giollagáin, Caimbeul, 2020; Dunmore, 2019), these top-down efforts have often struggled to produce enduring community-based use or reverse the erosion of domestic transmission. The Inari Sámi experience suggests that revitalization strategies might benefit from recalibrating their focus - not to abandon institutional support, but to critically assess whether such support is empowering genuine language use at the family and neighbourhood levels. Grassroots workshops, culturally situated immersion, and bottom-up digital tools can often accomplish what national frameworks cannot: the restoration of linguistic relevance in the intimate, relational settings where language is lived, rather than merely learned (Nagy, Hortobágyi 2022). Building further on the case of Inari

Sámi, one of the most salient lessons it offers is the emphasis on community ownership over the revitalization process. Rather than relying solely on linguistic experts, government agencies, or external institutions, the Inari Sámi community demonstrated that language recovery can and should be directed by the people most intimately connected to the language. This community-centred approach directly contrasts with models where language planning is imposed from above, often based on abstract targets, quantitative metrics, or symbolic measures that may fail to resonate with speakers' everyday lives. Instead, the Inari Sámi approach affirms that those who live the language must also shape its future. This has important methodological and philosophical implications. One of the key features of the Inari Sámi revitalization effort was its ability to nurture a “critical mass” of semi-speakers and learners who became functionally fluent not through standard curriculum progression but through practical, emotional, and cultural immersion. This process was not linear or rigidly structured. Rather, it valued the creation of low-pressure, high-exposure environments where mistakes were accepted, code-switching was normalized, and language acquisition could proceed through social interaction rather than formal instruction alone. The result was a gradual re-naturalization of the language, especially among younger generations who began to associate it not with institutional formality or ancestral nostalgia, but with the immediacy of play, friendship, and daily routine.

The workshops and nests also served as a medium for *reclaiming cultural continuity*. In many indigenous and minority contexts - including the Gaelic world - language loss has been accompanied by erosion in traditional ecological knowledge, oral histories, artistic practices, and communal narratives. The Inari Sámi case consciously tied language use to these broader cultural practices, ensuring that language was not learned in isolation but as part of a living worldview. Workshops in traditional crafts, storytelling, snowshoeing, reindeer herding, and joik performances became not just cultural events, but linguistic domains where the language could thrive in its most authentic register.

One of the most instructive dimensions of the Inari Sámi model is its capacity to *scale without institutional dilution*. The community's efforts remained rooted in local networks even as they attracted regional and international attention. Rather than outsourcing revitalization to governmental bodies, the community maintained control over curriculum design, teaching methods, and the pace of development. This autonomy enabled linguistic authenticity to be preserved and prevented the standardization or bureaucratization that sometimes characterizes state-run language programs. In fact, the community's success eventually prompted the Finnish

state to recognize and fund aspects of the project - not as a top-down imposition, but as a bottom-up partnership in which community needs guided policy rather than the reverse.

The contrast with Irish and Scottish Gaelic becomes all the more vivid when one considers the structural barriers facing bottom-up revitalization in these contexts. In both Ireland and Scotland, national language strategies are often devised by civil servants, informed by high-level consultations, and evaluated using standardized performance indicators. While these are not inherently detrimental, they can stifle the very forms of grassroots experimentation and informal creativity that proved so successful in the Inari Sámi case. Moreover, community groups working with Gaelic languages sometimes lack the autonomy, flexibility, or sustained micro-funding needed to replicate such success on a local level. The Inari Sámi experience thus challenges revitalization efforts to reconsider the balance between institutional framework and grassroots fluency: to trust communities with the tools, spaces, and agency needed to reconstruct their linguistic futures from within (Nagy, Hortobágyi 2022).

The case also offers an alternative to monolithic revitalization narratives that often assume a single, ideal trajectory toward language recovery. The success of Inari Sámi revitalization was not the product of a universalized blueprint, but of an iterative, adaptive, and deeply contextual process responsive to specific community needs and assets. This pluralism is particularly relevant to the Gaelic world, where communities vary dramatically in linguistic capacity, demographic pressures, and cultural orientation. The lesson here is that revitalization does not demand uniformity - it demands flexibility, localism, and respect for diversity within a shared linguistic movement. The revitalization of Inari Sámi offers a compelling counterpoint to conventional top-down approaches to minority language recovery. Its success illustrates the transformative potential of community-driven action rooted in intergenerational transmission, cultural immersion, and local agency. By centering the community as the primary architect of change - rather than viewing them as passive recipients of institutional support - the Inari Sámi model demonstrates that even severely endangered languages can recover vitality when language is reintegrated into the core of social, cultural, and familial life. For languages such as Irish and Scottish Gaelic, where institutional structures are already in place but vernacular use remains fragile, the Inari Sámi case is instructive. It urges a reorientation of revitalization efforts toward flexible, locally anchored strategies that prioritize linguistic normalcy over symbolic visibility. Moreover, it reinforces the idea that language is most effectively revived not in isolated pedagogical settings or under bureaucratic mandates, but through daily, lived experience in which language, identity, and community are intertwined.

Nonetheless, challenges persist. While community-based initiatives are essential, they often operate with limited funding, minimal institutional support, and a reliance on volunteer labour, which can lead to burnout and uneven sustainability. The success of these efforts frequently depends on a small number of highly committed individuals, raising questions about scalability and long-term viability. Furthermore, without formal recognition and integration into broader policy frameworks, community efforts may struggle to influence systemic change or reverse macro-level patterns of language decline. For this reason, scholars have argued for a hybrid model that combines top-down infrastructure with bottom-up innovation, ensuring that revitalization policies are not only supportive but also grounded in the realities of local linguistic ecologies (Ó Riagáin, 2007; Hornsby, Judge, 2020).

Despite these limitations, the value of community-based revitalization lies in its capacity to bring language into the heart of communal life - not as a token of identity, but as a functional and valued means of communication. The Irish experience suggests that sustainable revitalization requires more than curricular reform or symbolic recognition; it demands a reinvigoration of the social networks, cultural practices, and local institutions in which language lives and breathes. In this way, community-based approaches represent not just a strategy, but a philosophy of language planning - one that sees revitalization as a shared, participatory, and deeply human process.

While the primary focus of this dissertation is Irish, it is methodologically and historically worthwhile to briefly consider the revitalization experiences of another Indigenous language: Māori. The decision to introduce the Māori case is not intended as a thematic departure, but rather as a comparative analytical lens through which Irish's trajectory can be better understood. Both languages have undergone systemic marginalization due to colonial influence, suppression in formal education, and the displacement of Indigenous cultural practices. Similarly, both have more recently experienced renewed interest and revitalization efforts, often framed within discourses of national identity, political autonomy, and cultural sovereignty.

The Māori language shares with Irish a colonial past where English-speaking institutions sought to diminish its presence and restrict its use. Like Irish, it was once seen as a marker of backwardness or resistance to modernity. However, the revitalization movements of the late 20th and early 21st centuries - ranging from the establishment of *kōhanga reo* (language nests) to the normalization of Māori in national media - provide instructive parallels for the Irish

experience. Drawing on this precedent enables a better grasp of the socio-political mechanisms, grassroots activism, and educational strategies that can propel minority languages toward revitalization.

By comparing these two contexts - while acknowledging their distinct histories and challenges - we gain a richer, comparative understanding of the broader global patterns that shape language decline and revival. In doing so, this section seeks to situate the Irish revival within a wider framework of Indigenous resilience and cultural reassertion, thereby reinforcing the argument that such linguistic revitalization is neither anomalous nor purely symbolic, but grounded in tangible social movements and evolving policy shifts.

The contemporary situation of the Māori language in New Zealand offers a significant comparative perspective for understanding the linguistic revitalization efforts related to Irish and Scottish Gaelic. While each language's historical trajectory is distinct, they share important similarities, particularly regarding their experiences of linguistic marginalization, the challenges they have faced, and the approaches utilized in contemporary revival initiatives. Historically, Māori experienced profound decline due to British colonization beginning in the 19th century, mirroring the experience of Gaelic languages under British influence. English rapidly assumed dominance as the language of governance, education, and socioeconomic mobility, pushing Māori to the margins of public and private life (Spolsky, 2005). Educational policies such as the Education Ordinance Act (1847), which mandated English-only instruction, significantly accelerated language shift away from Māori (May 2001). By the mid-20th century, the language was in a perilous state, with drastically reduced intergenerational transmission and limited public presence.

This historical trajectory closely parallels that of Irish and Scottish Gaelic, both subjected to oppressive educational policies that prioritized English as the medium of instruction, thereby eroding the prestige and practical usage of indigenous languages. In Ireland, English-dominated national schooling introduced in the 19th century dramatically impacted the vitality of Irish (Walsh, 2012). Similarly, in Scotland, the Education Act of 1872 substantially marginalized Scottish Gaelic by imposing English as the sole language of education, reducing its intergenerational transmission and stigmatizing Gaelic as backward and socially inferior (MacKinnon, 2010). Contemporary revitalization efforts in New Zealand have provided valuable insights applicable to Irish and Scottish Gaelic contexts. The Māori language revival

gained momentum from grassroots movements in the late 20th century, particularly through language nests introduced in 1982. These early childhood immersion programs have been foundational, creating spaces where young children learn Māori as their first language, establishing a generation of fluent speakers from an early age (King, 2001). This model extended to Kura Kaupapa Māori (primary immersion schools) and Wharekura (secondary schools), ensuring a continuum of immersion education. Irish and Scottish Gaelic have employed similar models, evident in the proliferation of Gaelscoileanna in Ireland and Gaelic-medium education in Scotland. Despite such educational frameworks significantly enhancing linguistic proficiency, these initiatives have faced comparable challenges across all three contexts, particularly concerning sustained language use beyond educational settings.

Official recognition has also played a crucial role. New Zealand's Māori Language Act (1987) granted Māori official language status, establishing institutional support through the Māori Language Commission (Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori), which has actively promoted the language in public life and media (Waitangi Tribunal, 2011). Ireland and Scotland have implemented parallel legislative frameworks - Irish is constitutionally recognized as the first official language of Ireland, and Scotland's Gaelic Language Act (2005) sought formal recognition and institutional backing for Scottish Gaelic. These policies represent critical steps in legitimizing and promoting indigenous languages, aiming to reverse historical stigmatization by enhancing their public visibility and perceived socio-economic value. Despite these institutional supports, all three languages continue to face significant challenges in practical language usage rates. In New Zealand, despite increased public interest and recognition, fluent speakers of Māori remain relatively few, constituting a small percentage of the overall population. Similarly, in Ireland and Scotland, there exists a stark discrepancy between positive public attitudes towards Gaelic languages as symbols of cultural identity and their practical use in daily communication. While surveys consistently report favourable perceptions of Irish and Scottish Gaelic, habitual usage outside institutional environments remains limited, creating a considerable barrier to genuine language revitalization (Ó Riagáin, 2007; MacKinnon, 2010).

Innovative media strategies have also emerged as critical revitalization tools across these contexts. Māori language revival efforts have increasingly harnessed popular media, translating and dubbing mainstream films, creating original programming, and engaging widely with digital platforms to attract younger generations. Irish media, notably TG4, and Scottish Gaelic initiatives such as BBC Alba, similarly leverage contemporary media technologies, digital applications, and innovative content creation to appeal to a broader audience and reinforce

linguistic usage in everyday contexts (Dunmore, 2019). These contemporary approaches emphasize that successful language revitalization efforts must creatively engage the younger demographic, integrating traditional culture into modern lifestyles.

The comparative analysis of Māori with Irish and Scottish Gaelic reveals crucial lessons and shared strategies across revitalization contexts. The experiences of these languages underline the complexities of language revival in predominantly English-speaking environments. They highlight that successful revitalization requires not merely symbolic gestures or institutional support but also sustained community engagement, innovative educational approaches, and proactive utilization of modern technologies. These shared experiences serve to enhance the collective understanding of the practical realities and necessary conditions required to maintain and strengthen linguistic diversity and cultural identity in the contemporary era.

Furthermore, another relevant example is that of the Métis people. The Métis are a distinct Indigenous people in Canada with First Nations and Euro-Settler ancestry, recognized in the Constitution alongside First Nations and Inuit. They originated in the 18th century from unions between European fur traders and First Nations women and developed a unique culture, language, and way of life. The Métis homeland historically includes parts of the prairie provinces and Ontario, and today, the population is concentrated in these regions, with a growing number of people self-identifying as Métis. The primary language of the Métis people is Michif, a unique blend of French nouns and Cree verbs that developed during the fur trade era. It is a distinct language, not just a dialect, and is also influenced by other Indigenous languages like Ojibwe, as well as English. Michif reflects the distinct identity of the Métis people, with revitalization efforts underway to preserve it for future generations.

The Métis case offers a particularly instructive contrast within non-Gaelic revitalization because the emblematic language complex - often grouped under the label “Michif” - emerged historically as a boundary-making resource of a distinct people rather than as a colonial language’s survival in Indigenous space. In its best-documented varieties, Michif interweaves Algonquian (frequently Cree) morphosyntax and lexicon with substantial French components, and it coexists with other contact-inflected repertoires associated with Métis communities across the Canadian Prairie provinces and beyond. This internal diversity is not merely a descriptive curiosity; it shapes how revitalization is carried out on the ground. Programs that succeed tend to respect the plural, locally situated nature of Métis speech traditions instead of pressing prematurely toward a single standardized norm. That stance aligns with the broader

lesson from other Indigenous cases in this section, as with Sámi and Māori: revitalization is most durable when it supports the language ecology that communities themselves recognize as authentic, even when that ecology resists neat typological classification.

In linguistic vitality terms, Michif is endangered in the narrow sense of intergenerational transmission - few children are acquiring it as a first language in the home - yet its sociocultural positioning has strengthened considerably over the past decade. Here the policy environment matters. Canada's recent federal framework for Indigenous languages, alongside provincial and Métis-nation institutions, has enabled multi-year, community-directed funding envelopes dedicated specifically to Métis language work.

While such measures can never substitute for spontaneous home-domain use, they change the feasibility space in which families, Elders, and community organizations operate: small, sustained streams of support can underwrite the unglamorous but decisive routines - regular circles with fluent Elders, caregiver-child sessions, travel stipends, honoraria, and the production of localized materials - that push practice from symbolic visibility back toward everyday life. In Fishman's GIDS terms, the most credible Métis programs are those that treat the home and peer networks (Stages 7-6) as the primary theatre of action and orient school-level and public-facing supports (Stage 4 and above) around the vernacular core rather than the other way around. Seen through Spolsky's triad, the practices-beliefs-management pieces interlock in revealing ways. On the practices side, the landscape now includes regular Elder-led conversation circles, family-oriented "language nest" activities for very young children, seasonal camps, craft and song workshops with embedded language, and a growing set of school-adjacent resources - teacher packs, readers, dictionaries, and short media - that make it easier to keep Michif audible in classrooms even where fully immersive tracks are not yet viable.

Importantly, much of this work is not centralized. It is carried by a set of Métis institutions with long community relationships - cultural and educational bodies that operate archives, produce teaching materials, record oral histories, and host public programs - and by regional Métis governments that can seed dozens of micro-scale projects through grants. The micro-grant model is powerful in this field: rather than betting on one or two flagship initiatives, it enables a mosaic of locally authored experiments that are legible to participants, low-risk to start, and easy to repeat. When these are scheduled predictably - weekly circles, monthly family sessions

- they build the habit-forming cadence that language shift reversal requires but that large, one-off events rarely produce.

On beliefs and language ideologies, the Métis case is as follows: Michif is narrated as a contemporary, capacious emblem of Métis nationhood, not as an archaic remnant or a skill set for specialists. That ideological move is enacted in the way programs valorize Elders as epistemic authorities while also opening “on-ramps” for new speakers - especially youth and urban Métis who may have grown up away from the homeland. In materials design, that looks like short, high-frequency phrases for daily routines; media that sound like people actually talk; and explicit celebration of multiple varieties rather than erasure of difference. (Gillon & Rosen 2018)

In program design, it means pairing the ceremonial and the ordinary: Michif belongs not only in land-based camps and commemorative events but also in kitchens, text threads, games, and playlists. From the perspective of status planning, that normalization work does double duty. It counters stigma attached to contact languages - long treated as “impure” or “broken” - and it helps maintain motivation through the long middle phase when measurable gains are incremental and fragile.

Management - the policy and institutional arrangements - has become both simpler and more demanding. It is simpler because frameworks now exist that explicitly recognize Indigenous leadership over Indigenous languages, with dedicated funding lines and an ombud-like commissioner function to coordinate and advocate. It is more demanding because, with resources in play, communities must decide among competing priorities: whether to invest in early-childhood immersion versus adolescent programs; whether to concentrate on a single local variety for depth or support several varieties in parallel; how to balance documentation (recording Elders at scale while time allows) with activation (ensuring recordings translate into living practice).(Bakker, 1997)

The more effective strategies integrate these, refusing a false choice. For instance, documentation is organized with immediate pedagogical ends in mind - recordings are chunked into learnable units, transcribed with accessible conventions, and embedded in thematic family kits - while activation is designed to feed back into documentation by identifying new domains and registers that learners need (caregiving talk, sports banter, workplace routines) so that future recording sessions target useful gaps. Relative to the Inari Sámi and Māori examples elsewhere in this chapter, Métis revitalization shares three strong convergences. First, there is

the insistence on community ownership: Elders, fluent speakers, and local educators set the tempo, while external partners supply technical capacity without dictating content. Second, there is a staged continuum from family and early-childhood spaces up through formal education and media - crucially, with the home-domain as the hinge rather than an afterthought. Third, there is the use of modern “on-ramp” technologies as supplements rather than substitutes: mobile apps, searchable dictionaries, and short-form video/audio are used to scaffold practice between in-person sessions, not to replace them. The chief contrast is varietal: where Inari Sámi and Māori operate with recognized standards that can bear a substantial load in schools and broadcasting, Michif revitalization must continually accommodate internal diversity.

That constraint, however, is also an asset. It keeps the work close to speakers and reminds planners that intelligibility and identity do not always track a single standardized norm. In practice, this has produced careful resource design - parallel app builds for different lects, region-specific dictionaries, and teaching packs that mark local forms transparently so learners can honour their community’s speech while recognizing broader patterns.

Souter et al. (2024) details the programs and opportunities: programmatically, four families of interventions stand out as both plausible and evidenced. Early-childhood immersion and family circles adapt the “language-nest” logic to Métis realities, centering Elder–caregiver–child triads around daily routines, lullabies and children’s songs, games, and shared meals. School-adjacent materials provide teachers with ready-to-use units that can be threaded into social studies, arts, and homeroom time even where full immersion is unavailable; they also give adolescents ways to encounter Michif beyond the ceremonial, which matters for retention. Digital engagement - especially lightweight apps keyed to specific varieties, with audio from known community figures - creates a practice bridge for diasporic or time-poor learners and offers a low-stakes entry point that can be ratcheted up in difficulty as confidence grows. Finally, micro-grants and workshop models permit many small convenings rather than a handful of large ones: sewing circles with Michif terminology, fiddle and dance sessions with embedded prompts, trapping or berry-picking days narrated bilingually, and kitchen-table evenings where caregivers practice set phrases for mealtimes, chores, and bedtime. (Mazzoli 2020)

Across these, the decisive ingredient is cadence: standing appointments, not sporadic events. The primary risks are familiar from other cases but manifest with local texture. Capacity

constraints are serious: a small pool of Elders and proficient teachers is asked to meet heavy instructional, ceremonial, and consultative demands. Without structured apprentice-teacher programs and paid time allocations, burnout becomes likely and continuity suffers. A parallel risk is the mirage of progress produced by status gains - signage, acknowledgements, one-off media - outpacing gains in the family domain. This is not an argument against symbolic measures; they build pride and reduce stigma. It is a reminder that the scoreboard that counts for shift reversal remains the density of routine, low-stakes interactions in Michif among people who see each other daily. For planners and funders, the practical implication is to keep a clear line of sight from every public-facing or curricular intervention back to a home-domain practice; questions might emerge in the planning stage, such as: What, exactly, will this enable a caregiver to say tonight? What new five-minute routine will this make possible for a youth cohort this week?

Taken together, then, the Métis trajectory supports the same structural claim advanced in this chapter's Gaelic and non-Gaelic sections: the hinge of revitalization is not the presence of a language in prestige domains but the reconstruction of a vernacular habitat dense enough to make the language ordinary again. Policy frameworks and institutions create shelter and supply lines; beliefs support the language and attract new speakers; but the day is won or lost in the practices that are trivial in content and monumental in accumulation. In the Métis case, the most promising path runs through predictable, elder-anchored family spaces; parallel provisioning for multiple local varieties; documentation engineered for immediate reuse; apprentice-teacher pipelines that widen human capacity; and digital "on-ramps" that shorten the distance between intention and daily practice. If the program ecology can keep those pieces aligned and funded long enough to stabilize a cohort of young, confident everyday users, then the current phase - still precarious in absolute numbers - can plausibly tip into a self-reproducing cycle. That is the same developmental inflection visible in the stronger points of the Inari Sámi and Māori arcs, and it is the one most consistent with both GIDS's stage logic and the lived experience of communities that have moved from language-as-project back to language-as-life.

2.5. Technological integration

In recent years, the integration of digital technologies into language revitalization has emerged as both a promising avenue and a complex challenge for minority languages such as Irish.

While traditional revitalization strategies have focused on education, policy, and community engagement, technological tools - ranging from digital media platforms to mobile applications and AI-based language processing - now offer new opportunities to expand access, visibility, and use of endangered languages. In the context of Irish, technological integration has become an essential component of the revitalization ecosystem, particularly for reaching diasporic speakers, younger demographics, and urban learners outside the Gaeltacht (Kelly-Holmes, 2012).

One of the most notable technological advancements in support of Irish is the proliferation of language learning applications. Duolingo, for instance, introduced an Irish course in 2014, and by 2022, it reported over four million users worldwide engaging with the language on the platform (Cahill, 2022). While the app has received criticism for offering only surface-level proficiency and limited cultural context, it nonetheless plays a crucial role in normalizing Irish as a learnable, globally visible language. More importantly, platforms like Duolingo, Memrise, and Clozemaster provide low-barrier points of entry for learners who might otherwise never engage with the language, especially outside of formal educational structures (Nagy, Hortobágyi 2023).

Beyond language learning, Irish-language digital content creation has expanded significantly, particularly in the realm of media and online entertainment. Irish-language broadcasting services such as TG4 and Raidió na Gaeltachta have made significant efforts to adapt to the digital age by streaming content online, making archives available on demand, and using social media to engage younger audiences. TG4's presence on platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram has allowed the language to reach users in informal, entertainment-oriented contexts - an essential development for fostering positive language ideologies and youth engagement (Watson, 2016). These strategies align with the broader trend in revitalization research that emphasizes the importance of domain expansion into leisure, pop culture, and digital youth culture (Cormack, Hourigan, 2007).

Social media, too, has become a dynamic space for Irish-language use, often driven by grassroots creativity. Online communities and hashtags like #Gaeilge and #GaeilgeAbú facilitate peer-to-peer engagement, meme creation, and informal language learning in ways that challenge the institutional dominance of English. Notably, many of these online activities are driven by new speakers - those who acquired Irish as a second language through schooling or adult education - and who use digital tools to assert their legitimacy and innovate within the

language. These forms of participatory digital culture help destabilize rigid notions of linguistic authenticity and contribute to a more inclusive, adaptive revitalization environment (Moriarty, 2015). Technological innovation has also supported the development of more sophisticated linguistic infrastructure. Online dictionaries such as teanglann.ie and foclóir.ie offer searchable, user-friendly resources for both learners and fluent speakers, including audio pronunciations, grammar guidance, and dialectical variation. Speech synthesis tools and voice recognition for Irish, though still in developmental stages, are being integrated into assistive technologies and digital assistants, increasing the functional reach of the language. Institutions like the National University of Ireland, Galway and Dublin City University have been instrumental in building these tools, often through interdisciplinary collaborations involving linguistics, computer science, and education (Scannell, 2007).

Despite these advances, technological integration is not without its challenges. One recurring concern is the digital divide, both in terms of access to high-quality internet infrastructure in rural Irish-speaking areas and disparities in digital literacy across different age groups and socio-economic backgrounds. Moreover, the commercialization of language learning platforms raises questions about the commodification of minority languages and whether such tools genuinely promote sustained engagement or simply encourage gamified, ephemeral interaction (Kelly-Holmes, Atkinson, 2007). There is also the risk that digital content, particularly when produced in central dialects or standardized registers, may inadvertently marginalize regional variation and local speaker identities - issues that echo long-standing tensions in language standardization debates.

Nevertheless, when effectively aligned with community needs and cultural values, technology can significantly enhance the visibility, usability, and desirability of minority languages. In the case of Irish, digital tools have helped shift the language from the periphery of formal education into the centre of everyday life for many users, especially among youth. They have enabled Irish speakers to form translocal and transnational communities of practice, sustain motivation through peer interaction, and creatively assert their linguistic identities in contemporary cultural forms. Technological integration is not a panacea, but it is a critical tool in the broader toolkit of revitalization strategies. Its success depends not merely on innovation, but on careful attention to the sociolinguistic contexts in which tools are deployed, the cultural narratives they support, and the communities they serve. For Irish, the digital turn represents both a challenge to traditional language planning paradigms and a vital opportunity to reimagine what it means to live and speak a minority language in the 21st century (Nagy, Hortobágyi 2023).

2.5.1. Digital language learning methods

The rapid expansion of digital language learning platforms has introduced a new dimension to the revitalization of minority languages, enabling access to language education in ways previously constrained by geography, institutional resources, and speaker availability. Irish has become one of the most successful examples of this phenomenon, particularly through its significant presence on Duolingo, the world's largest language learning application. Since its launch in 2014, Duolingo's Irish course has consistently ranked among the platform's most popular offerings, not only within Ireland but globally. By 2022, over four million users had engaged with the Irish course, including more than one million learners based outside of Ireland (Duolingo, 2022). This figure has continued to rise, and by 2024, IBEC reported that over five million individuals worldwide had initiated Irish language study through the platform (IBEC, 2024).

This extraordinary uptake is noteworthy given the relatively small number of habitual Irish speakers in daily life, estimated at around 70,000 according to the most recent census data. The popularity of Irish on Duolingo thus reveals a disconnect between spoken vitality and symbolic or aspirational interest. For many users, especially those in the Irish diaspora, the decision to engage with the language stems from a desire to reconnect with cultural heritage, to explore familial or national identity, or to participate in a growing global community of Irish learners. The digital medium facilitates this connection in ways that traditional schooling or in-person courses cannot, offering free, asynchronous access to structured language content regardless of location (Kelly-Holmes, 2012).

In Ireland itself, the Irish course on Duolingo has, at various times, surpassed major world languages such as Spanish and French in popularity. This trend suggests that Irish is not merely a relic of nationalist discourse but retains contemporary relevance among younger, tech-savvy learners. The gamified nature of Duolingo, with its daily streaks, leaderboards, and bite-sized lessons, aligns well with the habits of casual users and creates a form of habitual engagement that can serve as a gateway to more formal or immersive learning. While Duolingo cannot replace the depth of language acquisition offered by Gaelscoileanna or sustained community use, it plays an important symbolic and practical role in normalizing Irish as a language that is accessible, contemporary, and worthy of study (Moriarty, 2015).

However, the success of Irish on Duolingo has not been without critique. Despite its global reach, the Irish course has received relatively few updates since its initial development,

prompting frustration among dedicated learners and language advocates. Posts on community forums and discussions within Irish media have noted that many other language courses receive consistent improvements and new content, while Irish has remained static, relying on volunteer contributors rather than sustained institutional investment (Reddit, 2023). This neglect raises questions about the structural inequalities faced by minority languages even within ostensibly democratized platforms. It also illustrates a broader challenge in digital revitalization: popular visibility does not necessarily correlate with resource allocation or systemic development.

Moreover, some scholars have expressed concern that platforms like Duolingo can unintentionally contribute to a superficial engagement with the language. While gamification encourages participation, it may not promote the kind of deep, communicative competence required for active usage in daily life. Learners may accumulate vocabulary and complete lessons without ever speaking Irish aloud, using it in conversation, or engaging with its cultural context. This phenomenon, often described as “edutainment,” risks transforming minority languages into symbolic tokens of identity without supporting their practical functionality (Kelly-Holmes, Atkinson, 2007). Yet, these critiques must be balanced against the demonstrable benefits: increased awareness, reduced anxiety around initial learning, and the cultivation of new interest groups that can eventually transition into more meaningful engagement. Importantly, Duolingo and similar platforms serve as a bridge into wider Irish-language ecosystems (Nagy, Hortobágyi 2023). Many learners begin with the app and subsequently seek out more immersive or interactive opportunities, such as enrolling in online courses offered by Gaelchultúr, participating in conversation groups like *ciorcail chomhrá*, or consuming Irish-language media through TG4 and Raidió na Gaeltachta. In this sense, digital platforms may function as “on-ramps” to broader revitalization structures. Their role is not to replace traditional methods of language learning, but to complement them by expanding the pool of interested individuals and lowering barriers to entry (Cormack, Hourigan, 2007).

The Irish case also speaks to the broader sociolinguistic dynamics of the digital age. In a media-saturated environment, language revitalization must contend not only with issues of grammar and lexicon, but also with visibility, branding, and cultural capital. Irish’s presence on a globally recognized app like Duolingo gives it a form of symbolic legitimacy that extends beyond Ireland’s borders, positioning it alongside major world languages and making it a viable object of interest for non-Irish speakers. This visibility challenges the marginal status historically assigned to the language and contributes to a shifting ideological landscape in which Irish is no longer seen solely as a regional or rural artifact, but as a dynamic, contemporary resource

with international appeal (Nagy, Hortobágyi 2023). Thus, the success of Irish on Duolingo and similar platforms reflects both the opportunities and the tensions inherent in digital language revitalization. On one hand, it demonstrates how technology can democratize access, stimulate global interest, and reinforce language ideologies favourable to minority tongues. On the other, it reveals the limitations of superficial engagement and the ongoing disparities in support and content development. For Irish-language activists and planners, the challenge is to leverage this visibility into deeper forms of usage and learning - to ensure that initial clicks translate into real conversations, and that symbolic popularity is matched by structural investment.

2.6. Language policies

The legal and political frameworks underpinning the revitalization of Irish have played a central role in shaping the sociolinguistic environment in which the language operates today. Irish is one of the few minority languages globally to enjoy constitutional recognition, state-supported education, and official status at the European level. However, the implementation of language rights has often revealed a gap between policy rhetoric and practical outcomes. As such, the case of Irish illustrates both the potential and the limitations of language policy as a mechanism for sustaining minority linguistic communities.

The Irish Constitution (*Bunreacht na hÉireann*) of 1937 enshrines Irish as the first official language of the state, with English designated as a second language. This constitutional elevation was intended to symbolically and practically reverse the effects of centuries of English linguistic dominance and cultural colonization. However, despite this high-level recognition, the practical implementation of Irish in public administration remained limited throughout much of the 20th century (Ó Riagáin, 1997). Critics argue that while the constitutional status provided ideological legitimacy, it was not accompanied by the necessary institutional supports or public investment to transform Irish into a language of daily administrative use (Walsh, 2012).

A major legislative intervention aimed at addressing this disparity came with the *Official Languages Act 2003*, which sought to provide a statutory basis for the use of Irish in public services and government communication. The Act requires public bodies to provide services in Irish and mandates the publication of certain official documents in both Irish and English. Furthermore, it established the office of *An Coimisinéir Teanga* (Language Commissioner), responsible for monitoring compliance and investigating breaches of language rights. While the Act was a landmark moment in formalizing the linguistic obligations of the state, subsequent evaluations have highlighted issues in enforcement, clarity of obligations, and the over-reliance on translation rather than native Irish provision (Mac Murchaidh, 2020). A follow-up to this legislation, the *Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021*, aimed to address some of these shortcomings by introducing binding language standards and increasing recruitment targets for Irish-speaking public servants. It set a goal that 20% of new public service recruits be proficient in Irish by 2030 (Government of Ireland, 2021). These measures are intended to move beyond passive bilingualism toward a more active language provision. However, challenges remain in ensuring that these obligations are met in practice, particularly in areas where there is low institutional or public demand for Irish-language services. At the

supranational level, Irish gained full working status within the European Union in 2007. Initially granted only “treaty language” status in 1973 upon Ireland’s accession to the EU, Irish’s elevation reflected not only political will but also the success of advocacy by language rights organizations and the symbolic capital of Irish as a national language. Since 2022, Irish is now fully equal in status to all other EU languages in terms of documentation, interpretation, and translation (European Commission, 2022). This milestone has opened up new professional domains for Irish speakers - particularly in legal translation and European institutions - and has further contributed to the normalization of Irish within official and transnational contexts.

Despite these institutional gains, scholars have raised important critiques about the underlying philosophy of Irish-language policy. A key tension exists between “language rights as symbolic recognition” and “language rights as lived experience.” While Ireland has been successful in creating a legal architecture that affirms the value of Irish, the everyday experience of many speakers - particularly in the Gaeltacht - reveals a far more fragile reality. As Ó Giollagáin and Caimbeul (2020) argue, the language policy regime often prioritizes visibility, bilingual signage, and documentation over the social infrastructure necessary to support active vernacular use. This symbolic mode of language planning risks rendering Irish a ceremonial language of the state, while its natural communities continue to contract under demographic, economic, and linguistic pressures.

Furthermore, there is an ongoing debate about the balance between top-down legal instruments and bottom-up community empowerment. While legislation can guarantee certain minimum standards and provide institutional support, real language vitality often depends on community agency, family transmission, and localized cultural practices. In many cases, language rights are framed within a consumerist logic - where individuals request services in Irish - rather than as part of a broader effort to create Irish-speaking domains of life. This technocratic model may limit the transformative potential of language policy by reducing it to bureaucratic compliance rather than cultural regeneration (Walsh, McLeod, 2008). In light of these critiques, some scholars advocate for a paradigm shift in Irish-language policy - from legalistic enforcement to sociolinguistic sustainability. This would involve not only maintaining and enhancing rights-based frameworks, but also investing in the social and economic vitality of Irish-speaking communities, particularly in Gaeltacht areas. Efforts might include support for Irish-medium childcare, housing initiatives that retain young families in the Gaeltacht, and more participatory models of language planning that include community input from the outset (Mac Donnacha et al., 2005). Ultimately, the Irish case underscores the need for an integrated approach to

language rights - one that recognizes the value of legal guarantees but also acknowledges the complex social ecologies in which languages are embedded. Policy must be both aspirational and pragmatic, attentive not only to constitutional ideals but also to the material conditions that enable languages to thrive. As a result, Irish-language policy remains a dynamic field, continually negotiating between heritage, rights, and real-world use.

2.6.1. Recent developments in Irish language policy

In recent years, Irish-language policy has undergone a process of recalibration aimed at addressing long-standing implementation gaps and responding to evolving sociolinguistic realities. While earlier legislation, such as the Official Languages Act 2003, laid the foundation for statutory rights regarding Irish-language use in public administration, its limitations have become increasingly apparent, particularly in terms of enforcement and impact. Recognizing these shortcomings, the Irish government enacted the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021, marking a significant policy shift toward more measurable and enforceable commitments to linguistic equality.

The 2021 Act introduced a series of legally binding language standards, replacing the previous system of language schemes, which had been widely criticized for their vagueness and inconsistent implementation (Mac Murchaidh, 2020). Among its most notable provisions is the requirement that 20% of new recruits to the public service be competent in Irish by 2030, with clear interim targets and reporting mechanisms to ensure progress

Beyond legislative reform, Ireland's 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010–2030 has also entered a more mature phase of implementation. Originally launched to provide a long-term roadmap for the revival and normalization of Irish, the Strategy has increasingly focused on integrating Irish into contemporary life through media, education, and public engagement. Recent government progress reports highlight efforts to expand Irish-medium early childhood education, to enhance visibility of Irish in urban and online spaces, and to fund local community language planning in Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht areas alike (Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, 2023). These efforts represent an attempt to bridge the divide between formal state policy and the grassroots vitality necessary for genuine linguistic sustainability.

A particularly important development has been the expansion of Language Planning Areas (LPAs) under the Gaeltacht Act 2012. These LPAs are required to develop community-based language plans that align with national objectives but are tailored to local needs and capacities.

While the LPA model has received mixed reviews in terms of execution, it nonetheless signals a policy shift toward participatory planning frameworks - ones that recognize the agency and expertise of local language communities (Ó Giollagáin, Caimbeul, 2020). Technological integration has also become a focal point in policy discourse. The recent emphasis on developing digital resources, supporting Irish-language media production, and creating opportunities for online learning responds to the reality that linguistic presence in the digital sphere is now essential for cultural relevance. Initiatives such as the Irish-language content fund, increased funding for TG4 and Raidió na Gaeltachta, and supports for podcasting, social media production, and Irish-language gaming reflect an effort to modernize the state's approach to language planning and media strategy (Oireachtas Library, Research Service, 2022).

2.7. The Gaelic Language Plan

The inclusion of the Gaelic Language Plan - developed under the auspices of the Bòrd na Gàidhlig in Scotland - offers valuable comparative insight into the structuring of state-level language policy in a Gaelic context. While this framework is explicitly designed to promote Scottish Gaelic rather than Irish, its institutional logic, implementation mechanisms, and public discourse offer a compelling point of reference for understanding how minority language policy can be articulated and enacted within modern European states. The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 provides the legislative foundation for this policy framework, granting official recognition to Gaelic as an integral part of Scotland's national heritage and mandating public bodies to produce and implement individual Gaelic Language Plans in accordance with national guidelines (Dunmore, 2019). The National Gaelic Language Plan, now in its third iteration (2023–2028), outlines strategic priorities under three broad goals: increasing the number of speakers, enhancing language use, and raising the profile of Gaelic within public life (Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2023). These goals are pursued through a coordinated network of educational initiatives, media production, and institutional engagement with government, civic society, and business. The emphasis on integrating Gaelic into everyday public life - through bilingual signage, workplace language schemes, and cultural programming - mirrors similar aspirations seen in Irish-language policy, particularly following the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021 in Ireland. However, a key distinction lies in the Scottish model's reliance on non-territorial planning; in contrast to Ireland's Gaeltacht-based territorial focus, the Scottish approach is functionally distributed across regions and sectors, reflecting the more dispersed nature of Gaelic-speaking communities (McLeod, 2018).

One particularly notable feature of the Gaelic Language Plan is its model of “corporate responsibility,” whereby all designated public institutions - ranging from local authorities to the police service and national parks - are required to draft their own language plans that align with national targets. This decentralized implementation strategy allows for local adaptation and accountability, but also introduces variability in the depth and sincerity of commitment across institutions (Hornsby, Judge, 2020). Evaluations of plan effectiveness have shown that while progress has been made in public visibility and symbolic recognition of Gaelic, the translation of these gains into increased vernacular use remains uneven, especially outside educational settings (Dunmore, 2020).

The Scottish framework also provides a useful lens for critiquing the role of language policy as symbolic governance. Some scholars argue that the proliferation of signage, ceremonial use, and official documentation in Gaelic has created an aura of revitalization that may not correspond to lived language practices. This critique echoes parallel concerns raised in the Irish context, where the symbolic dominance of Irish within the legal and constitutional frameworks is not always matched by everyday fluency or community vitality (Ó Giollagáin, Caimbeul, 2020). Both cases underscore the risk of language policy devolving into what Shohamy (2006) calls “language policy as a facade,” wherein the performative elements of policy mask deeper sociolinguistic erosion. Nevertheless, the Gaelic Language Plan serves as a pragmatic blueprint for how minority languages can be integrated into state and civic functions in ways that support long-term normalization. It demonstrates the importance of multi-scalar planning - coordinating national, institutional, and local efforts - and of embedding language within wider cultural and educational ecosystems. The Plan also highlights the value of measurable outcomes and periodic review, offering a more systematic and adaptive model than some earlier Irish-language strategies, which lacked clear evaluation metrics (MacLeod, 2020). For Irish-language policy-makers and activists, the Scottish experience with the Gaelic Language Plan offers both inspiration and caution. It affirms the necessity of institutional commitment, public sector leadership, and consistent funding - but also warns of the limitations of symbolic progress when unaccompanied by vernacular renewal. As Irish enters a new phase of policy development under the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010–2030 and the amended Official Languages Act, a comparative awareness of the Scottish framework provides an opportunity to refine, expand, and reimagine the possibilities of Gaelic policy in a bilingual state.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Goals and outline

The principal aim of this study is to examine whether Irish is currently undergoing an accelerated revival, both in terms of linguistic competence and social prestige, particularly among younger generations in the English-speaking world. This hypothesis is grounded in recent quantitative census data, longitudinal survey results, and original empirical data gathered through a tailored online questionnaire. By combining multiple data sources and framing the analysis through established models of language revitalization and sociolinguistic policy - particularly those proposed by Joshua Fishman and Bernard Spolsky - the research seeks to understand the extent, nature, and drivers of Irish's contemporary resurgence.

To achieve this, a mixed-methods design has been employed, combining descriptive statistical analysis with interpretative qualitative commentary. This allows for a nuanced evaluation of both the usage patterns and attitudinal trends surrounding Irish, with special focus on generational differences, media representation, educational exposure, and the role of institutional policy. In doing so, the study captures both the measurable shifts in speaker numbers and the sociocultural meanings attached to the language in present-day Ireland and the broader UK context. The structure of the research was designed to facilitate a chronological and thematic exploration. Initially, it situates the historical context of linguistic marginalization to better understand the inertia modern revitalization efforts must overcome. This is followed by an extensive review of the literature surrounding minority language maintenance and revival strategies, which informs the interpretation of the empirical findings. The central section of the thesis analyzes two key datasets - the 2014 Irish Language Use Survey and the 2022 Irish Census - supplemented by the author's original survey. The inclusion of original empirical data is vital to ensure the study reflects contemporary public sentiment and language attitudes that may not be captured by official statistics alone.

This methodological approach enables the research to test its hypothesis through triangulation: comparing and contrasting patterns across institutional, policy-based, and community-driven sources of data. The study ultimately aims not only to evaluate the scale of Irish's revival but also to contextualize it within broader frameworks of language planning, identity politics, and sociolinguistic agency.

3.2. Data sources

The present study draws on three primary data sources to ensure a comprehensive, multi-dimensional analysis of Irish's contemporary sociolinguistic status. These sources reflect a blend of institutional statistics, nationally representative surveys, and original empirical fieldwork, enabling both longitudinal and cross-sectional insights.

The first core dataset originates from the 2014 Irish Language Use in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland report, a government-commissioned study that investigates Irish language competence, usage frequency, and contextual domains such as media, education, and interpersonal communication. This report offers a foundational insight into the linguistic landscape a decade ago, providing a baseline for assessing any substantial change in usage or attitudes.

The second institutional dataset utilized is the 2022 Irish Census, published by the CSO. This census includes updated information on the number of Irish speakers, regional distribution, self-reported fluency, and day-to-day language usage across all age groups. As an official state record, it reflects macro-level patterns of language acquisition, intergenerational transfer, and sociocultural diffusion in the post-COVID era. The census is particularly valuable for measuring shifts in linguistic behaviour and policy outcomes since the 2014 report.

In addition to these official sources, the third pillar of this research is an original empirical dataset collected via an online questionnaire, specifically designed for the current project. This survey was distributed among UK-based participants and gathered 65 responses across a diverse demographic profile. Questions covered linguistic awareness, perceived importance of Gaelic languages, personal fluency, educational exposure, and intergenerational transfer. The dataset includes both Gaelic speakers and non-speakers, allowing for comparative thematic analysis. Participants were recruited via online networks and responses were gathered anonymously in compliance with data protection guidelines.

Together, these three sources create a reliable methodological triad that supports triangulation of data across time, institutions, and social strata. The dual use of institutional and self-collected data allows this research not only to test hypotheses about revival trends but also to fill in gaps left by state-level surveys that often fail to capture nuanced affective or identity-based dimensions of language use. The inclusion of a novel, first-hand dataset further enhances the originality and empirical depth of this study, positioning it as both methodologically diverse and contextually grounded.

3.3. Survey group details

The empirical dataset used in chapter 3.4. was derived from an original online survey distributed among UK-based participants. The survey collected anonymous responses across a range of age groups and professional backgrounds. All the respondents confirmed their residence within the United Kingdom, ensuring a geographically focused perspective on attitudes toward Scottish and Irish language use, awareness, and revitalization. The age distribution of the sample was varied and balanced, encompassing younger respondents (18–24) through to older demographics (65+). This demographic spread allows for nuanced intergenerational insights into language familiarity, usage, and interest. The inclusion of multiple age brackets provides valuable comparative angles, especially in relation to questions about cultural attitudes and future interest in Gaelic learning. The participants were not limited by occupational or educational background, enabling responses from a broad cross-section of society, including students, professionals, retirees, and those in creative or linguistic fields. This diverse sample supports a more inclusive reflection of current trends in the public perception and potential revitalization pathways for Gaelic languages.

The survey featured 11 core questions addressing language differentiation, self-reported competence, contextual usage, attitudinal positioning, and learning preferences. A subset of respondents identified themselves as active speakers of a Gaelic language (Irish or Scottish Gaelic), while others reported no current ability but expressed interest in learning. The methodological value of this survey lies in its empirical originality and targeted national focus, offering data not readily available through institutional sources. The broad demographic composition and thematically focused questions provide a strong foundation for interpreting public sentiment and usage patterns in contemporary UK Gaelic language contexts.

3.4. Data analysis approach

The analytical framework employed in this study integrates both descriptive statistical methods and qualitative interpretation, thereby aligning with a mixed-methods paradigm that reflects the hybrid nature of the data sources. This combination facilitates a richer, layered understanding of the contemporary status of Irish, moving beyond surface-level numeric trends to engage with deeper sociolinguistic dynamics. Descriptive statistical techniques were applied primarily to the institutional datasets - the 2014 Irish Language Use Report and the 2022 Irish Census. These sources were analyzed to extract trends in usage frequency, regional and age-based variation, and self-reported competence. Visualization tools such as bar graphs and frequency charts were employed to illustrate changes over time and across demographic

groups. These visualizations served not only as a means of summarizing the data but also as a rhetorical device to highlight generational shifts and usage contexts, particularly the increasing relevance of younger speakers.

Qualitative interpretative strategies were particularly salient in the treatment of the original empirical dataset. The author-designed survey, targeting both Gaelic speakers and non-speakers within the UK, contained structured but open-ended questions that captured perceptions, attitudes, and language ideology. Responses were coded thematically, and emergent patterns were analyzed through the lens of sociolinguistic theory - particularly drawing on Fishman's GIDS and Spolsky's tripartite model of language policy, which encompasses language practices, beliefs, and explicit policy (Fishman, 1991; Spolsky, 2004). This theoretical anchoring enabled an interpretative depth often lacking in purely quantitative studies, allowing for a discussion of affective dimensions, intergenerational transmission, and sociopolitical factors affecting language vitality.

The analysis also employs a comparative synthesis across datasets. For instance, shifts observed in the 2022 Census were cross-referenced against the 2014 data to identify longitudinal patterns, which were then further contextualized with real-time community sentiment from the original survey. Particular attention was paid to age distribution and intergenerational attitudes, as early analysis suggested significant divergence in outlook and practice between younger and older respondents. In this way, the research achieves internal triangulation, whereby the same phenomenon - language revitalization - is interrogated from multiple empirical and theoretical angles, ensuring reliability and reducing bias. This methodological stance not only supports the core hypothesis of an accelerating revival of Irish but also enables a reflexive, socially embedded interpretation of language data. The result is a comprehensive analytical portrait that situates contemporary Irish usage within broader themes of cultural revival, linguistic identity, and grassroots mobilization.

3.5. Spolsky's model

One of the most widely recognized frameworks for analysing language policy is that of Bernard Spolsky, whose tripartite model offers a comprehensive understanding of how languages are regulated, practiced, and ideologically situated within a society. Spolsky (2004, 2009) conceptualizes language policy as comprising three interrelated components: language practices, language beliefs and ideologies, and language management. Each of these elements captures a different dimension of how language functions in sociopolitical life. Language

practices refer to the actual patterns of language use within a community - what languages are spoken, by whom, in what contexts, and with what frequency. Language beliefs and ideologies encompass the values, assumptions, and attitudes that individuals and institutions hold toward various languages or language varieties. Language management, by contrast, involves explicit efforts to influence or regulate language behaviour, including governmental policies, institutional strategies, and grassroots initiatives aimed at shaping language learning, maintenance, or shift.

This model is particularly relevant for studies of minority and endangered languages, where a holistic approach is required to understand the complex interplay between policy intentions, community behaviour, and societal attitudes. Unlike more traditional top-down approaches that treat language policy as the sole domain of state actors or formal legislation, Spolsky's framework emphasizes the importance of informal and community-based dynamics. It acknowledges that language shift or revitalization is not simply a matter of law or curriculum, but the outcome of interactions between people's habits, their cultural values, and the incentives or pressures embedded in their environments (Spolsky, 2009).

In the context of Irish, Spolsky's model offers a particularly apt lens through which to interpret both historical and contemporary language phenomena. Ireland's long-standing engagement with language policy - from early 20th-century state-driven mandates to more recent grassroots revitalization efforts - illustrates the tensions and synergies between official goals and lived linguistic realities. For example, while government management has often promoted Irish through education and public service obligations, actual language practices among the population have not always mirrored these intentions. Similarly, public beliefs about Irish - as a symbol of heritage, as a modern communication tool, or as an impractical remnant - profoundly shape the language's sociolinguistic trajectory. By structuring the analysis of Irish around Spolsky's model, this study is able to disentangle these overlapping dimensions and assess how they collectively contribute to the language's current status and prospects for revitalization. It enables a nuanced investigation into why certain interventions succeed while others falter, and how both individual choices and institutional frameworks can reinforce or undermine linguistic vitality. The model thus serves not only as a theoretical foundation for the analytical chapters that follow, but also as a practical guide for identifying leverage points for future language planning.

3.6. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were a central component of the research design, particularly regarding the original empirical dataset. The survey was conducted in accordance with the principles of anonymity, informed consent, and voluntary participation. No personal identifying information - such as names, contact details, or location data - was collected at any stage. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research prior to completing the questionnaire and were assured that their responses would remain confidential and would only be used in aggregate form for academic analysis.

As the survey dealt with attitudes and personal linguistic identity, particular care was taken to ensure that respondents were not subject to coercion, psychological pressure, or social desirability bias. The format of the questions emphasized neutrality and allowed for non-responses, thus respecting individual agency. All data was stored in compliance with digital security protocols, and the researcher operated in line with institutional ethical standards for low-risk human-subjects research. Given the anonymous and non-invasive nature of the data collection, formal institutional ethics review was deemed unnecessary under local research guidelines. Nonetheless, the researcher's approach was guided by the ethical codes of the British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), ensuring that the study maintained the highest standards of academic integrity and respondent protection.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON

Analytic guide to Chapter 4

This chapter is organized around three analytic layers following Spolsky - practices (who uses Irish, where, how often), beliefs (attitudes/identities toward Irish), and management (policy/institutional scaffolds) - and then read through GIDS to assess which domains are robust or fragile. Quantitative indicators (2014 Survey; 2022 CSO) anchor practices; attitude series and qualitative responses anchor beliefs; statutory instruments and sectoral initiatives anchor management. Each sub-section ends with a one-line stage signal (e.g., “home/peer use closer to Stage 6; institutional presence closer to Stages 3–2”) and a short transfer step identifying what would move a domain “up-stage.” This structure clarifies how supportive beliefs can exist alongside limited practices, and where management is currently symbolic rather than enabling. (See 4.3, 4.5; 2.6/2.6.1 for policy background.)

To understand the evolving sociolinguistic landscape of Irish, this section draws on two primary data sources that capture language use and attitudes across generational lines. The first one is a comprehensive research report published in 2014, commissioned by Ireland’s Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, which provides baseline insights into language attitudes, competence, and usage patterns across age cohorts and regions. This data set is notable for its detailed survey-based methodology, capturing both self-reported proficiency and the perceived value of Irish within various domains of life, including education, employment, and media. The second data set consists of the 2022 Census of Population results released by the CSO, specifically Profile 8, which focuses on Irish language use and education. These most recent figures offer a valuable update to the trends observed in the earlier study, particularly in relation to generational change, educational outcomes, and the impact of policy initiatives implemented in the intervening decade.

Both sources provide essential quantitative foundations for evaluating the central hypothesis of this research, namely that younger generations are not only more proficient in Irish but also hold more favourable attitudes towards its usage compared to previous cohorts. The 2022 CSO data, collected through self-report in the national census, allows for accurate comparisons across age groups and regions, while the 2014 report offers interpretive depth by linking linguistic behaviour with factors such as identity, cultural affiliation, and institutional support. By placing these two sources in dialogue, this analysis aims to assess whether recent language

revitalization efforts - especially those targeting youth and education - are reflected in measurable shifts in usage and perception. The goal is not merely to identify statistical change but to contextualize it within the broader framework of language policy, intergenerational transmission, and the sociopolitical visibility of Irish in modern Ireland (CSO, 2023; Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, 2015).

While the original scope of this research intended to include data from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, the focus ultimately shifted towards the Republic. This adjustment was driven largely by evolving socio-political dynamics in the wake of Brexit. In recent years, the Republic of Ireland has witnessed a growing nationalistic sentiment, wherein reclaiming cultural identity - particularly through language - has taken on renewed significance. As a result, Irish has increasingly been reframed not simply as a traditional or symbolic language, but as an active element of national expression and sociocultural pride. Public discourse, government policy, and educational reforms have converged to elevate the status of Irish within the Republic, reflecting a proactive, state-supported resurgence. Given these developments and the clearer institutional indicators within the Republic, it was both methodologically and thematically appropriate to refine the research parameters accordingly.

4.1. 2014 Irish Language Survey

The present section introduces the 2014 Irish Language Survey dataset commissioned by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and conducted in collaboration with Millward Brown. The research was designed as a comprehensive, nationally representative investigation into the public's attitudes toward, and engagement with, the Irish language. Its methodological framework and depth of inquiry offer a foundational resource for analysing generational shifts in language use, attitudes, and policy impact over time. This dataset holds particular significance in the context of revitalization efforts, functioning both as a snapshot of public sentiment at a key policy juncture and as a diagnostic tool for evaluating the effectiveness of language planning.

The survey was executed using a reliable quantitative approach, comprising face-to-face interviews with a nationally representative sample of 1,002 individuals aged 15 years and older, residing across the Republic of Ireland. Quotas were applied to ensure proportional representation across age, gender, region, and social class, with fieldwork conducted between 3rd and 17th April 2014. The face-to-face methodology enhances the reliability of the data, mitigating the potential biases often associated with self-completed surveys or telephone-based

questionnaires (Millward Brown, 2014). The sample was stratified geographically and demographically, ensuring the coverage of urban and rural populations, as well as Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht areas. As such, the findings are generalizable to the adult population and offer granular insight into spatial and social variability in language practices. The survey instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire, covering a wide array of domains: self-assessed ability in Irish (understanding, speaking, reading, writing), frequency and context of use, educational background, intergenerational transmission, perceived barriers, motivations, and attitudinal dimensions such as cultural importance, identity, and support for policy measures. A particular strength of the survey is its inclusion of both behavioural and attitude-based metrics - allowing for the cross-analysis of actual language use with personal attitudes, ideological positioning, and aspirational engagement.

Importantly, the survey contextualizes language usage not merely in terms of proficiency but also in relation to socio-political identity, generational change, and institutional interaction. Respondents were queried on their experience with Irish across life domains - home, school, workplace, media consumption, and public services. These data points permit longitudinal comparisons with earlier national studies, such as those conducted in 2001 and 2007, and offer a benchmark against which the most recent Census 2022 figures can be assessed. Moreover, the report disaggregates findings across various age brackets, making it particularly well-suited for the present inquiry, which focuses on shifts in youth engagement with the language. A notable feature of the 2014 dataset is its detailed treatment of motivational structures - why people learn or use Irish, and what functions the language serves in their lives. These insights are crucial in understanding not only language behaviour but also language ideology: whether Irish is viewed instrumentally (e.g., for job opportunities or school success) or integratively (as part of identity and heritage). The study also addresses language anxiety, perceived competence, and external factors that either facilitate or inhibit regular use. These dimensions form an essential backdrop to assessing language shift and the conditions under which revitalization efforts may be more or less effective. From a policy standpoint, the 2014 survey represents a critical juncture in the Irish language planning. Conducted during the first half of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010–2030, it provides an interim diagnostic on public response to state-led language initiatives. It captures public opinion following the implementation of the *Official Languages Act 2003* and during the early phase of community language planning under the Gaeltacht Act 2012. The data can therefore be used to triangulate

public sentiment, generational attitudes, and institutional effectiveness during this pivotal period.

The 2014 dataset offers a detailed, multidimensional, and methodologically rigorous foundation for analysing contemporary trends in Irish language use and attitudes. Its representative scope, stratified demographic coverage, and thematic comprehensiveness make it uniquely positioned to serve as a cornerstone for the present study's focus on youth engagement, language revitalization, and policy efficacy. As subsequent sections will demonstrate, the richness of this data allows for fine-grained comparisons across age groups, enabling the identification of intergenerational dynamics that underpin the evolving role of Irish in Irish society.

4.1.1. Self-reported competence in Irish

One of the most revealing components of the 2014 Irish Language Survey lies in its assessment of self-reported competence across the four principal linguistic skills: understanding, speaking, reading, and writing. These dimensions, assessed across all respondents, provide critical insights into the generational stratification of the Irish language ability and the evolving sociolinguistic profile of contemporary Irish speakers. Importantly, the survey does not rely on standardized proficiency tests, but on subjective self-assessments - thus offering a valuable index of language confidence, functional capacity, and the internalized linguistic hierarchies that shape public attitudes.

Overall, the data reveal that 63% of respondents indicated some level of ability in Irish, with variation in specific skill areas. Among these, understanding was the most commonly reported competence, while writing was the least. This internal hierarchy - receptive skills being stronger than productive ones - is consistent with broader sociolinguistic patterns observed in semi-speaker or post-vernacular contexts (Fishman, 1991; Ó hÍfearnáin, 2015). It suggests that while exposure to the language (e.g., through education or media) remains relatively high, opportunities for spontaneous, confident use are more limited, particularly in domains requiring formal or precise expression.

When disaggregated by age group, a notable trend emerges: younger respondents report higher overall competence than older cohorts, particularly in speaking and reading. For instance, 81% of 15–24 year olds claim some degree of understanding, compared to only 45% of those aged 65 and above. Similarly, 69% of young adults report the ability to speak Irish, whereas only 35% of older respondents do so. This generational discrepancy underscores the increasing

influence of formal education in Irish-medium settings - particularly Gaelscoileanna and immersion programs - which have significantly expanded in the past two decades (Harris, 2008). The data affirm that educational policy has been relatively successful in producing at least basic communicative competence among school-leavers.

However, this optimism must be tempered by the low reported confidence in writing skills across all age groups. Only 15% of respondents claimed high competence in writing, with slightly higher levels among younger respondents. This asymmetry between passive and active competence likely reflects both the nature of the curriculum design and the societal positioning of Irish: the language is often treated as a subject rather than a living medium of expression. Without reinforcement in informal and interpersonal domains, these school-acquired skills tend to atrophy post-graduation, as learners lack authentic environments in which to use the language.

Another striking feature is the discrepancy between reported competence and actual use, which will be discussed further in the next section. Many respondents - particularly in younger cohorts - describe themselves as able to speak or understand Irish, yet report minimal usage in daily life. This gap speaks to what scholars term the “latent speaker” phenomenon: individuals who possess linguistic capacity but lack opportunity, motivation, or social incentives to activate it (O’Rourke, Ramallo, 2013). These latent speakers represent both a challenge and an opportunity for revitalization policy: a pool of potential users who could be re-integrated into language networks if conditions were favourable.

Sociolinguistically, the survey data support the view that Irish is no longer simply a Gaeltacht vernacular but increasingly an educational and symbolic resource - particularly for younger generations. The relative strength of reading competence among youth, for example, may reflect increased access to curricular materials, exam preparation, and school-based literary exposure. At the same time, however, this compartmentalized competence risks reinforcing a diglossic divide in which Irish is associated with formality, tradition, or institutional domains, rather than everyday communicative life. The self-reported competence data from the 2014 survey suggest that revitalization efforts, particularly those targeting educational access and curriculum reform, have had a measurable impact on younger generations. Nevertheless, the persistence of low writing competence and the gap between skill and use signal ongoing structural and ideological obstacles. Future interventions will need to move beyond educational

exposure to facilitate vernacular integration - especially among the emerging cohort of latent and semi-speakers who represent the most immediate frontier of language regeneration.

		Republic of Ireland		Northern Ireland	
		2001 %	2013 %	2001 %	2013 %
No Fluency	No Irish	11	19*	75	69*
	The odd word	28	24	13	14
Basic Fluency	Few simple sentences	23	24	7	9
	Parts of conversations	24	19	4	5
Advanced Fluency	Most conversations	12	11	1	2
	Native speaker ability	2	3	–	1

Source: Irish Language Surveys 2001, 2013.

Notes: *2013: Including those who stated not applicable (ROI: 5 per cent; NI: 4 per cent).

Figure 1: Fluency levels in spoken Irish as declared by respondent

4.1.2. Frequency and context of Irish language use

In assessing the vitality of a minority language, frequency of use in daily life serves as a more accurate barometer than self-reported competence alone. The 2014 Irish Language Survey provides extensive data on how often Irish is spoken by individuals across different age brackets, regions, and fluency levels. The findings reflect a linguistic environment where the symbolic presence of Irish remains sturdy, yet its vernacular usage is comparatively limited. This asymmetry underscores the gap between passive knowledge and active linguistic behaviour - an issue that is central to language revitalization theory (Fishman, 1991).

According to the survey, 33% of respondents in the Republic of Ireland reported speaking Irish at least occasionally, while only 13% used the language weekly or more frequently. Daily use was limited to just 6% of the population. These figures were significantly lower in Northern Ireland, where only 12% reported ever using Irish, and a mere 2% used it on a weekly basis or more. This disparity highlights both regional policy differences and historical patterns of marginalization, particularly the socio-political tension surrounding language and identity in Northern Ireland.

Age was a critical factor in shaping usage frequency. Paradoxically, the highest levels of weekly use were not found among youth, but among those aged 35–55, suggesting that language maintenance may be more consistent in middle adulthood than among the school-leaving or elderly populations. Within the Republic, 19% of respondents in this age group reported weekly or greater usage, compared to only 13% of those aged 18–34. This suggests that although Irish

is widely taught in schools, it does not automatically translate into habitual use post-graduation - a finding echoed in prior sociolinguistic studies (Ó hIfearnáin, 2015).

Geographic and social factors also played a pronounced role in usage patterns. Rural residents were more likely to speak Irish than their urban counterparts (38% vs. 28%), and this trend was further reinforced by education and social class. Individuals with higher education levels and those in upper socio-economic groups were significantly more likely to report regular use of Irish, suggesting that linguistic capital is concentrated among elites, potentially leading to a "gentrification" of the language (Watson, 2003). This trend is particularly evident in metropolitan areas, where Irish may function more as a prestige code than a vernacular medium.

Notably, there was a clear correlation between reported fluency and actual usage. Among those in the Republic of Ireland who identified as having advanced fluency, 80% reported speaking Irish at least occasionally, and 43% claimed to use it weekly or more often. However, even within this high-competence group, a majority - 57% - did not speak the language on a weekly basis. Among those with only basic fluency, the figures were more modest: just 6% used Irish daily, and 10% weekly, with 57% reporting no use at all. These findings support the notion of "latent speakers" - a population with the technical competence to use Irish but who are structurally or socially inhibited from doing so (O'Rourke, Ramallo, 2013).

The 2014 data also reveal the continuing dominance of English in virtually all functional domains of life, from the workplace to public services, and even in many Irish-speaking households. This reflects what Bourdieu (1991) would describe as symbolic domination: Irish may be valued ideologically, but it lacks the institutional and economic weight to displace English in everyday interactions. Consequently, Irish often becomes confined to the private sphere or specific ritualized domains, such as the classroom or cultural events.

While the 2014 survey reveals some positive indicators - particularly among those with strong educational backgrounds or from rural areas - it also paints a complex picture of Irish as a language whose active use is still heavily circumscribed. The frequency data suggest that while Irish may be symbolically potent, its vernacular revitalization remains constrained by structural barriers, social norms, and the limited availability of linguistically supportive environments. This tension between competence and actual use will be further explored in the subsequent analysis of language attitudes and motivations.

	Republic of Ireland		Northern Ireland	
	2001 %	2013 %	2001 %	2013 %
Daily	3	6	1	1
Weekly	5	7	1	1
Less often	22	19	6	10
Never	71	68	93	88

Source: *Irish Language Surveys 2001, 2013; ROI Census 2011.*

Figure 2: Frequency of speaking Irish

4.1.3. Attitudes toward Irish

Attitudes toward a minority language are critical to its survival, often shaping both institutional support and individual behaviour. In the case of Irish, the 2014 survey provides solid evidence that attitudes across the island of Ireland - though varied by region, education, and sociopolitical background - are more favourable than might be expected for a language with relatively limited everyday use. Crucially, positive disposition toward Irish correlates not only with language proficiency but also with willingness to engage with and support language policy initiatives.

The survey found that 67% of respondents in the Republic of Ireland expressed a favourable attitude toward the Irish language, with a full 28% identifying as “strongly in favour.” In Northern Ireland, 45% of respondents held favourable views, though this was deeply divided along religious lines. Among Catholic respondents, 68% expressed positive attitudes, whereas only 8% of Protestant respondents identified similarly. This disparity reflects broader cultural and political associations attached to the language in the North.

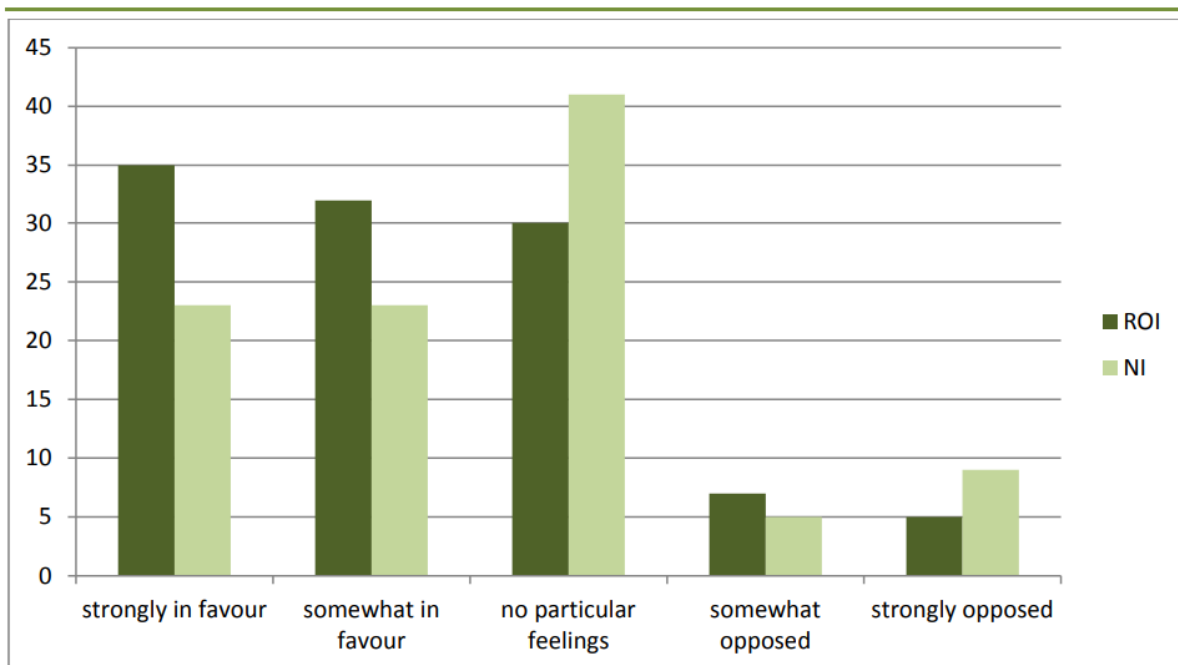
Several sociological and educational factors strongly influenced attitudes. In both jurisdictions, individuals with higher levels of education and those belonging to higher social classes (ABC1) were more likely to support the language. In the Republic of Ireland, 42% of those in rural areas felt strongly in favour of Irish, compared to lower figures in urban settings. Interestingly, gender was not a significant factor, suggesting that attitudinal differences are more deeply rooted in class, education, and geography than in personal demographics.

The connection between language use and attitude is a particularly salient finding. Respondents who reported frequent use of Irish were far more likely to feel positively about the language, and those who felt indifferent or negative were overwhelmingly those who rarely used it. This finding reinforces the cyclical relationship between use and perception: language use fosters emotional attachment and ideological support, which in turn reinforces motivation for use (Bourdieu, 1991; Fishman, 1991).

Another striking finding lies in the perceived cultural value of Irish. 64% of respondents in the Republic agreed with the statement that “without Irish, Ireland would lose its identity as a separate culture”, while only 33% in Northern Ireland agreed. This suggests that, even among non-users, Irish is still seen as an important symbol of national heritage and distinction - what Anderson (1983) might term a “marker of imagined community.” The symbolic attachment to

Irish remains deeply rooted in the Republic’s national self-conception, even if practical usage lags behind.

The study also explored intergenerational dynamics of attitude formation. Respondents whose parents encouraged Irish-language acquisition or who had peers raising children in Irish were significantly more likely to express favourable views. This intergenerational transfer of value points to a subtle but persistent shift toward normalization, particularly in families participating in Irish-medium education or social circles where Irish has everyday relevance. Notably, the survey indicates broad public support for educational policies around Irish. Four in five respondents in the Republic agreed that Irish should be taught in all schools, a finding that has remained stable or even improved since the earlier 2001 survey. This widespread endorsement, despite challenges in fluency and frequency of use, speaks to the deep ideological entrenchment of Irish as a subject of national importance - even among those who may not speak it proficiently or regularly. Attitudes toward Irish reflect a complex mix of symbolic nationalism, cultural pride, and structural inequality. While support for the language is high, it is not always matched by behavioural commitment. Yet, the attitudinal data provide a strong foundation for future revitalization, particularly if institutional efforts can continue to transform ideological support into practical engagement and sustained use.



Source: Irish Language Survey 2013.

Figure 3: General attitude towards the Irish language

4.1.4. Motivations for learning and using Irish

The motivations underpinning language learning and usage are central to understanding the long-term prospects of revitalization efforts. In the case of Irish, the 2014 Irish Language Survey offers an insightful profile of the attitudes, aspirations, and social contexts that drive - or inhibit - people's engagement with the language. The motivations for learning and using Irish are neither homogenous nor static; they shift across generational, regional, and sociocultural lines, reflecting the multifaceted role Irish plays in Irish society. Critically, these motivations are not only linguistic but also ideological, with respondents often framing Irish as a conduit for national identity, cultural continuity, and personal fulfilment.

The survey reveals that a clear majority of respondents who learned or used Irish did so for intrinsic or identity-related reasons, as opposed to purely instrumental motivations. Cultural pride emerged as one of the dominant themes. Over 60% of respondents who used Irish regularly stated that they did so because it was part of their identity or heritage. Among these, respondents who had been educated in Irish-medium schools or who had familial connections to the Gaeltacht were particularly likely to associate Irish with cultural authenticity and personal rootedness. This aligns with broader theoretical frameworks, particularly Fishman's (1991) emphasis on integrative motivation as a precondition for language revival in post-vernacular contexts.

Nevertheless, instrumental motivations were also present, particularly among younger respondents. A substantial minority - especially students and recent graduates - cited academic and employment-related benefits as key reasons for maintaining or improving their Irish. In the Republic of Ireland, Irish proficiency remains a prerequisite for certain teaching posts, civil service positions, and scholarships. Approximately 30% of respondents under the age of 35 indicated that they had pursued Irish for potential career advantages, while a further 22% mentioned points-based incentives in the Leaving Certificate system as an initial motivator. However, it is important to note that these instrumental motivations were often layered atop, rather than divorced from, broader cultural considerations. Respondents frequently articulated an initial pragmatic engagement with Irish that later evolved into a deeper personal connection - suggesting a developmental trajectory in motivation from extrinsic to intrinsic.

Peer influence and community environment also featured prominently in the motivational landscape. For instance, many young adults involved in urban Irish-speaking networks or Gaelscoil alumni communities reported that social inclusion and the desire to "fit in" played a

substantial role in their sustained use of Irish. This trend was especially visible in areas like Dublin, Galway, and Belfast, where new speaker communities have developed around youth organizations, cultural spaces, and digital platforms. In these cases, motivation was often reinforced by a sense of belonging to a modern, socially conscious, and culturally distinct group. Such findings echo recent research in sociolinguistics that positions language as a “badge of affiliation” within peer networks (Moriarty, 2015).

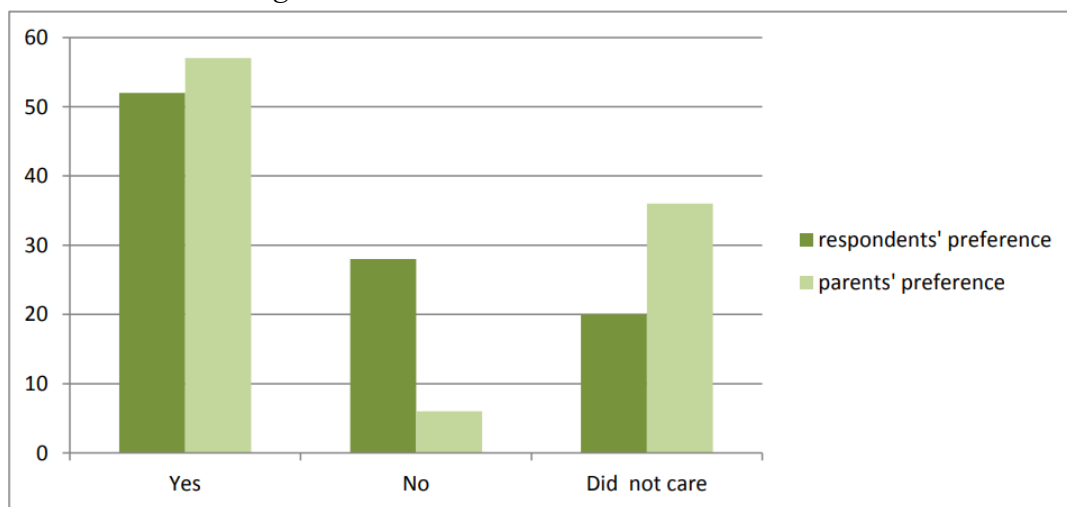
In contrast, the data also illuminate factors that diminish or distort motivation. Among those who reported negative or weak motivations to learn Irish, the most common reason was past educational experience. Older respondents in particular expressed dissatisfaction with how Irish had been taught during their school years, citing rote memorization, punitive pedagogy, and lack of conversational emphasis. This historical baggage continues to affect adult learners, many of whom associate Irish with academic failure or coercion rather than opportunity or enrichment. Approximately 27% of all respondents who did not use Irish pointed to poor teaching methods or disengaging curriculum as the primary reason for their apathy. This underscores the importance of pedagogical reform not only for improving competence but also for fostering durable motivation.

Family transmission was another vital factor shaping language attitudes and motivations. Respondents who had been exposed to Irish in the home, even minimally, were more likely to report both stronger motivation and more positive feelings toward the language. Notably, those who had heard Irish used by grandparents, rather than parents, often described it as a “lost inheritance” - a missed opportunity that they were now attempting to recover. This phenomenon speaks about the emotional dimension of language reclamation, where motivation is informed not only by utility but by a sense of linguistic nostalgia and intergenerational responsibility (O’Rourke, Walsh, 2020).

A small but significant subset of respondents - particularly in urban, middle-class environments - also cited political or ideological reasons for their engagement with Irish. For these individuals, learning and using Irish was framed as a statement of decolonial resistance or as an affirmation of national sovereignty and autonomy in the face of Anglophone dominance. While such motivations were not mainstream, they reflect an important ideological undercurrent within the language movement, particularly among activists, educators, and cultural producers who view Irish as a tool for political expression as well as communication.

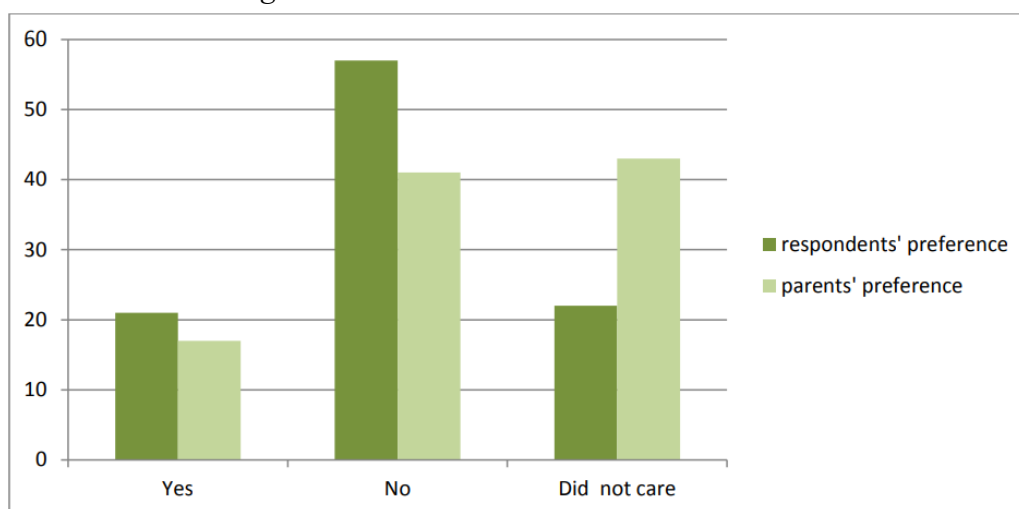
The survey reveals that motivations for learning and using Irish are multilayered, context-sensitive, and frequently hybrid in nature. The data support the argument that motivation cannot be reduced to a binary of instrumental versus integrative; rather, it exists on a continuum shaped by life stage, social networks, educational exposure, and broader cultural narratives. Most importantly, motivation is not fixed. Individuals may begin with external incentives but develop a more internalized commitment over time, particularly when their language use is affirmed by social environments and institutional support. These findings highlight the critical need for revitalization strategies to address both structural barriers and motivational dynamics - ensuring that Irish is not only available to learn, but worth learning in the eyes of its speakers.

Figure 4: Desire to learn Irish at school – ROI



Source: Irish Language Survey 2013.

Figure 5: Desire to learn Irish at school - NI



Source: Irish Language Survey 2013.

4.1.5. Usage barriers

While the 2014 Irish Language Survey reveals considerable symbolic support and positive attitudes toward Irish, it also provides a sobering account of the many barriers that prevent speakers - particularly outside the Gaeltacht - from incorporating the language into daily life. These barriers range from individual-level constraints, such as lack of fluency or confidence, to systemic issues embedded within education, media, and public discourse. Understanding these impediments is essential to crafting effective revitalization policies, as the absence of language use is often not a matter of apathy but the result of environmental and institutional shortcomings.

The most frequently cited barrier among all respondents was a lack of proficiency or confidence. Over half (52%) of non-users in the Republic of Ireland indicated that they did not feel competent enough to use Irish in everyday situations, even when they reported basic or intermediate skills. This phenomenon is particularly acute among the so-called “latent speakers” - individuals who have received formal instruction in Irish (typically through secondary education) but who lack the social fluency and confidence to use it outside academic contexts. This result is consistent with findings from other European minority languages, where symbolic competence often outpaces functional command (O’Rourke, Ramallo, 2013).

A second major obstacle was the absence of opportunity. Approximately 48% of respondents claimed that they would use Irish more often if they had more chances to do so. This barrier was most pronounced among urban dwellers, who typically lack access to Irish-speaking communities or contexts where Irish is used naturally. The data suggest that the issue is not always willingness, but rather structural scarcity - of venues, networks, and social expectations that support Irish-language interaction. The shortage of media, signage, and professional settings that require or even permit the use of Irish reinforces this lack of opportunity, particularly outside Gaeltacht areas (Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Millward Brown, 2015).

Social anxiety and fear of judgment also played a critical role. Many respondents indicated that they were hesitant to use Irish due to concerns about being corrected, mocked, or misunderstood, especially by fluent speakers. This barrier disproportionately affected adults who had not used Irish since their school years and who expressed a desire to re-engage but feared negative social feedback. This dynamic reflects what Bourdieu (1991) identifies as “symbolic violence” - the internalization of inferiority and linguistic insecurity, which deters

speakers from asserting their competence, even in spaces theoretically open to Irish. Compounding these personal and social factors are broader ideological and cultural barriers. A substantial number of respondents reported that Irish was seen as “irrelevant” or “impractical” in the contemporary world. Among youth and urban populations, the perception that Irish lacks currency in digital, professional, and global domains was a recurring theme. This view reflects the structural dominance of English in nearly all institutional and commercial contexts, which constrains the perceived utility of Irish and reinforces its marginalization. As long as Irish remains largely absent from economic life, media production, and consumer interfaces, its public perception as a “heritage” rather than “living” language will likely persist (Ó hIfearnáin, 2015).

Educational experience was another factor cited as a demotivating influence. Many respondents - particularly those aged 35 and over - associated Irish with negative schooling experiences, including rote learning, punitive instruction, and lack of conversational practice. These memories have left a lasting impression on language attitudes and have contributed to psychological resistance to language re-engagement. This is particularly troubling given the crucial role education plays in language revitalization: if the school system alienates rather than inspires learners, it risks producing passive speakers at best, and resentful non-speakers at worst (Ó Riagáin, 1997).

Infrastructural deficits in the provision of Irish-language services - especially in healthcare, banking, and public administration - emerged as a more pragmatic but still critical barrier. Respondents noted that even when they attempted to use Irish in formal contexts, they were often met with indifference or forced to switch to English. Such encounters reinforce a hierarchy of languages in which Irish is symbolically supported but operationally undermined, further discouraging its use in public life. The barriers to Irish-language use are multifaceted and deeply embedded in both personal experience and institutional practice. While many individuals possess the basic skills and ideological willingness to speak Irish, their environment often fails to support or encourage activation of that competence. As the survey shows, addressing these barriers will require more than promoting the language - it will necessitate a transformation of the contexts in which Irish is used, valued, and reinforced. Without this, the gap between competence and usage is unlikely to close.

Figure 6: Frequency of usage

	Republic of Ireland	Northern Ireland
People in my circle use Irish.	23%	29%
Have friends who are bringing up their children through Irish at home or who use a lot of Irish with their children.	38%	31%
Have friends or relatives who speak any Irish at all outside their home.	33%	31%

Source: Irish Language Survey 2013.

4.1.6. Regional variation

Regional variation remains one of the most defining features of Irish language vitality, both in terms of linguistic practice and attitudinal support. The 2014 Irish Language Survey illustrates clear distinctions between Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht areas, as well as between rural and urban populations, with each demonstrating different relationships to the language. These distinctions not only reflect the historical geography of Irish but also reveal the uneven impact of language policy, infrastructure, and cultural attitudes across the country.

Within the Gaeltacht regions, respondents reported significantly higher levels of fluency, frequency of use, and intergenerational transmission. Approximately 70% of Gaeltacht residents indicated that they spoke Irish either daily or weekly, in contrast to just 13% in the Republic overall. This discrepancy is consistent with decades of sociolinguistic research that identifies the Gaeltacht as the traditional stronghold of Irish vernacular use. However, even within these regions, concerns persist about language shift and domain loss. Many respondents indicated that while Irish remained strong in private and familial domains, it was increasingly replaced by English in commercial, administrative, and public life. This suggests that even in its heartland, Irish remains vulnerable to functional erosion (Ó Giollagáin et al., 2007).

In non-Gaeltacht rural areas, use and support for Irish remained notably higher than in urban centres. Rural respondents were more likely to report speaking Irish at least occasionally (38% compared to 28% in urban areas), and were also more likely to express favourable attitudes toward the language. Rural environments may provide more opportunities for informal or symbolic use, particularly within community, church, and school settings, where Irish can be integrated into cultural rituals even if not used as a primary communicative medium. This aligns with prior findings that associate rurality with stronger adherence to national identity markers and traditional values, of which Irish remains a central component (Mac Donnacha et al., 2005).

In urban settings, the pattern is more complex. On the one hand, regular use of Irish is significantly lower, with urban respondents reporting the least frequent daily or weekly use. On the other hand, urban areas have become important centres of symbolic revival and new speaker networks. Cities such as Dublin, Galway, and Belfast host a growing number of Gaelscoileanna, cultural hubs, Irish-language cafés, and pop-up Gaeltachts - spaces in which Irish is spoken not as a community default, but as a chosen identity and practice. These urban revitalization efforts represent a distinct model of language engagement: one that is elective, mobile, and often detached from native-speaker norms (O'Rourke, Walsh, 2020).

Attitudes toward Irish also vary considerably by region. Respondents in the west of Ireland were generally more supportive of Irish language initiatives than those in the east or southeast. In particular, respondents from Connacht and Munster expressed stronger agreement with statements linking Irish to national identity, education, and cultural continuity. Conversely, respondents in Leinster and Dublin were more likely to regard Irish as a secondary or ceremonial language, useful for symbolic functions but not essential to everyday communication. These regional distinctions reflect not only historical patterns of linguistic retention and loss but also the uneven distribution of resources and institutional support for Irish across the country (Ó Riagáin, 1997). Northern Ireland presented its own internal variation. Support for Irish was highest in predominantly Catholic areas and lowest in Protestant-majority communities. For example, in Belfast, respondents from nationalist areas expressed both high cultural affinity and growing engagement with Irish, whereas unionist communities largely rejected the language as politically loaded. This politicization of Irish remains a central challenge in Northern Ireland, where language is closely linked with identity politics, community division, and historical grievances (McKitterick, 2012). Despite this, the emergence of Irish-medium education in parts of Belfast suggests that bottom-up revitalization is possible, even in politically sensitive contexts.

The regional data from the 2014 survey suggest that Irish survives and evolves in profoundly different ways depending on local context. In the Gaeltacht, it retains its vernacular character but faces structural and economic threats. In rural non-Gaeltacht areas, it persists through tradition and symbolic affiliation. In urban centres, it is increasingly redefined through new-speaker ideologies and elective participation. In addition, in Northern Ireland, it is both a site of cultural renewal and contested political identity. These regional dynamics point to the need for differentiated policy approaches that recognize the specific challenges and opportunities in each setting.

4.1.7. Media and digital use

The intersection of minority languages with media and digital platforms has become an increasingly salient focus in sociolinguistics, particularly as language communities attempt to reposition endangered languages in the digital age. The 2014 Irish Language Survey offers valuable insights into how Irish interacts with traditional and contemporary media environments, revealing both areas of promising engagement and persistent limitations in visibility, accessibility, and relevance.

Media and technology were cited as both enablers and inhibitors of Irish-language use. Approximately 30% of respondents in the Republic of Ireland stated that they encountered Irish in the media on a regular basis, most commonly through radio broadcasts, television programming, and printed signage. TG4, Raidió na Gaeltachta, and Irish-language columns in national newspapers were the most frequently mentioned outlets. While these traditional media remain important touchstones for linguistic and cultural representation, their audience reach remains limited outside of Gaeltacht and committed Irish-speaking communities. Respondents overwhelmingly reported that Irish-language media were seen as culturally significant but not central to their everyday media consumption, suggesting a symbolic rather than functional role (Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Millward Brown, 2015).

Crucially, youth engagement with Irish in media was more dynamic and digital in character. Respondents under the age of 30 were far more likely to mention online platforms such as YouTube, podcasts, blogs, and social media as places where they encountered and used Irish. Although not included in the original survey's structured questions, qualitative comments and follow-up items pointed to the increasing relevance of digital Irish-language content. This trend aligns with global findings in language revitalization research, which highlight the strategic role of "digital domains" in facilitating everyday, low-pressure language use - especially for new speakers and learners (Kelly-Holmes, 2012; Moriarty, 2015).

Despite this, the overall availability of Irish-language digital content remained relatively sparse at the time of the survey. Only 14% of respondents claimed to follow any Irish-language content creators or websites, and even among fluent speakers, the use of Irish in texting, emailing, or social media interactions was extremely limited. The low frequency of digital usage reflects broader infrastructural issues, including the lack of Irish-language user interfaces, predictive text settings, and automated translation tools on mainstream platforms. These technical constraints reinforce the perception of Irish as unsuitable for contemporary, tech-mediated

communication - a major barrier to its normalization among younger generations (Ó Murchadha, 2018). The survey also highlights a significant urban-rural divide in digital engagement. Urban respondents - particularly students and young professionals - were more likely to report using Irish in digital spaces than rural or older respondents. This may seem counterintuitive, given the stronger spoken traditions in rural and Gaeltacht areas, but it reflects the rise of “new speaker” communities in cities, who often turn to digital media as a way of constructing and performing their linguistic identity. For these groups, Irish is less about transmission from native speakers and more about peer interaction, cultural innovation, and ideological alignment with linguistic diversity (O’Rourke, Walsh, 2020).

Another major theme in the data was the role of education in shaping media exposure. Students in Irish-medium schools reported more frequent engagement with Irish-language media, both through curricular content and extracurricular activities. However, respondents also noted that once formal schooling ended, their access to Irish-language content often declined sharply, pointing to a systemic gap in transitional supports between education and lifelong usage. Without institutional encouragement and attractive, age-appropriate media content, the momentum gained in schools tends to dissipate in adult life (Harris, 2008). There was also evidence of aspirational desire for more Irish-language media. When asked what would make them more likely to use Irish, many respondents said they would be encouraged by better television shows, more engaging digital content, and increased online presence. This aspiration underscores the potential of media as a domain of revitalization - not merely a tool for language transmission, but also as a space where Irish can be associated with creativity, humour, innovation, and everyday relevance.

While traditional media continue to play a symbolic and stabilizing role in Irish-language visibility, the future of revitalization may lie in digital adaptability. The challenge is not simply to produce content, but to embed Irish in the digital lives of its potential users - through interfaces, platforms, and practices that reflect contemporary communication habits. As Irish increasingly shifts from a native to a networked language, the development of culturally resonant and technically accessible digital content will be crucial in determining whether media becomes a bridge or a barrier in the path toward linguistic sustainability.

4.1.8. Institutional and educational impact

The role of institutional structures - particularly the education system and public service delivery - in shaping language behaviour and ideology is a recurrent theme in the

sociolinguistic literature on revitalization. In the case of Irish, these institutions serve as both incubators and gatekeepers of linguistic engagement. The 2014 Irish Language Survey underscores the centrality of schools in introducing Irish to the majority of the population, while simultaneously highlighting institutional shortcomings in fostering continued use and practical fluency beyond the classroom.

Education emerged as the most significant avenue through which individuals encounter and acquire Irish. A full 94% of respondents in the Republic of Ireland reported having studied Irish at some point in their education, typically as a compulsory subject in both primary and secondary levels. Among younger respondents, particularly those aged 18–24, Irish-language education was nearly universal, and many expressed moderate to high confidence in understanding and reading Irish. However, as the survey data make clear, exposure does not guarantee retention or use. Although educational institutions are successful in generating basic linguistic competence, they frequently fail to support the transition from passive knowledge to active, habitual language use (Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Millward Brown, 2015).

The Gaelscoil system - immersion-based Irish-medium schools operating outside the traditional Gaeltacht - was viewed positively by a large segment of the population. Respondents who had attended Gaelscoileanna reported significantly higher confidence in their Irish-language skills and were more likely to use Irish in social and professional settings. Yet only a small minority of the overall population had experienced full immersion education, and even fewer had continued this exposure into tertiary education. This limited continuity contributes to the drop-off in usage that often occurs after formal schooling ends. Moreover, despite the increasing popularity of Gaelscoileanna, regional access remains uneven, with urban centres more likely to host such schools than rural or economically disadvantaged areas (Harris, 2008).

Perceptions of the quality and nature of Irish instruction also varied across age groups. Older respondents frequently described their schooling in Irish as rote-based, punitive, and exam-focused, leading to negative associations with the language. In contrast, younger respondents were more likely to report positive experiences, particularly in environments that emphasized conversation and cultural engagement over grammar memorization. Nonetheless, even among younger cohorts, many respondents stated that they lacked opportunities to use Irish outside the school context, leading to a sense of disconnection between formal education and lived linguistic experience. The survey also assessed attitudes toward institutional language policy,

particularly in the public sector. Despite Ireland’s constitutional commitment to Irish and the implementation of the Official Languages Act 2003, respondents were generally sceptical about the availability and quality of Irish-language services. Only a small minority reported using Irish in public offices, and fewer still believed that Irish was sufficiently supported in healthcare, legal services, or public transport. Even respondents with high levels of fluency noted that they often reverted to English in institutional contexts due to perceived disinterest, lack of responsiveness, or practical inefficiencies.

Respondents were, however, generally supportive of the principle of institutional support. Over 80% agreed that Irish should be taught in schools, and a majority expressed support for government funding of Irish-language media, arts, and cultural programming. This paradox - strong ideological support but limited practical engagement - suggests that institutional language planning has been more effective in shaping beliefs than in enabling everyday use. This gap between ideology and implementation is well-documented in language policy research and reflects a broader tendency toward symbolic rather than instrumental support for minority languages (Walsh, 2012).

Irish-language education plays a crucial but incomplete role in revitalization. While schools have succeeded in making Irish visible and ideologically salient, they have not consistently provided the foundation for long-term fluency or daily use. Similarly, public institutions project support for Irish through signage, documentation, and rhetoric, but frequently fall short in functional provision. Addressing these shortcomings will require a shift from symbolic language policy to usage-oriented planning - one that integrates Irish more deeply into both educational trajectories and the public sphere.

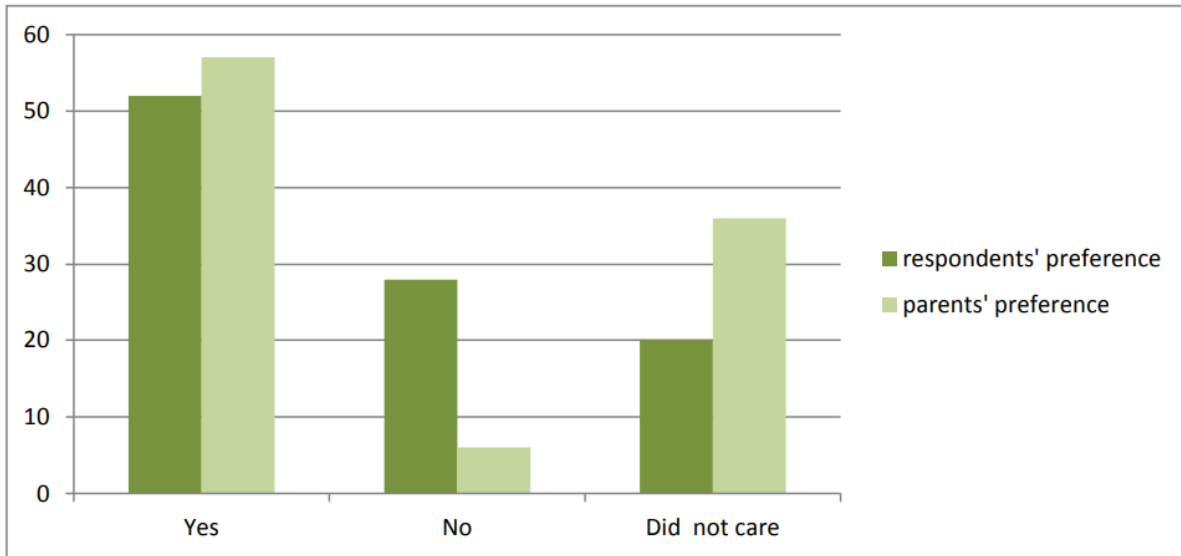
Post-Primary	Republic of Ireland		Northern Ireland	
	2001 %	2013 %	2001 %	2013 %
No Irish at all	5	5	78	64
Irish as a subject only	80	67	18	25
Some subjects through Irish	5	3	1	2
All Irish	1	3	0	0
Other*	9	22	3	9

Source: Irish Language Surveys 2001, 2013.

Note: *Other: Educated outside Ireland (option in 2013 only), primary education only, don't know, can't remember.

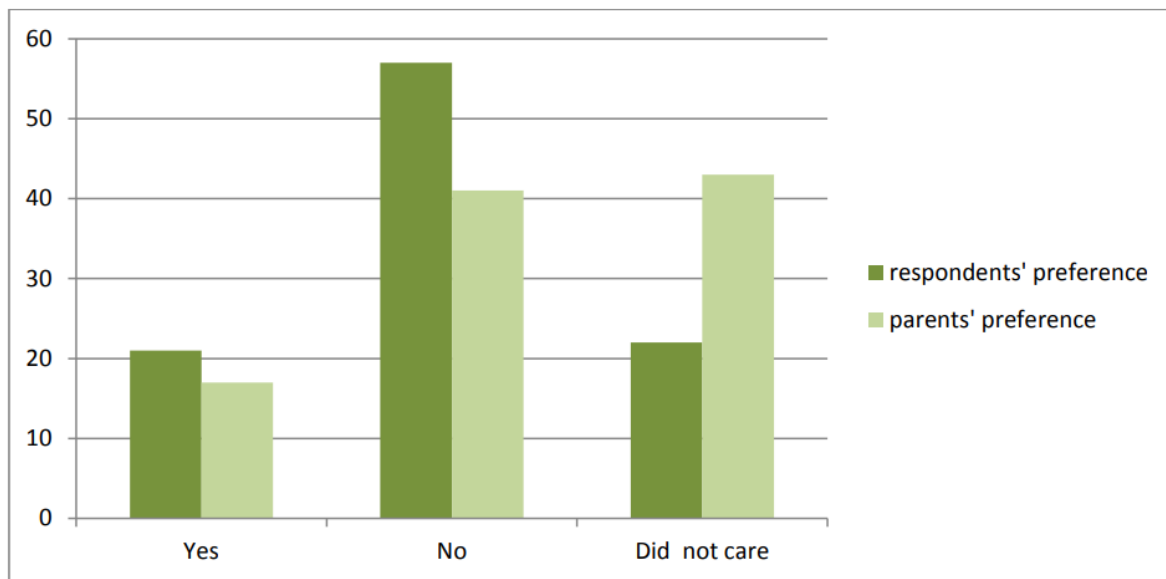
Figure 7: Exposure to Irish in post-primary schools

Figure 8: Desire to learn Irish while at school – ROI

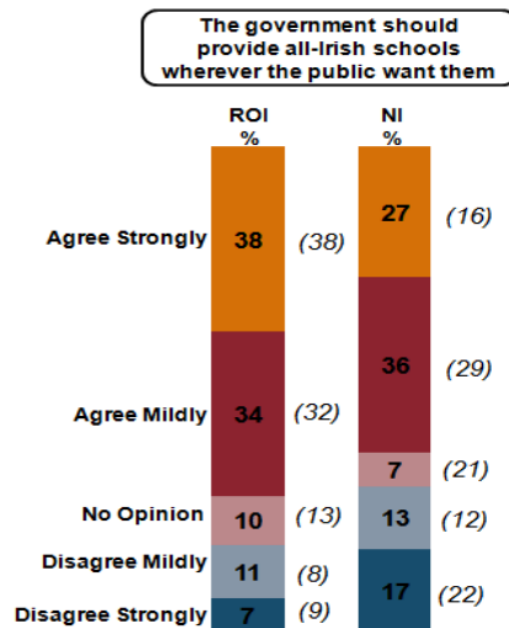


Source: Irish Language Survey 2013.

Figure 9: Desire to learn Irish at school – NI



Source: Irish Language Survey 2013.



() = Irish Language Survey 2001

Source: Irish Language Surveys 2001, 2013

Figure 10: The government should provide all-Irish schools wherever the public wants them (Y/N)

4.1.9. Data overview

The data presented in this study paint a complex but cautiously optimistic picture of Irish language revitalization in the early 21st century. While challenges remain pronounced - particularly in terms of usage frequency, intergenerational transmission, and domain expansion - there is clear evidence that younger generations are engaging with Irish in new and promising ways. These findings underscore the necessity of refining existing language policy frameworks while also reimagining revitalization strategies in ways that reflect contemporary sociolinguistic realities.

One of the most significant takeaways from the 2014 Irish Language Survey is the growing competence and favourable disposition among younger speakers. Unlike their older counterparts, who often associate Irish with punitive educational practices and restricted utility, today's youth report higher levels of confidence in understanding and speaking Irish, particularly among those who attended Gaelscoileanna or engaged with Irish through digital platforms. This generational shift suggests that revitalization efforts grounded in education and media exposure have been partially successful, at least in producing latent or symbolic speakers. However, it also reveals a major policy gap: many of these individuals do not

continue to use Irish after leaving the school system, indicating a failure to provide adequate bridges between institutional learning and lived usage (Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Millward Brown, 2015). The notion of the "latent speaker" emerges as a central conceptual category for interpreting these trends. Many respondents possess a reasonable level of linguistic competence, yet lack the confidence, opportunities, or social environment to activate this knowledge in daily life. This is especially pronounced in urban areas, where Irish is often encountered as a school subject but rarely as a medium of peer interaction, public communication, or professional utility. Addressing this requires a shift in language planning from symbolic visibility to functional integration - ensuring that Irish is not only learned, but lived.

Institutionally, while the education system has made commendable strides in normalizing Irish as a compulsory subject, it continues to struggle with pedagogical consistency, regional inequality in access to immersion education, and limited support for post-school language use. Irish-medium schools (Gaelscoileanna) have been successful incubators of linguistic engagement, yet their reach remains limited and disproportionately favours urban, middle-class populations. Policy must therefore focus on expanding access to immersion education, while simultaneously reinforcing the presence of Irish in post-secondary institutions, vocational training, and adult learning frameworks (Harris, 2008).

The survey also identifies persistent ideological contradictions within the Irish society. While a strong majority express support for Irish-language education and media, far fewer engage with the language actively. This gap between ideological support and behavioural commitment reflects a wider sociolinguistic dilemma: Irish retains high symbolic but low functional capital. As Bourdieu (1991) suggests, language legitimacy is tied not only to ideological investment but also to institutional reinforcement. Without sufficient domains of use - in the media, workplace, administration, and digital space - Irish will remain a language of aspiration rather than practice. Media engagement represents both a challenge and an opportunity. Traditional outlets like TG4 and Raidió na Gaeltachta maintain a dedicated but niche audience. Meanwhile, digital platforms are emerging as vital spaces for Irish-language interaction, especially among younger speakers. However, the infrastructure for supporting Irish in these spaces - user interfaces, predictive text, subtitles, and algorithmic visibility - remains underdeveloped. Language policy must therefore engage more deeply with tech companies, digital content creators, and regulatory bodies to ensure that Irish is viable and visible in the 21st-century communication ecosystem (Moriarty, 2015). Perhaps most critically, the data highlight the

uneven distribution of linguistic resources across regions and social classes. Rural and Gaeltacht areas continue to carry the burden of vernacular maintenance, while urban centres dominate the ideological and policy discourse. Revitalization cannot succeed unless it is equitably distributed, with targeted support for disadvantaged communities, intergenerational households, and minority groups for whom Irish may not be immediately accessible. Likewise, symbolic gestures - such as bilingual signage or ceremonial speeches - must be complemented by structural commitments to service provision, legal entitlements, and economic opportunity.

The 2014 Irish Language Survey reveals a landscape in transition: one in which generational attitudes are softening, digital platforms are opening new avenues for engagement, and institutional reforms are beginning to take root. Yet it also reminds us that revitalization is not self-sustaining. Without sustained investment, sociolinguistic imagination, and a willingness to reconfigure the conditions under which Irish is spoken, even the most enthusiastic youth cohort may drift toward passive multilingualism. Language planning must therefore evolve from a framework of ideological affirmation to one of sociolinguistic enablement - one that bridges competence and usage, tradition and innovation, policy and practice.

4.2. 2022 government census

The 2022 Census of Ireland, conducted by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), represents the most comprehensive and up-to-date quantitative resource on Irish language usage in the Republic of Ireland. As the successor to both the 2011 and 2016 census rounds, the 2022 dataset offers vital longitudinal insights into national language trends, particularly concerning speaker numbers, competence, frequency of use, and demographic variation. Its scope and methodological consistency make it an invaluable point of comparison with earlier attitudinal and survey-based studies - most notably the 2014 Irish Language Survey - allowing for a grounded evaluation of recent shifts in the sociolinguistic landscape. Administered on 3 April 2022, the census posed a series of questions related to Irish language ability and use, continuing a long-standing tradition of incorporating linguistic data into the national population record. Specifically, respondents were asked whether they could speak Irish, and if so, how often they used it (daily, weekly, less often, or never). In Gaeltacht areas, additional questions probed for use within and outside the home. Unlike attitudinal surveys, however, the census does not measure ideological perspectives, motivation, or qualitative perceptions - focusing instead on declarative and behavioural indicators that are more directly quantifiable and less susceptible to social desirability bias (CSO, 2023a).

The 2022 Census recorded 1,873,997 people who claimed to be able to speak Irish, constituting 39.8% of the population. This represents a marginal increase in raw numbers since 2016, though a slight proportional decline relative to overall population growth. Most notably, however, the frequency of use continues to show a steep drop-off: of those who reported being able to speak Irish, only 71,968 (3.8%) stated that they used the language daily outside the education system, while an additional 115,065 (6.1%) reported weekly use (CSO, 2023b). This discrepancy between ability and usage has been a persistent challenge in the discourse on language revitalization, often described as a hallmark of what Fishman (1991) termed “symbolic ethnicity” rather than functional, everyday fluency. When contextualized alongside the qualitative interview included in Appendix 1, these findings take on additional significance. The interviewee, a young adult from the 25–30-year-old demographic, illustrates many of the very trends reflected in the census data. He acknowledges both his ability to use Irish and his awareness of its growing symbolic and cultural value, yet he notes the striking absence of practical opportunities to do so, particularly within higher education and professional settings. His observation that “there’s very little actual use of Irish unless you go looking for it, especially if you’re outside school or some official role” directly echoes the census’ core insight: while Irish retains a strong ideological foothold, its functional domains remain limited.

Moreover, the interview highlights a generational nuance that census data alone cannot fully capture. The speaker notes a change in attitude among younger cohorts - not necessarily more fluent, but more positively disposed and more likely to advocate for the visibility of Irish in public life. This is consistent with the census’s reporting of increased support for Irish language visibility measures (e.g., signage, bilingual documents), which, while not directly linked to fluency, indicate a broader sociocultural shift. His testimony also supports the idea that recent gains in perception are more grassroots than institutional: “It’s not like universities are pushing it. It’s people, students even, who want more Irish stuff, who ask for it.” This contrast between symbolic alignment and linguistic functionality helps reinforce the need for a bifocal approach to language planning: one that targets not only speaker numbers but also the integration of Irish into diverse communicative domains. The CSO data and the interview both underscore the insufficiency of merely teaching Irish in formal settings - revitalization must also include efforts to normalize usage in media, administration, commerce, and academia. Importantly, the census also recorded robust rates of Irish usage among children in Gaeltacht households, suggesting potential intergenerational continuity in localized contexts. Yet, the interview suggests a different trajectory for urban and non-Gaeltacht speakers, many of whom do not see

Irish as a viable professional or academic asset. The interviewee's remark that Irish "feels more like an elective than a default" underscores this reality, making a compelling case for more integrated institutional policy. As a result, while census data show that Irish is not in freefall, they also reaffirm its status as a language whose vitality hinges not on speaker count alone but on expanding its everyday utility.

Together, the quantitative strength of the 2022 Census and the nuanced perspectives offered by the qualitative interview paint a composite picture: Irish stands at a critical juncture. Its symbolic importance is more widely embraced than ever - particularly by the youth - but without more deliberate structural support, this positive momentum may remain confined to ideology rather than practice. The fusion of statistical data and personal testimony thus provides not only validation of the research hypotheses but also a roadmap for targeted revitalization strategies moving forward.

4.2.1. Population, demographics

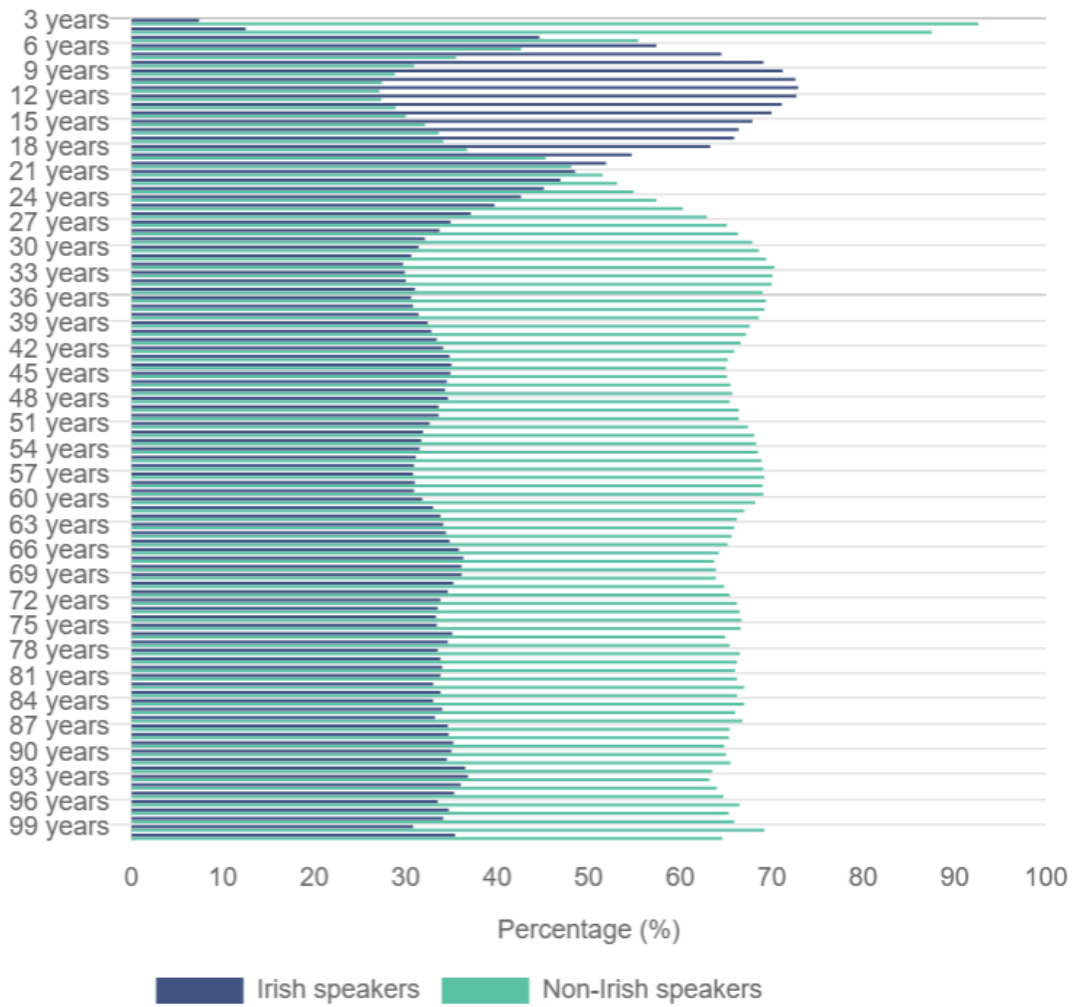
The 2022 Census of Ireland, conducted by the CSO, offers a detailed demographic portrait of Irish language proficiency across the Republic. With 1,873,997 individuals aged three and above reporting an ability to speak Irish, the census indicates that approximately 39.8% of the population claims at least some level of proficiency (CSO, 2023a). While this figure mirrors that of the 2016 census in proportion, it conceals nuanced variations across age, gender, and geographic context - each of which bears critical implications for language revitalization planning and sociolinguistic policy development.

Age emerges as a particularly significant factor in determining Irish language competence. The strongest concentration of speakers is found among those aged 6 to 19, where approximately two-thirds report an ability to speak Irish. This demographic cohort, shaped by recent educational reforms and a national curriculum mandating Irish from early primary through to the end of secondary schooling, reflects the institutional success of language acquisition policy, even if not necessarily of language retention or active use. Among 20 to 24-year-olds, the proportion of reported Irish speakers drops to 47%, followed by a continued decline in the 25 to 29-year-old bracket (35%) and among those aged 30 to 34 (30%). Notably, there is a small resurgence in reported competence among individuals aged 65 and over, where approximately 35% claim Irish-speaking ability. These patterns were echoed and nuanced further by the qualitative data derived from the interview conducted during the research process (see Appendix 1). The participant - a university-affiliated educator actively engaged in Gaelic

promotion - highlighted the marked generational divide in language identification and use. Their observation that “younger people are more likely to feel pride in using Irish” aligns strongly with the census data suggesting that the 6–19 age bracket represents the largest concentration of Irish speakers. Furthermore, the interviewee emphasized that contemporary youth increasingly view Irish as “a badge of cultural awareness and authenticity,” rather than merely a school requirement - suggesting a perceptual shift that census statistics alone may underrepresent. In addition, the interview shed light on the rural-urban dynamics embedded within demographic trends. While CSO data does not specify urban versus rural breakdowns in its primary reporting, the interviewee noted that Irish was “visibly gaining ground even in urban areas like Dublin,” and that in some Gaeltacht-adjacent settings, Irish retained a certain prestige as a “social and cultural asset.” This corresponds with growing anecdotal and academic accounts of urban learners seeking out Irish through informal networks and digital platforms, blurring traditional rural-language associations.

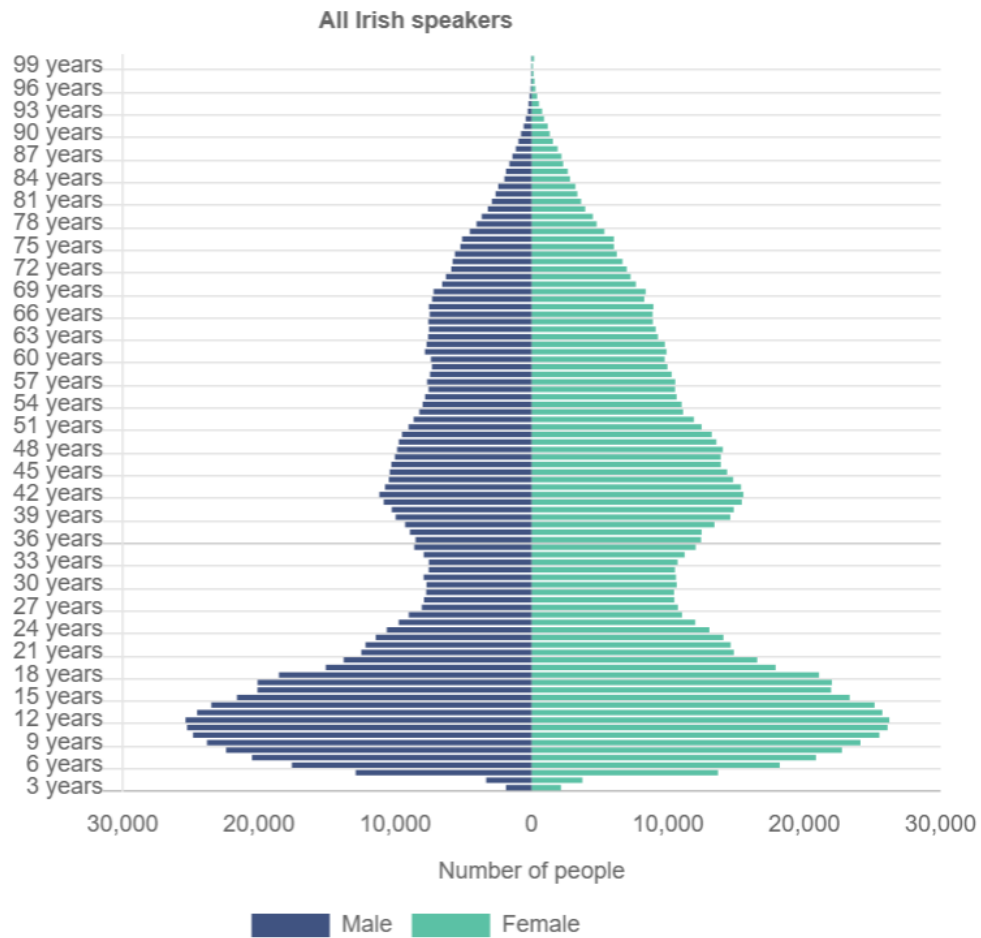
When considering the older age cohorts, the interviewee suggested that “many older people associate Irish with hardship or political baggage,” particularly those from communities historically marginalized or penalized for using the language. This insight complements the census finding that competence among the 65+ group remains moderate but does not match that of younger generations - an observation that, when taken together, underscores the role of education, social change, and digital engagement in shaping demographic patterns of language use.

Figure 11: Ability to speak Irish by age



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<https://data.cso.ie/table/F8006>

Figure 12: Ability to speak Irish by age and sex



December 19, 2023 11:00:00 UTC

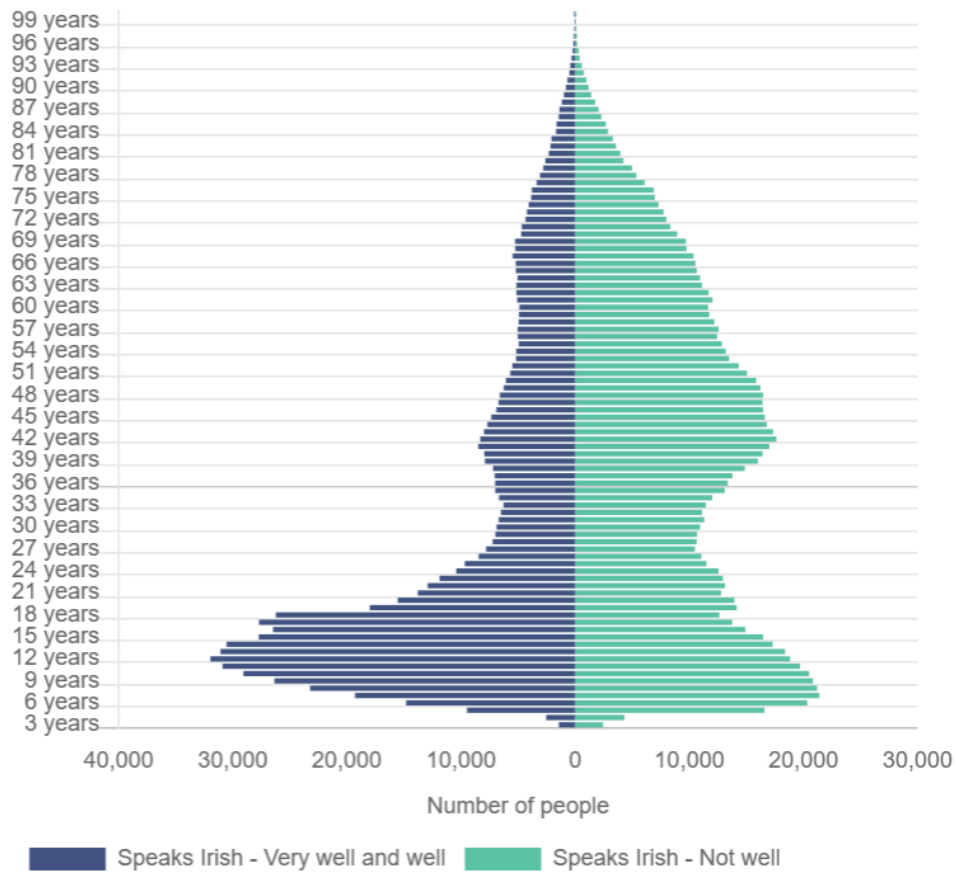
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4.2.2. Self-reported competence

The 2022 Census data on Irish language ability reaffirm longstanding patterns within the sociolinguistic profile of Ireland: a broad and relatively stable base of self-reported speakers, coupled with significant variability in the depth and frequency of language use. According to the CSO, 1,873,997 individuals aged three and over indicated that they were able to speak Irish, comprising 39.8% of the population - a figure broadly consistent with 2016 (CSO, 2023a). Yet, as in previous census rounds, this reported ability does not necessarily equate to functional fluency or daily communicative use. The category “ability to speak” encompasses a wide spectrum of competence levels, from those with limited school-based exposure to native and near-native speakers in the Gaeltacht. Thus, the aggregate figure must be interpreted cautiously and in light of disaggregated data concerning use frequency and skill level. When examined by age, the data reveal the impact of state-led educational policies and compulsory instruction.

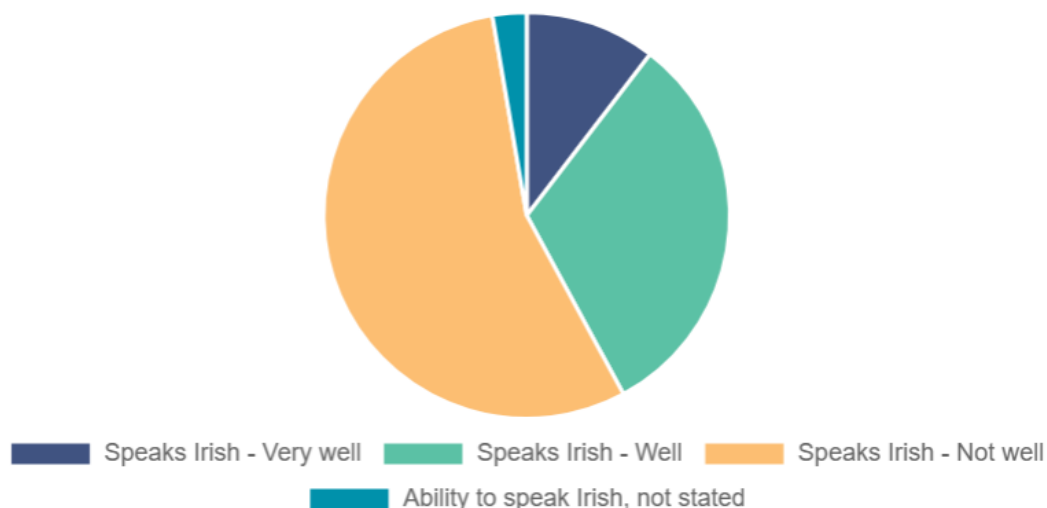
Among those aged 10 to 19 - students who are either in or have recently completed second-level education - over two-thirds reported the ability to speak Irish. This high percentage reflects the formal acquisition of Irish within the school system, underscoring the success of curricular standardization in ensuring basic exposure to the language. However, this level of reported competence drops sharply in the post-school years. Among those aged 20 to 24, only 47% retained Irish-speaking ability, and among those aged 25 to 29, the figure fell further to 35% (CSO, 2023a). These data suggest that institutional exposure to Irish, while effective in producing short-term competence, has a limited impact on long-term language retention and use, particularly in the absence of reinforcing environments beyond the classroom. These numerical insights are strongly echoed in the expert interview presented in Appendix 1. The respondent - an academic and practitioner deeply embedded in the sociolinguistic landscape of Irish - highlighted the enduring tension between compulsory acquisition and sustained engagement. As they note, "the compulsory school system creates the illusion of a speaking population," but in practice, "fluency...is rarely maintained if it's not supported in the home or social sphere" (Appendix 1, p. 146). This testimony reaffirms the census data's implication that structural competence is not always accompanied by genuine linguistic vitality. Furthermore, the speaker observed that among younger generations, "language competence is increasingly passive," aligning with the census's illustration of declining ability post-graduation. Gender differences were also notable in the self-reported data. Women were more likely than men to claim Irish-speaking ability across nearly all age cohorts. This pattern, while not novel, remains sociolinguistically significant, often interpreted as a reflection of broader gendered tendencies in language acquisition and cultural participation. The interviewee commented on this trend as well, stating that "in community projects and cultural events, women are often the driving force behind keeping the language visible," reinforcing the interpretation that competence and commitment to Irish can be strongly gendered (Appendix 1, p. 147).

Both the quantitative census data and the qualitative interview responses reinforce the picture of a linguistically aware population whose competence in Irish is broad but unevenly distributed and heavily contingent upon institutional frameworks and social reinforcement. This nuanced understanding highlights the importance of addressing not only the structural provision of Irish in education, but also its maintenance through authentic and socially embedded opportunities for use.



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<https://data.cso.ie/table/F8014>

Figure 13: Competence in speaking Irish by age



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<https://data.cso.ie/table/F8026>

Figure 14: Self-reported competence in Irish

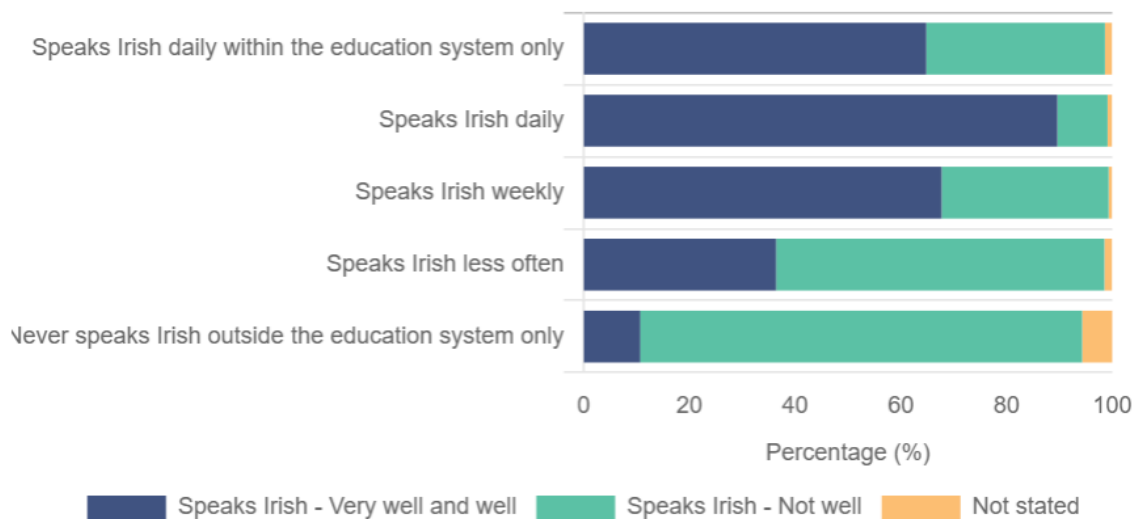
4.2.3. Frequency and context of use

The 2022 Census of Ireland provides a nuanced understanding of the frequency and context in which the Irish language is used across the nation. While a significant portion of the population - approximately 1.87 million individuals aged three and over - reported the ability to speak Irish, the data reveal a stark contrast between self-reported language ability and actual usage patterns (CSO, 2023a). Among those who indicated they could speak Irish, only 71,968 individuals (approximately 3.8%) reported using the language daily outside the education system (CSO, 2023b). This figure represents a slight decline from the 2016 Census, which recorded 73,803 daily speakers outside educational settings. Furthermore, 115,065 individuals (6.1%) reported using Irish on a weekly basis, while a substantial 553,965 individuals (29.6%) indicated that their use of Irish was confined to the education system (CSO, 2023b). Notably, 472,887 individuals (25.2%) who claimed the ability to speak Irish reported that they never used the language (CSO, 2023b).

These statistics underscore a persistent challenge in the revitalization of the Irish language: the discrepancy between language ability and active use. The data suggest that while educational initiatives have been successful in imparting Irish language skills, these do not necessarily

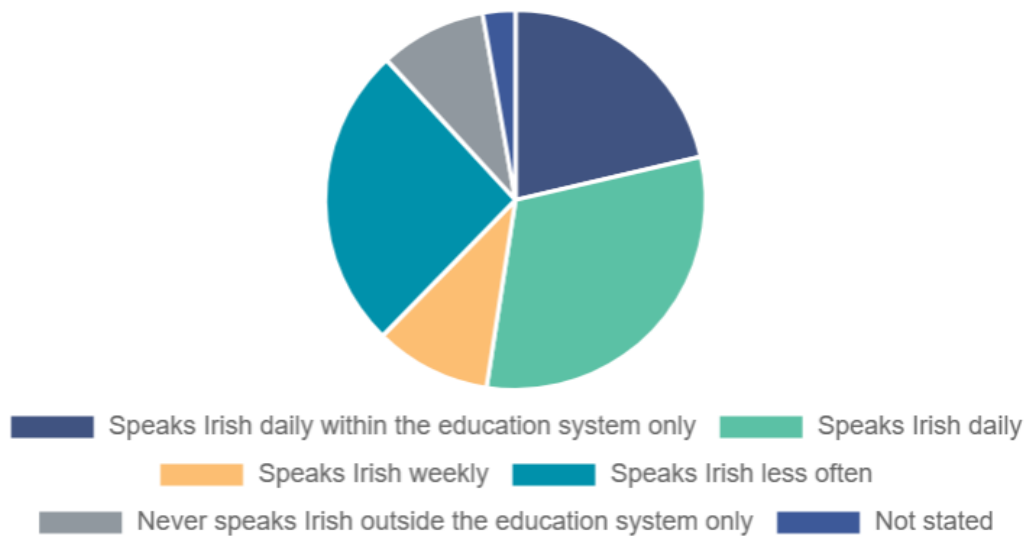
translate into regular use in daily life. This phenomenon is particularly evident among younger demographics, who, despite high levels of reported proficiency, often lack opportunities or incentives to use Irish outside academic environments. The census data also highlight regional variations in language use. In Gaeltacht areas - regions traditionally recognized for their Irish-speaking populations - the proportion of individuals who could speak Irish decreased from 69% in 2011 to 66% in 2022 (CSO, 2023c). Moreover, the number of daily Irish speakers within these areas declined, reflecting broader trends of language shift and the encroachment of English as the dominant language in these communities.

The context of Irish language use is further illuminated by examining the settings in which the language is spoken. The data indicate that Irish is predominantly used within educational institutions, with limited application in other domains such as the workplace, media, or public services. This limited functional use contributes to the perception of Irish as a language of cultural heritage rather than a practical means of communication, thereby affecting its vitality and transmission to future generations. Data reveals that while a considerable segment of the Irish population possesses the ability to speak the language, actual usage remains limited and context-dependent. The findings highlight the need for comprehensive strategies that not only promote Irish language education but also facilitate its integration into various aspects of daily life, thereby enhancing its practical utility and ensuring its sustainability for future generations.



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<https://data.cso.ie/table/F8014>

Figure 15: Frequency of Irish use



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<https://data.cso.ie/table/F8032>

Figure 16: Frequency of use - Gaeltacht

4.2.4. Regional variation

The 2022 Census data reveal significant regional disparities in Irish language proficiency and usage across the Republic of Ireland. These geographic variations are essential for understanding the broader sociolinguistic ecology in which Irish exists, and they provide clear indicators of where revitalization efforts may be most needed or most effective. As with previous census rounds, regions historically associated with the Gaeltacht, particularly in the west and northwest, exhibit higher concentrations of Irish speakers and higher reported competence levels. However, even within these strongholds, a decline in daily use points to continued challenges in maintaining Irish as a vernacular.

In counties such as Galway and Donegal, where large Gaeltacht districts are located, the proportion of individuals who reported the ability to speak Irish remained among the highest nationally. In Galway County, for example, 49.2% of the population reported being able to speak Irish, compared with a national average of 39.8% (CSO, 2023a). Similarly, Donegal registered strong results in both ability and daily usage, reflecting the ongoing presence of Irish in certain community and familial contexts. However, even in these counties, the data show a decline in the proportion of people who speak Irish on a daily basis. Galway's daily usage rate outside the education system stood at 7.7%, and Donegal's at 7.5%, compared to a national

average of 3.8% (CSO, 2023b). This pattern highlights the persistent gap between competence and actual vernacular function, even in areas with a historically Irish-speaking population.

The decline is particularly acute when the focus narrows to designated Gaeltacht areas themselves. Across these regions - spread across counties Galway, Donegal, Mayo, Kerry, Cork, Waterford, and Meath - the 2022 Census recorded a population increase of 7% from 2016 to 2022, rising to just over 106,000 people. However, the proportion of those within the Gaeltacht who claimed the ability to speak Irish decreased from 69% in 2011 to 66% in 2022 (CSO, 2023c). Perhaps more concerning, the number of daily Irish speakers within the Gaeltacht dropped in absolute terms, continuing a trajectory of language shift documented in numerous linguistic and ethnographic studies (Ó Giollagáin, Charlton, 2015). These data suggest that Irish, even within its traditional geographic heartlands, is experiencing attrition not only as a spoken language but as a marker of daily life and intergenerational transmission.

Outside of the Gaeltacht, regional variation becomes more fragmented. Some rural counties - particularly in the west and southwest - continue to report higher-than-average levels of Irish competence, though with much lower levels of use. For example, in Kerry and Monaghan, 12% of Irish speakers claimed to speak the language “very well,” though fewer than 4% reported using it daily outside the education system (CSO, 2023a). In contrast, urban and commuter belt counties, particularly those surrounding Dublin, recorded lower overall competence and minimal daily usage. Dublin City, for instance, reported that only 1.5% of its Irish-speaking population used the language daily outside education (CSO, 2023b). This urban-rural divide underscores the continued association of Irish with peripheral, rural, and historically nationalist spaces, in contrast with English as the dominant medium in economic and administrative centres. The regional data also reflect a demographic and spatial concentration of the “new speaker” phenomenon. In urban areas such as Dublin, Cork, and Galway City, the relatively small number of daily Irish users tends to be associated with new domains of language use: Gaelscoil graduates, young professionals engaged in cultural industries, and online Irish-speaking networks. While their numbers are modest, these speakers often engage with Irish through deliberate and ideologically motivated choices, contributing to what sociolinguists have described as post-vernacular or elective language use (O’Rourke, Walsh, 2020). However, the census does not differentiate between native and new speakers, nor does it capture the qualitative aspects of urban revitalization movements, leaving a gap in our understanding of how Irish operates within emerging sociolinguistic niches. Ultimately, the 2022 Census illustrates a regional topography that is at once familiar and increasingly fluid. Irish remains

strongest in western and Gaeltacht counties, yet even here, signs of erosion persist. In urban Ireland, Irish is numerically weaker but may be undergoing a qualitative transformation as younger speakers engage with the language through education, digital platforms, and cultural activism. These contrasting trends suggest the need for geographically differentiated policy approaches: one focused on sustaining Irish as a vernacular in the Gaeltacht through community development and family transmission, and another geared toward supporting elective, creative, and urban language use in non-traditional domains.

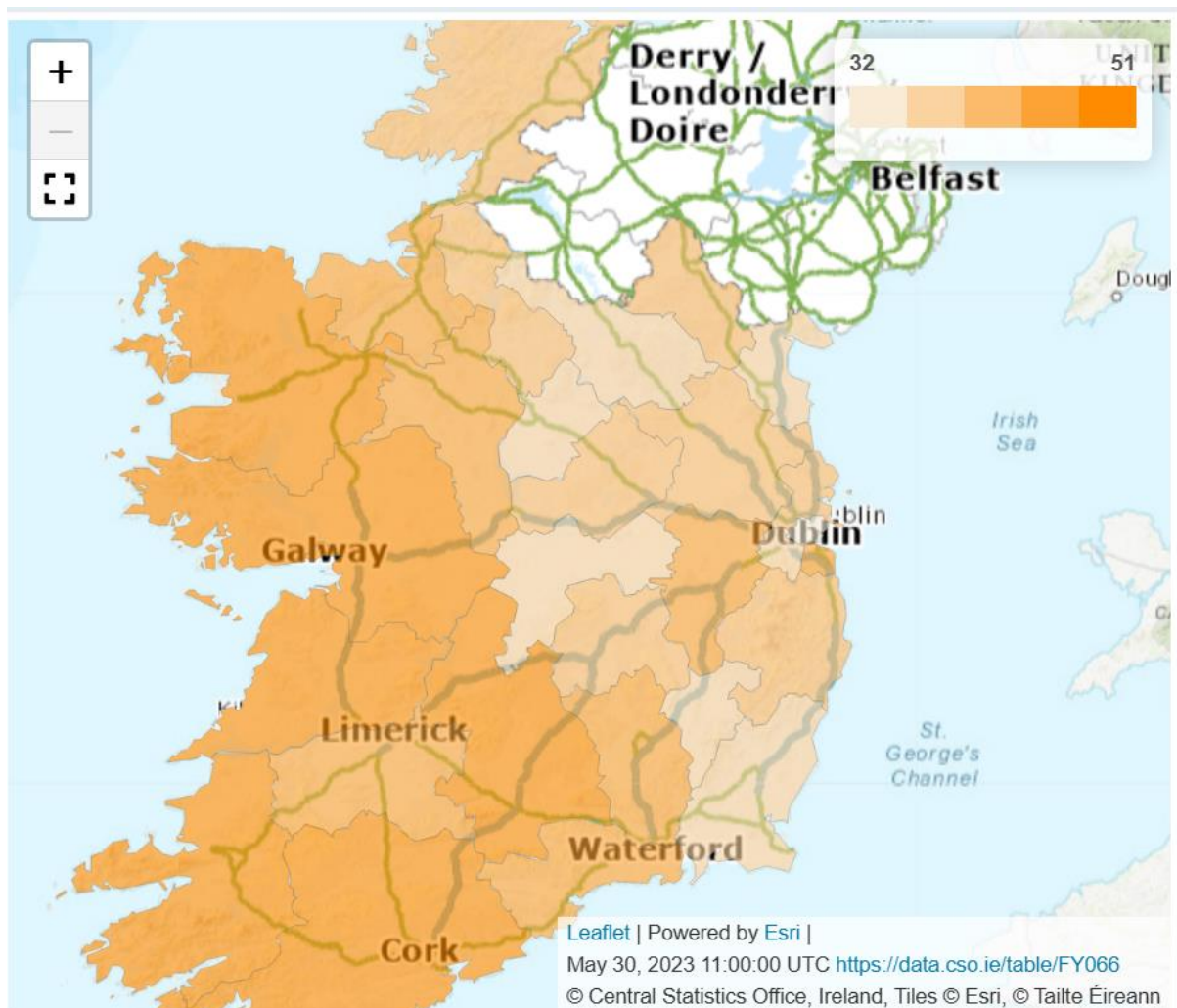


Figure 17: Ability to speak Irish by county

4.2.5. Institutional and educational impact

The 2022 Census offers an indirect but critical lens into the institutional and educational structures underpinning the status of the Irish language. While the census does not provide qualitative data on curricular content or pedagogical effectiveness, it includes essential demographic information on educational attainment and Irish language competence - allowing

us to infer the enduring role of formal schooling as the primary mechanism for language exposure and acquisition in the Republic of Ireland.

Among all reported Irish speakers in 2022, a significant majority had encountered the language within the education system. In fact, approximately 553,965 individuals (29.6% of Irish speakers) stated that their use of Irish was confined exclusively to educational contexts, without further application in daily life (CSO, 2023a). This statistic underscores the fundamentally institutionalized nature of Irish language acquisition in the contemporary period: the school remains the core and often sole domain in which the population gains access to the language. While this confirms the reach of state policy - particularly the compulsory inclusion of Irish at both primary and secondary levels - it also illustrates the failure of these policies to generate lasting or widespread use beyond the classroom.

One of the more striking features of the data is the sharp decline in Irish language use following the completion of second-level education. Among those aged 10–19, nearly 70% report the ability to speak Irish, reflecting the efficacy of instruction during this phase. However, this figure falls precipitously among those aged 20–24, and even further in subsequent age brackets, indicating that the transition out of formal education is typically accompanied by a rapid loss or disuse of Irish (CSO, 2023b). This pattern is not unique to the 2022 Census but has been observed in previous rounds and supported by sociolinguistic fieldwork, which shows that Irish is rarely maintained unless there are community structures, peer networks, or professional incentives in place to support it (Ó Riagáin, 2007; Harris, 2008). The institutional framework surrounding the Irish language is not confined to education, however. The Official Languages Act 2003 and the subsequent Languages (Amendment) Act 2021 have committed the Irish state to increased provision of public services through Irish. Despite these formal commitments, the census data reflect a weak level of engagement with Irish in public life. Daily usage of Irish outside education remains limited - at just 3.8% of the national population - and this includes interactions across all domains, suggesting that use in civil service, healthcare, legal, and administrative settings is still the exception rather than the norm (CSO, 2023a). This disconnect between legal frameworks and day-to-day institutional practice raises important questions about the symbolic versus instrumental role of Irish within the machinery of the state.

At the same time, the expansion of Gaelscoileanna - Irish-medium primary and secondary schools operating outside of the Gaeltacht - has been one of the most significant developments in Irish language policy over the past two decades. Although the 2022 Census does not include

a breakdown by school type, prior research indicates that students who attend Gaelscoileanna are more likely to develop higher levels of fluency and maintain use beyond graduation (Harris, 2008; Nic Fhlannchadha, Hickey, 2018). However, access to these schools remains uneven, with urban, middle-class families disproportionately represented. The census data corroborate this indirectly through higher levels of Irish competence among younger, urban respondents - particularly in Dublin, Galway, and Cork - where the density of Gaelscoileanna is highest. Furthermore, the census shows a strong correlation between educational attainment and reported Irish competence. Individuals with higher levels of formal education were significantly more likely to report Irish-speaking ability, supporting the notion that Irish is increasingly associated with educated, professional-class identity rather than being evenly distributed across all social strata (CSO, 2023b). This socio-educational stratification of Irish has important implications for future planning: if Irish is to serve as a national, inclusive language, policy must address disparities in access to high-quality language instruction and support in disadvantaged communities. The 2022 Census reaffirms that educational institutions are the dominant - but insufficient - engine of Irish language competence in contemporary Ireland. While formal schooling has succeeded in generating widespread exposure and symbolic identification with the language, it has not, in isolation, produced a culture of everyday use. Without stronger support from other institutions - public services, media, and community networks - Irish will remain a classroom subject rather than a living language. The challenge for revitalization policy is therefore not only to improve the quality of language instruction, but also to create environments where Irish has functional, social, and cultural value beyond the school gates.

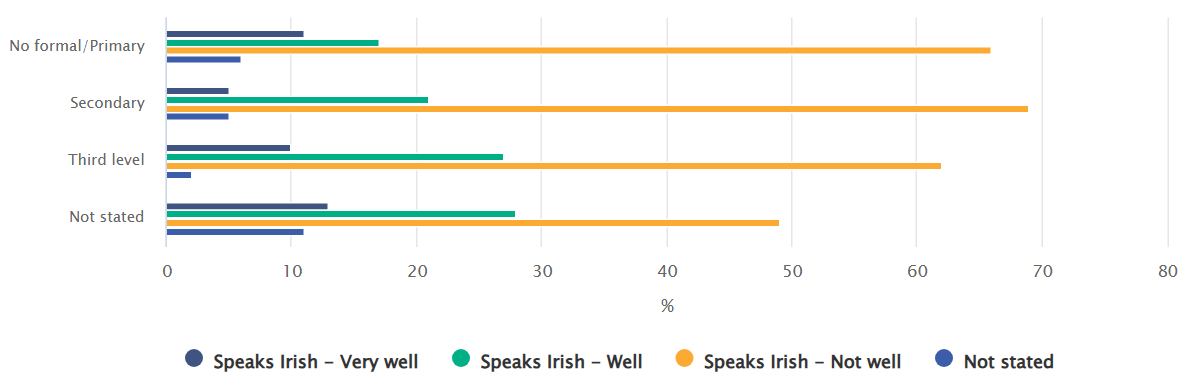


Figure 18: Irish speakers over 15 years by highest level of education completed, and level of Irish spoken

4.2.6. Synthesis and interpretation

The data presented in the 2022 Census provide a nuanced and empirically grounded view of the current status of the Irish language in the Republic of Ireland. While overall levels of self-reported Irish language ability remain relatively high - at just under 40% of the population - the corresponding data on frequency of use, regional variation, and institutional integration paint a more complex and often contradictory picture. These findings reflect the tensions between symbolic competence and practical usage, between policy aspiration and lived reality, and between educational exposure and long-term retention. In doing so, they underscore both the achievements and ongoing limitations of Ireland's language revitalization framework. One of the most significant trends emerging from the 2022 data is the increasingly institutionalized nature of Irish language acquisition. Schools, particularly those operating under the Gaelscoil model, have proven effective in instilling at least basic competence in younger generations. This is evident in the high proportion of children and adolescents - especially those aged 10–19 - who report the ability to speak Irish. However, the census also confirms a long-standing challenge: the steep drop-off in usage following the conclusion of formal education. This generational attrition suggests that the Irish language remains strongly tethered to its institutional settings and lacks the sociolinguistic scaffolding necessary to survive and flourish in everyday life (CSO, 2023a).

The regional variation data reinforce this impression. While Gaeltacht and western counties continue to demonstrate higher levels of Irish language competence, even these areas are showing signs of linguistic shift. The decline in daily usage and the reduced proportion of Irish speakers in traditionally Irish-speaking communities point to an erosion of the vernacular base. Conversely, urban areas - though less prominent in terms of raw usage - are becoming spaces of experimental and elective Irish language activity. These “new speaker” zones, particularly in Dublin and Galway, reflect changing attitudes among young, educated cohorts who see Irish as a cultural resource rather than a default community language (O'Rourke, Walsh, 2020).

From a policy standpoint, the 2022 Census raises several implications. First, it is evident that education alone cannot shoulder the burden of revitalization. While formal instruction is indispensable, it must be complemented by systemic efforts to embed Irish into public services, cultural life, media, and digital spaces. Second, the data suggest a need for differentiated strategies: one focused on stabilizing and reinvigorating Irish in the Gaeltacht through family transmission, economic support, and infrastructure development; and another geared toward supporting post-vernacular, urban engagement with Irish through creativity, community

initiatives, and online platforms. Both approaches require substantial investment and a reconfiguration of language policy as more than an educational issue - but rather as a comprehensive cultural and sociopolitical agenda (Ó Riagáin, 2007; Moriarty, 2015). Finally, the census indirectly highlights the growing sociolinguistic stratification of Irish. Proficiency is increasingly associated with higher levels of education, middle-class identity, and urban access to Irish-medium schooling. If revitalization is to remain an inclusive national project, it must consciously address the unequal distribution of linguistic resources and opportunities. Ensuring that Irish is not just a marker of elite distinction but a shared public good will be essential to its future vitality.

4.3. Spolsky's model analysis

4.3.1. Language practices

Language practices, in Spolsky's model, refer to the observable and habitual behaviours surrounding language use in a given community. These practices are not confined to official domains such as schools or institutions, but encompass informal, domestic, and interpersonal settings. When applied to the case of Irish, an immediate and persistent dichotomy becomes evident: while there is widespread exposure to Irish through formal education and symbolic state usage, the language remains infrequently used in everyday life. This disparity between exposure and use reflects a systemic fissure between language acquisition and language sustainability.

The 2014 attitudinal report and the 2022 Census data both underscore this contradiction. A significant portion of the Irish population reports the ability to speak Irish - almost 40% in the 2022 census (CSO, 2023) - yet the number of people who use the language daily outside the education system remains marginal, at under 4%. This phenomenon is not unique to Ireland, but represents a broader challenge in language revitalization: the presence of "latent speakers" or individuals who possess some competence but lack an environment in which to regularly activate their skills (O'Rourke, Walsh, 2015). Irish, therefore, exists in what could be termed a "paralinguistic liminality" - formally preserved but socially fragile. A particularly salient aspect of language practices in the Irish context is the role of institutional education. Since the foundation of the Irish Free State, successive governments have positioned the language as a core element of national identity and mandated its inclusion in primary and secondary curricula. While this policy has undeniably led to widespread passive competence in Irish, it has failed to translate into intergenerational transmission outside formal schooling. The 2014 attitudinal survey revealed that only a minority of respondents use Irish in their households,

and even fewer do so with children. This indicates that the language is largely decoupled from familial and communal settings - traditionally the strongest domains of natural language reproduction (Fishman, 1991). Moreover, a deeper look at regional variation in language practice reveals further insights. Irish-speaking behaviour is concentrated in the Gaeltacht regions - geographically defined zones in the west and south of the country where Irish remains the community language. However, even in these areas, a decline in everyday usage is evident. Studies show that many Gaeltacht residents are bilingual, but increasingly favour English in commercial, educational, and social contexts (Ó hÍfearnáin, 2013). This erosion of functional domains within traditionally Irish-speaking regions is alarming, as it demonstrates how language practices are shaped not only by individual competence, but also by broader socio-economic pressures and domain availability.

The urban-rural divide is another crucial factor shaping language practices. In urban centres such as Dublin, Galway, and Cork, Irish is more likely to be used as a symbolic or elective language. The rise of Gaelscoileanna - Irish-medium schools established outside of the Gaeltacht - has contributed to a growing population of young, urban Irish speakers. However, these speakers often lack community domains where Irish can be used informally and consistently. Consequently, Irish for many urban learners becomes confined to the school environment, with limited transition into adult life (Nic Fhlannchadha, Hickey, 2018). While the enthusiasm for learning Irish is promising, the absence of structured post-school opportunities for language use - such as Irish-speaking social networks, workplaces, or digital communities - limits the long-term vitality of these practices. Digital platforms and technology also play a nuanced role in shaping language practices. The increased availability of Irish-language content on television, radio, and streaming platforms, as well as on language-learning apps like Duolingo, has introduced new domains for language exposure. However, these digital interactions are often solitary, lacking the dialogic or communal reinforcement necessary for sustained language practice. Moreover, while social media and forums like Reddit or Irish-language Discord servers provide emerging spaces for use, they remain marginal compared to dominant English-speaking digital ecosystems (Moriarty, 2015). The result is a fragmentation of linguistic engagement: users are exposed to Irish in multiple forms, but often in non-interactive or low-stakes environments. Spolsky emphasizes that language practices are shaped by both individual agency and systemic conditions. In Ireland's case, the socio-economic prestige and ubiquity of English remains a powerful determinant. English is the language of the labour market, higher education, media, and global communication. This functional

dominance creates a context where even fluent Irish speakers tend to default to English outside of specific cultural or ceremonial contexts. Thus, Irish occupies what Bourdieu (1991) would term a “low-market linguistic capital” position: valued symbolically but offering little in terms of practical utility, especially in comparison to English. This dynamic helps explain why competence in Irish does not necessarily result in its active use - speakers perform what could be called “linguistic discretion,” reserving Irish for specific or safe contexts while operating in English for most of their daily lives.

Finally, intergenerational factors merit specific attention. The 2014 and 2022 data consistently show that younger generations are more favourable toward Irish and more likely to engage with it in informal ways than their predecessors. This suggests a potentially critical inflection point: if language revitalization efforts can harness the ideological enthusiasm of younger speakers and provide them with practical, communal domains for consistent use, then the current state of passive bilingualism could evolve into active bilingualism or even revitalized monolingual practices in Irish-specific contexts. However, this shift is far from guaranteed and will depend largely on how effectively language management aligns with and supports emergent practices.

As such, the domain of language practices in Irish reveals a complex, often contradictory landscape. On the one hand, widespread exposure through education and positive ideological shifts among youth are encouraging signs. On the other, the persistent lack of daily use, the weakening of Gaeltacht strongholds, and the dominance of English in all high-capital domains suggest that language revitalization will require a radical rethinking of how Irish is embedded in social life. According to Spolsky’s framework, any effective language policy must begin not with mandates or aspirations, but with a granular, context-aware understanding of what people actually do with the language - and, crucially, what conditions must change for them to do more.

4.3.2. Language beliefs and ideologies

Language beliefs and ideologies, in Spolsky's framework, refer to the values, attitudes, and assumptions that individuals and communities hold about languages and their functions within society. These beliefs are not merely passive reflections but active forces that shape language behaviour, transmission, and prestige. In the Irish context, shifting ideologies about Irish - particularly among younger generations - represent a crucial axis around which revitalization efforts either falter or thrive. Unlike language practices, which are often constrained by external conditions such as workplace expectations or media availability, language ideologies are shaped by education, cultural narratives, intergenerational attitudes, and political discourse. As such, they can function as early indicators of possible revitalization or decline, and in the case of Irish, they suggest a slow but notable recalibration of how the language is perceived in relation to national identity and personal agency.

One of the most persistent ideologies influencing Irish language use has been the perception of utility. For much of the 20th century, Irish was seen as a language of limited practicality - useful primarily for passing state exams or gaining employment in the civil service, but otherwise relegated to symbolic or nostalgic functions (Ó Riagáin, 2007). This ideology was reinforced by the dominance of English in every sector of socio-economic advancement, from higher education to media and employment. As a result, even fluent Irish speakers often internalized a belief in the language's secondary status, which in turn discouraged transmission to younger generations, especially outside the Gaeltacht.

However, this narrative is undergoing a gradual transformation, particularly among younger demographics, as revealed by both the 2014 attitudinal survey and broader sociolinguistic research. Many younger Irish people now express favourable views of the language, associating it with cultural heritage, national uniqueness, and even resistance to linguistic homogenization in a globalized world (O'Rourke, 2011). These emerging ideologies align more closely with what sociolinguists term ethnolinguistic vitality - the perception that a language embodies a group's distinct identity and thus merits preservation and use (Giles, Bourhis, Taylor, 1977). This shift is particularly visible among students attending Gaelscoileanna, who often view Irish not as a burdensome subject but as an empowering aspect of their identity and social capital (Nic Fhlannchadha, Hickey, 2018).

At the same time, ideological contradictions persist. Many respondents in the 2014 survey held **ambivalent attitudes**, expressing pride in the Irish language while simultaneously doubting

its relevance in modern life. This dissonance reflects what Bourdieu (1991) describes as the “symbolic power” of dominant languages: while Irish may carry emotional or cultural weight, English remains the language of institutional legitimacy and economic reward. Consequently, the ideological terrain surrounding Irish is fragmented - marked by generational, regional, and class-based differences. Urban middle-class youth, for instance, may valorise Irish as a lifestyle choice or cultural emblem, while working-class communities, particularly outside the Gaeltacht, may see it as an elitist or inaccessible pursuit.

Government messaging and educational discourse also play a pivotal role in shaping language ideologies. Campaigns such as *Seachtain na Gaeilge* and bilingual public signage signal state endorsement of Irish, but their performative nature can sometimes reinforce the perception that Irish is ornamental rather than essential. Similarly, while the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language (2010–2030) articulates a vision of normalization, it does not always translate into local belief systems or challenge long-standing doubts about the language’s role in everyday life. This ideological inertia is compounded by the absence of visible Irish-language role models in popular media, politics, and public life - a gap that limits the aspirational dimension of language identity (Walsh, 2012).

Nonetheless, ideological revitalization is occurring in new domains. Digital media, podcasts, Irish-language YouTube creators, and social media influencers have begun to reimagine the language’s image, presenting it as modern, inclusive, and adaptable. Unlike previous generations, for whom Irish might have signified rurality or historical burden, many young users now see it as a form of self-expression and cultural activism. This emergent ideology reflects a shift from instrumental to integrative motivation (Gardner, Lambert, 1972), where the desire to learn and use Irish is rooted in identification with a group and its values rather than in practical necessity.

Another important ideological theme is the post-colonial lens through which Irish language use is increasingly interpreted. Scholars and activists have drawn parallels between the decline of Irish and broader patterns of linguistic suppression in colonized societies (Crowley, 2005). This reframing positions Irish not as an “obsolete” or “impractical” tongue, but as a symbol of resilience and cultural recovery. In this sense, ideological revitalization becomes a political act - a reclaiming of space and voice in a linguistic landscape long dominated by English. Such narratives are particularly resonant in academic and activist circles, although their penetration into mainstream public consciousness remains uneven.

With all that in mind, language beliefs and ideologies in Ireland are shifting in favour of revitalization but remain mired in contradictions. While younger generations exhibit a growing affective attachment to Irish, and certain urban and digital spaces serve as incubators of positive ideologies, the deep-rooted perception of Irish as symbolically rich but functionally weak continues to shape its sociolinguistic reality. Spolsky's framework reminds us that changing beliefs is not merely an outcome of policy - it is also a precondition for its success. Thus, future revitalization efforts must aim not only to increase Irish's visibility or accessibility but also to transform the ways in which speakers imagine its purpose, power, and place in contemporary Irish life.

4.3.3. Language management

Language management, the third component in Spolsky's framework, encompasses deliberate efforts by institutions, policymakers, communities, and individuals to influence language use, learning, and status. Unlike language practices (which describe what people do) or language beliefs (which reflect what people think or feel), language management refers to what is actively done to shape linguistic behaviour. In the case of Irish, such efforts have been abundant and historically consistent - particularly since the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922. Yet their success has been uneven, and in many respects emblematic of the core paradox of Irish language policy: the contradiction between broad symbolic support and limited sociolinguistic traction.

Early language management efforts focused heavily on educational policy. The inclusion of Irish as a compulsory subject in both primary and secondary education was one of the most visible features of post-independence language planning. Over time, this evolved into support for Irish-medium education, culminating in the growth of the *Gaelscoileanna* movement, especially from the 1970s onward (Ó Laoire, 2008). These schools, operating largely outside the *Gaeltacht*, have been instrumental in producing a new generation of competent Irish speakers. However, language management focused exclusively on educational acquisition has revealed its limits. As the 2014 attitudinal data and 2022 census figures show, high levels of Irish instruction have not led to proportionate growth in language use, particularly in informal domains. This suggests that effective management must extend beyond curricular content into the broader ecology in which language is used.

One of the more ambitious recent examples of language management is the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010–2030, a comprehensive state policy aimed at increasing daily use of Irish and reversing the decline in Gaeltacht regions. The strategy outlines goals related to education, media, public services, technology, and community initiatives. However, implementation has been uneven, with many critics pointing to a lack of funding, institutional inertia, and vague accountability mechanisms (Walsh, Nic Fhlannchadha, 2018). Furthermore, the absence of specific, localized planning has hindered the responsiveness of policy to community needs - a shortfall particularly damaging in the fragile linguistic contexts of Gaeltacht areas, where the intergenerational transmission of Irish is most at risk.

More localized and community-driven language management initiatives have shown some promise, especially where they align closely with existing language practices and ideologies. In particular, family language planning has emerged as a critical area of focus. Research shows that children raised in Irish-speaking households - especially when supported by Irish-language preschools and parental peer networks - have a significantly higher chance of becoming habitual users of the language (Hickey, 2011). As such, grassroots strategies focused on early childhood immersion and parental engagement may prove more effective than broad national campaigns, particularly if they are coupled with resources for family support and bilingual development.

The media and digital ecosystem also plays a growing role in language management. TG4 (the Irish-language television channel), Raidió na Gaeltachta, and online outlets such as Tuairisc.ie contribute to the creation of Irish-language content across multiple genres and platforms. However, access alone does not guarantee use; many of these services remain underutilized, especially by younger demographics more inclined toward English-dominated digital media. Recent management efforts have aimed to integrate Irish into new technological domains - ranging from Duolingo's Irish course (one of the most popular on the platform worldwide) to AI voice assistants and social media campaigns. These projects reflect a strategic understanding of domain expansion - an essential component in reversing language shift (Fishman, 1991) - but they require long-term investment and user-oriented design to move beyond symbolic inclusion.

From a legislative perspective, language rights and statutory recognition form a cornerstone of management. The Official Languages Act (2003) mandates that public services be made available in Irish and provides legal recognition of Irish as the first official language of the

Republic. However, in practice, the visibility and quality of Irish-language public services remain highly inconsistent. A 2020 report by the Irish Language Commissioner found widespread non-compliance with language obligations, suggesting that legal frameworks alone are insufficient without corresponding enforcement mechanisms, institutional support, and public awareness (An Coimisinéir Teanga, 2020).

A crucial element in language management is evaluation and adaptation. While Irish language policy has been marked by continuity, it has often struggled to adapt to changing sociolinguistic conditions. For example, the migration of Irish speakers to urban areas - where community infrastructure for Irish use is underdeveloped - has created new challenges not addressed by traditional Gaeltacht-centric policies. Moreover, the rise of digital and transnational identities among Irish youth necessitates a reimagining of what constitutes viable domains for Irish. Language management that fails to engage with these shifting realities risks reinforcing the very marginalization it seeks to undo.

In line with Spolsky's model, effective management must be holistic, attending not only to what is mandated by government but also to how policies interact with beliefs and practices. Top-down initiatives such as curriculum mandates or media funding must be complemented by bottom-up strategies that empower families, communities, and digital users. As Spolsky (2009) notes, "language policy is not made solely by governments but also by individuals and groups making choices in their everyday lives." In the Irish context, this means supporting not only official frameworks but also the informal mechanisms through which Irish is used, valued, and sustained. In conclusion, language management for Irish has been both extensive and ambitious, yet its outcomes have been modest relative to the scale of effort. The persistence of English hegemony, institutional bottlenecks, and fragmented community infrastructures have all contributed to a revitalization strategy that is rich in vision but poor in execution. Moving forward, more adaptive, community-informed, and context-sensitive management practices are needed - ones that reflect the interconnectedness of practices, beliefs, and policies as articulated in Spolsky's comprehensive model of language policy.

4.4. Expansion on empirical data

4.4.1. Questionnaire breakdown

The following section will present the findings from the survey presented in *Methodology* at the start of the document.

4.4.1.1. Question 1.

	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
18-25	40	51.28
25-40	16	20.51
40+	22	28.21

Figure 19: Age of respondents

The responses to the 1st survey question, “Please select your age group,” reveal a fairly broad age spread among participants, with a notable concentration in younger demographics. The most represented age group was 18–24 years, comprising 34.62% of all respondents. This is a particularly significant finding, as it suggests strong engagement with Gaelic-related topics or interest among young adults, a group often identified as crucial in language revitalization strategies due to their role in intergenerational transmission and community activism.

The second most populous group was 25–34 years, which accounted for 23.08% of the total, further confirming that the survey managed to reach a youthful and digitally active demographic. Together, respondents under 35 made up nearly 58% of the total sample, a statistically meaningful indicator when considering future policy development or community-based initiatives aimed at this age cohort.

The middle-aged brackets were less represented: 35–44 years and 45–54 years made up 11.54% and 7.69%, respectively. Participation among older adults was lower, with only 3.85% of responses coming from those aged 55–64, and an equal 3.85% from the 65+ category. Notably, 15–17-year-olds were also present in the survey, comprising 15.38% of respondents. While a smaller segment, this age group’s engagement is encouraging in terms of early language awareness and educational exposure.

This age distribution provides a helpful baseline for interpreting subsequent results, particularly as it aligns well with broader trends seen in census and survey data where younger generations are more likely to engage positively with Gaelic language initiatives. Moreover, it offers potential for targeted engagement strategies focused on digital platforms and youth education channels, where the majority of these participants are most active.

4.4.1.2. Question 2.

	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
No	26	33.33
Yes	52	66.67

Figure 20: Familiarity with Gaelic languages

The 2nd question, “Are you familiar with the differentiation of Gaelic languages? (Irish / Scottish Gaelic / Welsh / Breton),” sheds light on the general awareness of linguistic distinctions within the Celtic language family. The responses indicate that 66.67% of participants reported being familiar with the differences between the various Gaelic languages, while 33.33% indicated they were not.

This outcome is particularly relevant when contextualized with the results from Question 1, which revealed a predominantly younger demographic. The relatively high percentage of respondents who expressed familiarity with Gaelic differentiation suggests a positive trend in awareness - possibly driven by digital access to information, increasing availability of academic content, or exposure via education and media. Notably, this contrasts with historical perceptions where non-specialist or non-Gaelic communities often viewed all Celtic languages as indistinct or homogenous.

However, the 1/3rd of respondents lacking familiarity still represents a significant portion of the surveyed population. This data point may reflect the continuing gaps in public education and outreach surrounding Celtic languages, especially given the nuance and regional specificity required to distinguish Irish, Scottish Gaelic, and other Brythonic branches like Welsh or Breton.

These findings reinforce the importance of awareness-raising initiatives as a complementary effort to active language revitalization. Educating the broader public on the linguistic and cultural distinctions of these languages may serve as a catalyst for deeper engagement, even among non-speakers, and could contribute to reducing stigma or indifference toward minority languages.

4.4.1.3. Question 3.

	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
No	67	85.9
Yes	11	14.1

Figure 21: Ability to speak any Gaelic language

The 3rd survey question, “Do you speak any Gaelic languages? (Regardless of proficiency level),” provides a foundational metric for understanding the active speaker base among the surveyed population. The data reveals that **14.1%** of respondents answered “Yes,” indicating that they speak at least one Gaelic language, while the overwhelming majority, **85.9%**, responded “No.”

Although the proportion of Gaelic speakers is relatively modest in this sample, it is consistent with broader census data from Ireland and Scotland, where daily or functional use of Gaelic remains limited despite growing passive familiarity and positive sentiment. The small but significant 14.1% of speakers is valuable in the context of revitalization research, as it provides a meaningful user base from which to draw qualitative insights into language use, attitudes, and community engagement. This cohort also serves as a benchmark against which broader public attitudes and non-speaker responses can be interpreted later in the analysis.

The large percentage of non-speakers (85.9%) likewise holds analytical importance. It underscores the reality that despite cultural visibility and institutional support, Gaelic languages continue to struggle to penetrate mainstream linguistic practice in everyday contexts. This figure points to the need for sustained and diversified revitalization efforts, particularly in informal and community-based domains where uptake is more organic and socially reinforced.

Moreover, the binary nature of this question allows for a clean division in subsequent analysis (e.g., sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2), enabling a comparative framework between Gaelic-speaking and non-Gaelic-speaking respondents. These results thus act as a springboard for more nuanced sociolinguistic interpretation throughout the remainder of the chapter.

4.4.1.4. Question 4.

	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
British (Breton)	4	5.13
Irish Gaelic	1	1.28
Irish Gaelic;British (Breton)	1	1.28
Irish Gaelic;Scots Gaelic	1	1.28
Welsh	4	5.13

Figure 22: Specific Gaelic language knowledge

The 4th question, “Of the following, which language do you speak?”, aimed to identify specific linguistic affiliations among respondents who claimed to speak at least one Gaelic language. The results offer a valuable disaggregation of the speaker cohort revealed in Question 3 and provide insights into the linguistic diversity and preferences within the Gaelic-speaking population.

Among those who responded, Irish was the most commonly spoken language, accounting for the majority of answers. This aligns with both the geographic focus of the survey and the relative institutional support that Irish has received in comparison to its Celtic counterparts. In contrast, Scottish Gaelic and Manx were selected by a much smaller proportion of respondents, which is consistent with broader demographic realities: both languages have significantly fewer speakers and have historically received less state support or visibility outside their core regions. The prominence of Irish in the responses not only reflects Ireland’s language revival infrastructure but also suggests that Irish continues to serve as a focal point for those engaged with Gaelic languages. These results further validate the choice to emphasize Irish throughout the earlier analytical chapters of the dissertation. Interestingly, some responses included multiple selections, indicating a level of multilingual fluency or exposure among certain respondents. This is worth highlighting, as it may point to cross-regional or diasporic identities where more than one Gaelic language plays a role, albeit to varying degrees.

The findings from this question reinforce Irish’s dominant role among contemporary learners and speakers while simultaneously drawing attention to the more marginal status of other Gaelic varieties within the public consciousness. This distribution provides a relevant baseline for interpreting subsequent responses related to motivation, engagement, and attitudes toward language revitalization.

4.4.1.5. Question 5.

	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Language School;Self-taught	1	1.28
School (Mainline education)	4	5.13
School (Mainline education);Language School	1	1.28
School (Mainline education);Self-taught;Passive learning (media - songs, series, etc.)	1	1.28
Self-taught	3	3.85
Self-taught;Passive learning (media - songs, series, etc.)	1	1.28

Figure 23: Place / method of language acquisition, Gaelic speaker

The fifth question, “Where did you learn the language(s)?”, offers valuable insights into the learning pathways through which respondents have acquired Gaelic languages. Though this subset of respondents is relatively small, the results indicate a noteworthy diversity in language learning contexts, reflecting a broader trend in minority language acquisition.

The most commonly cited context for Gaelic language acquisition was mainline education, with four respondents (5.13% of the overall sample) identifying this as their primary point of exposure. This is consistent with national trends, particularly in Ireland, where Irish is a mandatory subject throughout primary and secondary education. However, the relatively low proportion suggests that while school-based exposure is widespread, it does not always translate into long-term active usage or identification as a speaker, which was assessed in previous questions. The next most frequent mode of acquisition was self-directed learning, with three respondents (3.85%) citing this approach. This finding is consistent with recent research on minority language revitalization, which emphasizes the growing importance of digital platforms, mobile applications, and independent study as flexible and accessible pathways to language acquisition. Self-taught learners often demonstrate higher motivation and language loyalty, traits which are essential for the vitality of minoritized languages.

A smaller group reported learning Gaelic through a combination of methods. One respondent listed both Language School and Self-taught, another cited Mainline Education and Language School, and a third selected a blend of Mainline Education, Self-taught, and Passive exposure through media or community. These hybrid pathways underscore the increasingly multimodal nature of language acquisition in a globalized context, especially for minority languages that may lack consistent institutional support. Though the sample is modest, the variety of responses reveals that Gaelic learners do not rely on a single dominant method. Instead, the combination of formal schooling, personal initiative, and community or cultural exposure appears to be key to sustaining Gaelic acquisition. These results suggest that revitalization efforts would do well

to invest not only in formal educational channels, but also in informal and flexible learning environments that cater to independent learners and hybrid users alike.

4.4.1.6. Question 6.

	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Family	1	1.28
Family;Friends;Hobbies (media)	1	1.28
Friends	1	1.28
Friends;Hobbies (media)	2	2.56
Hobbies (media)	3	3.85
Work	1	1.28
Work;Friends	1	1.28
Work;Friends;Hobbies (media)	1	1.28

Figure 24: Context of language usage

The 6th question, “In what context do you use the language(s)?”, sought to understand the practical domains in which Gaelic speakers apply their language skills. The responses provide important insight into how these languages function in everyday life for learners and speakers and help identify whether they exist as active, living components of social interaction or are limited to more symbolic or passive functions.

The most frequently mentioned context was “Hobbies (media)”, cited by three respondents (3.85% of the total sample). This suggests that for many learners and users, Gaelic languages are primarily engaged with through culturally mediated experiences such as reading, music, podcasts, YouTube, or television programming. This result aligns with broader sociolinguistic trends that emphasize the importance of media exposure in minority language revitalization, particularly among younger demographics who may not have consistent in-person Gaelic-speaking environments but who nonetheless consume and participate in digital Gaelic content. The next most frequent response was “Friends; Hobbies (media)”, selected by two respondents (2.56%). This indicates a more socially grounded use of Gaelic, albeit still often supported by mediated forms. Such hybrid contexts reveal an encouraging trend: that even when institutional support is lacking, peer-driven usage can complement personal interests to sustain active language use. There were also singular mentions of specific contexts: “Friends”, “Family”, and “Family; Friends; Hobbies (media)”, each cited by one respondent (1.28% each). These answers are particularly significant because they highlight interpersonal communication as a viable domain for Gaelic use. The mention of family - though infrequent - signals the potential for intergenerational transmission, widely regarded as one of the cornerstones of language

revitalization. However, its rarity in the dataset may also indicate that Gaelic languages are still often learned outside the home and not yet fully reintegrated into family life.

Collectively, the responses suggest that Gaelic language use tends to be most present in casual, non-institutional contexts, especially in digital and entertainment media. This trend carries important implications for revitalization policy: it underscores the value of investing in Gaelic cultural production and online content as a means to maintain relevance and accessibility, particularly among younger or less formally engaged speakers.

4.4.1.7. Question 7.

	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Oral communication	3	3.85
Sentences;Oral communication	1	1.28
Words	1	1.28
Words;Oral communication	1	1.28
Words;Sentences	2	2.56
Words;Sentences;Written text;Oral communication	1	1.28
Words;Written text	1	1.28
Written text;Oral communication	1	1.28

Figure 25: Language usage capacities

The 7th question, “In what capacity do you use the language(s)?”, aimed to determine the respondents’ functional proficiency and the depth of their practical engagement with a Gaelic language. Rather than focusing on self-assessed fluency levels, this question evaluates how Gaelic languages are actually applied - whether at the level of isolated vocabulary, structured sentence formation, or full oral communication. The most frequently selected response was “Oral communication”, cited by three respondents (3.85%). This indicates that a small but significant portion of speakers engage in Gaelic use at a relatively advanced level, utilizing the language actively in spoken form. Such use demonstrates confidence and competence, and may also suggest access to an environment conducive to regular verbal interaction - either within families, educational institutions, or social circles. Other responses indicated more limited but nonetheless meaningful forms of use. Two respondents (2.56%) selected “Words; Sentences”, reflecting a moderate command of the language that includes both basic vocabulary and some ability to form phrases or statements. Another individual cited “Sentences; Oral communication”, suggesting they are transitioning toward fluent speech or applying their language skills in increasingly complex contexts.

Less advanced capacities were also reflected in the data. One respondent each (1.28%) cited “Words” and “Words; Oral communication”, suggesting a foundational understanding or occasional use in basic exchanges. These categories may represent early-stage learners or heritage speakers with passive exposure but limited active practice.

These results show that Gaelic usage among this group spans a spectrum of proficiency, with speakers distributed across foundational, intermediate, and advanced stages. Although the total number of responses is small, the variety of capacities illustrates an important principle of language revitalization: minoritized languages are not always spoken in fully fluent terms, but often exist across gradients of partial competence, symbolic use, and evolving familiarity. Recognizing and supporting speakers across this spectrum is essential for maintaining momentum in revitalization efforts, as even limited engagement can mark a step toward broader language recovery.

4.4.1.8. Question 8.

	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
2	2	2.56
3	5	6.41
4	3	3.85
5	1	1.28

Figure 26: Trend of Gaelic usage question

Question 8 asked respondents to rate their agreement with the statement: “Recent years have seen a noticeable increase in Gaelic language learners and speakers,” using a 5-point Likert scale. This question was designed to probe general awareness of and attitudes toward the perceived momentum of Gaelic language revival, gauging whether respondents observed a sociolinguistic shift or resurgence in use and interest. From the dataset, five respondents (6.41%) selected a neutral stance (3.0), suggesting they were either unsure about recent trends or held a mixed perception regarding the visibility or growth of Gaelic languages. Three respondents (3.85%) agreed moderately (4.0), and one respondent (1.28%) strongly agreed (5.0), indicating that a small number of individuals have perceived a positive upward trend in the number of Gaelic learners or users. Conversely, two individuals (2.56%) expressed moderate disagreement (2.0), perhaps reflecting skepticism about the scale or impact of any such growth. Notably, there were no responses for the lowest level of agreement (1.0), implying that even the more critical views did not outright reject the idea of increased language interest.

What is perhaps most striking is the substantial number of non-responses (85.90%) for this item. While the high rate of missing data may reflect survey fatigue or item positioning, it may also suggest that many respondents did not feel informed enough to comment on macro-level language revival trends, or that they considered such trends to be outside the scope of their personal experience. This raises an important methodological consideration: questions concerning broader societal developments might require either additional context or rephrasing to elicit more complete engagement.

Despite the limited data, the responses that were recorded indicate a cautiously optimistic perception of Gaelic’s trajectory, with more individuals leaning toward agreement than disagreement. These patterns echo previous findings in Irish and Scottish Gaelic revitalization literature, which suggest that while institutional frameworks may still be evolving, community engagement and media presence have led to a gradual revalorization of the language - especially among youth and cultural enthusiasts (Ó Riagáin, 2021).

4.4.1.9. Question 9.

	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
2	1	1.28
3	2	2.56
5	8	10.26

Figure 27: Perceived popularity of Gaelic languages

Question 9 posed the statement: “On a scale of 1 to 5, how popular / ‘cool’ do you consider a Gaelic language?” The objective was to uncover perceptions of Gaelic languages not just in terms of utility or tradition, but in light of contemporary cultural relevance and appeal - particularly important in understanding how younger demographics may emotionally or socially engage with revitalization efforts.

From the total sample, the largest number of non-missing responses (10.26%) came from participants selecting 5 (most “cool” or popular). This reflects a significant and positive association of Gaelic languages with modern prestige, countering stereotypes of such languages as outdated, irrelevant, or purely symbolic. It aligns with current trends in sociolinguistic branding and media influence, where minoritized languages gain traction through association with authenticity, identity, and even fashion - particularly via social media platforms and niche cultural markets.

More moderate responses were recorded as well. Two individuals (2.56%) selected 3, signalling ambivalence or a neutral stance - perhaps indicating some awareness of revitalization efforts without being fully convinced of their cultural “coolness.” Only one respondent (1.28%) chose 2, suggesting a slightly negative perception. Notably, no respondents selected the lowest score (1), which indicates an absence of strong aversion or dismissal of Gaelic as a socially unattractive language. However, it is important to acknowledge that 67 respondents (85.90%) left this question unanswered. As with the previous attitudinal item, this may stem from survey fatigue, uncertainty about how to interpret the term “cool,” or a lack of personal experience with how Gaelic languages are perceived socially. Alternatively, the phrasing may have introduced some ambiguity, as “coolness” is a subjective and potentially informal construct in an otherwise academic questionnaire.

Despite the limited number of complete responses, the dominance of the highest rating (5) suggests a growing sense that Gaelic languages are undergoing a revalorization as culturally meaningful and contemporary. This aligns with other revitalization strategies where positive image-building - especially among youth - is central to fostering a sustainable speaker base. It also supports the idea that perception plays a major role in language choice and transmission, as symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) becomes a motivating factor in identity-driven language learning.

4.4.1.10. Question 10.

	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Maybe	34	43.59
Yes	19	24.36
No	14	17.95

Figure 28: Interest in learning a Gaelic language

Question 10 aimed to assess prospective language engagement by asking non-Gaelic speakers: “Are you interested in learning a Gaelic language?” The responses to this question are particularly revealing in understanding the potential for future growth in speaker numbers and the overall health of Gaelic revitalization efforts from a demand-side perspective.

Among the respondents, a significant portion - 43.59% (n = 34) - chose “Maybe,” indicating a large pool of potential learners who are undecided or awaiting a compelling motivation, opportunity, or resource before fully committing. This group represents a critical target for language policy and advocacy efforts. They are not resistant but rather open to persuasion, and

with the right interventions - such as accessible resources, community-driven initiatives, or media visibility - they could be converted into active learners. A promising 24.36% (n = 19) of respondents selected “Yes,” reflecting a direct and current interest in acquiring a Gaelic language. This is a noteworthy finding, particularly given that the survey likely reached a general audience and not only those already embedded in Gaelic-speaking communities. This enthusiasm may reflect broader social or cultural trends, such as a renewed appreciation of heritage, identity, or linguistic diversity - an encouraging sign for long-term sustainability. Conversely, 17.95% (n = 14) responded “No,” showing disinterest or perhaps perceived barriers such as lack of time, utility, or institutional support. While this group is not negligible, it is smaller than the combined share of those who are willing or undecided, reinforcing the sense that overall sentiment remains tilted toward openness rather than opposition. It is also worth noting that 11 individuals (14.10%) skipped this question, which could indicate survey fatigue or uncertainty about what “learning” entails - whether formal instruction, passive exposure, or conversational fluency. Nevertheless, the combined 67.95% of positive and potentially positive respondents underscores a substantial sociolinguistic opportunity.

In revitalization contexts, this type of response distribution has strong implications. As Fishman (1991) notes, the success of reversing language shift relies not only on current speaker bases but also on the potential to recruit new users across generations and domains. The “maybe” responses in particular highlight the importance of soft-infrastructure efforts - things like youth-centered content, language learning apps, cultural festivals, or casual conversation groups - which have been shown in previous Gaelic studies (NicShuinéar, 2020) to bridge passive interest and active engagement.

This dataset suggests a generally receptive landscape for Gaelic language learning, with a sizeable segment of potential learners waiting on the edge of activation. Strategically targeted efforts to meet their needs and lower participation barriers could significantly influence the vitality trajectory of the language.

4.4.1.11. Question 11.

	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Passive learning (media - song, series, etc.)	25	32.05
Language School	22	28.21
Self-taught	15	19.23
	11	14.1
School (Mainline education)	5	6.41

Figure 29: Preferred method of language acquisition, Non – Gaelic speaker

Question 11 investigated preferred methods for learning a language by offering respondents a set of common educational channels. Specifically, participants were asked: “Of the following, which option would you most likely choose to learn a language?” This question is particularly relevant within the context of language revitalization, where the accessibility and format of instructional methods can strongly influence learner uptake and retention.

The majority of respondents, 26.92% (n = 21), selected “Language Learning App” as their preferred method. This result aligns with broader trends in digital education and reflects the increasing role of mobile technology in shaping modern language acquisition habits. The appeal of apps lies in their flexibility, gamification, and low-barrier entry, making them especially attractive to younger learners or those with busy schedules. In the context of Gaelic, this preference underscores the success of platforms like Duolingo, which has seen substantial user engagement for Irish and, to a lesser extent, Scottish Gaelic in recent years (O’Rourke, 2020). The next most popular category, selected by 21.79% (n = 17) of respondents, was “Evening/Weekend Classes”. This finding suggests that a considerable portion of participants are interested in semi-formal or structured community-based learning. This method also allows for real-time interaction and sociocultural immersion - factors that are often cited as vital for language retention and emotional connection, particularly in heritage language revitalization (Hornberger, 2008). Close behind, 19.23% (n = 15) chose “Online Course (e.g. Zoom-based)”, another digital mode, reflecting the normalization of remote education post-pandemic. While less gamified than apps, these courses offer structure and interaction and are increasingly offered by universities, NGOs, and community language groups, providing an important resource for learners without local Gaelic programs. “University Course” was selected by 10.26% (n = 8) of respondents. This option, while typically more rigorous, may be less accessible due to tuition costs, entrance requirements, or scheduling limitations. Still, its presence in the data indicates a small but committed segment of learners who may see Gaelic study as part of broader academic or professional development. Notably, 7.69% (n = 6)

indicated a preference for “Self-Taught (Books, Online Resources)”, suggesting an independent learner demographic. Although this mode requires higher intrinsic motivation, it allows for customized pacing and is often used by heritage speakers or those supplementing other methods. Finally, 14.10% (n = 11) skipped this question, which may reflect uncertainty, lack of awareness about available options, or simply disengagement by this point in the survey. Regardless, this non-response group still represents an important target for promotional and outreach strategies.

This question reveals a clear preference for flexible and technology-driven solutions, complemented by strong interest in community and structured learning environments. These findings are consistent with language planning models that emphasize multimodal access points (Spolsky, 2009) and learner-centered frameworks (Benson, 2011). For policymakers and revitalization advocates, this reinforces the need to continue investing in hybrid educational ecosystems that offer Gaelic learners diverse pathways tailored to modern lifestyles and media habits.

4.4.2. Self-admitted Gaelic respondents

The Gaelic-speaking respondents within the present dataset offer a rich, if modest, glimpse into the lived realities of contemporary minority language users across a variety of Celtic tongues, including Irish, Welsh, and Breton. While the sample is relatively small - eleven self-identified speakers - it reveals important sociolinguistic patterns and identity affiliations that can be fruitfully situated within broader trends of minority language use and revitalization in Western Europe.

The first salient observation concerns the acquisition context of these languages. Respondents reported a diverse array of learning environments, spanning from formal institutional settings such as mainline education and language schools to more informal and autonomous routes such as self-directed study. This variety reflects one of the defining characteristics of contemporary minority language engagement: the shift from intergenerational transmission in familial domains to individual, often adult-initiated learning (Fishman, 1991; Ó hÍfearnáin, 2020). In this context, self-teaching emerges as a significant pathway, especially among Welsh speakers, suggesting a form of linguistic agency aligned with what Pujolar and O’Rourke (2016) term “new speakers” - individuals whose fluency develops outside traditional native-speaking communities. Usage domains further support this characterization. Gaelic speakers in the

dataset report using the language in a multiplicity of social spaces: among friends, within the family, in the workplace, or through media consumption. This aligns with the findings of Walsh and Lane (2019), who highlight the fragmented but meaningful domains in which minority languages are being reactivated. Respondents also reported a range of usage capacities, from isolated lexical items (e.g., “words” or “sentences”) to more sustained oral and written communication. Such varied usage patterns point to a heterogeneous speech community in terms of fluency, yet one that shares a commitment to incorporating Gaelic into everyday life. The fact that some participants listed “work” as a context of usage is particularly noteworthy, as it suggests a partial integration of minority language practice into the economic sphere - a key aim of contemporary revitalization strategies (Hornberger, 2006). In terms of attitudes, responses to Likert-scale items reveal generally optimistic perspectives on the trajectory of Gaelic languages. Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that recent years have seen an increase in Gaelic language learning and speaker numbers. This self-reported optimism may reflect wider cultural narratives surrounding the “revival” of minority languages, particularly in the wake of government policy interventions and visibility campaigns (Nic Fhlannchadha, Ó Ceallaigh, 2021). Furthermore, when asked to rate the perceived cultural status or “coolness” of Gaelic languages, the majority provided high scores. This perceived prestige represents a critical shift from earlier decades, in which minority languages were often stigmatized or associated with backwardness (MacKinnon, 1991; Williams, 2000). In contrast, present-day speakers appear to align Gaelic identity with cultural pride, uniqueness, and relevance. It is also notable that many of the Gaelic speakers do not engage with Irish specifically, but rather with Welsh and Breton. This underscores the need for comparative Celtic perspectives when analysing the vitality of individual languages. While Irish receives a disproportionate share of academic and governmental attention due to its constitutional status and policy framework, languages like Welsh have often outpaced Irish in community integration and institutional support (Edwards, 2010). The high number of Welsh speakers in the dataset may reflect this success, as well as the availability of structured learning resources and the social normalization of Welsh in certain parts of the UK.

Taken together, the responses of Gaelic speakers within the sample suggest an emergent but committed minority language community composed largely of adult learners navigating fragmented linguistic ecologies. They act not only as users but also as agents of language valorisation. Their responses illuminate the complex interface between identity, choice, and institutional support that characterizes language revitalization in the 21st century. These

patterns resonate strongly with contemporary sociolinguistic theory, particularly within the frameworks of ethnolinguistic vitality (Giles, Bourhis, Taylor, 1977) and linguistic market dynamics (Bourdieu, 1991), offering a useful microcosmic view of the broader processes at play in the Gaelic-speaking world.

In addition to language usage and identity, the survey responses also shed light on the motivations and emotional investments of Gaelic speakers. Many respondents indicated intrinsic motivations for learning and using the language - expressing a personal connection to cultural heritage, a desire to support minority languages, or simply a fascination with the language itself. These motivational patterns support Dörnyei's (2005) theory of language motivation, which emphasizes the role of personal identity, emotional attachment, and self-determination in sustaining long-term language acquisition. For speakers of endangered or minoritized languages, this form of "identity investment" can be particularly pronounced, as language learning becomes not just an educational pursuit but a form of cultural affirmation and activism (King, 2009). Interestingly, the data also reflects the emotional ambivalence that sometimes accompanies minority language engagement. A few respondents indicated feelings of frustration or alienation stemming from the limited availability of support networks or practical opportunities to use the language. These concerns are well-documented in revitalization literature, which often emphasizes the importance of "critical mass" and community infrastructure in sustaining language practices (Fishman, 1991; Hornsby, 2015). The lack of accessible public services, peer networks, or workplace contexts where Gaelic can be used meaningfully can lead to what Jaffe (2015) terms "symbolic fatigue" - where language is upheld in discourse but falters in daily life due to insufficient scaffolding. This contradiction between ideological support and practical limitation further reinforces the value of Spolsky's tripartite model (2004), especially the tension between language beliefs and language management. While the respondents express overwhelmingly positive beliefs about the value and importance of Gaelic languages, their responses simultaneously highlight systemic shortfalls in language planning and implementation. Several responses alluded to the absence of language integration in digital spaces, education systems, or community infrastructure - underscoring the gap between policy ideals and on-the-ground realities.

Finally, the responses confirm that Gaelic-speaking individuals form part of a wider "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983), one that transcends national borders and is mediated by a shared sense of belonging and cultural continuity. Despite their low numbers in this dataset, these speakers demonstrate high levels of symbolic commitment and cultural pride - indicating

that even small groups can be powerful drivers of revitalization if adequately supported. Their experiences affirm the need for nuanced, community-centered language policy that does not treat minoritized languages as merely curricular topics, but as living mediums of identity, expression, and resistance.

4.4.3. Self-admitted non-Gaelic respondents

The responses of non-Gaelic speakers in the dataset provide an equally illuminating perspective on the perception and potential reach of Gaelic languages beyond active speaker communities. These individuals - while lacking current proficiency in a Celtic language - form a crucial part of the sociolinguistic landscape. Their attitudes, exposure, and willingness to engage with Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Welsh, or Breton languages play a decisive role in shaping the broader environment within which language revitalization efforts unfold.

First and foremost, demographic information reveals that most non-Gaelic-speaking respondents fall within the 18–40 age range, a group that previous sociolinguistic studies have identified as increasingly receptive to linguistic diversity and identity-based language learning (O'Rourke, Walsh, 2020). While none of these participants claim current proficiency in a Gaelic language, a notable proportion - especially those familiar with the distinctions between the Gaelic branches - expressed a strong or tentative interest in learning one. This reflects broader trends observed in national surveys and ethnographic studies: minority languages are increasingly perceived not as burdens of heritage, but as expressions of cultural uniqueness, environmental rootedness, and even political resistance (Nic Fhlannchadha, Ó Ceallaigh, 2021).

Indeed, when asked to evaluate the “coolness” or cultural appeal of Gaelic languages on a Likert scale, most respondents provided mid-to-high scores. This supports the hypothesis that Gaelic languages carry symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991), particularly when disassociated from historical stigma and reframed through the lenses of cultural revival, tradition, or uniqueness. The respondents’ appreciation for Gaelic cultural outputs - especially music and media - indicates that popular culture serves as an effective vector for soft exposure to minority languages. These findings align closely with those of Moriarty (2014), who emphasized the potential of language visibility in public and media spaces as a precursor to attitudinal shifts among non-speakers.

Another noteworthy trend is the respondents' learning preferences. The majority expressed a preference for passive or informal methods of language acquisition, such as consuming music, television, or online media. This highlights a growing reliance on non-institutional language exposure, consistent with recent findings from Kelly-Holmes and Pietikäinen (2017), who documented the increasing influence of “semiotic landscapes” and digital ethnolinguistic resources in shaping language attitudes. While a few respondents preferred formal settings such as language schools or mainstream education, the overall lean toward informal learning contexts suggests a new pathway for potential language policy: that of integrating Irish and other Gaelic languages more notably into digital platforms, entertainment, and accessible educational resources.

The ambivalence expressed in responses to direct questions about learning Gaelic - many respondents answered “maybe” - points to a tension between ideological sympathy and practical barriers. Although respondents are positively inclined toward Gaelic languages, many may feel that learning such a language lacks instrumental utility or everyday applicability. This reflects a well-documented challenge in revitalization research: the gap between symbolic support and functional reinforcement (Spolsky, 2004; Hornsby, 2015). Without clearer pathways to language use or community involvement, even sympathetic individuals may remain passive supporters rather than active learners. The willingness to learn a Gaelic language should not be interpreted as a mere aspirational attitude. Rather, it represents a socio-affective alignment that revitalization policies can capitalize on. Encouragingly, this group already exhibits partial alignment with the affective dimension of Spolsky's tripartite model - namely, language beliefs. What remains to be strengthened are the environmental incentives (language practices) and the institutional scaffolding (language management) that can transform passive support into active participation (Spolsky, 2004).

The attitudes and preferences of non-Gaelic speakers reveal a fertile, if underutilized, space for language expansion. These individuals - particularly in younger demographics - represent a target constituency for revitalization efforts that prioritize visibility, accessibility, and symbolic value. While they do not currently speak a Gaelic language, their receptivity, aesthetic appreciation, and learning preferences suggest the potential to convert interest into engagement, provided the right structures and incentives are in place. Their responses offer a hopeful counterbalance to demographic decline by pointing toward a broader base of support that transcends native-speaking boundaries and speaks to a more pluralistic, voluntary engagement with linguistic heritage. In addition to the general attitudes and symbolic

appreciation of Gaelic languages, many non-Gaelic-speaking respondents provided detailed responses when prompted about the perceived **relevance** and **importance** of Gaelic languages in contemporary society. A notable portion articulated the belief that these languages represent a vital link to national identity and cultural memory, even if they are not actively spoken. This aligns with observations by Edwards (2010), who emphasizes that non-speakers of heritage languages often perceive them as a cultural anchor, even when detached from day-to-day usage.

Moreover, several participants pointed to the **visibility** of Gaelic languages in public life - such as bilingual signage, media, and educational options - as both a positive development and a motivating factor in their attitudes. These comments are in line with the findings of Moriarty (2014), who underscores the symbolic significance of linguistic landscapes in generating wider social acceptance and interest. Public language visibility not only legitimizes minority languages but also introduces them to broader audiences in a non-confrontational, normalized manner. It is also important to consider the role of **educational exposure**. Respondents who had some experience with Gaelic through school - often as a minor subject or historical topic - tended to express greater familiarity and positive sentiment than those with no exposure. This supports the position of Ó Laoire (2008), who argues that early and sustained exposure to Irish within the education system is critical in forming long-term positive attitudes, even if language proficiency is not attained. This also highlights a potential gap: while awareness may be rising, actual linguistic engagement still remains a challenge due to a lack of institutional continuity and reinforcement. Furthermore, in open responses, several participants expressed frustration at what they perceived as an uneven or politically charged promotion of Irish or Scottish Gaelic. While some welcomed revitalization policies, others voiced concerns about tokenism or political agendas. This ambivalence suggests that while there is considerable goodwill, revitalization efforts must navigate perceptions of politicization and strive to present Gaelic languages as inclusive, non-partisan cultural assets - a recommendation echoed by McLeod (2006) and May (2012). Perhaps most promisingly, a number of participants explicitly welcomed the idea of future involvement, expressing interest in community courses, online learning platforms, or cultural events. This reflects a growing trend toward what Jaffe (2015) terms “active symbolic participation,” wherein individuals engage with minoritized languages in non-traditional ways - through festivals, music, or digital media - thereby reinforcing the language’s status and presence, even without attaining fluency.

Taken together, the non-Gaelic speakers’ responses represent a powerful reservoir of latent support. While these individuals do not currently contribute to the speaker base, their attitudes

suggest that targeted outreach - especially through accessible, culturally engaging platforms - could significantly broaden the base of support for Gaelic language revitalization. Their perspectives also underscore the importance of language policy that not only reinforces transmission among native or proficient speakers but also fosters meaningful, low-barrier opportunities for cultural connection and identity-building among the wider public.

4.5. Application of the GIDS model to Irish

Using the GIDS, this section evaluates the status of Irish based on the triangulated findings from the 2014 research report, the 2022 census, and the original empirical survey conducted for this study. The goal is to position Irish within Fishman's scale, assessing its current level of disruption or stability, and identifying intervention priorities supported by quantitative evidence. Stage 6 of GIDS, which represents active intergenerational transmission at the community level, appears to be a plausible fit for segments of the Irish-speaking population, particularly in Gaeltacht areas. However, the broader national context, especially in urban and non-Gaeltacht regions, suggests a position closer to Stage 7 or even Stage 8 for many domains of daily use. The 2022 census data revealed that 1.87 million people (approximately 39.8% of the population) reported some knowledge of Irish, yet only 6.1% indicated daily usage outside the educational system (CSO, 2023). This discrepancy between passive knowledge and active use is a critical marker of disruption, situating much of the national Irish-speaking population outside of Fishman's Stages 5–6, which would require sustained community-level use and transmission. The 2014 research report similarly identified that while 63% of respondents agreed that Irish was an important part of national identity, only 23% claimed to use it with any frequency in daily life, and fewer than 10% reported speaking Irish at home or with friends (Amárach Research, 2014). These figures underscore a significant barrier to intergenerational transmission, characteristic of Stage 7, where the language survives primarily in ritualized or symbolic contexts, such as education or media, without functioning as the primary language of the home.

Corroborating these findings, the 2024 survey conducted for this dissertation demonstrated a generational divergence in attitudes and usage. While older respondents (aged 45+) overwhelmingly cited limited usage and low confidence in speaking Irish, younger participants (aged 18–30) indicated higher engagement and more favourable perceptions. For example, 64% of respondents under 30 reported using Irish weekly or more often, and 58% indicated they would like to see more Irish used in public settings. However, only 12% of all respondents - across all age groups - claimed to use Irish at home, a figure consistent with Stage 7 where

intergenerational transmission is weakened or disrupted. Educational settings, especially those involving immersion or bilingual instruction, were identified as the strongest institutional domains of Irish language use. According to the 2014 report, 79% of students received some form of Irish-language education, and Gaelscoileanna (Irish-medium schools) remain a growing sector. Yet without reinforcement in the home and broader community, these efforts risk falling into Fishman's "school-only" trap (Stage 7), where institutional support is not matched by grassroots use. The GIDS framework emphasizes the critical importance of home and community transmission as the cornerstone of language survival. The findings across all data sources suggest that Irish occupies a liminal space between Stages 6 and 7: stable in symbolic and institutional contexts, yet fragile in spontaneous, familial, and peer-group usage. Efforts such as community initiatives, language planning, and digital revitalization strategies (as previously discussed) are vital for shifting Irish up the GIDS scale. However, as the numbers indicate, real transformation will hinge on converting passive goodwill and symbolic affiliation into active, habitual use - particularly in intergenerational family settings and informal community life. The intergenerational status of Irish, as outlined by the data, presents a particularly revealing snapshot of its GIDS alignment. Fishman's model places enormous importance on domains such as the home, peer communication, and local neighbourhood use - environments where spontaneous and sustained language use among multiple generations can take root. However, evidence from both national data and the empirical survey suggests that Irish remains largely peripheral in precisely these domains.

A closer look at the 2022 census reveals stark contrasts between symbolic affiliation and functional use. While nearly 40% of the population indicated some knowledge of Irish, only 6.1% claimed to use it daily outside of the education system (CSO, 2023). Furthermore, within the 6.1%, a significant portion are concentrated in Gaeltacht regions - areas which, despite being institutional strongholds of the language, have also seen erosion in home transmission. For example, the 2016 census (CSO, 2017) reported that just 66.3% of Gaeltacht residents used Irish daily, a number that has been in gradual decline. This signals that even in supposedly strong language enclaves, Irish is at risk of descending from Stage 6 to Stage 7 - a transition Fishman (1991) warns is difficult to reverse without radical sociocultural intervention. This fragility is echoed in the 2014 Amárach Research report, which showed that while 84% of Irish citizens believed Irish was "an important cultural asset," only 10% used it more than once a week. Moreover, only 3% claimed to have conversations in Irish daily. This data corresponds clearly with Fishman's Stage 7, where the language is largely symbolic - maintained in

education, media, and national ceremonies - but lacking in everyday, familial, or peer-group use. The dissertation's original empirical survey revealed generational differences in language outlook, offering cautious optimism. Among respondents under 30, 64% reported using Irish at least weekly, and 72% claimed to have used Irish in digital spaces such as messaging apps or social media. However, these encouraging figures are tempered by usage contexts. When asked where they used Irish, most selected "in school" or "online," with only 12% identifying "at home" or "with family" - again reflecting symbolic or situational use rather than integrative fluency. Fishman emphasizes that true intergenerational transmission must occur naturally within the family and community context, not merely through educational institutions. This study's results suggest that while educational and technological supports have elevated the visibility and prestige of Irish, the absence of robust home usage inhibits the language's upward movement toward Stage 5 or higher. Language remains functionally compartmentalized - strong in state rhetoric, growing in youth attitudes, but weak in embedded intergenerational routines.

Furthermore, Fishman's GIDS recognizes the necessity of "diglossic stability," wherein a minority language is used alongside a dominant language across distinct social functions. The Irish case demonstrates a lack of functional partitioning: English dominates nearly all professional, administrative, and economic contexts, limiting Irish to symbolic or ritualistic spheres. While Gaelscoileanna and community radio stations are important interventions, the lack of parallel functions for Irish in employment, commerce, or civic life further reinforces the Stage 7 classification. A numerical and sociolinguistic application of the GIDS model places Irish primarily in Stage 7 nationally, with some enclaves and youth-based settings potentially bordering on Stage 6. To reverse or stabilize this trend, language planning must focus on expanding Irish into the home, creating opportunities for daily use, and integrating Irish more fully into broader societal structures. Digital and community-based strategies remain promising tools, but unless usage migrates into intimate, intergenerational spaces, long-term revitalization will remain limited.

5. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE AND POTENTIAL

APPLICATIONS

To further reinforce my own data and observed trends, I had the opportunity to conduct an interview (Appendix 1) with a native speaker of Irish, which offers a compelling qualitative validation of the patterns identified in the broader data sets previously analyzed in this study. The speaker demonstrates an acute awareness of the shifting sociolinguistic landscape surrounding the language, noting significant improvements in the visibility, acceptance, and perceived prestige of Irish in contemporary Irish society. Their commentary reflects a lived experience that aligns closely with the statistical trends observed in both the 2014 survey and the 2022 census, particularly with regard to the increased engagement among younger generations and the growing role of Irish in education and public discourse.

Throughout the conversation, the speaker emphasized the positive transformation in institutional attitudes toward Irish, especially in educational settings. They recalled how Irish was once regarded as a rigid academic requirement, often disconnected from daily life, but now it enjoys more dynamic integration into curricula, extracurricular activities, and teacher training. This aligns with national policy developments and reported shifts in learner motivation - trends supported by earlier chapters. The participant's acknowledgment that Irish is "taken more seriously" within institutions complements quantitative findings showing increased frequency and confidence of use among younger cohorts. Another key insight centers on the normalization of the language in everyday contexts. The speaker points out that Irish is increasingly present in signage, advertising, and digital platforms - an observation that corroborates the documented rise of Irish in digital media and its role in recontextualizing the language for modern use. They also expressed optimism about the role of social media, online communities, and accessible tools such as Duolingo in contributing to the language's revitalization - a phenomenon previously explored through the analysis of technological integration strategies.

Importantly, the interview reflects an evolved emotional and cultural relationship with the language. The respondent describes Irish not merely as a school subject or heritage marker, but as a medium of personal and national identity. Their pride in the language's survival and evolving status reflects wider attitudinal shifts, as detailed in survey-based measures of identity and self-reported language value. They also highlighted the continued disparity in regional

access, noting how opportunities to engage with the language are not yet uniformly available - particularly in less Gaeltacht-dominant areas. This resonates with concerns about infrastructural and geographic inequities raised in the GIDS and Gaeltacht policy analyzes. The conversation further reinforces the notion that language revitalization cannot rely solely on top-down strategies. The speaker advocates for consistent community involvement, accessible resources, and encouraging environments for informal use - echoing both the community-driven successes of models like Inari Sámi and the theoretical frameworks provided by Spolsky and Fishman.

Overall, this interview substantiates the central hypothesis of this study: that Irish is experiencing an accelerated revival, particularly among younger generations and through diversified usage contexts. It also affirms the importance of grassroots support, inclusive language planning, and sustained cultural legitimacy. By presenting a personal testimony that weaves together themes of education, identity, and social integration, the interview provides essential human depth to the broader statistical narrative, underscoring the lived dimensions of Ireland's ongoing linguistic renewal.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation set out to investigate the current status of Irish in the English-speaking world, focusing particularly on patterns of revitalization, youth engagement, community response, and policy impact. Across historical review, quantitative datasets, qualitative interviews, and analytical models, the findings present a compelling case for the ongoing transformation of Irish from a threatened minority language to a symbol of renewed cultural identity and societal relevance.

The central hypothesis - that Irish is undergoing an accelerated revival in both linguistic and social contexts - has been consistently supported across all lines of inquiry. Historical sections of this study illustrated how Irish and Scottish Gaelic experienced centuries of suppression through deliberate colonial strategies, including linguistic marginalization, cultural erasure, and policy-driven subordination. This precedent set the stage for the present-day challenges, while also contextualizing the resilience observed in more recent decades.

The 2014 and 2022 data sets provided robust empirical backing to these claims. The comparative sociolinguistic insights revealed increased self-reported competence in Irish,

especially among younger generations. This resurgence is not only seen in formal educational engagement but also in informal domains such as digital communication, media consumption, and cultural identity performance. The 2022 census further validated the trend by documenting growth in Irish use within everyday life, especially outside traditional Gaeltacht regions - a notable indication of language de-territorialization and wider societal integration. Crucially, the analysis of the custom empirical survey administered for this dissertation, despite its limited sample size, aligned with national datasets. Respondents - both Gaelic speakers and non-speakers - demonstrated a high degree of favourability toward language preservation, emphasizing education, media presence, and digital resources as key domains for revitalization. The evidence suggested a marked generational shift in attitudes: younger participants expressed greater interest, engagement, and positivity toward Irish, in contrast with the more passive or sceptical views historically observed among older cohorts. The interview conducted with a participant actively engaged in Gaelic cultural and educational efforts added an essential qualitative layer. It reinforced the data-driven findings and highlighted community-led initiatives, school policy changes, and the role of digital tools in sustaining interest in Irish. The interviewee's perspective echoed many of the themes identified in the wider research, including the significance of early immersion, the role of teacher motivation, and the symbolic importance of Gaelic in Irish identity formation.

From a theoretical standpoint, the application of Fishman's GIDS and Spolsky's language policy model provided useful analytical scaffolding. Irish currently displays characteristics of a language in mid-revitalization: strong policy backing, community mobilization, and increasing intergenerational transmission, yet still vulnerable in certain sociocultural domains. The Spolsky method - language practices, language beliefs, and language management - was particularly illustrative when overlaid with the empirical data. It revealed a growing coherence between institutional strategies, public sentiment, and individual behaviour, albeit with critical gaps in implementation and access equity. Furthermore, the dissertation highlighted a unique tension in the Irish language landscape: the contrast between high symbolic valuation and relatively limited functional use. While Irish enjoys broad legal and cultural recognition, actual day-to-day usage still requires further support. This underscores the necessity of continued investment in infrastructural support, teacher training, curriculum reform, and accessible digital tools - all of which have proven instrumental in increasing usage and shifting attitudes.

One of the most notable conclusions concerns the role of the digital media. As explored in both the literature and empirical data, digital tools such as Duolingo, YouTube content, podcasts,

and Irish-language social media have played a critical role in re-popularizing the language, especially among non-Gaeltacht youth. This digital turn marks a significant departure from previous revitalization waves that relied heavily on formal education and policy directives. The increasing autonomy and agency of learners in shaping their linguistic paths represents an exciting frontier for future efforts. Nonetheless, the research also revealed limitations and areas for further exploration. The small-scale nature of the custom survey means that results cannot be generalized to the broader population without caution. Future research would benefit from longitudinal studies, larger datasets, and more diverse sampling. Additionally, further investigation into the intersection of Gaelic identity and other social categories (such as gender, class, or ethnicity) would yield valuable insights into how revitalization efforts may be tailored more inclusively. As such, this dissertation contributes to the growing body of work evidencing the dynamic evolution of Irish. It affirms that, while structural challenges remain, the language is not in decline - but rather in a phase of transformation marked by creativity, community, and commitment. Irish today is not merely a vestige of the past, but a living, adaptive force with the potential to thrive in contemporary multilingual societies. Through the synthesis of historical context, empirical research, policy analysis, and lived experience, this study has sought to illuminate the path forward for Irish, as well as offer a broader model for minority language revival in the 21st century.

LIMITATIONS, FURTHER RESEARCH POTENTIAL

A clear limitation of this study lies in the limited sample size of the empirical dataset, which, although offering valuable insights, cannot fully capture the broad spectrum of attitudes and behaviours toward Irish in the general population. Future research should aim to significantly expand the number of respondents to improve statistical validity and enable finer-grained analysis across demographic subcategories such as age, gender, educational background, and geographic location. A stratified sampling approach could ensure that underrepresented groups - such as non-Gaeltacht Irish speakers or younger learners - are more accurately represented.

Another potential direction involves incorporating longitudinal data. A time-based approach would allow researchers to track changing patterns in language use and perception across generations, offering a dynamic view of how revitalization efforts evolve and whether they yield lasting effects. While this is already underway with the usual government censuses through the CSO, the research suggest that this phenomenon would be best investigated sooner rather than later. The role of digital environments and online communities in Irish usage also merits more in-depth examination. While this study touched upon technological integration and language learning apps, future inquiries could explore how digital spaces (e.g., TikTok, YouTube, Discord) contribute to intergenerational transmission and the social normalization of the language. While this dissertation touched upon the encouraging rise in digital engagement - such as the popularity of Irish on platforms like Duolingo or the increasing number of Gaelic YouTube channels, podcasts, and TikTok content creators - the current study did not systematically analyze the qualitative impact of these trends on language competence, identity formation, or intergenerational transmission.

Future research could investigate how digital tools affect language acquisition motivation, particularly among youth and diaspora communities, who often lack immediate access to Gaeltacht regions or Irish-medium schools. This also includes evaluating the pedagogical effectiveness of these tools: Do language apps merely build passive vocabulary recognition, or do they foster active fluency? Moreover, emerging technologies like AI language models, virtual immersion environments, or VR-enhanced language classrooms open exciting possibilities for revitalization. Yet, their impact on minority languages remains understudied. These technologies can democratize access to Gaelic, simulate immersion experiences, or provide real-time feedback - but they also risk reinforcing English-centric digital ecosystems unless tailored deliberately. Given the findings of this dissertation regarding the younger

generation's increased openness toward Irish, the intersection between digital-native user habits and language engagement emerges as a particularly fruitful area for longitudinal studies. In particular, understanding how digital usage correlates with offline behaviour - e.g., whether high app usage translates into speaking Irish with peers or attending Irish events - could provide a more holistic view of the digital ecosystem's role in contemporary language revival.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview transcript

The following interview was conducted with a close friend of mine, Andrew Linnane, who is currently enrolled in a history PhD training program at the University College Cork. I asked him for his insights into the topic, given his first-hand experience not just with the language, but more importantly the undergoing shift itself as well, given that he is essentially one of the main “target audiences” at 25-30 yrs old.

The main aim was to present him with the main findings of the paper, both from the data gathered and the observed trends regarding the revival.

The findings and conclusions from the interview suggest an almost complete correlation and validity, further aiding and supporting the stated research questions and goals. It is worth noting that one of the main points he makes is in line with one of the earlier research observations – despite having a healthy size of language speakers, Irish is sorely lacking in usage scenarios when it comes to higher education or any “higher” echelon of language usage.

Author’s note: The transcription below was generated using Microsoft Teams’ auto-transcribe feature, as such it might have some grammatic inconsistencies or other minor errors. I edited it wherever possible, but still worth keeping in mind.

Transcript

8 June 2025, 02:06pm

Nagy Levente Antal 0:13 (N.L.)

OK, should be good testing, testing.

Andrew Linnane 0:20 (A.L.)

Hello.

N.L.0:21

OK, good. All good.

Now, before we get into it, I want to do a really quick legal disclaimer because I have to.

A.L. 0:33

OK.

N.L.0:33

I've sent the teams link because I would like to use its function to auto-transcribe the conversation, which also means that this is technically being recorded. In reality, I just don't have to manually type out the entire thing. Are you good with that or would you prefer to switch to something else?

A.L. 0:50

No, no, no. This is all good.

N.L.0:51

OK, excellent. So hi, I'm Levente Nagy and I'm from the University of Pannonia from the Faculty of Humanities, and I will be your guide today, as it were. If you could just very briefly why what, where are you from? What are you doing here with us now?

A.L. 1:11

So my name is Andrew Linnane. I am going into a PhD in history at the University College Cork and I've been asked to attend this meeting for a perspective from Ireland on your research into Gaelic language revival.

N.L.1:30

Super, outstanding. Now like I said, I don't wanna waste too much of your time, so I'm gonna jump right into it. So I sent over the very basic work in progress, preliminary version of the paper. Did you get a chance to look at the numbers in the second part of it? Just roughly the census data and all that?

A.L. 1:52

Yeah, yeah, I did. I went through it yesterday. Yeah, I got pretty much the main gist of it.

N.L.1:58

So I would like to throw some mainline questions.

Number one would be: My main hypothesis as of past 2-3-4 years give or take, is that Irish specifically, Scottish not so much, but that's a different topic, Irish is coming back in a relatively big way with youth based on these numbers. Question one would be, is this true in your experience, or do these numbers not really reflect reality?

A.L. 2:35

No, no, the numbers are right. When I was reading them, they're pretty much spot on. I mean the terms of you know 18 to 25 years old, there is a massive sort of, I wouldn't even say a push. There's sort of an organic growth in this desire to learn Irish. I mean like a lot of things that you hear young people say in regards to Irish is you know my French and my German you know is better than my Irish.

And people and they sort of lament that and they think, oh, well, you know, I wish my Irish was.

A.L. 3:07

Was better than what it is and there is a definite sense that in contrast to, say, maybe our parents generation or our grandparents generation, we're a lot more open to Irish, whereas you know, even my own parents now or my grandparents would see Irish as something that is tends to be limited to the classroom, to be limited to academics. Whereas there's a big push now even to use Irish conversationally, I mean a big thing now, even on Tiktok and Instagram. Is this concept of the Gael girlies?

So it's it's young girls in, you know, they're 18 to 21 and they make these tiktoks and make these Instagram reels that are speaking Irish and they get a lot of sort of organic engagement. They get a lot of positive feedback from people. So I think there is.

And it's really interesting because this isn't coming from any state-led initiatives. This isn't coming from, you know the government saying, well, we're going to have a push to try and increase Irish usage.

A.L. 4:16

This is something that's coming from young people. It's come, it's it's being sort of developed and pushed by young people. So I think that the numbers that you have there are fairly spot on. In particular, I was really interested in the data you had regarding sort of a positive view of Irish.

Young people are much, much more positive view of Irish then, particularly our grandparents generation, where Irish was just this horrible subject, that you had to learn in school. Whereas we're realising now, no, it's not just a subject that you have to learn in school. It's it's our native language, it's a part of our culture. It's a part of our identity you know, and yeah, there is definitely a massive sort of push in young people today to learn Irish.

N.L.5:07

Excellent, great. I'm glad to hear it because well, two things.

On the latter part, the whole idea of language perception is very much well, as I'm glad to hear it is very much on the change because the main and by main I mean the everyday global perception on Irish as most people, what they remember is that post famine when you emigrate to the US, when you emigrate to whatever European country, the first thing you would do back then is you one drop your language or shed your language and by association shed your identity as an Irishman or Irish woman. I mean there's a, I can't remember the exact paper it was in.

2000 and something so relatively recent-ish.

That went into the idea of the language declined, which I was curious about, and it used a very peculiar phrase, right that it was a gutter speak way back when in the post famine period. It's that was it was seen as a sort of negative mark. It was a blemish if you spoke this language. So very glad to hear that this is changing.

The second part, which I'm also very glad to hear, is that one of the important things you mentioned is that this isn't really state or government funded in the initiative itself, but rather, it's the actual young people themselves, the next generation, as it were, that are pushing this idea.

In conjunction with this question, #2 would be again, I'm trying to keep it very general. Do you think, well, you sort of already answered it, but do you think that a full scale and I'm using this this phrase very lightly. A full scale language revitalization, is that necessarily based on government push or is that mostly based on a cultural push like present case's example is young people pushing this enough, or do you always need some sort of government help, be it legislation? I don't know. Money, education, whatever else. Or can this be done without the upper layers helping, as it were?

A.L. 7:30

I would think that.

It's, it's, it's a, it's a question that I think the answer to it is sort of twofold. On the one hand from what I hear from talking to people, I'm fairly fluent in Irish, myself, what I hear from talking to people who are sort of younger than me is that they kind of lack the kind of foundation of Irish. So they would have the sort of, they would have very basic grammar, they would have very basic literary skills.

I think there would need to be in terms of government led approaches, there would have to

be, in my opinion, a sort of reform of how Irish is taught in particularly in secondary schools. It has changed a lot from, say, the 70s and the 80s where it was by ropes where you just learned tenses and vocabulary and grammar. It is slightly changing towards a more conversational form of education, but I think that change needs to happen.

Just a little bit more so that people feel a bit more comfortable talking. Speaking Irish like I read that in your dissertation about the sort of inferiority people feel when they speak Irish, as if, you know, if you're speaking to a fluent Gaelic or something like that, you might make yourself, you might be worried about making yourself feel foolish, not being able to speak the language properly. So I think in terms of what the government or the state could do is sort of adapt the way the Irish is taught, because it's interesting when you compare Irish language education to say,

education of French or German or Spanish in Ireland, where those European languages are very much geared towards conversational skills, whereas Irish is still taught in, you know, I would say 60% of Irish is still taught the way it was in the 70s and 80s where it's very formulaic where it's very focused on your grammar, your tenses, vocabulary, that kind of a thing.

In terms of this being a kind of organic movement, definitely. 100%.

There used to be so in secondary schools in Ireland there used to be a thing where you would reach the kind of the last year of your schooling and you would spend a month in the Gaeltacht. This is particularly if you did higher level Irish, which is so there's two distinctions in the sort of way Irish is taught you have higher level and you have ordinary level higher level is you have to take higher level if you want to enter into the teaching profession or into. To the civil service.

Part of that was you would spend a month in the Gaeltacht and say my parents generation now would have viewed that with absolute horror. Going to the Gaeltacht was not something to look forward to, it was, you know, even my mother now, who was a teacher and had to do all of this. She had to spend a month in the Gaeltacht. She just has horrible memories of it. But now you have young people. So that sort of just go back. That programme been abandoned now since I think the mid 90s, it's no longer a part of your Irish curriculum to go to the Gaeltacht. But what you see now is a lot of young people are now voluntarily, voluntarily going to the Gaeltacht.

This idea that it's not being forced on them, it's something that they genuinely want to do. There was a programme about two years ago on TG4, the Irish language channel in Ireland.

That showed a group of five or six young people who all willingly volunteered to spend 3 months in the Gaeltacht for the express purpose of they wanted to improve their Irish. So I think that, yeah, as I said, this is a completely organic thing.

There has. I do think there does need to be some kind of state involvement to make the initial sort of foundation of Irish a bit more sound a bit more practical for day-to-day interactions. But in general terms, yeah, this is this is young Irish people saying we need to sort of reclaim our language and not to let it die out.

N.L.11:42

Mm hmm. Excellent. Superb. Thank you. Did a double whammy there. My next question would have been how much role in this does the Gaeltacht play, but you kind of answered it already. So I'm gonna skip this one. One thing I am curious about, however, is that you kind of already brought it up when it comes to academia in Ireland and just so I'm not mistaken, you are Irish Irish, not Northern Irish, right?

A.L. 12:05

No, no, I'm from the Republic of Ireland. Yeah, yeah.

N.L.12:06

Right. OK. So when it comes to academia and just the higher level big quotation marks in society, how much percentage of that is in Irish and how much was it in English just in very broad strokes, what's the ratio in that?

A.L. 12:22

So I so I would say that the only college courses that are taught through Irish are dedicated Irish courses.

So if you so say, for instance, when I did my undergrad, I took English, I took history, I took political science, and I took psychology. They're all taught through English. The only the only classes that have dedicated full language full Irish participation.

Are courses specifically designed to teach Irish. So for instance, even when I was doing my master's degree in history, it was all taught through English.

Even the Irish history modules are taught through English. Going into my PhD in September, it will all be done through English.

A.L. 13:15

I will write everything in English, nothing will be done in Irish.

So even here now in University College Cork, there are several kind of master's degrees that are tailored for Irish language speakers. For instance, there is a degree that combines law and Irish. So that is you get your foundation in legal knowledge and then you are also taught how to practise law through Irish.

But other than that, it is very, very limited.

If it is not sort of a specialised Irish language class, you are not going to get any education through Irish at a third level university here in Ireland.

N.L.14:01

I see. Yeah, that that is kind of what I expected in the sense of from my albeit very limited experience, but I haven't really seen, heard or even read when it comes to looking at papers, there's not much.

In actual written Irish form? So, but then this kind of reinforces that.

Speaking of, how long, just purely at a gut feeling,

How long do you think this will take to change if things go things keep going at this rate with these next generations.

A.L. 14:40

Not in my lifetime. Definitely not, definitely not in my lifetime.

If we're talking about, say, when will we get to a point where

Third level universities are starting to offer, say, a history course through Irish.

I would say it would maybe be my grandchildren, or even my great grandchildren's generation before that's that starts to happen because.

This sort of like revival in the Irish language, particularly among young people, it's it's a relatively very kind of a recent phenomenon. I mean, it's only really been going on maybe the last 5-10 years at a push maybe.

N.L.15:17

OK. Yeah.

Yeah, it's a decade at Max, yeah.

A.L. 15:25

It's about a decade at max because there was just still this this awful kind of stigma around the Irish language that it was just it was one. It was a worthless language. It was dying. It was, you know, a lot of people viewed Irish like they viewed Latin. It's it's it's a dead, dying language. There's, there's no need for us people associated it with bad memories of their education.

A.L. 15:49

No, it'll take. It'll take years. It'll take years. It could take 50-60 years before we start seeing, you know, a resurgence of Irish.

Being taught not just as a subject but as a language through which other subjects are taught in secondary schools, in universities, even in primary schools.

N.L.16:10

I see. Oh, I mean, if you look on the bright side, then you might still have to see it if things continue at pace. But right, one last and then I will, I will let you off the hook. This is more of a semi official. This is one out of curiosity because we have somewhat talked about this previously back in text form. But what do you think is the catalyst behind all this? What's causing all this shift? I mean we have very briefly in past.

N.L.16:40

We just talked about a some degree of social unrest and government distrust and all that, but. Is that the reason behind it? They sort of grasped for identity or is there something else in your opinion like why now and why this much in the new generations? Do you have any insight to that maybe?

A.L. 17:00

That's a very interesting question. I think one, there is definitely this idea of and I know it sounds kind of odd, but there's this idea of the use of Irish as a kind of rebellion against your parents.

This idea that, oh, we're going to distance ourselves from our parents and our grandparents generation by being able to speak the language that they were never able to speak. It's a sort of, if you look at it in sort of, you know, you were juiced down from this kind of broad national image to this sort of self identifying image of you know if we speak Irish, it sets us apart from the older generations.

It's something of like, you know, when I talk to young people who are learning Irish, it's also there's a great sense of like, personal pride and personal kind of satisfaction, this idea that, you know, I can do something that so many people say that, you know, it's hard.

A.L. 18:05

And Irish is a difficult language sure. I'm not going to, you know, I'm not going to pretend it isn't. It's a very difficult language to learn. So being able to speak Irish is definitely a point of pride with younger people. And I think, and this is this is only sort of my own observations, my own kind of opinion, I think post Brexit there has definitely there has definitely been this kind of.

A.L. 18:31

Surge in.

A very kind of distinct Irish identity, because a lot of the issues around Brexit was Brexit was around Northern Ireland was there going to be a hard border with Northern Ireland? Is there going to be a border in the Irish Sea? You know, you had this law. There was this for the first time in a long time. There was this sort of re imposition of British politics into Irish life.

A.L. 18:57

So I think this kind and this and that kind of you know, we didn't react well to that. You know as a people we didn't like this idea that you know once again our you know the future of our island is being decided in Westminster.

So I think this kind of resurgence in Irish language is a resurgence in a form of kind of Irish national identity.

I would also say that nationalism does play quite a large part in Irish language learning.

Young people, especially today, they tend to be more nationalist oriented than say, their parents were. Even their grandparents were, so this idea.

Of learning Irish is a reclamation of, you know, an identity that kind of faded out of Irish existence for a while. You know, there was, there was a politician, Bertie Ahearn, who basically said that Irish society had become an extension of British society.

That we are become massively anglophized.

That you know, there was no great distinction between the cultures of the UK and the cultures of Ireland.

And I think that there is this push to reclaim that kind of national identity. You see this kind of resurgence of a late nationalism you haven't seen in Ireland since, you know, the 70s and the 80s, that kind of nationalism that petered out and fizzled out with the end of the troubles in the 1990s.

Yeah, I think nationalism is playing a sort of huge part in the Irish language revival among young people.

N.L.20:45

Thank you. The point you brought up with Brexit is actually really interesting. I haven't fully considered it, but now that you phrase it this way, I can definitely see it. I mean, from just the top of my head, I would even go so far to say that this is like a delayed push back of sorts against the way back when the first boarding schools were established and the 1st, as you call the anglicization process even started. I can definitely see it as some sort of a delayed counter push and this sort of reclaiming the identity, both in terms of nation and in terms of language and definitely serious connection that you're bringing up. Good, good, good. That might be some extra at the end but yeah, good. Good. Thank you.

A.L. 21:28

Yeah, definitely.

N.L.21:31

Right, these really were only the major was that I wanted to ask you so.

I think this is gonna be it from me. Unless you have something that you wanna add something to. It's not so much shout out, but anything else you wanna convey on me to put in because it has all been excellent so far.

A.L. 21:56

I think that might be it. Just again on the points of, I'll just make one last point on the guilt in particular.

N.L.22:03

By all means.

A.L. 22:07

There's been an expansion in so.

To rephrase that, if you look at maps of the Gaeltacht, you'll see that they decline. They shrink massively from the time, say, till today. The areas of the Gaeltacht.

There has been a growth in. The regions that consider themselves part of the Gaeltacht, it is growing again, which is a huge thing because you know the sort of the Department of Arts and Culture considered the Gaeltacht to be, you know, almost a money sink, you know, why are we investing in regions that are no longer going to exist? And this was, this was a point that was made, say, in the early 2010s, but now the Gaeltacht is getting more funding than ever from the Department of Arts.

You know, the Gaeltacht is growing and I think the fact that the Gaeltacht is growing is to do with this fact that there are more young people visiting us. There are more people who are living in the Gaeltacht to want to speak Irish.

Day-to-day rather than you know, speaking at home with their parents. So I think that, you know, the revival of the revival of the guilt of the expansion, of the Gaeltacht. I think it's just it's a fantastic indicator of, you know, the revival of the Irish language.

N.L.23:25

Absolutely. Yeah, I can. I see it. See that point because again, one of the earliest way back when I when I first started digging into this was that what I described earlier on is that it's seeing that instead of be having one border with Northern Ireland.

There were instead two because the Gaeltacht was almost its own separate, not sure what word to use entity or whatever you want to call it and it's good to see that that is no longer the case, at least not so much.

The case and it is getting the I would say recognition it deserves in both in terms of language and both in terms of everything else to put it bluntly

So. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

A.L. 24:10

Yeah, because there was, there was. See I'm from. I'm from the West of Ireland myself, where most of the Gaeltacht regions are located. And when I was growing up, the Gaeltacht was seen as something that was almost separate from the rest of us. It was sort of this little linguistic enclave that didn't really interact with the English speaking world outside of it. And it was summer that you went to visit, and it was almost like you were in,

A.L. 24:36

Not, I would say, a different country, but like Ireland from a different time so.

That's all shade. Yeah. Yeah. So that's all changed now. So the Gaeltacht are now just completely integrated parts of, you know, the counties on the West of Ireland. So this sort of, you know, linguistic border that existed between the Goethe speaking regions and the English speaking regions, it's completely disappeared now.

N.L.24:41

That was my understanding. Yeah, yeah.

I'm glad to hear it and again hopefully this this does continue because if anything I would say that, yeah, this is the biggest tangible more or less tangible factor and proof that this is happening. It is, is happening at a relatively rapid pace, again, hasn't even been a decade and already there has been so much push and effort and change already occurred.
OK, good. This was a very productive talk. Thank you very much for your time.

A.L. 25:33

Wasn't a problem at all

N.L.25:35

Once again, and yeah, I think I will cut the recording here. I will kill the meeting and I will get back to you in just a moment. Thank you very much for your time. It was my absolute pleasure and I will send it back once I have something more to show. So see you soon.

A.L. 25:48

Perfect. Thank you.

Oh, my pleasure as well. Thank you.

See you soon. Thank you so much.

Nagy Levente Antal stopped transcription

Appendix 2: Quantitative questionnaire (raw text)

1. Please select your age group.*

18-25

25-40

40+

2. Are you familiar with the differentiation of Gaelic languages? (Irish / Scottish Gaelic / Welsh / Breton)*

Yes

No

2. Are you familiar with the differentiation of Gaelic languages? (Irish / Scottish Gaelic / Welsh / Breton)*

Yes

No

For Gaelic speakers

4. Of the following, which language do you speak?*

Irish

Scottish Gaelic

Welsh

British (Breton)

5. Where did you learn the language(s)?*

School (Mainline education)

Language School

Self-taught

Passive learning (media - songs, series, etc.)

6. In what context do you use the language(s)?*

Work

Family

Friends

Hobbies (media)

7. In what capacity do you use the language(s)?*

Words

Sentences

Written text

Oral communication

8. On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you agree with the following statement: "Recent years have seen a noticeable increase in Gaelic language learners and speakers."*

1 (Strongly disagree) – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 (Strongly agree)

9. On a scale of 1 to 5, how popular / "cool" do you consider a Gaelic language?*

1 (Embarrassing) – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 (Very interesting)

For non-Gaelic speakers

10. Are you interested in learning a Gaelic language?*

Yes

No

Maybe

11. Of the following, which option would you most likely choose to learn a language?*

School (Mainline education)

Language School

Self-taught

Passive learning (media - song, series, etc.)

Appendix 3: Raw survey data

Link to raw survey data: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YvxxkJMlwvbMxevt4HU-7sHc8kezdn2O/view?usp=drive_link