



Workshop Briefing Report 3

Workshop theme: Language revitalisation and economic transformation

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February 2019



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Executive summary

- This paper reports on the deliberations of the third Revitalise project workshop held in Cardiff, 5 October 2018. The workshop was entitled 'Language Revitalisation and Economic Transformation'. Its aim was to investigate in detail the different dimensions of the relationship between language and economy in connection with minority language revitalisation. Key conclusions arising from the workshop are set out below.
- Whilst there is widespread consensus regarding the centrality of the language-economy link to language revitalisation efforts, the overall tendency is for discussion of the relationship between the two to be conducted in rather general terms. Instead, there is a need to differentiate more clearly between facets of the language-economy relationship (p. 4).
- Workshop discussions highlighted different dimensions of the language-economy relationship (pp. 4-6), namely how language variables can influence economic variables; how economic variables impact upon linguistic variables; and the indirect impact of economic factors on levels of language vitality. This briefing report recognises the inter-relationship between these dimensions, but strives to identify the key features of each one. The paper calls for further engagement with this categorisation of the distinct dimensions of the language-economy relationship in order to assess its usefulness, particularly whether it provides greater clarity for policy practitioners engaged in thinking about the relationship between the economy and minority languages.
- Presentations at the workshop also demonstrated how the tools of language economics can assist the analysis of language-related issues, including the potential to inform decisions regarding policy interventions (p. 6).
- Examination of the impact of language variables on economic variables focused specifically on the economic impact of minority languages (pp. 6-7). Research on Scotland has suggested that there is a Gaelic premium in employment and that there have been efforts to quantify the economic value of Gaelic to the Scottish economy. Discussion of the Welsh case suggested that there were continuing gaps in the evidence base with respect to the benefits of bilingual skills in the workplace, and especially the demand for bilingual skills in particular sectors. A robust evidence base is central to make the case of the benefits of bilingualism to businesses. Further research would therefore be beneficial to address these gaps.
- The most significant research gap identified, however, was the lack of a detailed understanding regarding how economic changes can impact positively or negatively on levels of linguistic vitality (pp. 7-10). The report discusses some of the key ways in which economic change and changes in employment can impact upon language vitality. Moreover, it highlights current policy trends that need to be considered further, such as: a lack of alignment between strategies to promote regional and minority languages and other governmental economic development policies; a lack of coordination between economic initiatives specifically conceived to promote a minority language; and the general approaches to economic development pursued by state and sub-state governments, ones that seem to be increasingly less responsive and sensitive to their impact on language revitalisation efforts. Consequently, there is a clear need for further research in this area. There is also a pressing need to identify methods to ensure better consideration of linguistic vitality as part of the process of formulating economic policies, including greater use of policy integration within the work of sub-state governments.
- The main tendency identified with regard to the indirect impact of economic changes on minority language revitalisation is the effect upon patterns of migration and the consequent impact of new



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patterns of employment for language vitality (pp. 10-11). Evidence discussed at the workshop pointed to the economic benefits of migration. However, policy initiatives to promote language revitalisation need to be more nuanced in order to take account of the impact of migration on policy processes that seek to strengthen the promotion of minority languages, without incurring the risk of heightening the discrimination facing migrants.