REVITALISE

Language Revitalisation
and Social Transformation

Promoting regional or minority languages in a global age

Key findings and recommendations
from the Revitalise research network

Prepared by Dr Huw Lewis, Dr Elin Royles,
Professor Wilson McLeod

July 2019

Contents

Please reference this report as follows:

Executive summary: main findings and key recommendations

This paper summarises the main findings and key recommendations that arise from the **Revitalise** project, a research network established in 2017 with the aim of examining the implications of contemporary social, economic and political changes for our understanding of how language revitalisation efforts should be designed and implemented.

Language revitalisation as a multi-level activity (p. 5). Most of the recent activity across Western Europe in support of regional or minority languages has been led by governments and organisations at the regional level. Yet, these initiatives have rarely been conceived and developed in isolation: they are also potentially influenced by decisions and processes at the state and continental levels, meaning that language revitalisation should be viewed as an increasingly multi-level activity.

- **Recommendation 1:** Greater recognition needs to be given to the move towards multi-level patterns of governance when seeking to understand the political dynamics that influence the development of policy interventions regarding regional or minority languages.

- **Recommendation 2:** Developing a firmer understanding of the multi-level factors that influence policy development in relation to regional or minority languages can lead to a better appreciation of the political opportunities and constraints that face those working in the area, either as policy officials or civil society activists. It can also help to promote awareness of opportunities for policy learning and policy transfer.

Balancing the role of governmental institutions and civil society organisations (p. 6). Over recent decades, governments – usually regional governments – are increasingly influential in many European language revitalisation efforts. However, a greater role for governmental institutions in language revitalisation can impact upon the essential work of civil society organisations, with consequences for the latter's autonomy and potential for innovation.

- **Recommendation 3:** Governmental institutions should recognise that effective language revitalisation efforts depend on more than official governmental action. Broad popular engagement and the contribution of civil society organisations

are also vital components. Consequently, the balance between the role played by various governmental institutions and civil society organisations should be a key consideration when designing language promotion strategies and individual language promotion initiatives.

- **Recommendation 4:** Civil society organisations involved in language revitalisation should work to ensure that, either individually or as part of a coalition of organisations, that their work strikes a balance between two key areas: i) political activity and advocacy work to ensure that governments support language promotion, including through implementing necessary legislative and policy measures; and ii) broader social activity to promote interest, awareness, positive attitudes and pride in the regional or minority language.

Mobility, territory and daily language use (p. 7). Today, people live increasingly mobile lives that span ever-wider geographic areas. Such trends impact upon how people interact with each other from day-to-day, and, by extension, how and where they use their languages. Consequently, contemporary language communities can take several different forms – geographical communities, communities of interest, online communities etc. – with implications for how interventions that promote minority language use should be conceived and implemented.

- **Recommendation 5:** In recognition of the increase in levels of personal mobility and its effects on language use, community-level and national-level approaches to language planning increasingly need to be supplemented by a regional-level approach.

- **Recommendation 6:** Interventions, either by governmental or civil society organisations, to promote greater social use of regional or minority languages should take account of the increasingly networked nature of contemporary social life and the implications for language use. In particular,

interventions should give greater attention to the potential of targeting specific communities of interest.

Intergenerational language transmission and the evolution of the family (p. 8). Intergenerational language transmission between parents and children is viewed as a key element in language revitalisation, yet understanding of the process remains limited. The significance of increasing diversity in the composition of family units has not been examined in sufficient detail. Moreover, changes in how families organise their day-to-day lives due to parental work practices and the increased use of various care or early-education providers have implications for how children experience early socialisation.

- **Recommendation 7:** Research projects that seek to understand the process of intergenerational language transmission should ensure that they study a wide range of family circumstances in order to acknowledge and respond to the increasing diversity in the composition of family units.

- **Recommendation 8:** Interventions to strengthen levels of intergenerational transmission need to take greater account of the ways in which that the process is rarely influenced solely by factors internal to the family home, but rather a combination of home-based factors and other external factors. Interventions should also better recognise that parental actions are seldom based on a series of wholly rational and intentional decisions.

International migration, multiculturalism and language revitalisation (p. 9). In an age of international migration, a number of language revitalisation efforts take place within increasingly multilingual and multi-ethnic contexts, rather than the more traditional context of majority-minority bilingualism. This has important implications for future discussions concerning regional or minority languages in key policy areas, such as education.

- **Recommendation 9:** Governments should give greater consideration to the degree to which official language revitalisation strategies are reinforced or undermined by citizenship and integration policies.

- **Recommendation 10:** Governments should also assess the steps that need to be taken in order to facilitate the ability of international immigrants

to acquire the regional or minority language through the education system. For instance, there are possible implications for issues such as pedagogical approaches, the teaching resources required and staff training.

- **Recommendation 11:** Civil society organisations active in language revitalisation should reflect on how they engage with immigrant communities and consider how they ensure that immigrants are able to view the revitalisation effort as one to which they can also contribute and help to shape.

Globalisation and the language-economy link (p. 10). Whilst there is widespread consensus regarding the centrality of economic factors for the prospects of regional or minority languages, there remains a lack of clarity regarding the different types of concerns that are often brought together when considering the language-economy heading. Moreover, a lack of consideration has been given to the specific question of how structural changes in the economy and in patterns of employment impact, either positively or negatively, on the vitality of specific minority language communities.

- **Recommendation 12:** Governments, civil society actors and academic researchers should aim to develop a better awareness of the different ways in which economic concerns can relate to the prospects of reginal or minority languages. In particular, policy discussions should distinguish more clearly between: i) the extent to which regional or minority languages can influence economic performance (i.e. the language > economy link); and ii) how and in what ways do economic processes influence levels of language vitality (i.e. the economy > language link).

- **Recommendation 13:** Governments should prioritise the task of developing a better understanding of how economic developments within a particular geographical area, or initiatives within regional or other economic development strategies, impact upon a regional or minority language, either in terms of the numbers of speakers, their geographical concentration or their propensity to use the language.

- **Recommendation 14:** Governments should aim to strengthen alignment between official strategies seeking to promote regional and minority languages and other governmental programmes seeking to promote economic development.

1. Introduction

Since its establishment in 2017, the core aim of the Revitalise research network has been to examine the implications of some of the major social, economic and political changes witnessed across Western societies today for our understanding of how contemporary language revitalisation efforts should be designed and implemented. The network was funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and led by Dr Huw Lewis (Aberystwyth University), Professor Wilson McLeod (Edinburgh University) and Dr Elin Royles (Aberystwyth University).

The centrepiece of the network's activities was a series of four workshops held in Aberystwyth, Edinburgh and Cardiff between May 2017 and February 2019. These workshops brought together an international group of academic researchers, spanning the arts, humanities and social sciences, along with a number of prominent language policy practitioners and civil society organisations that work on language revitalisation. Moreover, a concluding conference was held in Brussels in early April 2019. This event was organised in collaboration with the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity and attendees included representatives from the European Commission, the Council of Europe as well as several regional governments active in regional or minority language promotion.

This paper presents the main findings and key recommendations to arise from the project, with each section highlighting how contemporary social, economic or political changes have important implications for discussions concerning how to approach the challenge of promoting regional or minority languages.

For further information regarding the work of the Revitalise network, including briefing reports that summarise the discussions during the project's workshops, as well as short video and audio clips where various contributors discuss their ideas, please visit the project's website: **https://revitalise.aber.ac.uk**

2. Language revitalisation as a multi-level activity

Regional institutions and organisations have overseen most of the recent activity in support of regional or minority languages. Yet, decisions taken at the state, continental or global levels can also influence the nature of policy development in this area, meaning that language revitalisation should be viewed as a multi-level activity.

Context: Over recent decades, Europe has witnessed a process of 'rescaling' in which different social, economic and political roles and responsibilities have migrated to territorial levels both above and below the state. This has led to new patterns of multi-level governance where influence over decision-making in various policy fields is dispersed across numerous institutions and organisations located across more than one territorial level– international, state, regional and local.

Overall, when considering policy interventions in support of regional or minority languages, the tendency has been to focus on specific territorial levels in isolation, be that the local, regional, state or international level. Therefore, the issue of whether language policy choices in a particular location are potentially influenced by interactions between institutions or organisations across multiple territorial levels has been less explored.

As a result, greater attention needs to be given to the move towards multi-level patterns of governance when seeking to understand how different policies relating to regional or minority languages are formulated. While regional level governments may have been responsible for overseeing most of the policy activity in support of such languages over recent decades, regional-level initiatives have rarely been conceived and developed in isolation. Reflecting patterns of multi-level governance, policy interventions aiming to promote regional or minority languages are likely to be influenced by decisions taken across numerous levels. For example, even when the regional level has formal competence for policy relating to regional or minority languages, state-level structures (e.g. constitutional or financial arrangements) are still likely to exert a significant influence on language revitalisation initiatives. Continental or global level structures are also potentially significant, with current evidence suggesting that their influence may be greater if a state adopts a more restrictive stance in relation to its regional or minority language(s).

Recommendations:

- **Recommendation 1: Greater recognition needs to be given to the move towards multi-level patterns of governance when seeking to understand the political dynamics that influence the development of policy interventions regarding regional or minority languages.**

- **Recommendation 2: Developing a firmer understanding of the multi-level factors that influence policy development in relation to regional or minority languages can lead to a better appreciation of the political opportunities and constraints that face those working in the area, either as policy officials or civil society activists. It can also help to promote awareness of opportunities for policy learning and policy transfer.**

3. Balancing the role of governmental institutions and civil society organisations in language revitalisation

Over recent decades, governments – usually regional governments – have become increasingly influential in many European language revitalisation efforts, but does this trend impact upon the essential work of civil society organisations?

Context: Over the past thirty years, there has been an important shift in the role that democratic governments play in the process of coordinating society. Many academic researchers argue that, across a range of different social and economic fields, governments can no longer be seen as all-powerful decision makers. Rather, they claim that non-governmental actors, including various appointed, arms-length, bodies, private corporations and civil society organisations, are increasingly important in the development and implementation of public policy.

Yet, when the focus turns to how efforts to revitalise minority languages have been organised over recent years, we see a slightly different trend. Since the late 1970s, language revitalisation efforts across Western Europe, in places such as Catalonia, the Basque Country, Wales or Scotland, have been characterised by the fact that governments – usually regional governments – have become increasingly important and influential. This has meant that in several European locations language revitalisation has moved away from being a grassroots and bottom-up activity that is based primarily on the work of various civil society organisations.

An important theme during the project was the need to recognise the tensions that can emerge between governments and civil society organisations when the former become increasingly influential in language revitalisation efforts. It was questioned whether too much emphasis on the role of governmental bodies can lead to a situation where the potential contribution of other non-governmental, grassroots organisations being discounted or constrained, both by officials and activists alike. Moreover, it was argued that amongst the implications of more direct involvement by governmental bodies (e.g. through the allocation of public funding) is to potentially undermine the autonomy of grassroots organisations and constrain their ability to innovate and experiment with different language promotion initiatives, as their work may become subject to greater oversight, regulation and control. In sum, while the importance of official governmental support for minority languages, whether through the creation of suitable policy structures or the provision of funding, was not questioned, it became apparent that those engaged in language revitalisation activities need to give greater attention to the implications of increased governmental involvement.

Recommendations:

- **Recommendation 3: Governmental institutions should recognise that effective language revitalisation efforts depend on more than official governmental action. Broad popular engagement and the contribution of civil society organisations are also vital components. Consequently, the relative balance between the role played by various governmental institutions and civil society organisations should be a key consideration when designing language promotion strategies and individual language promotion initiatives.**

- **Recommendation 4: Civil society organisations involved in language revitalisation should work to ensure that, either individually or as part of a coalition of organisations, that their work strikes a balance between two key areas: i) political activity and advocacy work to ensure that governments support language promotion, including through implementing necessary legislative and policy measures; and ii) broader social activity to promote interest, awareness, positive attitudes and pride in the regional or minority language.**

4. Mobility, territory and daily language use

Today, people live increasingly mobile lives that span ever-wider geographic areas. Such trends have implications for how people interact with one another day-to-day, and, therefore, should influence how interventions that aim to promote minority language use are conceived and implemented.

Context: In recent decades, important changes have occurred in the spatial organisation of societies. First, in many European countries, the general trend of counter-urbanisation of the 1970s and early 1980s, has reverted to one of urbanisation. Second, urbanisation has been particularly pronounced among younger age groups, leading to increasingly polarised population profiles between rural and urban areas. Furthermore, these spatial changes, combined with technological advances, have led to fundamental changes in how people interact with each other. An increase in personal mobility, related to wider car ownership and better infrastructure, has led people to live their lives across ever-wider geographic areas. This, in turn, has consequences for how people engage with a range of core services (e.g. education and health), particularly in a context of service-rationalisation around urban centres. Mobility and technology have also contributed to changes to the nature of civil society. Overall, the trend is one in which we see a move away from informal, localised forms of social interaction, towards thinner, more formal, and more individualistic forms of engagement, based on common communities of interest. At the same time, the spread of information communication technology (ICT) has prompted the development of novel forms of social interaction in which geographic location is less of a determining factor.

Traditionally, discussions concerning how to stimulate greater social use of regional or minority languages have emphasised the need to target specific territorial communities with the aim of promoting local, neighbourhood-based networks. While such a community-based approach should not be discounted completely, contemporary urban and mobile lifestyles mean that the extent to which the local neighbourhood remains the main influence on people's day-to-day language use practices should be reassessed. Everyday social practices are now being stretched across wider areas, thereby influencing where, when and how people interact with each other, and, by extension, where they use their languages. This affects children and adults alike and impacts on issues such as engagement by children in extra-curricular activities, participation in recreational activities and use of public services. Consequently, traditional assumptions regarding how to intervene in order to promote minority language use need to be revised.

Recommendations:

- **Recommendation 5: In recognition of the increase in levels of personal mobility and its effects on language use, community-level and national-level approaches to language planning increasingly need to be supplemented by a regional-level approach.**

- **Recommendation 6: Interventions, either by governmental or civil society organisations, to promote greater social use of regional or minority languages should take account of the increasingly networked nature of contemporary social life and the implications for language use. In particular, interventions should give greater attention to the potential of targeting specific communities of interest.**

5. Intergenerational language transmission and the evolution of the family

Intergenerational language transmission between parents and children is viewed as a key element in language revitalisation, yet understanding of the process remains limited, and the significance of increasing diversity in the composition of family units is an issue that deserves more detailed consideration.

Context: The family, and in particular the process of intergenerational language transmission between parents and children, has been consistently emphasised as a key issue for language revitalisation. However, during the project it was argued that intergenerational transmission has not yet been conceptualised in a satisfactory manner, with the consequence that we still know relatively little about how the process works and also what types of steps can be taken to influence it.

With a view to developing a firmer conceptualisation of intergenerational language transmission, the project highlighted a series of key principles:

- **first, the need to acknowledge the inherently 'messy' nature of intergenerational transmission and thus the importance of not conceiving the process in simple binary terms – i.e. as either 'on' or 'off' in different family circumstances;**

- **second, the need to acknowledge that intergenerational transmission often stems from unplanned and unconscious behaviour, particularly within monolingual contexts, and that it is vital that it is not assumed to be a process that results from a series of rational and intentional parental decisions;**

- **and third, the importance of conceiving intergenerational language transmission as a process that is not influenced solely by factors internal to the family home, but rather a complex interaction between home-based factors and other external factors.**

A further significant factor highlighted, and one that links directly with the overarching theme of contemporary social change, was the need for discussions concerning intergenerational transmission to give greater consideration to the significance of increasing diversity in the composition of family units. To date, research studying language use within families has tended to focus on a narrow range of family circumstances, predominantly looking at language practices within two-parent, heterosexual families. It has not responded to the increasing diversity in the composition of family units by also examining the distinct circumstances of single-parent families or gay-parent families, or the consequences of relationship breakups and more complex domestic arrangements. Consequently, little is known regarding the extent to which different family circumstances may influence language acquisition by children, or whether these changing patterns should influence the design and implementation of strategies aiming to improve levels of intergenerational transmission.

Recommendations:

- **Recommendation 7: Research projects that seek to understand the process of intergenerational language transmission should ensure that they study a wide range of family circumstances in order to acknowledge and respond to the increasing diversity in the composition of family units.**

- **Recommendation 8: Interventions to strengthen levels of intergenerational transmission need to take greater account of the ways in which that the process is rarely influenced solely by factors internal to the family home, but rather a combination of home-based factors and other external factors. Interventions should also better recognise that parental actions are seldom based on a series of wholly rational and intentional decisions.**

6. International migration, multiculturalism and language revitalisation

In an age of international migration, a number of language revitalisation efforts take place within increasingly multilingual and multi-ethnic contexts, rather than the more traditional context of majority-minority bilingualism.

Context: Recent demographic trends have led to important changes in the population composition of many European societies. In this 'age of migration', societies have become more multi-ethnic and multi-cultural.

International migration and the move towards increasingly diverse societies are trends with clear implications for efforts to promote the prospects of regional or minority languages. In several instances across Europe, language revitalisation efforts take place within increasingly multilingual and multi-ethnic contexts, rather than the more traditional context of majority-minority bilingualism. During the project, Catalonia was highlighted on several occasions as a case where such demographic change has led to innovative efforts to maintain and normalise the position of the Catalan language, with the Barcelona region being particularly relevant. Yet, significantly, the implications of international migration extend well beyond the most well-recognised cases. In particular, this contemporary phenomenon is relevant not only to language revitalisation efforts in large urban locations, but also to rural and remote rural areas such as the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and north-west Wales.

The implications of international migration give rise to several opportunities and challenges for proponents of minority languages. At the most general level, it is necessary to consider the need to allow plural linguistic identities to be maintained, while at the same time ensuring that there are sufficient spaces where the minority language can be normalised as a main medium of interaction. More specifically, consideration needs to be given to the degree to which citizenship and integration policies reinforce or undermine established language revitalisation goals; the manner in which minority language education is planned, delivered and promoted among linguistically and culturally diverse populations; and the fact that particular socio-economic challenges faced by immigrant communities (e.g. a lack of time owing to the higher than average proportion of in-migrants that work in labour intensive-sectors) may affect their ability to engage in programmes aiming to promote minority language acquisition and use.

Recommendations:

- **Recommendation 9: Governments should give greater consideration to the degree to which official language revitalisation strategies are reinforced or undermined by citizenship and integration policies.**

- **Recommendation 10: Governments should also assess the steps that need to be taken in order to facilitate the ability of international immigrants to acquire the regional or minority language through the education system. For instance, there are possible implications for issues such as pedagogical approaches, the teaching resources required and staff training.**

- **Recommendation 11: Civil society organisations active in language revitalisation should reflect on how they engage with immigrant communities and consider how they ensure that immigrants are able to view the revitalisation effort as one to which they can also contribute and help to shape.**

7. Globalisation and the link between language and contemporary economic development models

Whilst there is widespread consensus regarding the centrality of economic factors for the prospects of regional or minority languages, there is a lack of understanding of how structural changes in the economy and in patterns of employment impact, either positively or negatively, on the vitality of specific minority languages.

Context: In contrast to the growing influence of governments, particularly regional governments, over initiatives aiming to promote regional or minority languages (discussed in section 2 of this paper), there has been a substantial decline in the ability of governments to intervene in the economy. Economic globalisation has had a significant impact upon Western societies. It has heralded a shift from distinct national economies towards an increasingly interconnected and interdependent global economy and this has prompted major changes in patterns of work and strengthened the position of transnational actors, particularly multinational corporations.

While these structural economic changes have unfolded, proponents of regional or minority languages have regularly stressed the significance of the language-economy link. Yet, there remains a lack of clarity regarding the different types of economic concerns that can impact upon the prospects regional or minority languages, and this is hampering policy activity in this area.

On the one hand, there have been many efforts by academic researchers and policy practitioners over recent years to explore the extent to which regional or minority languages can influence economic performance (i.e the language > economy link). In this context, the focus tends to be on issues such as whether the ability to speak a particular language influences people's employment prospects and their potential earnings, or whether the use of a particular language by individual companies or within specific sectors influences their economic performance, e.g. in terms of market profile or annual turnover.

Yet, it became evident during the project that, to date, a lack of consideration has been given to the distinct issue of how economic processes influence language vitality (i.e. the economy > language link). For example, how economic developments within a particular area, or general initiatives linked to regional economic development strategies, impact upon a regional or minority language, either in terms of the numbers of speakers, their geographical concentration, or their propensity to use the language. In addition, it is unclear whether governmental strategies and plans to promote economic development interconnect with official strategies seeking to promote regional and minority languages, or indeed whether economic development strategies give any consideration to their potential impact (either positively or negatively) on ongoing language revitalisation efforts. Moreover, as economic development strategies seem to be increasingly less sensitive to the situation of regional or minority languages, little consideration is given to the implications of factors such as peripherality, rurality and economic weakness that often characterise areas associated with regional or minority languages. Also overlooked is the possibility that some initiatives to promote minority language revitalisation, most notably in relation to government and media sectors, tend to generate employment in urban areas in a way that arguably undermines the economic basis of more rural communities.

Recommendations:

- **Recommendation 12: Governments, civil society actors and academic researchers should aim to develop a better awareness of the different ways in which economic concerns can relate to the prospects of reginal or minority languages. In particular, policy discussions should distinguish more clearly between: i) the extent to which regional or minority languages can influence economic performance (i.e. the language > economy link); and ii) how and in what ways do economic processes influence levels of language vitality (i.e. the economy > language link).**

- **Recommendation 13: Governments should prioritise the task of developing a better understanding of how economic developments within a particular geographical area, or initiatives within regional or other economic development strategies, impact upon a regional or minority language, either in terms of the numbers of speakers, their geographical concentration or their propensity to use the language.**

- **Recommendation 14: Governments should aim to strengthen alignment between official strategies seeking to promote regional and minority languages and other governmental programmes seeking to promote economic development.**