Réamhrá / Introduction

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This volume of papers arises from the Seventh Language and Politics Symposium on the Gaeltacht and Scotstacht, which was held from 7–9 November 2007, at Queen’s University Belfast. The series of symposia forms a project within the AHRC Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies. This particular symposium also received financial support from Colmcille and Foras na Gaeilge, who have also helped fund these proceedings. For all this support we are most grateful.

The central theme of the symposium was concerned with policies for sustaining minority language communities and their implementation, with particular emphasis on Irish and Scottish Gaelic. The main focus was on identifying the role of language in forming and sustaining stabilised communities.

We devised several key questions at the outset, and each contributor was asked to address some or all of these questions in their contributions.

(a) What’s wrong with current arrangements and practice? What research is needed to show what needs to be done?
(b) Are Irish and Gaelic self-sustaining to ensure their vibrancy and maintenance as community languages?
(c) How far is the sustaining of minority language communities conditional on infrastructure, environment, society, employment, urban renewal, culture, or anything else?
(d) What is the role of education in the sustaining of minority language communities – e.g. developing social skills, cultural identity or linguistic confidence?
(e) How far is the integration of language and culture into the community an environmental issue?
(f) Is the approach to such questions top-down or bottom-up? Whose task or responsibility is it ultimately to sustain a minority language community?
(g) What role can universities and other institutions of higher education play?
(h) With the arrival in Ireland and Scotland of significant numbers of speakers of Eastern European languages, how far have the future role and supporting mechanisms for Irish and Gaelic been undermined?
(i) Where are there communities where minority languages are being successfully sustained? What comparisons may be drawn with Irish and Gaelic, and what lessons are to be learned?
(j) In comparison with Gaelic, where does Scots stand with regard to its being a community language for much of the Scottish population, and what is or should be done for it? And for Scots speakers in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland?

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For this publication, we have grouped the papers into four different sections:

- Role of Education in Sustaining Minority Language Communities
- Role of Policy in Sustaining Minority Language Communities
- Sustaining Scots
- Sustaining Minority Language Communities in Other Countries.

Education and Minority Languages

Part 1, the educational section focuses on the child’s perception and experience in acquiring a minority language. From a larger research project emanating from Trinity College Dublin entitled ‘Children’s Voices’ (‘An Bradán Feasa’), there has emerged several sub-projects which are discussed under the following related topics: ‘Minority Languages, Community and Identity in Ireland and Scotland’, ‘Family Language Policy and Immersion Education’, and ‘Beyond Language’. Each project in both parts of Ireland and in Scotland involves the investigation of both the indigenous as well as the recently introduced minority languages with the aim of gathering new and informative linguistic information about how plurilingual children function in multilingual societies.

John Harris sets out the above research context against prevailing knowledge. He finds the situation regarding Irish so different in Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland that each jurisdiction lends itself to very different techniques and measures of experimentation in language planning and language revitalisation. Levels of proficiency are different in each zone, although Harris argues that the recent increase in proficiency in the North may be due to measures and resources adopted in the South which have spilled over. But that speed of ‘unprecedented change’ in the North is also attributable to shifts in attitude arising in large measure from the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which, along with devolution in Scotland, have led to re-examinations and re-vitalisations of ethno-national sensibilities and identities and transformed them. Harris finds that although it is in the North that there is an appetite and a greater vitality for Irish despite the fact that the resources and infrastructure may be the poorer; at the same time, the status and position of Irish in the South have been reinforced by formal legislative measures, and long-term educational provision, which has produced an overall increase in the proportion of the population studying Irish at post-primary level, has been vindicated. Nevertheless, Harris concedes that more recent research into primary schools is showing that education is no longer playing that revitalisation and maintenance role it was doing only a generation ago.

At the same time, with immigration having risen 10% in the past ten years, there is now a new cohort of possible learners of Irish – through adaptation, accommodation, interaction and provision. Against this growing socio-political background of accelerated change, Harris calls for a new assessment of age-old issues such as language and identity and finds encouraging possibilities and prospects in immersion education for both natives and immigrants alike. For Harris, the starting point should be the embracing of changes to those concepts, paradigms and above all mindsets through which we currently seek to make sense of plurilingual individuals in a multi-lingual society.

Dónall Ó Baoill focuses on the crucial role of education and exposure in nurturing and developing a child’s social and interactive abilities as well as its simultaneous
acquisition of pragmatic skills. He raises questions about how such crucial skills are being conveyed through the immersion curriculum which forms part of the teaching of Irish. Ó BaoiIl emphasises the importance of integrating pragmatic skills through well-informed language teaching, and he urges the integration of language and social skills. Ó BaoiIl raises many questions and issues which Irish-medium educators have never considered in any great detail. Nevertheless, the success and potential survival of minority languages are intricately related to the outcomes of educational policies and their application. There is an urgent need for a re-assessment of curriculum content and language, culture and historical and environmental content need to be reconciled and integrated with children’s learning and social integration.

**Morag MacNeil** and **Donall Ó BaoiIl** stress the totality of the child’s experience in its use of Gaelic in the context of other languages and the need for research to take a broader, interdisciplinary approach encompassing the impact on the child of the acquisition of more than one language. They feel that there is a need to look at the social community of the child, which begins with the social norms of the home and the home language and ends with the social norms of broader society, being mindful at all times of the child’s linguistic competence in each environment. They put forward a model which links linguistic factors to social development, and in turn social development to cultural and ethnicity factors as these impinge on the child, on the one hand, and to an understanding of diversity in terms of the sense made of it by the child, on the other. Like John Harris, they further contrasts the situation of the autochthonous and allochthonous child and finds fresh common ground in each being ‘the other’.

**John Galloway** looks at the inter-relationship between language, culture and identity in the Gaelic situation. Whereas he acknowledges that language may not be indicative of culture or identity, he does recognise that, if a language is once lost, there is usually less cultural identity. Although neither evidence-based nor speculative about the project to which Galloway is attached, he nevertheless constructs four cultural identities for possible future Gàidhealtachd: ‘a strong and vibrant Gaelic identity’, ‘a Highland identity’, ‘an undifferentiated Scottish identity’, and ‘an undifferentiated British identity’, all recalling to mind a similar set of possible identities investigated in **MacCaluim** (2007).

These opening papers are complemented by three papers which identify language communities and efforts to sustain or develop language confidence within them.

**Ian Malcolm** reports on his recent empirically-based doctoral research on the teaching of Irish in a number of Protestant post-primary schools in Northern Ireland. His results are fascinating, not least because it would appear that there may be real substance to the ‘children of the ceasefire’ concept. For many of the secondary school pupils interviewed, Irish amounted to an additional and potentially useful skill which could enhance their CVs. Irish-learning was only one part of a broader programme in Irish Studies developed by Gael-Linn. Malcolm concludes that his research shows that ‘many young Protestants are ready and willing to learn the language [Irish] ... if they get the chance’ and appeals to the authorities to give them that chance. Malcolm’s paper is, of course, developed further in his monograph (2009), which shows that the depoliticisation agenda suggested by some is unlikely to work. Rather, he maintains that the way ahead is a sort-of ‘multi-politicisation’ of the language, which will require some radical thinking and fresh policies.

**Joe Mac Donncha** reports on the Irish-medium tertiary level academy, *An tÁcadamh*, in the Gaeltacht which is administered by the National University of Ireland, Galway. The academy has developed three undergraduate degree programmes, four
full-time and seven part-time undergraduate diploma programmes, covering a broad range of courses and of research activities through the medium of Irish, with priority being given to the following needs of the Gaeltacht community: translation studies, language planning, education studies, information technology, communication studies, the arts, courses in applied Irish language skills, community development studies, studies in the development of natural resources, and managerial and business studies, each of which Mac Donnacha discusses briefly. Although the courses are delivered through the medium of Irish, the primary emphasis is on meeting the needs and requirements of the Irish-speaking community.

Mary Delargy reports anecdotally on her experience of teaching Irish to immigrants in Derry. In their different contexts and by their different means, these fresh initiatives are indicative of new approaches to the sustaining of Irish in response to changing needs and circumstances.

In the final paper in Part 1, Göran Wolf critiques the concepts of ‘minority language’ and ‘national language’. By drawing on German scholarship, he unravels the contradiction regarding Irish as both a ‘minority language’ and a ‘national language’ and finds it more to be a ‘nationalist language’, not least because, for Wolf, it is Irish English (Hiberno-English, some might say) that is the ‘national language’. If it is in need of safeguarding and maintenance, a language simply cannot be a national language, the inherent strength of which, through its mere existence, will maintain itself.

Policy and Minority Languages

The papers in Part 2 address the need for clear policies for sustaining Irish- and Gaelic-speaking communities.

Pádraig Ó hAoláin critiques recent reports on the Gaeltacht and is very critical of their not having achieved or maintained the numbers of speakers or any other envisaged targets, and of their demonstration for Irish of steady decline. Despite numerous agencies and commissioned reports devoted to language survival, he is highly critical of the state for not playing its role, particularly through the public administration system. Although he lists the considerable body of individual pieces of support infrastructure now in place, he finds a serious lack of integration or co-ordination and also a lack of information particularly regarding speaker attitudes. So, for Ó hAoláin there is a serious language planning and language maintenance deficit with regard to Irish, and he calls for more co-ordination at central level and an integrated action policy.

Dónall Ó Riagáin urges a reconceptualisation of the ‘Gaeltacht’ as people or speakers, not as areas. Just as Irish speakers are to be found throughout the country, so, Ó Riagáin contends, public support and initiatives should be directed throughout the country too, and a nationwide approach adopted. The ‘Gaeltacht’ should be replaced by the notion of ‘language development areas’, where the use of the language should be revitalised in all transactions and exchanges of everyday life.

Laaoise Ní Dhúda reports on her sociolinguistic and ethnographic doctoral case-study research within an unidentified Gaeltacht speech community (An Breacbaile) somewhere in Ireland. Her paper addresses the aims and objectives of the study, the research questions being pursued and the proposed methodology which she intends to follow. A conceptual and empirical illustration of Spolsky’s tripartite division associated with language policies are described for the communities which inhabit the
'Breacbhaile'. She summarises various approaches associated with language policy initiatives – outlining the success or otherwise of such initiatives. She outlines her methodology and gives a very full literature review section on the academic discourse associated with language planning, policy and management.

**Feargal Mac Ionrrachtaigh** finds that for some in the North of Ireland, particularly Republican prisoners, their interest in learning Irish grew through its being a useful even if largely symbolic weapon in their armory. Mac Ionrrachtaigh reports on his doctoral research, which involved his interviewing former Republican prisoners about their learning experiences. For those prisoners, Irish served as a badge of resistance against English, with all its cultural and hegemonic symbolism.

In the next paper, **John Walsh** and **Wilson McLeod** connect Ireland and Scotland by a critique of their separate language policies provided by Ireland’s *Official Languages Act* (2003) and the *Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act* 2005. They begin by setting out the background both to language revitalisation, particularly in urban areas, and to each piece of legislation before going on to draw comparisons between the schemes and plans for Dublin (comprising those for Dublin City Council, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Council and South Dublin Council, and Fingal Council) and Glasgow. They provide much valuable, detailed information about each city. They conclude that direct comparison is difficult and parallels are few because of the differences in context and the separate requirements for each plan. In their comparison, however, Walsh and McLeod are invaluably instructive as well as beneficially critical. The paper updates the one presented at the symposium, which was largely based on Walsh and McLeod (2008).

**Douglas Chalmers** and **Mike Danson** also look at Glasgow’s *Gaelic Language Plan* (2009) and do so alongside Glasgow’s previous *Gaelic Arts Strategy* (2006–9). At the heart of the arts strategy was sustainability as well as value-addedness. To Chalmers and Danson, what is also important is the Gaelic labour market, for it is in Glasgow that there is a disproportionate share of the high quality jobs for which a working knowledge of Gaelic is essential. They explore the real impact of the annual Celtic Connections festival.

The final contribution on Gaelic is by **Matthew MacIver**, who, in his capacity of the then Chairman of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, sets out in an address his ‘vision’ for sustaining Gaelic and lays considerable importance on the Gaelic community seizing the unprecedented infrastructure now in place.

**Sustaining Scots-speaking Communities**

In **Part 3**, the issue which is addressed is that of a Scots-speaking community, with Scots in Scotland and Northern Ireland being subjected to the same questions set out above as Irish and Gaelic were.

To these questions, **John Kirk** provides a set of answers; before that, however, he contextualises Scots-speaking communities by reviewing the prickly ‘what-is-Scots?’ question by explaining six factors or issues which underlie possible answers: the languageness of Scots, the apperception of Scots, the literariness of Scots, the medium issue (whether Scots is a matter of speech or writing or both), the legislative issue, and finally the issue of social need.

**Billy Kay**, well-known broadcaster and author of the highly-acclaimed book *Scots: The Mither Tongue*, now in a third edition (2006), provides in his highly vivid and accessible Scots a different set of answers to the set questions of sustainability by way
of a valuable set of anecdotes and personal reflections to the questions set – albeit in the context of 2007 and not without serious challenge to the Scottish Executive prior to the 2007 election. As always, Kay provides many constructive suggestions for future action, some of which have come to fruition during the 2007–11 SNP Minority Government.

Another personal reflection to the questions is provided by the late John Law, a former editor of Lallans magazine, in a paper in a more traditional literary Scots. For many, Scots is first and foremost a literary language, and it was on that basis that Law and others succeeded in gaining recognition for Scots in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Like Kay, Law is highly critical of past Executive inaction but sees some hope with the SNP Minority Government.

Robert McColl Millar addresses the issue – much advocated by activists – of upgrading Scots to Part III recognition within the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages – for many activists, a factor central to the sustaining of Scots at any level. Millar considers that many of the provisions simply could not be fulfilled, or even afforded. A huge burden would be placed on education, where Scots is already marginalised, and Millar’s enthusiasm about the possibility is qualified by realism about the provision, cost-effectiveness and outcomes. More generally, he recognises that fragmentation and disconnectedness between – and even within – the parties mitigate against the formulation of a coherent policy for Scots or Part III recognition.

John Corbett and Wendy Anderson address the question of sustaining a Scots-speaking community by considering the potential uses of a corpus in creating teaching material for instruction in the language. Using data from their impressive Scottish Corpus of Texts and Speech, which has an unrivalled collection of current and authentic spoken and written Scots, they show how exercises on the use of the material can be applied to instruction about the language. Although the techniques are widespread in teaching English as a Foreign Language, until now they have not been applied to Scots. Corbett and Anderson thus offer a practical educational tool for increasing awareness of and increasing proficiency in Scots which is quite original.

It is often claimed that a historical dictionary is an indicator of language status, and that the two major historical dictionaries of Scots, the Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue and the Scottish National Dictionary are proof alone of Scots’s languageness. Christine Robinson gives an account of the evolution of these dictionaries and of the on-going work of updating and revision, now happily funded directly by the Scottish Government. A language community cannot be maintained without a serious lexicographical record, and for Scots the historical dictionaries are the primary institution.

A language is also sustained through its literary oeuvre, and Scots has a literary output the equivalent of that in any standard language in sustained quality and quantity over a long period. Ian Brown, himself an accomplished dramatist in Scots, discusses several varieties of Scots which have appeared on the Scottish stage in the last half-century or so, constructing the argument – in his own style of effective and idiomatic Scots – that just by seeing and hearing Scots spoken on the stage and how the play shapes and crafts it into a form of an artistic expression is important for its sustaining.

Gavin Falconer considers the classification of Scots in Ulster by invoking the Klossian (1952, 1978) notion of ‘unroofedness’ whereby the formal functions of a variety of language are either not performed by that variety itself or are performed in another unrelated language. Applied to Scots, formal functions are performed by English, although the thrust of Falconer’s paper is to show that Scots has had – and could still yet have – the functionality of a standard language, or ‘roofedness’. He proposes the
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label of ‘Hiberno-Central’ for Ulster Scots, following the Scottish National Dictionary’s claim that Ulster Scots is a variant of West Mid Scots. Falconer argues against the notion that Ulster-Scots is a language, and also that it is as differentiated as Insular or Northern Scots.

These eight papers provide a useful snapshot of both the linguistic as well as political realities concerning Scots in 2007. The many anecdotes and personal observations provide useful documentation for garnering the many different attitudes towards Scots or levels of proficiency or awareness in the community or among politicians.

Minority Languages in Other Countries

In Part 4, we turn to how minority languages are being sustained in a number of comparable communities.

In a masterpiece of scholarly Scots, Andy Eagle looks at the situation in Switzerland. Swiss German is often compared as the closest comparable case with Scots, as a classic case of diglossia between Swiss German and standard German. Eagle reviews the functions performed by each before going on to discuss the threats to Swiss German, as well the motivations for its maintenance. Finally, Eagle teases out strengths and weaknesses in the situation, with valuable lessons for Scots.

Bernadette O’Rourke contends that Galician may be favourably compared with Irish. Although Galician has a reputation as a lost Celtic language, it is more usually compared with Spanish and other members of the Iberian language group. By moving away from each of those paradigms, O’Rourke attempts a fresh comparison with Irish with a macro-sociolinguistic approach involving socio-economic, socio-political and socio-demographic factors in each country. Her work is extended in O’Rourke (2010).

Judit Solymosi reports on linguistic diversity in Hungary, where no fewer than 13, mostly non-autochthonous, languages have state protection, each spread throughout the country. As no language predominates in any one area, sustainability takes on a different complexion in comparison with Scotland and Ireland, especially with regard to national minorities and their ethnicities.

Tõnu Tender reports on Estonia, another country where national minorities predominate, and where, since independence, reversing language shift and promoting ever-greater use of Estonian has been a major success. Tender recounts those developments and presents the various legislative acts which have bought about the sustaining of Estonian.

Like Estonia, Tatarstan, in its desire to establish its national identity, is seeking to assert that identity through its national tongue (Tatar). Marina Solnyshkina sets out the considerable ideologies which lie behind implementing greater use of Tatar and sustaining that use, albeit in a bilingual situation with Russian, which she describes.

Finally, Alexander Pavlenko describes the situation of Ukrainian in Southern Russia, where it remains only as a spoken language and in folksongs and folktales, but which is not otherwise being sustained, although serious efforts to do so were proposed as part of an ultimately rejected policy on Ukrainisation between 1925 and 1933. Despite these setbacks, Pavlenko describes how there remain some settlements where Ukrainian continues to be spoken and how these communities are being helped by a stronger, independent Ukraine.

In their different ways, these five case studies with their descriptions, reflections and insightful commentaries help us better to understand the situations in Ireland and
Scotland, in what ways minority languages are being sustained, and in what ways politics, legislation and the State can intervene to help that process.

References


