

Munsche, Horst Haider: Handbuch des Friesischen / Handbook of Frisian Studies. Tübingen 2001.

Pöge-Alder, Kathrin: Märchen als mündlich tradierte Erzählungen des Volkes? Zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte der Erstherungs- und Verbreitungstheorien von Volksmärchen von den Brüdern Grimm bis zur Märchenforschung in der DDR. Frankfurt am Main etc. 1994.

Ranke, Kurt, ea. (eds.): Enzyklopädie des Märchens. Handwörterbuch zur historischen und vergleichenden Erzählforschung. Vol. 1. Berlin, New York 1977.

Thompson, Suth: The Folklore. New York 1946.

Uther, Hans-Jörg: Katalog der Volkszählung. 2 vols. München etc. 1984.

Warner, Marina: From the Beast to the Blonde. On Fairy Tales and their Tellers. London 1994.

2001

'Is societal bilingualism sustainable? Reflections and indications from the Celtic countries' in Helmut Eberhart & Ulrike Wolf-Knauts (eds)

Migrations, Minorities, Compensation: Issues of Cultural Identity in Europe

(Brussels: The Coimbra ~~Working~~ Group Working Party for Folklore and European Ethnology) pp. 121-42

IS SOCIETAL BILINGUALISM SUSTAINABLE ? : REFLECTIONS AND INDICATIONS FROM THE CELTIC COUNTRIES

Iwan Wriiffe

SYNOPSIS

In north-western Europe a consensus has established itself that bilingualism, is not only good, but desirable, it is the main thrust of this paper to analyse and criticise this consensus. This will be done by defining what we mean by the term 'bilingualism'; which is open to ambiguity, as well as by presenting facts - both societal and historical - to illustrate the workings of 'bilingualism' from the Celtic fringe of north-western Europe (Brittany, Cornwall, Wales, Ireland, The Isle of Man, Scotland).

It is hoped that the criticism implicit in this paper will be the means to come to a better understanding of the way two languages can coexist and will prove of use to those forming multilingual language policies by suggesting more effective and less wasteful courses of action.

AMBIGUITY OF THE TERM 'BILINGUALISM'

One must be wary of an unqualified use of the adjective 'bilingual', few would define any society as bilingual on account of the prevalence of a second language in restricted educational spheres. Wales, commonly described as a bilingual country for example, would never be described as a bilingual country despite the large number of people who have learnt French through education. At the present time English in many countries throughout the world constitutes the 'learned' language, as did Latin many centuries ago in western Europe. But it is only when the 'learned' language begins being used within the country itself, and outside educational and restricted contexts, that we should begin describing the society as bilingual. When 'bilingual' is used it usually implies equal usage and equal fluency in two languages, thus an English person who could only manage a few sentences of French would hardly be accounted 'bilingual'. Even in such states as the Netherlands and Norway, where the adoption of English as a 'learned' language has progressed the furthest, we would hesitate at present to call the societies of these states bilingual (though, of course, it remains a

¹ Throughout this paper I talk of 'bilingualism', the most common form of multilingualism, though what is said about 'bilingualism' can in most cases be stated of multilingualism. For a more detailed look at variations concerning multilingualism see Edwards (1995), esp. pp.55-88 for the different kinds of bilingualism.

those learning the language at school and those who actually speak it as well as the practice by some of describing themselves as Irish-speaking as a political statement. Those interested in prising out the real figures of Irish figures have decided to take account only of the census figures relating to those over 19 years of age, whose schooling is over, and this gives a figure in the Republic of some 70,000 speakers (Ó hÉallaithe 1999 : 10) to which can be safely be added a third of that figure (for those under 19 years of age) which gives some 100,000 speakers, as well as a difficulty assessable number in northern Ireland (20,000 ?) - thus we shall not be far off in setting 150,000 speakers as the ceiling of Irish-speakers in all of Ireland. The figures of the official census however show that there is a much greater number of people in Ireland who have some knowledge of Irish through schooling than those who can actually speak it (though, again, it is likely to be significantly less than the 1,200,000 (25%) speakers, perhaps - if I venture a guess - some 500,000 (10%) people).

A global perspective gives us at present some 1,000,000 (7%) speakers of a Celtic language, within a combined population of some 14,500,000 in the 'Celtic' countries. It clearly follows that the so-called 'Celtic' countries are nowadays hardly Celtic by any objective standard, but are thus called in consideration to their past history as Celtic countries. Since at least 1500 (and even earlier in the case of Scotland and Brittany) every Celtic language has been in marked decline, in social as well as in geographical terms, due to their increasing incorporation into the powerful English and French states where the English and French languages enjoyed official supremacy. This is not the place to chart the various stages in the decline of the Celtic languages from being the languages of well-defined territories and monolingual societies to that of being gradually pushed out by the ever encroaching English/French languages⁷. Suffice to note that the introduction of compulsory universal primary education through official English/French in the 1870s and 1880s can be considered the chief mechanism that transformed the then basically monolingual Celtic societies into the increasingly bilingual Celtic societies of the 20th century (the exception being Ireland where the spread of English had occurred in the 18th century well before the introduction of universal compulsory education - here the spread of English had begun as a predominantly societal rather than educational phenomenon which is reflected in the greater prevalence of idiosyncrasies in Irish-English than in any other variety of Celtic English/French).

7 For more details on the decline of the Celtic languages prior to 1900 see for Welsh Jenkins (1997/1999), Jones (1998), for Breton Humphreys (1993), Broudic (1995), for Irish Hindley (1990), O'Car (1985), for Scottish-Gaelic Dunbar (1983), Wilkins (1994).

The decline of the Celtic languages during the 20th century can be clearly seen by contrasting the figures of table 2 with those of table 1 (note the number of monolinguals in 1900, no longer existent in any significant number since the 1960s) :

TABLE 2 ⁸	ca.1900	number of speakers	% of total	monolingual Celtic speakers	% of total	total population
Brittany	1,400,000	44	840,000	26	3,200,000	
Wales	930,000	50	280,000	15	1,900,000	
Ireland	640,000	15	21,000	0.5	4,500,000	
Scotland	230,000	6	28,000	0.5	4,500,000	

Coming back to the present, we cannot simply place 1 million Celts against 135 million non-Celts. For while this may hold true if we restrict ourselves to a political voter headcount within the administrative areas in which Celts are found, in the economic perspective we must reckon in global terms, since the native English speakers of the Celtic countries are at one with the 320 million or so native speakers of English from around the world, and the exponentially growing number of people who have English as a second language. Furthermore the umbrella term Celtic covers languages distinct and incomprehensible the one to the other (with the exception, perhaps, of Irish and Scottish Gaelic). Thus if we think of the economic potential of the English speaking media market (books, visual and aural media), we are probably facing a discrepancy of 0.5 million Celts to some 500 million consumers of English (Welsh with 0.5 million speakers being the strongest of the surviving Celtic languages). The discrepancy between English and Welsh for a marketable product that uses either language is thus 1 thousand to 1. This situation is not made any the better when one realises that the majority of the 1 million or so Celts are also consumers and producers of English marketable products.

IS BILINGUALISM A NORMAL STATE FOR A WHOLE SOCIETY ?

It is nowadays often stated that bilingualism is commoner than monolingualism, and thus - in contrast to what was hitherto commonly believed - that bilingualism is more natural than monolingualism, if one believes,

8 Sources : Brittany (www.bretagne.com/supplements/histoire/1990131.htm, Broudic 1987 in Humphreys, 1993 : 628), Wales (O'Jones 1998 : 225), Ireland (Hindley 1990, Scotland (Wilkins 210/213/281)

- 2) notwithstanding that a language can be a minority language in some areas it can also be a majority language in other areas, so that Welsh though a minority language in many parts of Wales nevertheless is a majority language over a significant portion of Welsh territory.
- 3) both English in India and French in Switzerland were/are minority languages, yet one would hardly ever see mention of French or English as minority languages since the concept 'minority language' is in practice restricted to languages dominated by another.

I would maintain that all the languages of the world, for various reasons, are hierarchically placed and that the less powerful are dominated by the more powerful, or put in another way, the dominated languages live in the shadow of more powerful languages (so Edwards (1995 : 89-124)). Because of this I prefer the term 'dominated language' to 'minority language' because each minority language is dominated, but not each dominated language is a minority language (domination here ranging from outright banning of the language, through institutional neglect, to the simple dominance by another language through economic superiority).

- Restricting ourselves to the European Union, we should distinguish at least six types of situations where languages are in contact with one another, and which have relevance as to the way in which they are dominated or not:
- 1) dominant language (English, French, German, Spanish, etc)
 - 2) overspill language (Aisatian German, Finland Swedish, Swiss French, etc)
 - 3) 'singular' language (Basque, Breton, Welsh, etc)
 - 4) 'related' language (Catalan, Friesian, Occitan, etc)⁹
 - 5) immigrant language (Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, etc)
 - 6) travelling language (Roma)

From the point of view of dominance there is a tendency for these types to become increasingly dominated from type 1 to type 6. Being an autochthonous language (types 1-4, that is with an associated territory) or an overspill/immigrant language (types 2,5, which enjoys the external support of a stronger heartland) constitutes an advantage that is wholly lacking for type 6 (exemplified by the Roma language of the Gypsies). The two advantages of territoriality and external support means that the advantage type 4 has over type 6 is clear, but is not so clear as over type 5. The similarity of

⁹ Here *vital* I mean by 'related' is related to an official language of the state (for Scottish-Gaelic and Irish, also related, see following note).

type 4 languages to official state languages can be a handicap as they may easily considered as debased forms of the state language by the state as well as by the speakers themselves, on the other hand their similarity to the official language can work to their advantage as it makes integration of non-speakers that much easier as is surely the case between Catalan and Spanish, and, outside the EU, between Ukrainian and Russian. An example of the different position of 'related' as opposed to 'singular' language is demonstrated in the autonomous parts of the Spanish state by the existence of monolingual Catalan signs in contrast to bilingual Basque/Spanish signs (since Catalan, unlike Basque, is not wholly opaque to a Castilian speaker, the Catalan authorities find it easier to implement a monolingual policy). Like Basque the present-day Celtic languages are all 'singular' languages¹⁰ that can look to no external support from stronger heartlands. Much of what follows is specifically relevant to this type of dominated language.

It is widely accepted that in order to preserve the viability of a dominated language in a particular locality it must be spoken by above about 75% of society¹¹. It must always be kept in mind that the percentage able to speak a language is always higher than the percentage who actually use the language, and, furthermore, that the percentage of societal use of the language decreases at a greater exponential rate as the percentage of speakers decrease (that is those who actually use the language increasingly have trouble to meet with counterparts the lower the percentage)¹². All this entails that absolute numbers, while certainly not to be discounted, are not as important as concentrations of speakers in close geographical proximity. This can be readily demonstrated by the high census figures of Irish speakers and the low day-to-day usage of the language.

Having lived and travelled extensively in Wales I can testify that the local percentage of Welsh speakers closely corresponds to the use of the language:

- In areas where Welsh-speakers are below 75% it is wholly unusual for strangers to address each other in Welsh. English-only speakers also comport themselves differently when the percentage is above 75%, for example, it has often struck me when addressing an English-only person in Welsh in Tregaron (80% Welsh-speaking) that the reply would often

¹⁰ It is true that Irish and Scottish-Gaelic are intimately linked, but only with each other, and not with English the true official state language of both countries.

¹¹ The threshold figure of 70% seems to be generally accepted by observers of the Welsh language situation, e.g. Humphreys (1979 : 34), Grant, Williams of Aberystwyth University (Mackintosh, 1991 : 185), and is accorded by Selydd Menter/Wentnau (Iath yn Sir Gaerfyrddin, a 1997 consultancy paper for Carmarthenshire County Council).

¹² Both Humphreys (1979 : 34-35,81) and Fasold (1984 : chap.5) propose formulae to predict actual usage from the potential of given percentages.

TABLE 3¹⁵

	-25%	25-50%	50-75%	+75%	total number of 'communities'
Wales (communities)	532	97	214	55	898
Rep. of Ireland ^a (dist. electoral divisions)	3400	22	18	18	3,458
Scotland (civil-parishes)	871	11	7	4	893
Région Bretagne ^b (communes)					1,335

That is to say, there are only some 80 'communities' in the world where Celtic is a viable native language of every generation of society, but even here there are indications that many young children employ English rather than their native language. Whilst such generational loss of the language is somewhat exceptional in Welsh-speaking communities, Wales suffers an enormous immigration of monolingual English speakers and emigration of young Welsh speakers, to give an idea of the effect of this immigration I call attention to the community of Llanddewi Brefi with over 60% Welsh speakers, but where only 5 out of the 50 or so children attending the primary school came from Welsh-speaking homes around 1995. It will be further noticed that there remains nowhere in Brittany where Breton is the language of the whole community, this situation has developed since the 1950s when there occurred a general failure to transmit Breton to the children so that ever since, with each passing year, Breton has become increasingly a language of old people. Broudic calculates that there may only remain 13,000 speakers of Breton under 40 years of age (or said in another way: some 95% of Breton speakers are over 40 years old, or some 67% above 60 years old).

The coming generation of native speakers of Celtic language are being ever increasingly brought up in a basically hostile foreign environment, and Míkael Madeg, in an important sociolinguistic study (1986) on the raising of children in Breton in such an environment, concludes that in order to ensure transmission of the language it should be the only language used in the home which is the only way the dominated language can hope to compete with the power of the hostile linguistic environment outside the home. One should never underestimate the power of society in shaping

the perception of the growing children and those wishing to rear their children at home with a language other than that of the locality should consider that in normal monolingual circumstances children most usually speak with the accent of their neighbourhood rather than with that of their parents, thus demonstrating the conformist power of peer-pressure on a growing child. The results of parents leaving the task of transmitting the language to schools are that such children brought up in that way tend to have a passive knowledge and a lack of identity with the language (and often left wondering why they are made to learn what is a language irrelevant, not only to the surrounding society, but also - in practical terms - to their parents). And even when brought up exclusively with the dominated language at home, there will tend to be in the language of the children a marked interference from English/French, dominant in nearby communities, amongst visitors, and on the television. Of course, it has probably always been the case that older generations corrected the language of younger generations, but it is likely that the qualitative changes in the native speech is being accelerated to an unprecedented level by the disintegration of the traditional societies.

BILINGUALISM AS A WEAKNESS

Even in areas where the Welsh percentage is above the 75% threshold there exists a tendency to address people one doesn't know in English. Travelling on a bus in one of the strongest Welsh-speaking areas of South Wales at Crosshands about 1990 I witnessed a middle-aged woman questioning the other passengers as to whether they spoke Welsh and having got a positive response from the dozen or so passengers on board (including the driver) exclaimed in Welsh: "Isn't it shameful that we don't speak Welsh to each other!". For many years it has been customary for speakers at various gatherings in Welsh-speaking areas to speak in English: "For the sake of our English friends ... " - a phrase that rankles with many supporters of Welsh as the 'English friends' may be as little as one individual in a gathering of two hundred people. Since everyone can speak English/French - these being the only languages taught in schools until recently - it is assumed by the remnant Celtic speakers that these are the most appropriate media for conversation with strangers. This was demonstrated to me by the behaviour of my old neighbour in Brittany who was to most intents and purposes monolingual in Breton, but who upon meeting

¹⁵ Sources: Wales: 8. Northern Ireland: http://cenus.uk.uk/cdu/gopher/censushelp/codes1/Region/Breagne/laevy/gemeu_gallicton.com/pages/engsel; Republic of Ireland & Scotland: ipsc.comm.from.census.office

¹⁶ Whilst the administrative definition, institution, below the county and county borough level (the nearest thing to a county) is a district level division, which like the ward in the United Kingdom, is a primary administrative division, there are no equivalents. The number of wards in Northern Ireland is 566.

¹⁷ The number of communes in Lower Brittany (Finistère) is attached to the neighbouring administrative region (Finistère) is 237.

a foreigner, listening to a tongue that defeated me utterly to a understand a word. / I grew resentful as the conversation bubbled on. For what could be the purpose of this strange Welsh tongue? I wondered. Did it provide the key to a treasure store of epic literature? Did its use increase the culture of the Welsh race? Or was it simply that this half-defiant secretive, mediocre people clung to a useless language to bolster their nationalism? That they were a kind of overgrown Ku Klux Klan masquerading in bardic robes in bardic ceremonies. / The conductor laughed heartily, the young girl smiled irresistibly, doubtless wondering at my sober looks. / 'I don't speak Welsh,' I said. / They were friendly people. / 'I'd no idea Welsh was spoken like this ... that it was in daily use.' / The conductor laughed again. 'There now,' said the girl, 'in all the schools it is taught!'" / Yes, yes, said the conductor quickly, 'in my home there is not a word of English spoken.' / I was astonished. / We read the English newspapers,' said the dark, secretive-looking passenger. / Their voices rose high to a peak at the end of their sentences. I shook my head. 'It seems strange to me, I don't know why you need this language. French, German, Spanish would all be so much more useful.' / Welsh is our language,' they said. / But they could tell me no purpose that it served. They agreed that they expressed themselves equally well in English. And their English was quaint sounding, musical, pleasant to hear. 'Yes, yes,' they would say, and always there was a note of surprise, high pitched." [Thomson 1937 : 47-48]

In a visit to a colliery in the nearby Gwendraeth valley the same journalist reveals more of his resentment at the existence of Welsh :

"We walked interminably. Here and there men were at work repairing roof or walls, their eyes staring white in their black faces, searching me, while their tongues unloosed their strange, high-pitched, questioning language. / What do they say? / 'Just want to know all about you,' said the miner. 'Who are you, what you want down here?' He chuckled quietly to himself. / 'Can't they speak English?' / 'Yes, yes.' Said the miner quickly, 'Yes, yes, they can.'" [Thomson 1937 : 45]

Such examples, and many more, of a sad catalogue of petty intolerances does lead one to question whether any kind of equality is possible whilst one section of a society is unilaterally allowed to remain monolingual : can the English monolingual lion sleep with the Welsh bilingual lamb?

¹⁰ This deserves comment. Since the late 1920s Welsh had begun to be employed as a medium of education in a number of primary schools in the strongest Welsh-speaking areas, but in secondary schools Welsh was only taught as a subject and sometimes in English. Even such paltrious provision stood in sharp contrast in Welsh-speaking areas to the utter prohibition in schools before the 1914-18 war.

CONCLUSIONS

There is an exaggerated expectation by many that since the Celtic languages are not so stigmatised at present as they were 50 years ago they can be revived outside the areas where they are still traditionally spoken - despite the fact that all moves to nurture the language in its heartlands have, without an exception, failed so far. The increasingly popular misconception that people should speak a language because it is their 'heritage' (the concept of 'heritage' being open to manipulation of historical sources) misses the fundamental point that people primarily speak a language because it is in their surrounding environment, and if an environment for a language disappears then the natural societal trend is for them to neglect that language. The contemporary existence of Celtic languages is not due primarily to nationalistic sentiments but because these languages were the ordinary means of communication with other human beings in these areas, and whilst a sense of national identity does help the maintenance of these languages it is only through being a practical tool of communication of a society that a language can prosper. No amount of social networking will surpass the transmissive effect of a territorial concentration of over 75% native speakers, unless that networking becomes like unto that of a 'ghettoised' fundamentalist Jewish or Christian sect (something which I do not believe would be acceptable to the open and mobile society of the present-day speakers of Celtic). One should have no illusions : speaking a Celtic language at the present-day is a struggle, a struggle that many speakers, preoccupied as they are by the many other ordinary problems of life, decide to abandon as an unnecessary complication to an already over-complicated life. An acclaimed Welsh-language pop singer, Dave Edwards of Datbygu, stated in the explanatory notes of a 1990s CD of his :

"Full decoder for those who didn't have to learn to say the same thing in two different languages - Over ..."

I, and some others, may disagree with these sentiments, but this is a matter of individual choice, and Dave Edwards' views on bilingualism may be shared by a larger number of Celtic speakers than had been thought of hitherto. If individuals choose to change their language this is - and should be - their prerogative, but one should not cease to condemn or try to improve unfair governmental and societal circumstances which often govern how this 'choice' is arrived at. The burden of being a bilingual speaker

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Atchison, John & Carter, Harold, 2000. *A Geography of the Welsh Language*, 1961-1991. UWP, Cardiff
- Ball, Martin J. & Fife, James, 1993. *The Celtic Languages*, Routledge, London.
- Betts, Clive, 1976. *Culture in Crisis: the Future of the Welsh Language*, Ffynon, Upton
- Broudic, Fañch, 1987. '550,000 Brezoneger a zo en Breiz-izel, med piau int?' in Brud Nevez n.104 pp.2-54
- Broudic, Fañch, 1991. 'Ar brezoneg hag ar brezonegerien e 1991: eun enkask bet kaset da benn gant TMO-Ouest' in Brud Nevez n.143 pp.20-60
- Broudic, Fañch, 1995. *La Pratique du Breton depuis l'Ancien Régime jusqu'à nos jours*. PU Rennes, Rennes
- Broudic, Fañch, 1996. *L'interdiction du Breton en 1902: la IIIe République contre les Langues Régionales*, Coop Breizh, Spézet
- Broudic, Fañch, 1998. 'Ar brezoneg hag ar brezonegerien e 1991: eun enkask bet kaset da benn gant TMO-Régions' in Brud Nevez n.207 pp.5-59
- Broudic, Fañch, 1999. *Qui Parle le Breton Aujourd'hui? : Qui le Parlera Demain?* Brud Nevez, Brest
- Broudic, Fañch, 2000. research website: <http://perso.wanadoo.fr/fanchbroudic/DANVEZ/>
- Durkacz, Victor Edward, 1983. *The Decline of the Celtic Languages*, John Donald, Edinburgh
- Edwards, John, 1995. *Multilingualism*, Penguin, 1995
- Fasold, Ralph W., 1984. *The Sociolinguistics of Language*, Blackwell, Oxford
- Fennell, Desmond, 1973. *Sketches of the New Ireland*, Association for the Advancement of Self-government, Galway
- Fennell, Desmond, 1977. *Where it all went wrong: the Irish language movement* in Planet Feb-Mar pp.3-13
- Fennell, Desmond, 1981 a. 'Can a shrinking linguistic minority be saved?' in E.Haugen & J.D.McClure & D.Thomson *Minority Languages Today*, Edinburgh UP, Edinburgh
- Fennell, Desmond, 1981 b. 'The last years of the Gaeltacht' in *The Revision of Irish Nationalism*
- Fennell, Desmond, 1983. *The State of the Nation: Ireland since the Sixties* Ward River, Swords
- Fishman, Joshua A., 1991. *Reversing Language Shift*
- Gardiner, Nick c.1995. *Goodwill, Language Planning and Language Policies*, Dyfed County Council, Carmarthen
- Gawne, Phillip, 2000. 'Aithne na nGael: life after death?' in McCoy & Scott pp.139-43
- George, Ken & Broderick, George, 1993. *The revved languages: Modern Cornish and Modern Manx* in Ball & Fife pp.644-63
- Hindley, Reg, 1990. *The Death of the Irish Language*, Routledge, London
- Humphreys, Humphrey Lloyd, 1979. *La Langue Galloise: une Présentation: vol.1*, Studi, Rennes
- Humphreys, Humphrey Lloyd, 1991. 'The geolinguistics of Breton' in Williams & Ambrose pp.96-120
- Humphreys, Humphrey Lloyd, 1993. 'The Breton language: its present position and historical background' in Ball & Fife pp.606-43
- Jenkins, Geraint H., 1997. *The Welsh Language before the Industrial Revolution*, UWP, Cardiff
- Jenkins, Geraint H., 1999. *Gwnewch Bopeth yn Gymraeg*, UWP, Cardiff
- Jones, Dot, 1998. *Statistical Evidence relating to the Welsh Language 1801-1911*, UWP, Cardiff
- Jones, Robert Owen, 1997. *Hir Oes i'r Iaith*, Comer, Llandysul
- Llywelyn, Emyr, 1976. *Adfer ar Fro Gymraeg*, Adler
- Mackinnon, Kenneth, 1991. *Gaelic: a Past and Future Prospect*, Saltire, Edinburgh
- Mackinnon, Kenneth, 2000. 'Neighbours in persistence: prospects for Gaelic maintenance in a globalising English world' in McCoy & Scott pp.144-55
- Madeg, Milkael, 1986. *Desevel Bugale e Brezoneg*, Brud Nevez, Brest