Language Revitalization in the 21ˢᵗ Century

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Language Revitalization Origins

- Late nineteenth and twentieth century:- vision political struggle and programme for action.

- Basque:-Sabino de Arana established the *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* in 1895; Father Aberasturi, Basque Language reformer; Lehen Euskal Pizkundea.

- Welsh:- Emrys ap Iwan; Cymru Fydd; Saunders Lewis; Gwynfor Evans; Plaid Cymru.

- Irish:-Douglas Hyde, *Conradh na Gaeilge* in 1893; Pádraig Pearse and Éamon de Valera; Irish Independence; National language policy.

Three Freedoms

Freedom **from** oppression, discrimination, mass removal and genocide.

Freedom **of** expression, religion, representation and political mobilization.

Freedom **to** be recognised and integrated into the state and local state system, education programmes, local administration, justice and public policy writ large.

Language Revitalization is part of real politic

- Tendency today to treat language revitalization as an autonomous process, in a rather mechanistic fashion, without due regard for pressing contextual issues which limit the freedom of actions.

- Depoliticizing the language policy of a territory is not the same as underemphasising the political context, merely a more nuanced approach.

- However, there is an absence of radically different approaches to Language Revitalization.

- The internal criticism is subjugated to the communal effort of survival.

Geostrategic considerations in Europe

- Political reformulation of the international system.
- The effects of austerity measures used to justify limits of intervention in favour of language minority progress and policy implementation.
- Ideology-the impact of Neo-Liberal precepts.
- Difficulties within the Eurozone and rise of populism.
- Role of outside actors- Russia, USA, China.
- Refugees from war-torn conflict spaces and economic migrants.

Revitalise as a network and programme

- Builds on many generations' involvement in these issues.
- Undoubted success in addressing four salient themes.
- Community, Language Transmission, the Economy and Governance.
- Places selected case studies within wider comparative context.
- Diverse range of disciplines, career ages and thematic experience brought to the discussions.
- Engagement demonstrated - what of impact on policy makers?

Language and Community

- Largely consensual and uncontroversial discussion on the primacy of community vitality to support language revitalisation.
- Identification of key stake holders, local and national government initiatives, implementation programmes; salience of NGOs.
- Influence social networks, share of voice, production and consumption.
- The over-dependence on the community, acting as supplicants, on government-determined and financed programmes of action.
- Is there a growing room for more autonomy of decision-making and does this inevitably require independent social capital and financial resources?
- Basque and Catalan best-practice not mirrored in Celtic contexts.

Language Transmission in Family

- The most fundamental and successful theme of network.
- Link early years immersion to fluency- Welsh material suggests:-
  "respondents tended to label language use as either Welsh or/English, though some respondents did note using both.

  Formulaic Welsh used by many respondents who had acquired Welsh through Welsh-medium education once their child had started school.

  Barriers to using more Welsh with their children include:
       Lack of confidence in Welsh or perceived negative experiences
       Perceived lack of opportunity to use Welsh since leaving school."
       (Source:-Evas, Morris and Whitmarsh, 2019).

Language Transmission: Structure and Agency

- Some critical concerns, as to how efficient is the process of language acquisition for the family as a whole and parent to parent influence.

- Evidence from Irish experience suggests that it is more complex and unpredictable than initially postulated.

- Has much to do with individual choices being conditioned by historical and contemporary power relations, the structure of society and the hegemony of the overwhelmingly dominant language.

- Recommendations are reasonable, but will only influence a fragment of the behavioural outcomes.

- Pressing need for clear integrated policy for language transmission in family and early years education to be developed in partnerships.

Early years immersion education

- Undoubted efficiency of this sector in all the jurisdictions, upwards of 86% transfer from early years to primary statutory schooling in target language.

- Modernising of teaching material, mixed competence of teachers, short termism rather than career structure, advocacy and empirical justification of second language acquisition, bilingualism not seen as a norm.

- Overall success and competence is subject to extra-curricular influences such as lack of access to childcare, poverty, relative status of target language and social class-related perceptions, identification with language community, a perpetuation of 'us and them' binary narrative, language affinity drop out at each successive stage in the statutory educational process, lack of parental awareness of the choices on offer, official support.

Language and the Economy

- Few international specialists, plenty of local evidence and case studies. The least conclusive of the Lang Rev network's four sectors.

- Hard to establish a definitive and directional relationship in most aspects of the general economy. Indirect effects/migration.

- Easier to identify specific sectors, geared to satisfying linguistically segmented clientele, such as media, agrobusiness, tourism.

- This relationship a major challenge to language policy makers and without a robust engagement and set of evidence-based arguments, prompts advocates to concentrate on the public sector for fertile ground and purposeful policy interventions.

Language and Governance

- Rich case studies from jurisdictions, UK, Ireland, Europe and Canada.
- Conventional analysis of nationalism, regionalism and territory supplemented by more nuanced approaches and a concern with the impact of the Regulatory State on language policy, education, local government and employment conditions as regards the use and rights of one or more minority language within a jurisdiction.
- Increasing dependence of revitalisation efforts on sub-state political agendas and resources. Residual jurisdictional turf warfare between state and sub-state actors on key socio-linguistic elements, related to media, local taxation, electoral representation and public service career paths.

Unfulfilled Challenges

Language acquisition does not automatically lead to increased use, thus we need to focus on how to trigger skill into routine use.

Good examples currently implemented in Basque Country

BASQUE INITIATIVE
HOW TO MANAGE SUCCESS?

- One illustration will suffice: the Basque Education System.
A miracle of post-Franco Euskadi- how the society has embraced the integral use of Basque from kindergarten to Higher Education.
A generation ago some 20% enrolled in **Ikastolas,** now 80% plus with only some 5% enrolled in conventional Spanish-medium schools.
This a result of a massive swing in parental choice.
Huge investment by successive governments and educational authorities in teacher training, educational resources, assessment bodies.
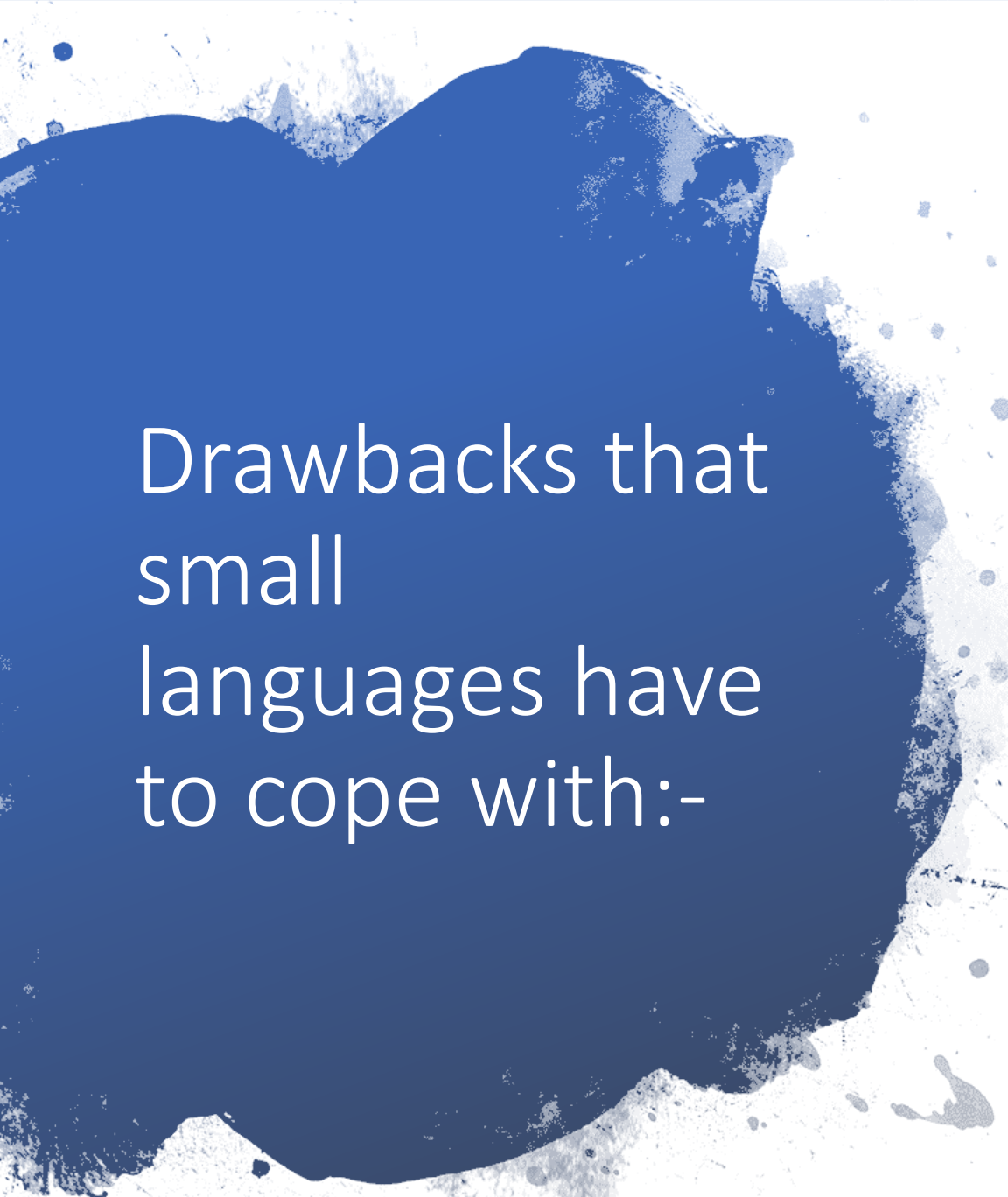
Growth does not necessarily lead to use, so doubts, uncertainties, fears!

- Formal assessment of student skills and competencies do not match the expectations of professionals and parents.

- Early-warning signals that the spectacular growth to date may be questioned by both supporters and opponents alike.

- Some teacher trainers argue for better training methods, others for differentiated class-room practices to account for diversity of home language and argue that it is unfair to expect L2 to match L1 competences in a short space of time.

- How to manage the expected backlash? Social Intervention:- Udaltop; Euskaralida.

The digital revolution!

- T. Moring (FUEN Bolzano, December 2018) argues it is difficult to find any excellent examples.

- Early developers are easy to detect: Catalan, Basque and Irish compete with many national languages.

- An EU-project for developing news automation across language boundaries including minority languages (Embeddia) https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/218731_en.html

- Digital support to Sámi in Norway, at the university in Tromsø

Drawbacks that small languages have to cope with:-

- The limited base for data mining in smaller language communities.
- Slows down machine learning and the development of automatic language generation.
- Moring argues that this has not been sufficiently dealt with by developers.
- In single digital economy, minorities always play catch up, so how do we manage the expectations?

Additional work required!

- The bilingualism-multilingualism continuum.

- The contribution of new speakers, both indigenous and migrant streams.

- The co-learning by migrant new speakers of hegemonic and lesser used languages, and their integration into either/both communities.

- A major push on understanding and interpreting economic transformation and its effects on skills development, community regeneration, regional development and rewards for multilingual competence in all sectors.

Policy Outcomes

- Education, local administration and community development are necessary but not sufficient.

- Need to develop truly holistic language revitalisation polices which transcend the embedded structural character of established government departments and their programmes.

- Much lip service paid to mainstreaming and joined-up thinking, but only joined-up financing and implementation will lead to desired outcomes not to outputs.

- Bringing the economy back in to provide instrumental justification for maintaining language competence in as many domains as is possible.

Angst and social psychology

- Conflicting emotions often involved self-denial, underperformance, marginalisation and hatred in late 19th, to mid 20th century struggles of identity construction.

- Today we see the return of the repressed, self-loathing, psychological dissonance and negative social memories as an awkward part of the Language Revitalisation process.

- Economic or social failure is sometimes attributed to poor, forced schooling in minority language, with inadequate facilities and relatively limited educational opportunities.

- The rise of victimhood and social marginalisation.

Side of the Angels?

There is a common presumption that because linguistic minorities have been discriminated against they are necessarily worthy, honourable, and therefore deserving of sympathy, support and restitution.

But the revitalisation process also involves a conflict of rights, duties and recompense between the former hegemonic and the resurgent, 'intrusive' sections of society in fields such as education, public administration and health care services.

So how does a zero-sum structure morph into a win-win outcome so that all parties to the relationship believe they have managed expectations in a non-violent manner? What mechanisms can be employed to facilitate reconciliation and mutual progress?

Future Work

- An end-note to signal the trajectory of our work group in terms of future work to be done.

- Challenges yet to be faced.

- Stakeholders and agencies that would most likely benefit from learning from and adopting some of our recommendations.

- Imperative then that we are clear in our own minds what we are about and what general areas we want to progress and what specific recommendations we would action for decision-makers at several levels in the policy community hierarchy.