



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.



Language revitalisation and the transformation of family life

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This paper reports on **the second Revitalise workshop, held at the University of Edinburgh on 8-9 September 2017**. Revitalise is an interdisciplinary research network, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK), that aims to examine the implications of some of the major social, economic and political changes witnessed across Western societies today for understanding how contemporary language revitalisation efforts should be designed and implemented. It brings together an international group of academic researchers, spanning the arts, humanities and social sciences, along with a number of prominent language policy practitioners. The network is led by Dr Huw Lewis (Aberystwyth University), Professor Wilson McLeod (Edinburgh University) and Dr Elin Royles (Aberystwyth University).
- 1.2. The second workshop was entitled '**Language revitalisation and the transformation of family life**', and its aim was to reflect critically on the significance of recent changes in the nature of family life for ideas regarding how to approach language revitalisation. During the workshop participants were encouraged to consider the implications of developments such as: an increasing diversity with regard to the composition of family units; the gradual rebalancing of relationships between sexes and the increasing feminisation of the labour market; the related changes in how parents care for their children from day to day, including an increased role of grandparents as well as various professional care providers; and the impact of technology on patterns of interaction within the family home, including patterns of play and learning among young children.
- 1.3. This paper summarises the main elements of the discussion during the workshop, drawing on the 16 presentations delivered over the course of the two days, and also the questions and comments raised during the ensuing discussion periods. Further material from the workshop, including short video clips where contributors discuss their presentations, can be found on the project's website: <https://revitalise.aber.ac.uk>. A copy of the workshop's programme can be found at the end of this paper.
- 1.4. This paper is organised thematically and highlights a series of key themes that emerged from reflecting on the workshop's deliberations. The sections that follow therefore focus on insights relevant to the following themes:
 - The emergence of children as social actors
 - Family language policy and the limitations of current research
 - Key issues in the conceptualisation of intergenerational transmission
 - The institutionalisation, professionalisation and regulation of childcare provision
 - The linguistic abilities and attitudes of parents
 - The impact of technology on patterns of interaction within the family home



2. The emergence of children as social actors

- 2.1. The workshop's opening presentations by Professors Lynn Jamieson and Kay Tisdall provided a very useful overview of key themes and perspectives that have featured in recent research regarding the sociology of families and the sociology of childhood. An important issue that arose during these presentations was the increasing emphasis among sociologists and educationalists on the need to view children as social actors in their own right. Subsequent discussion demonstrated that this issue has particular relevance to both researchers and practitioners focusing on language revitalisation.
- 2.2. Tisdall explained that the past two decades have witnessed the emergence of a new paradigm among researchers working in the broad field of childhood studies. The traditional approach among such scholars was to assume that while adults were fully formed and rational actors, children should be viewed as incomplete - empty vessels that did not yet possess any meaningful agency. However, such an approach has been challenged, with a new wave of researchers emphasising the need to view children as agency-possessing social actors in their own right. According to Tisdall, the emergence of such a different perspective has numerous implications for social science research and public policy programmes alike. Among other things, it 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.
- 2.3. These insights led to an interesting discussion regarding the possible implications of adopting an explicitly child-focused approach to language revitalisation. Clearly, given the future-orientated nature of language revitalisation efforts and the emphasis placed on transferring 'good' linguistic practices from one generation to the next, children feature prominently in work in the field. Yet, there was acknowledgement that, to date, the research and policy literature focusing on both the design and implementation of language revitalisation efforts has tended to operate under the influence of the more traditional conception of child agency. On this basis, a series of questions were identified as ones requiring further consideration in light of the recent emphasis on the notion of children as social actors in their own right:
 - In a context where increasing emphasis is placed on the need to acknowledge the agency and preferences of children, how should minority language activists design and implement interventions aimed at promoting social use of the target language? Would adopting a child-focused approach lead to a different strategy?
 - How should minority language activists that wish to take the agency of children seriously respond appropriately in a context where a child, either explicitly or implicitly, resists the target language (e.g. refuses to speak the language and answers in another language)?
 - Laws or constitutional clauses that establish rights in relation to minority languages, particularly in the context of education, seldom refer directly to children. Rather reference is made to the rights and interests of parents or those of the language community in general. Can such approaches be balanced with the increasing emphasis on the status of children as rights holders? Would a children's rights



approach to minority language promotion open up new opportunities - e.g. when considering the interests of the child in relation to parents that may be hostile to the target language?

3. Family language policy and the limitations of current research

- 3.1. During her presentation Professor Kendall King reflected on the evolution of family language policy as a distinct research area. The notion of family language policy can be understood by drawing on Bernard Spolsky's general conceptualisation of language policy and applying it to the family context.¹ Spolsky argues that, in general, language policy can be understood as a diffuse mechanism that guides people's language behaviour in different social contexts. On this basis, language policy is comprised of three distinct elements: first, general attitudes regarding different languages (beliefs); second, habitual patterns of linguistic interaction (practices); and third, deliberate efforts to influence either these beliefs or practices (management). Consequently, family language policy has been conceived as a mechanism governing language behaviour within the specific domain of the family home, and its form will stem from interaction between the language beliefs, practices and management activities of different family members.
- 3.2. King explained that since the 1990s there has been a significant growth in research focusing on family language policy. However, as the previous three decades has been a period during which the nature of family life has changed significantly there is now a need to take stock: to reflect on what has been learned, but also to consider what gaps in knowledge need to be filled.
- 3.3. King argued for greater acknowledgement of three limitations evident in the research focusing on family language policy. First, the literature has tended to focus on a narrow range of family circumstances, focusing almost exclusively on 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. King argued that such a research gap could potentially be significant as research suggests that the composition of the family unit may influence patterns of interaction. For example, some have hypothesised that single-parent families may be more likely to elevate children's conversation as they are more likely to be included in decision-making processes.
- 3.4. Second, King expressed concern regarding the nature of the research methods prioritised in the area of family language policy. Her contention was that there has been an overreliance on interviews and questionnaires as methods of collecting data. While such methods can allow the researcher to gather a significant amount of information, the risk is that the data will provide an account of how family members (and in particular, parents) think that they act, or how they would like the researcher to think that they act, as opposed to an account of what actually takes place. This concern was linked to a growing literature that has examined the role of interviews as performance events as opposed to scientific research instruments. In sum, King argued that future family language policy research needs to complement the use of methods such as interviews

¹ Bernard Spolsky, *Language Policy* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004).



with other methods that are more observational and include a stronger longitudinal dimension.

- 3.5. Third, King argued that there was a need for future family language policy research to place further emphasis on theory building. To date, the emphasis has been on developing a catalogue of detailed studies that tend to focus on small numbers of families/cases. However, there is now a need to broaden the focus by seeking to compare and generalise across different empirical cases. As part of this endeavour King argued that an effort should be made to pose more theoretically driven research questions.

4. Key issues in the conceptualisation of intergenerational transmission

- 4.1. The family, and in particular the process of intergenerational language transmission between parents and children, has been consistently emphasised as a key area of concern in both the policy and research literature relating to language revitalisation. To a large extent, this stems from the prominence attributed to intergenerational transmission in Joshua Fishman's influential Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale, posited as a device to assist with the prioritisation of interventions designed to reverse language shift.² However, during the workshop it was argued that intergenerational transmission has not yet been conceptualised in a satisfactory manner, with the consequence that it is not possible to assess its actual significance or to determine what can be done to influence the process. It was claimed that we still know relatively little about intergenerational transmission as a process, including how it works, what types of factors influence it and what types of outcomes may be anticipated. With a view to developing a firmer conceptualisation of intergenerational language transmission, several of the workshop's presentations highlighted key themes or issues that should be taken into account.
- 4.2. King argued any discussion of intergenerational language transmission needs to refrain from conceiving the process in simple binary terms - i.e. as either 'on' or 'off' in different family circumstances. Research on family language policy since the late 1990s has highlighted the inherently 'messy' nature of language use patterns within many family homes and also the manner in which these patterns are often influenced by a multitude of different pressures.
- 4.3. Building on the above point, Dr Jeremy Evas argued that it is essential that we refrain from assuming that intergenerational transmission is a process that results from a series of rational and intentional parental decisions. Rather, transmission will often stem from unplanned and unconscious behaviour, particularly within linguistically endogenous contexts. Evas based this argument on the findings of a recent study that examined patterns of language transmission in a selection of families living in north west and south east Wales.³

² Joshua A. Fishman, *Reversing Language Shift* (Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 1991).

³ Jeremy Evas, Jonathan Morris and Lorraine Whitmarsh, *Welsh Language Transmission and Use in Families* (Cardiff, Welsh Government, 2017). Available online: <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/welsh-language-transmission-use-in-families/?lang=en>



- 4.4. Presentations by King, Evas and also Dr Tina Hickey highlighted, in various ways, the importance of conceiving intergenerational language transmission as a process that is not influenced solely by factors internal to the family home. The language practices that parents adopt with their children (either consciously or unconsciously) will often be linked to broader social and economic factors. Indeed, Evas reported that his findings suggest that social factors tend to play a more important role than psychological ones (e.g. attitudes of individual parents towards the target language). As a result, those engaged in language revitalisation should refrain from viewing the family home as a secluded or detached domain. A sophisticated conceptualisation of the process of parent-child language transmission will entail assessing what home-based factors and what out-of-home factors influence the process, as well as assessing how each set of factors interact with each other.
- 4.5. With regard to the specific types of home-based factors that can help to promote efficient intergenerational transmission, Dr Tina Hickey highlighted the need to take account of not only 'quantity of input', but also the 'quality of input'. Quantity of input refers to how often the target language is used within the home, and in particular how often it is used as part of conversations between parents and children. This is usually the main factor considered when examining patterns of intergenerational transmission. However, according to Hickey, the quality of input, meaning the manner in which the target language is used when conversing with children, and the degree to which speech is conducted in a child-directed manner, is also a factor that can influence the effectiveness of intergenerational transmission. This may be a particularly relevant consideration when parents are not fluent speakers of the target language and therefore possess a more limited conversational range (see Section 6 below for further discussion of such issues).
- 4.6. A further issue highlighted by Dr Cassie Smith-Christmas and Professor Kendall King (linking to points raised by Professor Kay Tisdall regarding developments in the field of child sociology) was the need to acknowledge the potential for child agency. It is vital that intergenerational transmission is not conceived as a simple one-way process in which parents impart a particular language and the child acts as a passive recipient. Such an approach fails to acknowledge the important role that children can play in actively resisting or co-constructing family language policy, either through interactions with parents (e.g. during dinner-time conversations) or through interactions with siblings (e.g. in terms of how they structure their play). On this basis, it is vital that those who seek to develop a better understanding of intergenerational transmission ensure that future research studies take account of the process not only from an adult's standpoint, but also from the point of view of the child. This latter point was one that was explored in detail during Cassie Smith-Christmas's presentation.
- 4.7. During his presentation, Dr Michael Hornsby focused on the case of the Breton language and highlighted that intergenerational transmission does not always stem from the idealised notion of two L1 parents passing a language on to their children. A series of linguistic ruptures over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries served to undermine this 'traditional' process of transmission in relation to Breton. However, over recent years alternative 'creative' modes of transmission have been very much in evidence. These can include educational (immersion or L2 instruction) methods, adult-adult transmission



(including an important role for grandparents) and also neo-native transmission via 'new speaker' parents. Hornsby argued that the role of such alternative routes should also feature in discussions concerning intergenerational transmission. Moreover, while such routes may not lead to identical language competencies (e.g. accent, ways of speaking etc.), care should be taken to avoid depicting them as being somehow deficient or less authentic than the traditional L1 route, as this risks promoting tensions within a language community.

- 4.8. Finally, in his presentation, Dr Andy Hancock directed the focus away from the Celtic language context and addressed some of the challenges faced by families of immigrant origin in Scotland who are endeavouring to transmit their heritage language. A large number of complementary schools have been established by parents from different language communities. Their goals and aspirations in relation to their languages vary considerably, as do the educational approaches employed at these different complementary schools. Dr Hancock focused in particular on the schools organised by the 'settled' Chinese community (speakers of Cantonese or Hakka with roots in Hong Kong), concentrating on approaches taken to the development of literacy in Chinese.

5. The institutionalisation, professionalization and regulation of childcare provision

- 5.1. A number of workshop presentations reflected on how the increasing feminisation of the labour market, along with related changes in how parents care for their children from day to day, poses new questions for those engaged in minority language revitalisation, particularly with regard to the aim of promoting acquisition of the target language by young children.
- 5.2. During her presentation Professor Lynn Jamieson provided a clear overview of the gendered changes transforming the nature of family life over recent decades. The traditional notion of the 'stay at home mother', common throughout much of the 20th century, is now an exception. In its place, the model of dual-earner families has emerged as the new norm across most Western societies. Consequently, social attitudes and public policy alike have come to assume that a lifetime of earning and producing is to be expected from women. If women step away from the labour market to have children, it is likely that they will return in due course. Moreover, as a result of these shifts, families have been required to alter how they care for their children from day to day. In certain contexts this has involved grandparents shouldering an increasing amount of the childcare duties. However, families also make greater use of a range of designated pre- and post-school childcare providers (day nurseries, registered child-minders, playgroups, after-school clubs etc.). In turn, this latter development - tied to the new emphasis on the rights of children (see point 2.2 above) - has prompted policy and statutory frameworks that regulate the provision of childcare, and heighten the need for relevant training and professional qualifications on the part of those working in the field.
- 5.3. Several of these general points also arose, either directly or indirectly, during other presentations. For example, while reflecting on the work of *Mudiad Meithrin* (the Welsh-medium early-years care and education provider), Dr Gwenllian Lansdown Davies explained that given the regulatory frameworks that now exist in the field of childcare a



significant amount of the organisation's work entails engaging with bodies that do not have any link with Welsh-language promotion. Indeed it was suggested that the most influential organisations in terms of *Mudiad Meithrin's* day-to-day work were not those linked to the administration of language policy in Wales, but rather those responsible for monitoring child welfare and the maintenance of basic care standards (e.g. Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales). Such points were not raised in order to critique the regulatory arrangements that exist in relation to the provision of childcare - there are very good reasons why they have been introduced. At the same time, such an example highlighted that organisations such as *Mudiad Meithrin*, which aim to promote minority language acquisition and use among young children, must now navigate complex regulatory environments to satisfy a series of basic standards that are not directly linked to language. This is in addition to the task of ensuring that core linguistic considerations are covered, for example that all staff possess the required Welsh language skills and also that they are familiar with methods of introducing the language to young children, particularly those that do not speak it at home. This combination of challenges did not face *Mudiad Meithrin* when it was established during the early 1970s.

- 5.4. Albeit on a smaller scale, a similar point was raised by Órlaith Ruiséal during her presentation discussing the work of *Tús Maith*, an initiative in the Kerry *Gaeltacht* that seeks to support families raising their children with Irish as well as those who wish to use more Irish in their daily lives. *Tús Maith* organise playgroups, home language visits and *Scléip an tSathairn* family activity sessions to assist parents in their efforts. In addition, *Tús Maith* has recently established a family resource centre in Ballyferriter as a base for its activities. However, staffing the centre has proved challenging as it is necessary to find individuals with both the necessary Irish language skills and the required qualifications in the field of childcare. The fact that the centre is located in a part of Ireland that is characterised by depopulation has added to the challenge, as has the fact that work in the field of childcare tends to be low-paid.
- 5.5. Some of the presentations also touched on how public policy initiatives aiming to facilitate women's return to the labour market can unintentionally add to the challenge of ensuring that adequate childcare provision is available through the medium of the minority language. For example Dr Tina Hickey referred to the Irish government's subsidy to parents in order to assist with childcare costs, which involves the requirement that a registered childcare provider be used in order to qualify for this support. Hickey suggested that a possible consequence is that the policy indirectly promotes the status of institutionalised childcare options and devalues the potential contribution of voluntary care by older relatives whose Irish language skills are likely to be more firmly established.
- 5.6. Dr Gwenllian Lansdown Davies referred to the Welsh Government's plan to introduce 30 hours of free childcare for 3 and 4 year olds. This new policy presents an opportunity for the Welsh-medium care and education sector to expand, but the policy may also present a serious risk, should it be implemented without careful planning. The current lack of Welsh-medium childcare options across Wales could be compounded by parents simply opting for 30 hours provision in the most accessible setting, which at present is usually English-medium. This could mean missing the opportunity not only to introduce the Welsh language to a substantial number of young children through early-years



immersion, but also to encourage their parents to consider continuing on to Welsh-medium statutory education.

6. The linguistic ability and attitudes of parents

- 6.1. A number of presentations discussed the challenges that arise when parents seek to promote use of the minority language within the home while possessing only a limited level of communicative competence themselves. As Dr Tina Hickey explained in her presentation, this is a key issue as efforts to facilitate greater acquisition and use of a minority language among young children take place in contexts where the language proficiency of parents can vary substantially.
- 6.2. A variation in the language proficiency of parents emerged as a particular challenge in some of the family-focused activities taking place in Scotland and Ireland. Both Jennifer Gilmour from *Cròileagan Dhùn Eideann* (based in Edinburgh) and Orlaith Ruiséal from *Tús Maith* explained that their respective organisations organise informal sessions to introduce either Gaelic or Irish to young children through play, music and stories. However, a difficulty encountered while running such sessions is that the Gaelic or Irish ability of the parents that attend varies significantly, meaning that it can be extremely difficult to prevent the sessions from turning into primarily English-medium events. A further point added was that, due to changes in childcare methods, it is increasingly common for a childminder, rather than the parents, to accompany children to such sessions. Generally, these individuals will not possess any Gaelic or Irish either. Ruiséal explained that, in response, *Tús Maith* have begun to organise distinct Irish-only sessions and that the relevant publicity material has emphasised that only parents or carers who are able to participate through the medium of Irish are invited to attend the session. These new Irish-only sessions provide a more immersive experience for children. Yet, Ruiséal noted that introducing these more exclusive sessions has been a challenge, particularly within small close-knit areas.
- 6.3. Dr Timothy Currie Armstrong provided an overview of recent research that analysed the experiences of parents who had sought to use the decision to send their children to Gaelic-medium education as a prompt to improve their own grasp of the language, and if possible, augment its use within the home. Evidence gathered through interviews highlighted that it was possible for parents to succeed in such endeavours, but that a number of challenges will arise along the way. Among the challenges was the difficulty that some parents experienced in ensuring that the development of their Gaelic language skills kept pace with that of their children. Armstrong also explained that a number of parents mentioned the feelings of frustration or foolishness experienced when attempting to conduct family discussions in a language that their children spoke with greater fluency. This latter point was also one that was raised by Magaidh Wentworth during her presentation on the work of *Comann nam Pàrant*. According to Wentworth, a lack of communicative fluency can be particularly challenging for parents keen to promote minority language use within the home, particularly when they wish to interact affectionately with their children.



- 6.4. On the issue of how to support parents (particularly those with only a limited level of communicative competence) in their efforts to ensure that the minority language is acquired and used by their children, a number of the contributors emphasised the importance of building a close partnership between the home and the school. For example, Hickey argued that while there has been much emphasis in the field of education over recent years on the need for partnership between parents and educators in order to develop the language and literacy skills of children, the tendency has been for the discussion to focus on school-based elements. Her contention was that there is also a need to consider how schools can help to promote use of certain languages within the home. On this later point, it was noteworthy that during his presentation discussing the efforts of parents to establish Gaelic as the main language of the home, Armstrong argued that the evidence gathered suggested that the task was made easier if the children attended schools where there were active efforts to promote use of Gaelic outside of the classroom, both in the playground and within the wider community. It was argued that such efforts on the part of schoolteachers helped to legitimise the family language practices that parents were seeking to promote. It meant that Gaelic was less likely to be seen by the children as simply a language relevant to academic work.
- 6.5. Evas also raised the issue of partnership and argued that his research on language transmission in Wales pointed to the potential of using Welsh-medium schools as hubs that can help to promote and support language use within families. For example, he argued that schools could be used as bases from which programmes that seek to create partnerships between parents could be coordinated (partnerships between parents that have similar language abilities, or partnerships where some parents are fluent speakers and other have a more limited grasp of the language). Evas suggested that through such partnerships parents could share experiences and seek advice on different language strategies to employ with their children.
- 6.6. Turning from parental abilities to attitudes, several contributors during the workshop also highlighted that parents may wish to see their children acquiring a minority language for a variety of different reasons. For example, during her presentation discussing the work of *Comann nam Pàrant*, Magaidh Wentworth explained that as interest in Gaelic-medium education has grown it has become apparent that while some parents decide to send their children to Gaelic schools on the basis of a desire to see the language flourish, others do so on the basis of a more general belief in the cognitive or social value of multilingualism. With the latter group, it was suggested that issues such as the use made of the language outside the classroom, either on the playground or within the wider community, tend not to be such a pressing concern. Similar points were raised during presentations by Dr Tina Hickey and Dr Ciorstaidh NicLeòid. Later discussion suggested that these types of observations regarding the differing attitudes of parents highlighted a challenge that those promoting language revitalisation must face as their efforts begin to gather momentum and begin to draw in new audiences. When this happens, revitalisation movements need to present a narrative regarding where they wish to go, but this needs to be framed in a manner that is sufficiently inclusive to allow the movement to grow in numbers. It was suggested that Joshua Fishman's discussion of the need for



'prior ideological clarification' when seeking to 'reverse language shift' was an issue that needed to be considered and possibly re-thought in this context.⁴

- 6.7. The issue of the perceived cognitive benefits of multilingualism was also discussed by Professor Antonella Sorace. Her presentation provided an overview of recent research relating to the 'multilingual advantage' among children and argued that there is a need to ensure that public audiences are presented with a correct interpretation of key findings arising from this research. According to Sorace, it is now increasingly accepted that a number of common beliefs regarding the potential problems associated with multilingualism (developmental delays, confusion at school etc.) have no basis. Indeed, it seems that the pendulum has gradually swung in the other direction as we now regularly hear claims regarding the potential benefits of multilingualism for children, for example: that multilingual children will be more intelligent; or that multilingualism can act as a reserve that delays the decline of certain cognitive abilities (e.g. dementia). Yet, Sorace argued that it is important that such claims are not over-generalised to a point where unrealistic expectations are created among parents. A careful reading of the research literature demonstrates that all bi- or multilingual children are different, and therefore, the level of benefit that may accrue from being able to speak multiple languages can vary from case to case. At the same time, it was argued that there is little evidence at present to suggest that any cognitive disadvantages stem from multilingualism.

7. The impact of technology on patterns of interaction within the home

- 7.1. Another theme that arose during several of the workshop's presentations was the potential impact of technology on how family members interact with each other, and in particular, on how young children play and develop early language skills. For example, as part of her assessment of the state of current research in the field of family language policy, Professor Kendall King highlighted that the potential influence of technology on family language behaviour was a key issue that needed to be considered over the coming years.
- 7.2. The theme of technology also arose during the presentation by Joanna McPake and Professor Lydia Plowman. Their starting point was the familiar observation that in cases of language shift, families where every member is able to speak the minority language tend to become less and less common. Therefore, a key consideration for those engaged in language revitalisation is how to support families that wish to make greater use of the minority language within the home. As part of such discussions, McPake and Plowman argued that contemporary language activists need to think carefully about the significance of digital technologies. Recent years have seen a proliferation of digital media devices. Such technology is now impacting on almost every aspect of family life, with the impact on the lives of children being particularly striking as patterns of play and learning have become increasingly 'digitised'. Given this, McPake and Plowman argued that those engaged in language revitalisation need to develop an understanding of how new patterns of 'digital play' can be harnessed in order to promote and support the acquisition and use of minority languages within the home. On the one hand, such work needs to consider issues relating to the design of digital technologies, such as apps, and

⁴ See Joshua Fishman, *Reversing Language Shift* (Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 1991).



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understand the difference between those that steer language choice and those that are language-neutral in nature. On the other hand, consideration also needs to be given to the types of behaviour that parents or caregivers should adopt during periods of digital play in order to encourage certain types of language behaviour among children. This should include reflection on the linguistic implications of the concept of 'guided interaction', which holds that children benefit most from their engagement with digital media when adults strike an appropriate balance between providing leadership or support and allowing autonomy for experimentation.



Workshop 2: Language revitalisation and the transformation of family life

Date: 8-9 September, 2017

Location: School of Scottish and Celtic Studies, University of Edinburgh

Friday 8 September

9.45 Welcome and introduction

10.00 **The transformation of family life**

Professor Lynn Jamieson (Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, University of Edinburgh)

Children as social actors? Perspectives from childhood studies and children's rights

Professor Kay Tisdall (Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, University of Edinburgh)

11.15 Break

11.45 **Family language policy research: where are we going and why?**

Professor Kendall King (University of Minnesota)

Promoting partnership in the early years to support minority language revitalisation

Dr Tina Hickey (University College Dublin)

13.00 Lunch

14.00 Panel discussion

Magaidh Wentworth (Comann nam Pàrant)
Gwenllian Lansdown Davies (Mudiad Meithrin)
Órlaith Ruiséal (Tús Maith)
Sine MacIlleathain (Bòrd na Gàidhlig)
Jennifer Gilmour (Cròileagan Dhùn Eideann)

15.45 Break

16.15 **Digital play to support family minority language practices**

Joanna McPake (University of Strathclyde) and Professor Lydia Plowman (Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh)



Saturday 8 September

9.30 **Welsh language transmission and use in families**

Dr Jeremy Evas (Cardiff University)

Engaging the whole family in language learning and use: opportunities and challenges for Gaelic-medium early years provision

Ciorstaidh NicLeòid (Celtic & Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh)

Ideological work: parents and teachers as language activists

Dr Timothy Currie Armstrong (Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, University of the Highlands and Islands)

11.15 Break

11.45 **Bilingualism and revitalisation: fact and fiction**

Professor Antonella Sorace (School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences/Bilingualism Matters, University of Edinburgh)

The role of complementary schools in Scotland: opportunities and constraints of intergenerational language maintenance

Dr Andy Hancock (Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh)

13.00 Lunch

14.00 **Creative modes of transmission for Breton in the 21st century**

Dr Michael Hornsby (Centre for Celtic Studies, Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu)

Language and imagination: the challenges of exploring family language policy through the children's eyes

Dr Cassie Smith-Christmas (University of Limerick)

15.15 Conclusions