



Workshop Briefing Report 2

Workshop theme: Language revitalisation and the transformation of family life

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Executive summary

- This paper reports on the **Revitalise** project's second workshop held at the University of Edinburgh on 8-9 September 2017. The aims of the workshop, entitled '**Language revitalisation and the transformation of family life**', was to reflect critically on the implications of recent changes in the ways that families organise their day-to-day lives and care for children for understandings of how to approach language revitalisation. Key conclusions arising from the workshop are listed below.
- **The emergence of children as social actors (pp. 6-7)**. Recent research in the field of childhood studies has emphasised the need to view children as agency-possessing social actors in their own right. This entails acknowledging that children have the potential to express preferences and opinions or exert influence; it also allows for the possibility that children *qua* children are able to possess and exercise rights. There is a need for researchers and practitioners working in the field of language revitalisation to reflect carefully on such ideas: what would be the implications of adopting an approach to language revitalisation that is informed by children's rights?
- **Family language policy and the limitations of current research (pp. 7-8)**. While recent decades have seen a significant growth in research focusing on family language policy, the work produced to date has its limitations. For example, the literature has tended to focus almost exclusively on language practices within two-parent, heterosexual families living in Western countries. It has not responded to the increasing diversity now evident in the composition of family units by also examining, for example, the distinct circumstances of single-parent families and also gay-parent families.
- **Key issues in the conceptualisation of intergenerational transmission (pp. 8-9)**. The process of intergenerational transmission has been consistently emphasised as a key area of concern in both the policy and research literature relating to language revitalisation. Yet, a meaningful evaluation of the significance of intergenerational transmission has been hampered by the fact that, to date, the process has not been conceptualised in a satisfactory manner. Greater consideration needs to be given to the balance between the influence of internal home factors and external social factors, and also to the active contribution of children in shaping family language practices.
- **The institutionalisation, professionalisation and regulation of childcare provision (pp. 10-12)**. As families make greater use of a range of pre- and post-school childcare providers (day nurseries, registered child-minders, playgroups, after-school clubs etc.), policy and statutory frameworks have been introduced to regulate the field and an increasing emphasis has been placed on the need for staff to hold relevant qualifications. Such developments mean that many organisations or initiatives that aim to promote minority language acquisition among young children now navigate complex regulatory environments, and need to satisfy a series of standards that are not directly linked to language.
- **The linguistic abilities and attitudes of parents (pp. 12-14)**. Interventions seeking to facilitate greater acquisition and use of a minority language among young children may



benefit from a greater acknowledgment of the variation in the language proficiency of parents. Some parents endeavouring to transmit the language will be fluent speakers while others may lack confidence for different reasons. In addition, some families who choose to have their children educated through the medium of a minority language may be motivated primarily by factors other than language maintenance and revitalisation, such as a desire to obtain the perceived cognitive benefits of bilingualism.

- **The impact of technology on patterns of interaction within the family home (p. 14).** Digital technology is transforming how family members interact with each other, and in particular, how young children play and learn. Given this, those engaged in language revitalisation need to understand how patterns of 'digital play' can be harnessed in order to promote and support the acquisition and use of minority languages within the home.