Irish and Other Languages in Ireland's Education System

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****DRAFT COPY****

Le tacaíocht ó
Foras na Gaeilge

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Introduction

In December 2017, The Department of Education and Skills in Dublin published *Languages Connect/Déanann Teangacha Nasc,* its Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education, 2017-2026 (DES 2017a). The consultation on the strategy took place in 2014, but the June 2016 Brexit decision in the United Kingdom (UK) to leave the European Union introduced a new dimension to the debate on the role of foreign languages in the Republic.

When launching the Strategy in December 2017, the Minister for Education and Skills Bruton Richard Bruton declared that the plan "sets out a roadmap to put Ireland in the top ten countries in Europe for the teaching and learning of foreign languages (DES 2017b). This aspiration links the Strategy to the Minister's highly ambitious aim "to make Ireland's education and training service the best in Europe within a decade". Already, as Minister for Enterprise and Employment in 1996, Mr Bruton had expressed the belief that poor language skills hindered the mobility of Irish workers and that foreign languages should be compulsory in primary school (although he failed to recognise that most of the mobility was to anglophone countries). (Irish Times 1996)

The strategy states from the outset that it does not consider the role of Irish or English but aims to increase the number of post-primary schools offering two or more foreign languages. Bizarrely, for a strategy that aims to make 'Languages Connect', it fails to make any attempt to connect with Irish. While acknowledging that through learning Irish "our children are exposed to bilingualism from a young age" (DES 2017b), the expectation of possible advantages to be transferred from this experience is scaled down. The strategy hopes to move from 'an official but lame bilingualism' (as described by the 2008 *Language Policy Profile, Ireland*, published jointly by the Council of Europe and the then Department of Education and Science) "to become a truly multilingual society, where the ability to learn and use two and more languages is taken for granted and fostered at every stage of the education system and throughout lifelong education" (DES 2017a, p8). While this might be interpreted as encouraging the learning of two foreign languages after Irish, the Irish version suggests encouraging "úsáid teanga iasachta amhain agus níos

mó" (DES 2017, p1) (encouraging the use of one or more foreign languages). It is hoped that one of the European Union's basic principles of linguistic diversity will be achieved:

> Linguistic diversity is a fundamental component of European culture and intercultural dialogue, and that the ability to communicate in *a language other than one's mother tongue* is acknowledged to be one of the key competences which citizens should seek to acquire. (Brussels, 20 May 2014) (Author's iralics)

The strategy makes no recommendations for Primary where the focus is on the development of pupils' competence in English and Irish. Nevertheless, it says that Primary schools may offer an additional modern language outside of the normal school day if they so wish.

The strategy hopes to achieve the Barcelona European Council goal of 'Mother Tongue plus Two':

> …the Barcelona European Council meeting of 15-16 March 2002, [which] called for action *"to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age",* as well as for the establishment of a linguistic competence indicator (Author's italics)

But this is where the problem arises – the word 'foreign'. It is not 'two further languages', or 'a language other than one's mother tongue', but 'two foreign languages'.

In the summary for post-primary it provided to EUROSTAT, the Department of Education and Skills summarises:

> Irish is a second language to the vast majority of pupils but is not considered a **foreign** language. At lower and upper secondary (ISCED 2 and 3), a **modern** language is not a compulsory element of either the required curriculum or of the State examinations (Emphasis by author)

EUROSTAT: National Education System - Provisions regarding language learning:

So, Irish is not a 'Foreign Language', nor is it a 'Modern Language'. It should be noted that in Northern Ireland Irish is included in the 'Modern Languages' area of the curriculum and the word 'Foreign' is not used. In the final analysis, what kind of a thing is Irish in the Irish educational system? And if the Irish Department of Education itself is confused and confusing in its classification, how can others understand the place of Irish in the education system and society? The position of Irish in Ireland, in Europe, and in the mind of Irish officialdom and language policy as well, has been entrapped and severely impeded by this foreign language fixation, its 'Foreign Fetish'.

I was working in Uppsala University, Sweden, in 1994 when that country voted to join the European Union. There was a discussion at the time about the place and future of Swedish in the Union, a small country and a small language ('Lilla Sverige'), but a country which had chosen and promoted English as its international medium (thereby diminishing the relevance of other languages). The former Swedish ambassador to the European Union wrote an article on the possibilities and challenges facing Swedish in the European Union. He recognised Sweden's English language advantage, but he had a word of warning:

> **…**vi inte kan tänkas följa det irländska exemplet och avstå från att svenska blir ett officielt EU-sprak. Detta är i grunden en demokratifråga.
>
> **…**we cannot contemplate following the Irish example and neglect to have Swedish become an official EU language. It is basically a question of democracy.
>
> Ingmar Karlsson: *Svenska Dagbladet* 29/8/1994

Countries joining the European Economic Community and later the European Union, for example the Baltic states from 2004, have been resolute in their support for their national languages following their independence from the Soviet Union and their joining the European Union. Estonia and Latvia, for example, with small

indigenous-speaking populations, have been able to use the opportunities offered by independence and then by the European Union to reinforce the vigour of their languages. In contrast, the Irish government in 1973 did not have confidence in the nation's ability to educate and provide translators and timidly elected that Irish would have the lower status of "treaty language". This was only upgraded to an official and working language in 2007, although it was temporarily derogated as a working language until the 1st of January 2022 (Eur-Lex). The designation of Irish as a "treaty language" meant that only the treaties of the European Union were translated into Irish, whereas Legal Acts of the European Union adopted under the treaties (like Directives and Regulations) did not have to be. Ireland's language policy is a matter of bemusement and often, frankly, scorn internationally, and the new post-primary strategy, *Languages Connect/Déanann Teangacha Nasc* is unlikely to change this.

The new strategy bases its rationale for multilingualism on Ireland's apparent bad standing for languages in surveys and statistics reports such as Eurobarometer and Eurydice/Eurostat produced in close cooperation with the European Commission. According to the department of Education and Skills, "Irish citizens lag behind most of their fellow European citizens in language competence". One can discuss these Eurobarometer and Eurydice/Eurostat figures but the Republic of Ireland is being rated so poorly in languages competence when compared with many other countries in Europe for the single reason that Irish is not included in the data.

There are many countries in Europe where a significant percentage of their citizens have competence in second, third and sometimes more languages (Eurostat 2019). But, undoubtedly, English is far ahead of all others. What is presented as European or worldwide multilingualism increasingly fails to extend beyond globalised English**.** For the younger age groups:

> At EU level, almost all students (97.3 %) learnt English during lower secondary education in 2014. In addition, the proportion of students learning English at primary level has increased at EU level by 18.7 percentage points since 2005, reaching a total of 79.4 %.
>
> Eurydice Highlights – 2017 Edition

In some countries, in Scandinavia for example, English is not considered to be a curricular choice language, but rather a compulsory core subject. Table 1 gives the Eurostat (2019) percentages of upper secondary pupils across Europe who studied the main languages in 2018:

Table 1 **Which are the languages most commonly studied by Upper Secondary Students in Europe in 2018**

English	86.8%
French	19.4%
German	18.3%
Spanish	17.5%
Russian	2.4%
Italian	2.3%

With Eurostat as source, Devlin in Pew Research (2020) list the most popular non-English languages learned in school in the 27 European Union states, plus Liechtenstein, Norway and North Macedonia (Appendix 1). Data were not available for anglophone Ireland or the UK. In most countries in Europe, English is followed by either German or French as the second most widely taught foreign language. Norway and Sweden have linguistic, historical, economic and cultural links with Germany, yet both, distancing themselves from Germany after the Second World war, have made a holiday lifestyle language choice, choosing Spanish after English. 18% of school students in Sweden and 10% in Norway learn Spanish after English, 8% and 9% respectively learn German and 6% and 4% learn French. France is the only other country where neighbouring Spanish is the most popular choice (33%) after English, followed by German (12%). Spanish, and Italian to a lesser degree, is the third or fourth most widely taught foreign language in a significant number of countries, especially at upper secondary level. Former Soviet block countries, the Baltic states and Bulgaria, favour Russian. The Baltic states all have large Russian-speaking communities and particularly close links to Russia. Over 30% of students in each Baltic state learn Russian, but none more than 35% of total enrolment.

In aggregation, 91% of all students in primary and secondary education in Europe in 2017 studied English; 15% French; 11% German; 9% Spanish; 2% Russian (Devlin, Pew Research 2020). Furthermore, competence in English across all age groups will increase as the current school generation grow up. At third level, university modern languages departments other than English for utilitarian purposes are being closed down across the world. On the whole, what is increasingly emerging is not multilingualism, but Anglophonisation. This is a word rarely encountered in English, but which, significantly, is established in, for example, French. Anglophonisation 'like globalization, often works against the intercultural, polyphonic outcomes desired by international educators' (De Wit et al.). In most of Europe third language multilingualism is of little importance as long as one has a competence in English. In only a few countries is the most popular language after English learnt by more than 40% of their post-primary students. Indeed, in Sweden, so often held up in Ireland as an example of good practice, the mother tongue plus two ideal has had limited success. In the educational arena, the situation of second foreign language teaching in Sweden has been described as "catastrophic" (Cabau-Lampa).

Historical and ethnic circumstances dictate other choices. So Italian is the main non-English language in Malta (22%), Danish in Iceland (36%) and Swedish in Finland (56%). Russian is the second most popular language after English in Estonia, reflecting the Russian-speaking population in the country. In contrast to Ireland, the official state languages, Finnish in Finland, Slovak in Slovakia and Estonian in Estonia are listed, reflecting the Swedish, Czech and Russian-speaking minority populations respectively. It is worth noting, for example, that Finnish is not listed for Estonia despite their Finno-Ugric linguistic links and other social and commercial connections.

Internal linguistic diversity can affect which languages students learn in school. In Belgium with two official languages, some distinct regions are French-speaking while other areas are predominantly Flemish- or German-speaking. In the Flemish-speaking community, nearly all students learn French while most students in the French-speaking communities learn Flemish (Dutch). A similar environment can be found in Luxembourg. In some countries regional languages have co-official

status. In Italy, for example, we have French in the Aosta Valley; German in the South Tyrol and also Ladin in some parts of the same province and in parts of the neighbouring Trentino and Slovene in the provinces of Trieste, Gorizia and Udine. Belgium and Luxembourg are the only countries where English is not the most commonly learnt language in school. It should also be noted that English is considered a neutral option in some circumstances where internal linguistic diversity is not always welcomed. Having limited Dutch and Finnish, this author has been rebuffed for beginning to speak French in Flanders or Swedish in Helsinki, both nominally bilingual areas in countries which are often cited in Ireland as examples of good practice and success. Similar cases can be cited across Europe where English is now the lingua franca of commerce and tourism.

Multilingualism in Ireland

According to the Languages Connect strategy, with Eurobarometer and Eurydice/Eurostat figures as sources, "Irish citizens lag behind most of their fellow European citizens in language competence". One can debate these figures, but is the Republic of Ireland really so poor in languages competence when compared with other countries in Europe as discussed above? Ireland is at the bottom of the list because as only official EU languages could be considered as second languages in the data, until Irish became an official EU language it was not included due to the confusion surrounding its official status. It is concerning that this self-inflicted limitation has left Irish students and citizens at a disadvantage when applying for positions in the European Union through the entry competitions as they could not offer Irish to fulfil the second language requirement. It has also limited awareness of and respect for Irish in the broader social and commercial domains nationally and internationally. In contrast, the Scandinavian countries, for example, have been able to benefit in European recruitment through recognition of their national languages, a pro-English education policy, and the high level of mutual intelligibility of their languages (excluding Finnish) as third options. This has led to the marginalisation of the main continental languages like French and German and the hegemony of English in the EU.

The learning of English in Gaeltacht schools has never been included in the reckoning, statistical or otherwise. How can it be, since English in Gaeltacht schools is not considered a foreign language? Yet the population of the Gaeltacht can be considered among the most successful fully functioning bilingual communities in Europe. Neither are the bilingual competences of pupils in Irish-medium schools taken into account. In 2020, there were almost 55,000 pupils in Irish-medium schools primary and post-primary schools outside the Gaeltacht and over 11,000 in the Gaeltacht. There is also a vibrant nursery school movement across the state. Eight per cent of primary pupils attend Gaelscoileanna and four per cent of post-primary students attend Gaelcholáistí in the Republic of Ireland. These figures show that about half the Irish Medium primary pupils transfer to English-medium post primary schools. While this rate of transfer is due to some extent to the pupil's personal choice or that of their parents, the lack of post primary Irish medium schools is the most obvious obstacle. Appropriate language provision for pupils transferring to English-medium post-primary schools is not always guaranteed and they may find themselves in a classroom which does not acknowledge their linguistic competence. Nevertheless, these pupils as more capable peers can provide a valuable boost to the other pupils in the Vygotskian social-constructivist perspective whereby they can take the role of '*knowledgeable other*' to support and motivate their classroom comrades in the linguistic zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky 1978, p. 86).

As a mandatory second language from lower primary upwards throughout the rest of the country outside the Gaeltacht, Irish in education has been for a century one of, if not the most far-reaching and comprehensive national second language learning programmes in Europe. Looking beyond the Language Connects strategy's negative characterisation of Irish learning in Ireland as 'lame bilingualism', one can see a population of language learners and 'New Speakers' (Walsh) with varying levels of competence across the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Does the Irish population over- or underestimate their individual competence in Irish? For many people, their personal assessment of their Irish language competence is most often based upon their confidence in the productive skills of speaking or writing Irish, which for many learners can be quite limited, whereas the

receptive skills of listening and reading can be quite highly developed, giving a greater connection to the language than often imagined. Shane Barry, writing in the IRAAL journal Teanga 27, summarises that “Even among the Irish speaking cohort there is an unconscious hierarchical acknowledgement that certain speakers are more apt than others, resulting in capable Irish speakers… underestimating their abilities (Barry 2020: 189)

Language learners often misinterpret their competence levels in languages. For many years I coordinated the post-primary Modern Languages PGCE in Queen’s University Belfast which every year receives a number of post-graduate applicants from the Republic with at least a 2:1 degree in French, German or Spanish. At the end of the formal interview, since the ability to offer a second modern language (which in the North includes Irish), merits extra points, applicants are asked if they have competence in another language which could be offered at Key Stage 3. [PAGE 16?] Applicants from the Republic are reminded that they have studied Irish for up to 12 years and that this could be to their benefit. The usual reaction was one of surprise and protestations that they don’t know any Irish. With gentle persuasion and the reassurance that they have nothing to lose, the interview conversation proceeds. To their surprise, the applicants were usually able to hold a conversation to a reasonable level. Indeed, it can sometimes happen that their communicative Irish was better than their degree language. Over the years, I only recall one applicant who was incapable of holding a basic conversation in Irish. The general pattern was an overestimation of their foreign language ability and an underestimation of their competence in Irish.

The achievements of learners from outside the Gaeltacht in all domains of society is testament to a positive outcome. What is described as a ‘lame bilingualism' has produced a population of competent second language users, ranging from a linguistically passive audience of *An Nuacht* to the literary productive authors of modern Irish language literature. It is highly unlikely that any other curricular language can ever achieve a comparable level of community bilingual competence through the education system. In addition, the experience of learning Irish gives experience and transferrable skills which can be built upon rather than ignored.

The European countries with the highest percentages of students learning a language other than the main five are those where, like with Irish, the alternative language is compulsory in education. These include Swedish in Finland and Danish in Iceland both of which are compulsory and are counted as 'foreign languages' for the purpose of education statistics. As well as noting the inclusion of these languages in the European statistics, comparisons between the school experiences of learning them with that of Irish would make interesting case studies. In Luxembourg likewise, although the official languages are French, German and Luxembourgish, French and German are counted as foreign languages. Like Ireland, Belgium has two official languages, French and Flemish/Dutch. Yet, despite having a bilingual status enshrined in the Irish constitution, as we have seen, Irish is not acknowledged in the statistics and attitudes which Languages Connect is based upon.

> In 2008 the Department of Education Language Policy Division published a report promoting a plural-lingual approach to language education. The report noted that the number of languages being offered to students for examination had risen from 5 in 2005 to 19 in 2008 (OECD, 2009b, 73-74).

The list of subjects for the Leaving Certificate examination includes the following curricular language subjects: Irish, English, Ancient Greek, Arabic, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Spanish and Russian. In 2019, 59,656 students sat the Leaving Certificate, including 2,774 who sat the Leaving Certificate Applied. 48,334 students sat Irish at Higher, Ordinary and Foundation levels combined. 55,094 sat Mathematics (Higher, Ordinary and Foundation) and 54,694 took English (Higher and Ordinary). The foreign curricular modern languages were sat at Higher and Ordinary levels (41,025 entries). There were 91,038 language entries in total including Irish and newcomer languages (N=1,679), an average of 1.53 languages per student.

Curricular Language Learning at Leaving Certificate

Language	Higher	Ordinary	Foundation	Total	Percentage of total entries (59,656)
Irish	23,176 (48%)	22,324 (46%)	2834 (6%)	48,334	81%
French	15,654 (67%)	7707 (33%)		23,361	39%
German	6247 (73%)	2297 (27%)		8544	14%
Spanish	5646 (73%)	2065 (27%)		7711	13%
Italian	361 (76%)	112 (24%)		473	<1%
Russian	458 (97%)	12 (3%)		470	<1%
Japanese	208 (76%)	66 (24%)		274	<1%
Arabic	168 (87.5%)	24 (12.5%)		192	

At Junior Certificate level in 2019, 87% of the 64,330 students entered sat Irish (55,859) at one of Higher, Ordinary or Foundation levels. 48% (31,070) sat French, 19% (12,013) sat German, 19% (12,099) sat Spanish, and fewer than 1% (511) sat Italian, This comes to a total of 111,552 language entries (55,693 foreign curricular language entries) at Junior cert in 2019, an average of 1.73 languages per pupil which together with the 1.53 at Leaving Certificate should leave Ireland towards the top of the European language learning table.

When one compares the percentages of entries at Leaving and Junior Certificate levels of languages other than Irish with the Eurostat figures for languages other than English discussed above (Appendix 1), it is clear that Ireland's education system compares very favourably with the rest of Europe. A large majority of Irish students learn a European language not as an L2 but as an L3 and third level students have, for the most part, spent thirteen years learning Irish. Indeed, an argument could be made for Ireland having one of, if not the most diverse and strongest foreign language learning systems in Europe. Since the UK is the common comparator country for so much of Irish life, one should also compare the Irish Leaving figures in languages with GCE A-Level entries as the matriculation examination for entry to university. Out of a total of 745,585 A-level entries in 2019 there were only 26,615 modern languages entries, 3.5% of the total. These comparisons are not generally appreciated in Ireland and certainly not in Languages Connect.

The CEFR as a Linguistic Competence Indicator

The 2002 Barcelona European Council meeting recommended "the establishment of a linguistic competence indicator". The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was developed by the Council of Europe as a guideline to describe achievements of learners of languages across Europe. The six reference levels range from A1, a Breakthrough or Beginner/ Basic User, through B1/B2 Independent/Intermediate User to C2, Mastery or Proficient Level User (Council of Europe, 2013). The CEFR is widely accepted as the European standard for grading an individual's language proficiency level. The comparative European assessment is based on the second language competences of 14-16 year old pupils:

> The percentage of pupils aged 15 or, where appropriate due to national circumstances, 14 or 16 years old, who attain the level of *independent user* in the second language studied.
>
> The term *independent user* corresponds at least to level B1, as defined in the Common European Framework of Reference for language competences (CEFR)

(EUR-Lex 2014)

Level B1 (Independent User) is defined as follows:

> Can understand the main points of clear standard input in familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

Miost students sitting the Leaving Certificate in foreign languages, normally after five/six years of post-primary study, would appear to achieve a standard corresponding approximately to a high A2, low B1 on the CEFR scale, with limited communicative competency in a prescribed, quite narrow range of transactional topics and little structural knowledge to facilitate individual language generation.

Recognising that Ireland benefits from a long established tradition of bilingualism and that taking account of developing research, theory and practice, “the new Primary Language Curriculum aims to further promote bilingualism and foster and develop transferable language skills between Irish and English from an early age” (2016 Curriculum), one can also ask how do the B1 objectives align with the Irish language level of pupils in the Republic’s schools, pupils in Irish-medium schools and pupils at Junior Certificate level in English-medium schools, or even younger? One could contend that a high percentage of pupils, having been exposed to Irish in school since early primary, would achieve Level B1 in Irish, enough certainly to significantly lift Ireland up the league tables and change the discourse on Irish pupils’ language competences in some or all of the four language learning skills, Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.

European Languages Portfolio

In tandem with the CEFR, the Council of Europe's European Languages Portfolio (ELP) can be introduced to effectively motivate pupils and integrate Irish and foreign languages learning. The ELP aims:

- to support the development of learner autonomy, plurilingualism and intercultural awareness and competence;
- to allow users to record their language learning achievements and their experience of learning and using languages.

Several accredited versions of the ELP are in use in Ireland. For example, primary and post-primary versions were developed by Integrate Ireland Language and Training for use in schools with non-English speaking pupils who are learning the language of the host community. Harris & Ó Duibhir (p69) discuss how this resource can be adapted for Irish. The Modern Languages in the Primary School Initiative developed a bilingual English/Irish version. Other examples are available.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

The 2019 Primary Language Curriculum recommends the adoption of a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach which is being promoted as 'an effective way to increase exposure to Irish by creating authentic contexts for children to use the language' *(DES 2019, 41).* The term CLIL was introduced in 1994 by Professor David Marsh of the University of Jyväskylä in Finland. It involves the teaching of subjects and life skills to students in a new language, using the target language for a curricular purpose, so that the language becomes a means to an end rather than an end in itself. The focus is not on language learning, but on acquiring new information.

While the term 'CLIL' is relatively recent, the concept of CLIL has been used long before 1994, particularly in Ireland. Indeed, it could be regarded as a continuation and updating of the strategies that have been in use for teaching Irish as a second language since the Modh Díreach at the beginning of the twentieth century and the 'long tradition (in Ireland) since the 1920s' is recognised (Eurydice 2006:15). So, in the 1999 Curaclam na Gaeilge (p3), 'Moltar an Ghaeilge a úsáid mar mheán cumarsáide go neamhfhoirmiúil i gcomhthéacs an tseomra ranga agus

na scoile de réir mar a oireann' and the 1999 Primary Language Curriculum advised that:

> In schools where English is the medium of instruction, it is important also that children see Irish used as a natural means of communication in the daily life of the class and the school. This is accomplished through the regular use of Irish as an informal means of communication. Irish can also be used as a medium of instruction in other carefully selected areas of the curriculum. Above all, whether in informal contexts or during the language lesson, the fostering of the child's enthusiasm for and enjoyment in using the language is a central goal of the curriculum.
>
> (DES 1999b, p44)

The cross-curricular opportunities with Irish are recognised in Northern Ireland. In 1974, the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI) published the Primary Education Teachers' Guide, and in the chapter on 'A Second Language' the advantages of Irish in Northern Ireland's cultural and linguistic environment are emphasised:

> In dealing with the teaching of Irish in the primary school, consideration can be given to certain environmental factors which bear on the subject in Ireland. Unlike other languages, Irish does have immediate historical relevance for school pupils here. Surnames, Christian names, names of towns, counties, rivers, fields and numerous other geographical features are in most cases derived directly from Irish. Indeed, the majority have still preserved the distinct Irish phonetic form to this day, e.g. Shankill, Knock, Belfast, Sean, Nuala, Erne, Lagan, Armagh, Fermanagh, O'Neill, MacShane, Devenney. In everyday conversation in town and country children here make use of words and idioms which are obviously peculiar to our language environment and cannot be overlooked in a consideration of the teaching of Irish. Since children here are in relatively close proximity to Irish-speaking areas they can familiarize themselves with Irish sounds and speech without serious difficulty.
>
> (DENI, 1974, p. 106).

This is CLIL before the term and a reminder that Irish is the most suitable second language in English-medium primary schools to benefit from its application:

> These factors are of considerable help in the teaching of Irish and confer certain advantages which no other second language can claim to the same extent in Ireland. (ibid)

While devised for language enrichment in mainstream schools and embedding language learning in a second language, the CLIL approach now encompasses both English-medium and immersion education (McKendry 2006) in a range from weak to strong bilingual education (Baker 2016). Gaelscolaíocht, where subjects are taught through the target language, reflects a strong version.

Language Learning and Acquisition

Applied linguistics recognises three variables or criteria for success in learning languages, whether immersion or second language learning:

> Essentially, language achievement in immersion education, when compared to subject teaching, can be attributed to three fundamental variables of successful second language acquisition namely, the extent of time, the intensity of use and the quality of exposure to the second language.
>
> McKendry *An Tumoideachas: Immersion Education* . CnaG. 2006. p5)

'Extent of time' is the number of years of exposure, primarily within the education system. Ireland's strength in multilingualism stems from the fact that Irish is taught from the start of primary education onwards. The Modern Languages in the Primary School Initiative was ended due to concern about the workload in the curriculum and about the capacity of the sector and teachers to service it. With the demise of the Initiative in the Republic and the strategy's distancing itself from the primary phase, exposure to foreign languages will be over a shorter number of years during the post-primary phase of education.

'Intensity of use' is how frequently the pupil encounters the language, in and out of school. How many foreign language lessons would they have per week in a crowded curriculum timetable that already includes Irish? If two foreign languages are taught, there will only be an inadequately few class periods available for each language, frustrating progress in all languages.

'Quality of exposure' traditionally depends to a great extent on the pedagogical and target language competence of the classroom teacher. While modern technology and greater travel opportunities have certainly enhanced the potential of the classroom and target language environment, the language competences of current graduates is a matter of concern. I say this having interviewed hundreds of applicants over the years, from Northern Ireland and the Republic for the Modern Languages PGCE, the initial teacher education qualification in the United Kingdom and I find it difficult to recall many PGCE applicants from the Republic who were able to conduct a sustained quality conversation in French. Taking these variables into account for English-medium schools in Ireland, there is only one language that comes close to fulfilling those variables for a significant percentage of students and across the ability range, namely Irish.

Language Diversity and Choice

And which foreign language should one choose? This issue does not arise much elsewhere in Europe because of the predominance of English. But there is a remarkably long list of foreign languages on offer to Irish post-primary schools – French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Japanese, Arabic, Chinese, and now the languages of the newcomer pupils, Polish, Lithuanian, etc. There is the danger for Irish that, with so much choice, as the French saying goes, 'on va noyer le poisson dans l'eau - the fish will be drowned in water'. Schools could end up with a widely diffuse and disorganised array of languages internally, regionally and nationally and Irish would be the loser. Mother tongue English plus two foreign languages plus Irish would result in a loss of focus with pupils ending up having a fragmented language learning experience and will be extremely challenging, particularly for those pupils for whom the promise of 'jobs in Europe' is unlikely to

bear fruit. There will be less class time and focus on each language, with an intellectual overburden for many pupils and little appreciation of the value and importance of the transferability of skills, particularly from Irish to L3.

It is interesting to see that the Strategy rekindles the Languages Other Than French (LOTF) debate:

> • The proportionate uptake of the languages in the system is unbalanced. French accounts for over half of all foreign language sits in Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations.
>
> • The traditional dominance of French in the system.
>
> • One of the most striking features of the data is the predominance of French.
>
> (Languages Connect)

There is the danger of the same situation arising as has happened in Britain and Northern Ireland, where language choice becomes a competition, not only in the classroom but also in the staffroom. A linguistic civil war, or war of friends, Cogadh na gCarad. So, for example, Spanish has improved its position in Northern Ireland schools, but this has been due in no small extent to undermining other languages, as exemplified by these quotes from curriculum officers promoting Spanish:

> "French has had its chance, it's time to do something else"
>
> "German is too difficult for the primary school"
>
> "The problem is Irish; if we could get rid of it"

In the anglophone world, one cannot foretell which foreign language will be 'useful' in the future when today's pupils go into the world of work. So, 20 years ago, who could have foretold that German would have practically disappeared from schools in Northern Ireland and Britain. Or, having studied French, Irish and Spanish at school (plus Latin), how could I have foreseen that Swedish would be the first language that would provide me with a real salary?

As one cannot foresee with much accuracy at primary or secondary level which languages will be useful in the future, one can regard language learning in school, indeed at university, as a bridge between English and whichever languages one encounters later in life. Hawkins (1981, p.22) argued that modern language learning is an apprenticeship in how to learn any language, including the mother tongue and this is how the inspectorate in England viewed learning languages in the period before the national curriculum:

> The language learnt at school… will provide an apprenticeship in foreign language learning, so that those pupils who in later life need or wish to acquire competence in a different language already have confidence, some idea of the objectives to be attained and some of the skills required. (HMSO, 1987, §10)

Comenius, the 17th century Czech philosopher advocated textbooks written in native languages rather than Latin and gave his name to the European Union educational project which aimed *'to help young people and educational staff better understand the range of European cultures, languages and values'* (European Commission, n.d.). Comenius encouraged students to learn their neighbours' languages. In a globalised world, the borders have become blurred. Travel, media and technology bring languages from across the world into the classroom. But just as for school students in Northern Ireland, Irish is the most obvious *'neighbour'* language, so also for pupils outside the Gaeltacht in the Republic.

The commercial and social arguments for learning languages have to contend with the emergence of English as the international lingua franca. There is now a widespread belief in the Anglophone world that *'English is Enough'*. This mindset leads school pupils and people in general to believe that learning foreign languages isn't worth the bother and contributed to the decision to end compulsory language learning after Key Stage 3, Age 13/14). In the Republic, however, the argument is frequently made that it is Irish that isn't worth the bother and that we should be learning foreign languages instead. Indeed, one often gets the impression from some discourses that the population of the Republic would all be plurilingual if they did not have to learn Irish. Nevertheless, while the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) in its Education and Skills Survey (2012) reported that nearly three quarters (72%) of businesses said they value foreign language skills among their employees, particularly in helping build

relations with clients, customers and suppliers (39%), only 2% preferred Modern Languages as a degree subject (CBI 2012, p. 47). IDA Ireland noted in 2012 that "most companies seeking people with language skills are looking for native speakers or the equivalent." This means that they seek to employ "foreign nationals who are already living in Ireland, Irish people living abroad, Irish people who have studied linguistics abroad, newcomers or a combination thereof" (Framework for Consultation on a Foreign Languages in Education Strategy for Ireland, August 2014 [Strategy Consultation Paper])

The denial of recognition of Irish as a working language in the EU has led to relatively few Irish employees being employed in the European institutions. Multilingual employees with competences in foreign languages in the international teams in administration or customer service in the global technology and other sectors in Ireland, as temporary appointments or long-term newcomers, come mostly from abroad. Businesses prefer to employ foreign Native Speakers as they can more efficiently deal with non-English speaking clients. There is no shortage of speakers of other languages available with good English language competences and often, importantly, with other marketable skills, knowledge and experience. Similar views are expressed in, for example, the British Academy's *Lost for Words* (2013). One can also note that many of the newcomer languages are of limited economic relevance to Ireland and any employment or economic or benefit will be gained by newcomers rather than the 'Old Irish', if that is the appropriate phrase to counterbalance the term New Irish.

Irish language interests must broadcast the message that, in real terms, utilitarian arguments that are at least as equally valid can be made for Irish as for foreign languages, considering the economic opportunities within the island of Ireland as well as professional opportunities abroad (academic, translation, etc.). Williams (2000) looks at some of the arguments surrounding reasons to teach Modern Foreign Languages in Ireland and Great Britain and claims there are serious defects in the argument on grounds of vocational usefulness. He claims that such an argument is invalid in the workplace unless someone is very competent. Will a school leaver with GCSE or Leaving French, German or Spanish really be able to cope competently? (Williams, 2000, p. 17). "Even in terms of utility, the case for the usefulness of teaching foreign languages can be called seriously into question" (Williams, 2000, p. 17). Lawes

joins the debate, commenting that the vocationalism surrounding language learning and education *per se* diminishes its status (Lawes, 2000, p. 41). As well as making the case for attainable employment opportunities in Irish through projects such as *Do Ghairm le Gaeilge* (Foras na Gaeilge and GradIreland), language apprenticeship and the cultural and environmental factors referred to above in the 1974 Primary Education Teachers' Guide are *'of considerable help in the teaching of Irish and confer certain advantages which no other second language can claim to the same extent in Ireland'* (DENI, 1974, p. 106).

The broad commercial opportunities aside, the societal and humanist arguments of identity, cultural self-worth and validation for the language have not lost any of their relevance and importance and constitute a real advantage for the language in education and society. The importance of a language apprenticeship and the development of language awareness and transferable language skills through Irish in school in order to promote openness and flexibility in language learning throughout life underline how attitude and motivation as well as academic aptitude are central to acquiring language competence and confidence in preparing students for whichever opportunities or language requirements the future might hold.

Newcomer Languages

Emigration rather than immigration has been the historic pattern for the island of Ireland but the Republic experienced rapid economic growth in the 1990s as a result of the so-called 'Celtic Tiger' boom and became an attractive destination for immigrants from across the world. It was the 2004 EU expansion, however, with the addition of eight Central and Eastern European countries to the EU, plus Cyprus and Malta, that led to the greatest change in immigration patterns, particularly from the former Soviet Bloc countries in Eastern Europe. Membership of the EU means that people have the right to move easily from one member country to another to work or to live. Ireland was unusual among western European countries in setting no numerical limits to admission to its labour market from the accession countries, following the example of the United Kingdom which miscalculated the expected numbers, and Sweden which had an ideological tradition of welcoming immigrants and refugees. This led to largescale, unplanned-for immigration into Ireland.

Large numbers of immigrants began to arrive from countries such as Poland and Lithuania and later from Romania who joined the EU in 2007 together with Bulgaria, followed by Croatia in 2013.

The Republic of Ireland was severely affected by the economic crisis of 2008, resulting in largescale emigration of the indigenous citizens, especially the young, but immigration from the EU and elsewhere remains high. Ireland now has a sizeable immigrant population, many of whose native language is not English, let alone Irish. The highest birth rates in the EU in 2019 were recorded in Ireland at 12.1 per 1000 residents (Eurostat July 2020). In 2009, a quarter of all children born in the Republic were born to mothers who had immigrated from other countries (The Journal). Immigrant communities now make up over 11% of the population and "these new Irish bring with them their own languages from almost two hundred countries around the world" (Languages Connect p5).

Tonkin describes a global tendency towards *'individual bilingualism and multilingualism, the creation of a language ecology that allows an individual to move in and out of overlapping linguistic codes with relative freedom'* (Tonkin 2003, 326).

The linguistic and cultural landscape in Ireland, North and South, has changed radically with the arrival of so many newcomers introducing their languages and cultures, a new *'linguistic dispensation'* (Aronin & Singleton)

The Languages Connect strategy recognises the value of the immigrant languages to their respective communities and their potential to enrich the host society, although how this new diverse resource manifests itself to the benefit of society is not clearly defined.

> These immigrant communities are providing Ireland with a rich and diverse source of new languages. They need to be supported in maintaining their own languages, which constitute a new resource, as yet largely untapped.

In response to the new circumstances arising from immigration, the government has taken significant steps to promote the integration of legal immigrants into Irish society and manage refugee resettlement. These proactive efforts include education, particularly English-language support and instruction, integration in the workplace and support of local integration initiatives.

Discussions around newcomers in the international literature distinguish between policies promoting either assimilation or integration. Neither of these words are mentioned in the strategy document but integration appears to be the aim. Integration typically involves merging or incorporating newcomers into the host society while encouraging them to maintain their own cultures, and importantly for our concern, languages. Assimilation, on the other hand, requires immigrants to adopt the customs and language of the host society. This is historically what has happened to Irish speakers who emigrated. Assimilation also occurs in minority language contexts, where the minority community is expected to conform to the majority language community's demands. This is often the case in Ireland where Irish speakers, even in the Gaeltacht, have difficulty in accessing services in Irish.

Cummins has highlighted the distinction between Additive Bilingualism and Subtractive Bilingualism. In Additive Bilingualism a student's first language continues to be developed and their first culture is valued while they are learning their second language. These students often have opportunities to use both languages inside and outside of school and are encouraged to develop a desire to maintain both. Subtractive bilingualism, on the other hand, is when a pupil's second language is learnt at the expense of their first language which is eroded and lost over time. Under subtractive bilingualism pupils have fewer opportunities to practise their first language and may even feel that their first language and often their culture are not welcomed in class. Cummins (1994) quotes research that suggests that students experiencing an additive bilingual environment have greater success than those whose first language and culture are devalued by their schools and wider society. The model proposed in the strategy for newcomers is integration with additive bilingualism.

The State Examinations Commission provides examinations in what are referred to as the non-curricular European Union languages. These are not offered as part of the normal school curriculum but students can be examined in one of the non-curricular languages if certain criteria are met. The policy is in response to Article 149 of the Treaty of Nice which states that "Community action shall be aimed at developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States." The bilingual European Baccalaureate is the model for the non-curricular language examination papers. To be eligible to sit this examination, candidates must:

- Be from a member state of the European Union
- Speak the language in which they opt to be examined in as a mother tongue,
- Have followed a programme of study leading to the Leaving Certificate
- Be taking Leaving Certificate English

The numbers availing of the right to gain the mother tongue qualification in 2019 are given in Table XX. The numbers of students with a background in one of the A8 countries who joined the EU with the expansion of 2004 clearly predominate.

Subject	**2019**
Dutch	17
Portuguese	116
Polish	780
Latvian	62
Lithuanian	177
Romanian	340
Hungarian	51
Czech	12
Slovakian	18
Bulgarian	16
Croatian	61
Modern Greek	13
Others with 10 or less candidates *	16
Total	**1,679**

From 2022, Chinese (simplified script), Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese will become curricular languages at higher or ordinary level. Senior cycle students can study the Mandarin Chinese curriculum with no prior knowledge. The standard expected for Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese is similar to that for the current Leaving Certificate languages. Given their competences in their home language, it could result in pupils from newcomer backgrounds gaining an advantage over indigenous students.

As well as maintaining their immigrant community language, the strategy quotes the EU's integration principle that "acquiring the language and culture of the host society should be an important focus" for migrants (2004). (p46). The Irish state has been proactive in supporting this for English, but not for Irish. So, for example, the Department of Education funds Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) whose mission statement is: "Through education and training, to empower people of other cultures to achieve a place in Irish society". Its main activities are:

1. To co-ordinate the provision of English language training for adult refugees and to support English language training provided for adult asylum seekers by the VEC and other agencies.
2. To provide a programme of support for teachers in primary and post-primary schools responsible for the English language development of non-English-speaking immigrant pupils.
3. To participate in consortia locally and internationally that bring IILTs core functions into interaction with closely related domains of activity.

David Little of Trinity College Dublin, who has long been to the forefront in supporting the language education of immigrants in Ireland, underlines the importance of the language rights of immigrants as well as their needs:

> The language rights of refugees are of two kinds. On the one hand, they share with all ethnic minorities the right to preserve their own language as a central element of the individual and group identity they have brought with them to Ireland. …..On the other hand, refugees have language rights in relation to the community of which they have become temporary or permanent members. Specifically, if they are to be integrated into Irish Society, every reasonable effort must be made to help them develop an appropriate level of proficiency in English; for without such proficiency, they cannot enjoy free access to Irish

society in general and to education, training and employment in particular (Little, 2000. P1).

Integrate Ireland Language and Training was also involved with the Southern Education and Library Board in Northern Ireland in a notable project "Together Towards Inclusion: Toolkit for Diversity in the Primary School" (2007). This joint North-South initiative aimed to provide assistance to schools in creating an intercultural learning environment and was distributed to all schools on the island. Substantial provision of English language classes for asylum seekers and refugees has been organised by the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and many organisations such as libraries, information centres, religious orders, and other organisations work with newcomers and members of ethnic minorities.

As well as ensuring that newcomer acquire competence in English, the strategy recognises that one of the challenges in developing an inclusive multi-lingual, intercultural society in an era of rapid change is to "acknowledge, appreciate and celebrate the cultural heritage unique to each different group whilst at the same time realising that this is contributing to a shared collective awareness of Irish identity, which is constantly evolving". (IES 1).

The DES 2010 **'Intercultural Education Strategy, 2010-2015'** aimed to ensure that:

1. all students experience an education that "respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society and is conducted in a spirit of partnership" (Education Act, 1998).

The strategy states that "in a changing, multicultural and multilingual Ireland, knowing and being aware of the languages and cultures of our immigrants is important for social cohesion (P13). Page 56 6. (***2 Framework for Intercultural Education)***. Education providers in particular, it says, have a leading role to play "in creating an inclusive society, as they represent the main opportunity for young people of migrant and host communities to get to know and respect one another" (EU, 2008:3). This suggests that as well as respecting the individual immigrant's language, there should also be an attempt to foster knowledge and respect of the

numerous other immigrant languages and cultures in the classroom and society where learning from each other is the norm.

The optimal aim is a bi- or multi-directional integration rather than a unidirectional understanding of integration (see figure XX). Current practice in Ireland principally follows the unidirectional model, focusing on ensuring that newcomers acquire English with little regard to the other newcomer languages or, it would appear, to Irish. Multi-directional integration should encourage each individual incomer group to appreciate the others. Just as there is no such language as 'foreign', there is no one 'foreign' culture.

Educators should be encouraged to ensure that 'inclusion and integration within an intercultural learning environment become the norm'. The promotion of language awareness in education and society will be required to achieve this. Examples of good practice on language awareness can be found in, for example the work of Deirdre Kirwan which has been recorded by Little and Kirwan (2019). But while Little recognises "that Irish belongs not just to Ireland's but to Europe's linguistic heritage" (Little 2000), the position of Irish does not seem to be given any substantial or serious consideration and other authors writing on the integration of newcomers through access to English make no mention of Irish (e.g. Faas et al.2006).

The strategy emphasises the importance of English for economic migrants and recognises the diversity of languages and cultures brought in by newcomer individuals and communities. What remains to be considered, however, is the place of Irish and its culture in this 'constantly evolving' Irish identity. Partnership and inclusion is a two-way process and Machowska-Kościak, for example, documents the negativity of some newcomer pupils and students to life in Ireland and its culture. The Irish language is not mentioned in her article.

But beyond language awareness, how many of the 'Old Irish', are learning or are likely to learn Polish or Lithuanian, etc.? A quick survey of adult and lifelong learning courses offered in Eastern European languages showed little if any interest in indigenous Irish learning of Polish, Estonian, etc. The European Baccalaureate is not intended for the natives. As 'a resource as yet untapped', the introduction of these new languages into the Irish education system and society will have a limited effect on and benefit for the host community. One can ask if diversity is a one-way

journey towards competence in English and, additionally, to what extent does the goal of social cohesion as expressed in the Strategy and emerging in practice encourage the learning of Irish among the New Irish?

Many Eastern European newcomers are from countries where, when faced in history with, for example, russification or germanisation policies, language preservation and promotion was central to their political, social and cultural history. The situation of Irish may seem shocking for many newcomers coming to Ireland since language preservation was central to much of their own history and identity. In 'After the Ball' (2003:1-2), Fintan O'Toole cites Orlando Figes (1996: 72-3) on how many other countries, the Baltic states for example, have, like Ireland, struggled to secure their independence and cultural identity against larger neighbours on the 19-20th centuries:

> The native language had survived only in the remote rural areas (the native élites had been assimilated into the dominant linguistic culture)…During the nineteenth century, linguists and ethnographers collected together and standardised these dialects in the form of a written language with a settled grammar and orthography. Ironically, even if the peasants could have read this "national language", most of them would have found it hard to understand, since it was usually based on just one of the dominant dialects or was an artificial construction, a sort of peasant Esperanto, made up from all the different dialects. Nevertheless, this creation of a literary native language, and the publication of a national literature and history written in prose, helped to start the process of nation-building, and made it possible, in future decades, to educate the peasantry in this emergent national culture.

The shortcomings of independent Ireland's response to linguistic and cultural challenges are manifest and some reflection upon how other small states have managed these challenges could be instructive. But, when it comes to immigrants, despite the contrast between cultural development in their native countries and Ireland, as economic migrants many newcomers unfortunately do not appear to rate the Irish language as a priority for themselves or their children. Large scale exemption from Irish in school could exacerbate alienation from the indigenous language and

culture. This disengagement could lead to resentment of Irish and Irishness/Ireland. It is also worrying to read of newcomers who take on board the anti-Irish tropes extant in the country while extolling the benefits of diversity and multilingualism. So, for example, a newcomer mother 'with a passion for languages' whose daughter attends primary school and also attends a Saturday school where she learns both Spanish and Polish 'believes learning a second language from primary school is imperative and can't understand why it is not part of the system here'. She 'knows children learn Irish, but it is like Latin, a dead language' (Irish Times. May 18. 2016). Unfortunately, such anti-Irish language attitudes are not isolated and could develop into a form of reverse racism. Even prior to the EU expansion in 2004 I received anonymous hate mail execrating Irish from a newcomer in response to a letter regarding Irish in the EU that I had published in the Irish Times in my professional role as director of NICILT.

Fortunately, however, we have encouraging examples of how newcomers can be positive about Irish. The iMeasc network was set up by a group of Irish-speaking immigrants and citizens of immigrant background in Ireland in order to counter attempts to use immigrants as an argument against promoting Irish or using Irish to create obstacles to immigrants. Ariel Killick, one of the founders of the organization, wrote:

> Immigrants had already been used by people only too ready to ditch Irish, to argue that a traditional aspect of Irish multilingualism should be further demoted in favour of languages newer to Ireland, and comments such as "We're all Europeans now, we should learn Spanish instead of Irish", or "More people in Ireland speak Chinese than Irish"; and "Compulsory Irish is racist", were becoming more familiar. We saw what many Irish people didn't, engaging immigrants and immigration against Irish in this way set immigrants up to be scapegoated in future for a demise in the language and played directly into the hands of those who could contribute to creating the dire scenario we sought to prevent (Killick 2006:95).

In Northern Ireland Gael Linn developed a project of particular potential in 2007. Entitled Szacunek–Meas ('Respect'), it aimed to promote a greater understanding of Polish language and culture amongst the local community in the districts of Armagh and Newry. The project won a Council of Europe European Award for

Languages and a special award for the promotion of languages in the community. The judges commented:

> The success of the project and the pride of the participants in their achievements were evident during the visit. The project provides an intellectual and cultural stimulus for them and fosters mutual respect for the cultures and communities
>
> (CILT 2008)

It should be understood that while there is the challenge and opportunity for the host population to learn about and from the various incoming cultures, it is also essential that newcomers, while retaining a positive appreciation of their ancestral identity, and the various other incomer identities surrounding them, also make a determined effort to integrate with the local population and culture. However, the primary onus to promote an integration that includes Irish does not lie with the immigrant population, but rather with the policies and practices of the Irish government and wider Irish society.

In discussing language competences of the indigenous Irish and newcomers we can distinguish between multilingualism and plurilingualism:

> …the term multilingual is used to describe a country, place or institution that uses several languages and the term plurilingual is used to describe an individual who speaks several languages.
>
> In everyday life, confusion between these two terms is common. However, from a linguistic point of view, it is important to make this distinction, and this has been highlighted by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe. (Alphatrad)

Much is made of Ireland becoming a multilingual society, but this often appears to be mainly due to or possible through newcomers with the local population considered to be generally monolingual. If the presence of Irish is recognised, however, the country is already elevated to a more plurilingual society

EXEMPTIONS

Department of Education regulations allow students to apply to be excused from studying Irish in English-medium primary and secondary schools. It is claimed that a student will only be given this exemption in very limited circumstances. These are if a student has lived abroad or does not speak English and for students with significant learning difficulties. Students in special schools and in special classes in mainstream schools may also be exempted if they present at or below the 10th percentile in either Word Reading, Reading Comprehension or Spelling. Despite stating that an exemption is to be granted in limited circumstances only, the Department's research report in 2018 on Review of Policy and Practice in Relation to Exemptions from the Study of Irish found that about 40% of exemptions were incorrectly awarded (Tuairisc.ie Dé hAoine, Nollaig 7 2018).

Following a public consultation in 2019, revised criteria for granting exemptions from Irish took effect from the beginning of the 2019/2020 school year. There are to be only certain limited and exceptional circumstances in which an exemption may be granted and the authority to grant an exemption has been delegated to school management. In 2019, 11% (6,464) of the 58,787 students who sat the Leaving Certificate were granted an exemption from Irish. But in 2020-2021, despite the revised criteria, an increase to 6,686 students in post-primary education were granted an exemption from Irish.

Under the two distinct categories for exemption, cognitively challenged pupils and newcomer/returned pupils, 'Integration' and 'Inclusion' are keywords in the department's aims, yet they are double-edged words, leading possibly to exclusion and exacerbating segregation through exemption. While there are compelling and legitimate cognitive reasons for exemption for some pupils/students, the system has evidently been erroneously applied with, for example, parents previously pressurising principals through certain psychologists (p43) now putting pressure on school principals, which must often leave them in an invidious situation.

The high level of exemption from Irish due to 'significant learning difficulties' is out of step with international statistics and good practice where we commonly see people with learning difficulties who can communicate in two or more languages.

Strategies to support pupils with, for example, dyslexia in second language learning are well established globally but the criteria for granting an exemption from the study of Irish in the case of pupils/students with learning difficulties appear to descend to the lowest possible denominator. It often appears that minimal or no effort is made to support and encourage pupils to participate in the learning of Irish. As well as international good practice one should also compare with the Irish learners of all abilities in Gaelscoileanna in Northern Ireland and the Republic, where language learning support for pupils with learning difficulties is the norm.

The report illustrates the shortcomings of current practice, serving neither pupils, parents, schools nor wider society. Where intervention or support are deemed appropriate, it should be within a wider perspective of how a pupil can profitably access the whole curriculum, not just Irish. 'Phonetic' difficulties are often cited against Irish, yet the Irish phonic/phonemic structure, based upon *caol/leathan* contrast and phonetic mutations, is relatively stable when compared, for example, with the phoneme/grapheme relationship of English orthography (hybrid origins) or French with silent letters and a proliferation of phonetic manifestations, for example for phonetic cardinal 2[e] and 3[ɛ], in morphology and syntax. Awareness of Irish phonics and *An Lárchanúint* should be ensured during Initial Teacher Education.

NEPS psychologists emphasise the benefits of L2 learning for all, including SEN pupils and the need for caution in excluding learners (p75). But granting blanket 10% has only led to further dubious demand and is contrary to international practice and research. The international research cited on exemptions (Ch.9) is predominately from Anglophone settings. Broader international experience underlines the value of L2 learning in special schools and the preference to include children with SEN in mainstream. The benefits of second language learning for all, including SEN pupils (p74) is emphasised as are the many different ways of working with second language learning for lesser ability pupils. Teachers have access to many strategies to motivate pupils, including individually tailored materials and being flexible with the curriculum and the pupils.

Good practice can be shared across English, Irish and foreign language pedagogy, as can awareness of international strategies and research as exemplified for example by the Association for Language Learning (all-languages.org.uk).

Research and good practice recommend and illustrate positive approaches to inclusive language learning rather than encouraging exemption. The Executive Summary (2005) of a European Commission document on Special Educational Needs and language learning stated that: “All young people in the European Union, whatever their disability, whether educated in mainstream or segregated schools/streams, have equal rights to foreign languages education”. We can replace ‘foreign’ here with ‘second’.

What is particularly striking is the very large number of students with an exemption from the study of Irish who sat an examination in a foreign curricular language. In 2016, 67 per cent of Junior Certificate students with an exemption from the study of Irish sat an examination in a foreign language. If these students were exempted from the study of Irish by reason of a language learning disability, their study of foreign languages is, to say the least, inconsistent.

There are of course the instances of ‘certain limited and exceptional circumstances’, where cognitive difficulties justify limitations to the curriculum on offer, for Irish and one would argue also for other curricular areas. These exemptions depend upon individual circumstances and appropriate professional judgement. In an inclusive, integrated primary and post-primary curriculum, schools can make individual provision for Irish with emphasis on oral/aural skills and cultural awareness. The revised curriculum for Irish eases some of the literacy (reading, writing) demands while encouraging aural/oral skills. The Bonnleibhéal *Ab initio* post-primary Communicative Irish would encourage participation and build upon recommended good practice of cross-curricular primary Irish. *Ab initio* Gaeilge Chumarsáideach should also obviate the dubious practice of exempted students taking up foreign languages. Post-Primary Newcomer students should avail of *ab initio* Irish and many will also profit from the home language option. Post-Primary support for EAL could be timetabled against curricular Foreign Language slots rather than Irish, allowing benefits of trilingual education (English, Irish, Home language) with access to an inclusive experience of the existing bilingual host cultures. In May 2021 Minister for Education Norma Foley invited expressions of interest to introduce a foreign language or Irish sign language on a pilot basis in primary and special schools. Could and should there be an opportunity here to widen

the project to include those primary pupils in special and other schools who have been exempted from Irish?

The Executive Summary (2005) of a European Commission document on Special Educational Needs and language learning states that: “All young people in the European Union, whatever their disability, whether educated in mainstream or segregated schools/streams, have equal rights to foreign languages education”. (www.languageswithoutlimits.co.uk/Resources/EUextracts.pdf)/ In Ireland, this goal can be most widely achieved through second language access to Irish. Members of the Dyslexia Association of Ireland have expressed doubts about teaching Irish to pupils with special educational needs, but we can note the conclusion of Jill Fernando of the British Dyslexia Association:

> Taking into account the cognitive and social benefits that come with language learning, we would be doing children with learning difficulties a great disservice to deny them the opportunity to acquire some of those benefits too. Jill Fernando, British Dyslexia Association.pdf (all-languages.org.uk)

When it comes to newcomers, one must ask if the exemption rules for Irish in education actually diminish the possibility of inclusion, promoting English and newcomer language bilingualism, but excluding Irish. Parents of EAL/Newcomer pupils (p44) “had little interest in Irish language or in their children learning the language”. This reflects immigrants’ economic and social priorities and possibly the linguistic policy environment of their countries of origin, for example the negativity towards Russian and German in many European countries, but the reproduction of such negativity should not be fostered within the newcomer pupil/student generation. The policy of exemption from Irish at school could marginalise the language and its heritage from the newcomer experience. Diagnosing special and newcomer needs to justify exemption from Irish could increase alienation and foster social exclusion. The European Union 2012 report on Education and disability/special needs notes “It is important, therefore, to scrutinize all categorization systems carefully, asking questions about whose interests are being served in the identification of difference, and whether the life chances of particular groups of children are being enhanced or diminished as a result” (European Union, NESSE report, 2012: 25). Any opportunity

to reinforce inclusion into wider Irish society and culture can be welcomed and, in summary, good practice and research recommend and illustrate positive approaches to Irish in inclusive language learning rather than encouraging exemption from the language.

Education cannot Compensate for Society

While focusing here on language teaching and learning in the education sector, one cannot rely solely on education. Basil Bernstein argued in the 1970s that "education cannot compensate for society". While his focus was on social class and language development and use, the argument that schools cannot bring about fundamental social change without taking account of wider social issues is relevant to the situation of Irish. Other than official documentation and road signs, there is little public or commercial presence of Irish, indeed the use of Irish in advertising would appear to have declined over the years. There is a campaign to provide bilingual packaging for goods manufactured in Ireland, although ironically Irish is more likely to appear currently in international packaging along with other languages than on Irish products. In a technological world which breaks down physical barriers to give access to other languages, Irish has been left behind. One can access television programmes and films with subtitles in multiple languages which allow enjoyable and stress-free input. RTÉ and TG4 do not provide subtitling in Irish to English or Irish programmes. Anything in Irish is subtitled in English which serves to promote English-language literacy in the Gaeltacht and beyond, but no subtitling is done in Irish to English-language programmes, thus denying learning opportunities to Irish learners and language development to native speakers. Countries such as Sweden and the Netherlands, which are cited as successful multilingual countries, do not dub their cultural imports but subtitle them instead in the local language. This ensures extensive input and develops the receptive skills of listening and reading. Much of TG4's schedule consists of old-fashioned English language programmes bought in cheaply. It is hard to see what audience these programmes could attract, but they might fulfil a useful function and attract a wider audience if they were subtitled in Irish. Comprehensible input is vital and the passive exposure to the written word through subtitles will have a positive effect and go some way to furthering TG4's role in providing for the Irish language.

Ireland has a limited tangible culture. Greater exposure to the broader world makes us aware that, despite our self-congratulatory claims, Ireland does not have an extensive repository of artistic, archaeological, industrial, architectural, even culinary heritage, and the Irish weather is not conducive to repeat tourism. Other than what has hitherto been described as the Anglo-Irish literary tradition, the indigenous Irish culture has little to show other than the Gaelic tradition. The Irish language, together with the GAA and traditional music, is an intangible resource and without it little else remains. While we can encourage newcomer and foreign languages, language awareness and cultural heritage should proceed, as was the case with the cross-curricular Cultural Heritage theme in the Northern Ireland Curriculum in 1989, from the Local, to the National, to the International.

Discussion

As someone from Northern Ireland, I was at first reluctant to undertake the task when invited to present my thoughts on language education in the Republic with particular reference to Irish as there are issues of curriculum and exemption policy in particular that I am not totally familiar with. I have accepted, however, that an external perspective might have something to offer the discussion. Over the years I have had many encounters with the Irish education system. I have served on the Royal Irish Academy's Modern Languages Committee and for many years was the external assessor for the Council of Europe's European Language Label/An Séala Eorpach in the Republic as well as acting as external examiner for postgraduate courses and theses in Republic universities. I have collaborated on research projects with Republic colleagues and as director of NICILT I made submissions to DES consultations and had the opportunity to attend many conferences where Modern Languages presenters from the Republic contributed.

While it was heartening to hear in these encounters how multilingualism is a reality in the Republic, rising out of the teaching of Irish from primary onwards, it was also very disheartening to hear a frequent refrain that pupils have no primary language exposure and should learn a 'modern' or a 'foreign' language instead of Irish. But it should be clearly emphasised that there is no such language as 'foreign'

or ‘modern’. Irish is a modern language, but not a foreign language in Ireland. Multilingualism encourages the development of language learning skills with language and cultural awareness and Irish from primary onwards lays a foundation for this greater access to other foreign languages. This curricular status of Irish in the Republic offers an advantage beyond what is on offer for languages in Northern Ireland or Great Britain (excepting Wales). Languages in education are now marginalised in the United Kingdom. Outside Wales, it was no longer compulsory after 2004 to study a language in Britain beyond Key Stage 3 (Age 14). The optional status beyond this stage has led to the demise of language study in many schools beyond Key Stage 3. Despite the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) in 2011 in which language study was an element, entries for GCSE languages continued to fall. In 2019, of those pupils who had entered subjects in 4 of the 5 required components of the EBacc, 80 per cent lacked the language element. There has accordingly been a knock-on decline in the numbers choosing languages at A-Level, leading to the closure of many university language departments.

There is an unspoken belief in the UK that ‘English is Enough’. Making Irish optional in the Republic will not lead to a surge in foreign language learning, but rather to a similar monolingualism. The National University of Ireland (NUI) requires its entrants to have a school-leaving qualification in a foreign language as well as in Irish. If the NUI decides to abandon this requirement, it is very likely that, as in the UK, foreign languages could quickly weaken if not disappear from many post-primary schools. The opportunity to learn Irish from early years onward is the strongest ace that Irish education system has to offer in acquiring a meaningful level of bilingualism and multilingualism. There is ample research evidence to show that students who have received instruction in a second language and have literacy skills in the language are more proficient in the acquisition of a third language. One can celebrate the fact that for the large majority of Irish students, learning a European language is not an L2 but an L3.

The large number of entrants to Irish and curricular foreign languages at Junior and Leaving Certificate in 2019, plus the significant number of students offering newcomer languages and learning English as a second language contradicts the argument that Ireland lags behind other European countries in language provision. But the low plateau of the level achieved in foreign languages

at Leaving Certificate and the evidence of language take-up in the United Kingdom give the lie to the claim that Ireland would be much more multilingual if Irish was made optional or dropped in favour of foreign languages. Put bluntly, the percentage of competent MFL speakers leaving school is much lower than that of Irish speakers. For the general Irish school population, achieving foreign language bilingualism in precedence and preference to Irish is a delusion.

Following the economic crisis of 2008, there was a great exodus from Ireland of the indigenous population, particularly of young people, many of whom would have had some competence in Irish. As an illustration of this, the UCD Architecture intake of 2006 required one of the highest Leaving Certificate Points total for that year, yet by the time that cohort graduated in 2009, only two of their number were able to find work placements in Ireland. This exodus of indigenous Irish has been counteracted to some extent by newcomer immigration. The newcomer population in Ireland is relatively recent, dating mostly from the Celtic Tiger period of rapid economic growth from the mid-1990s onwards, fuelled by foreign direct investment and the European Union expansion in 2004. Unlike elsewhere in the EU except Sweden, the UK and Ireland placed no limits to immigration from Accession countries. Despite the economic reversal following the global financial crisis of 2008, immigration continues, mostly from Eastern Europe and asylum seekers from further afield. While many of Ireland's immigrants are well-educated (Barrett et al.) newcomers are most visible in the service industries.

The rapid and unexpected growth in immigration numbers coincided with the economic downturn and the emigration of a large number of native Irish. But despite the economic crisis and its impact on public spending, resources for education and immigrant integration, Irish society and education has developed systems and policies to welcome and integrate newcomers through ensuring education in English and fostering the maintenance of home languages. The challenge of including Irish language integration has not been so purposefully met.

The presence of newcomers from across the world and the languages they bring with them is often hailed as evidence of a multilingual Ireland. But this is a dubious claim. The newcomer languages remain enclosed within their respective communities with little take-up within the host community. Worryingly, the diversity arising from the

influx of newcomers into Ireland runs the risk of being used by those elements unsympathetic to Irish as a smokescreen to marginalise the language further. McCubbin (2010:470) notes that Irish is rarely mentioned at all in public discourse on language and integration. The Irish speaking community is very appreciative of newcomers who learn or show respect for Irish, but while promoting English and newcomer language bilingualism, the exemption rules for Irish in education diminish the possibility of inclusion, promoting English and newcomer language bilingualism, but excluding Irish. It can also be noted that many newcomers with a marketable language will have an employment advantage over the indigenous population if Irish is not recognised and promoted as an official national and EU language and with a significant potential for employment.

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The countries whose languages we encourage and favour naturally value their own languages. While encouraging the learning of other languages, or at least English, for the sake of world communication, commerce and cultural purposes they do not disparage their own. They recognise that to abandon one's own language is to run the risk of sinking into an amorphous, homogenised linguistic landscape which manifests itself in Ireland as a deepening provincialism. We can see how the cultural organisations, L'Alliance Française, La Consejeria, Confucius etc. support their languages in Ireland and elsewhere, recognising the importance of language and culture as driving forces in soft diplomacy. Yet in Ireland a certain discourse discourages Irish, using 'MFL' as a stalking horse. It is disappointing that language policy and strategy in Ireland generally fails to encourage the link between learning Irish and foreign languages. Government policy has established two separate organisations, the Post-Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI) with a remit to implement key actions of diversifying, enhancing and expanding the teaching of foreign languages in second-level schools throughout Ireland (sic) and Foras na Gaeilge which is responsible for the promotion of the Irish language throughout the whole island of Ireland. The PPLI appears unfortunately to have taken an "Anything but Irish" approach which bizarrely ignores the obvious linguistic, social and cultural benefits accrued from the learners' experience of Irish. This narrow focus on foreign language learning ignores Irish and leads to statements such as:

> Ireland is one of the few countries which does not routinely offer a foreign language to preschool or primary school children. Research shows us that introducing foreign languages for the first time in secondary schools means that learners fail to benefit from the brain's natural capacity to acquire language with greater ease at a younger age. (Bruen RTÉ)

Such statements are easily countered by such as:

> On the other hand, we can respond by taking seriously the linguistic challenge of the European project; recognizing that Irish belongs not just to Ireland's but to Europe's linguistic heritage; taking note of the empirical fact that the more languages you learn, the easier it becomes.
>
> David Little, Centre for Language and Communication Studies, Trinity College Dublin

A credible policy and strategy for multilingualism would reinforce the relationship between native and foreign languages rather than segregate them

International good practice and NEPS emphasise the benefits of second language learning for all, including SEN pupils. Good practice can be shared across English/Irish pedagogy, as can awareness of international strategies. Appropriate differentiation should be encouraged rather than blanket exemption. Post-primary MFL rarely goes beyond parroting set phrases, and which MFL should be chosen in an Anglophone society? Revised *ab initio*/Gaellge Chumarsáideach/Bonnleibhéal options should allow for greater integration into an inclusive Irish society and culture. *Ab initio* Irish should also be the norm for Newcomer students to promote integration, otherwise a form of apartheid could develop. The Languages Connect report is positive about supporting newcomer languages. To combine this with a similar positivity about Irish is the route to multilingualism.

We can finish with this little 9th century Irish poem, given the title 'The Vanity of Pilgrimage' and inscribed in the margin of a copy of the letters of Saint Paul now found in Dresden in Germany. It embodies the complexity of what is commonly called nowadays, 'The European or the Global Dimension'. It also grounds our linguistic landscape and the importance of one's own culture and identity:

> **Techt do Róim**
>
> **Mór saido, becc torbai!**

In ri chon·daigi hi foss

Mani·m-bera latt, ni·fogbai

(Thurneysen, p. 41)

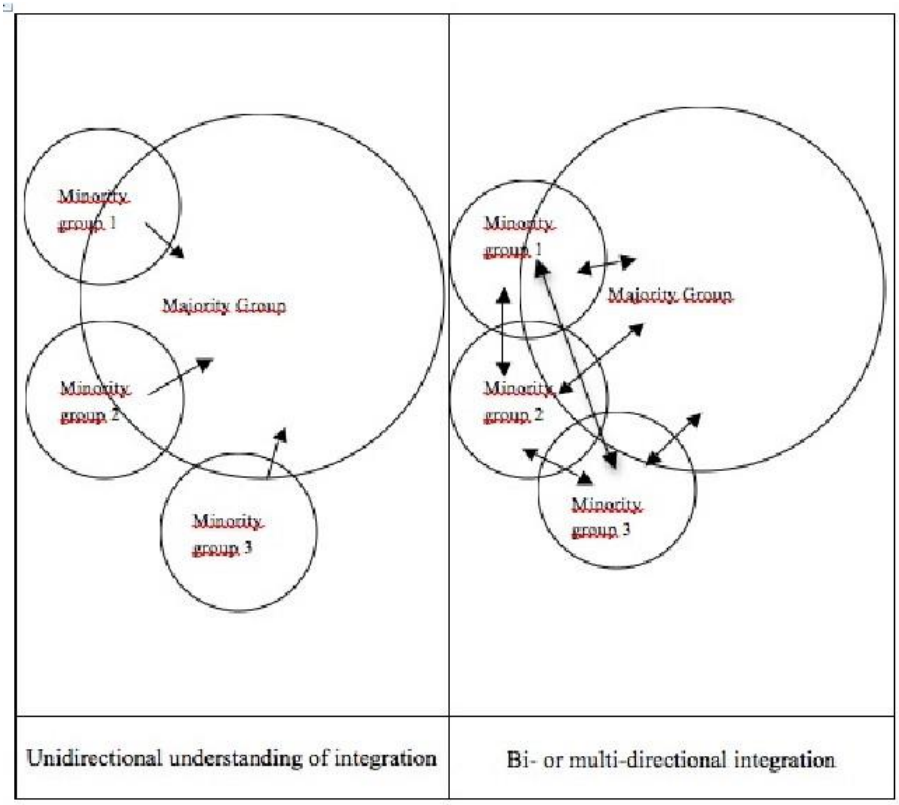
With a little licence, it translates as:

Going to Rome,

Great effort, little value,

And the goal you seek here,

If you do not bring it with you, you will not find there.



Unidirectional understanding of integration	Bi- or multi-directional integration

Many students across Europe learn French or German

% of all students learning each language in 2017, by country

	Most popular non-English foreign language learned in school	2nd most popular	3rd most popular	4th most popular
Belgium	French (33%)	Dutch (19)		
Bulgaria	Russian (16)	German (13)	French (4)	Spanish (3)
Czech Rep.	German (25)	Russian (6)	French (2)	Spanish (2)
Denmark	German (23)	French (4)	Spanish (3)	
Germany	French (15)	Spanish (5)	Russian (1)	
Estonia	Russian (33)	Estonian (20)	German (8)	French (2)
Greece	French (22)	German (20)		
Spain	French (22)	German (2)		
France	Spanish (33)	German (12)	Italian (3)	
Croatia	German (34)	Italian (10)	French (2)	
Italy	French (25)	Spanish (11)	German (6)	
Cyprus	French (29)	Russian (3)	Italian (2)	Spanish (2)
Latvia	Russian (32)	German (11)	French (2)	
Lithuania	Russian (35)	German (7)	French (2)	
Luxembourg	German (95)	French (88)		
Hungary	German (31)	French (2)	Italian (1)	
Malta	Italian (22)	French (12)	German (5)	Spanish (4)
Netherlands	German (20)	French (16)		
Austria	French (7)	Spanish (4)	Italian (4)	
Poland	German (34)	Russian (4)	French (2)	Spanish (2)
Portugal	French (20)	Spanish (7)		
Romania	French (57)	German (8)		
Slovenia	German (20)	Italian (3)	Spanish (2)	French (1)
Slovakia	German (29)	Russian (10)	Slovak (5)	French (2)
Finland	Swedish (56)	German (7)	Finnish (6)	French (4)
Sweden	Spanish (18)	German (8)	French (6)	
Iceland	Danish (36)	Spanish (7)	German (6)	French (3)
Liechtenstein	French (50)			
Norway	Spanish (10)	German (9)	French (4)	
N. Macedonia	German (24)	French (20)		

Note: Only languages learned by at least 1% of students within a country shown. Data not available for the UK, Ireland or Serbia.
Source: Eurostat, accessed Feb. 12, 2020.

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