

THE IRISH AND THEIR LANGUAGE

Treball de fi de grau

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ABSTRACT

Irish language is the official language of Ireland and since 2007 is an EU Language. Despite its status, only 3% of the population speaks Irish on a daily basis and Irish language is not used by its politicians. Because the number of Irish speakers has decreased drastically in the last twenty years, the Government has designed a new language policy. In this paper we have done an overview about the most representative aspects of the Irish language: the beginnings and evolution of the language, the history of the country and the prohibitions that the language has had to suffer due to invasions, the role of the Government towards the use of the language and the people's attitudes towards the language. We have analyzed the most representative organizations and their role to promote the Irish language through the whole island. Because Irish is in a vulnerable state, the Government has decided to design new strategies to obtain more fluent Irish speakers. To know what is the opinion of the Irish population, we have designed a questionnaire related to the current status of the language, why there is such a little amount of fluent speakers and the new strategies created to increase the use of the language to finally conclude with what will be the future of the Irish language.

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1. INTRODUCTION

My first intention with this paper was to discover about the language of the country I have been living in for a year. I have been working as a support teacher for a year in a secondary school in Dunmanway, a town in County Cork. During this year I have been involved in many aspects of the Irish language: music, food, dance, history, literature and cinema, but I haven't learned anything from a very important part of the country, their native and official language.

I thought that it was my duty to know at least where it came from, how the people learn it, what do Irish population think about their language, what is the government's position towards the language and why the number of Irish speakers has decreased so drastically.

My first intention was to do a research focusing on the evolution and history of the language and compare it to the English spoken in Ireland, but I realized that I should take advantage of the fact that I was living in the country and do some research about all aspects of the Irish language and compare the results with the opinion of the Irish population.

My intention with this paper is to discover about a language that a lot of people are unaware of its existence, a national language that none of its politicians use, a language only taught in school as a compulsory subject, a language forgotten by its population.

I think that the first think to know about a language that I am going to study is where it comes from, which are its origins, what kind of tribe spoke it and how it has evolved or who has made it possible to evolve the language. Irish history has a very deep mark of invasions and prohibitions, and I have done a research of the most representative moments of the Irish history, in order to understand the different phases of the language and the prohibitions that the Irish and their identity have suffered.

Because Irish is a relatively new independent country, I have analysed the measures created since the independence of the country, in which grade has the Government got

involved and if the results of those mechanisms to keep their national language have been efficient.

Nowadays, the total amount of people who is fluent in Irish is only 3%. To try to increase the number of Irish speakers, the Government has reacted and has recently created different strategies in order to encourage people to speak their national language. One of these strategies is very ambitious and is going to take part between 2010 and 2030. After analysing the different parts of this strategy and what kind of improvements will be made due to increase the number of Irish speakers, I am going to compare this new strategies and the current situation of Irish with its population.

Because I was in the country, I have been able to ask two groups of Irish people about their personal opinion towards their language, the current situation of the language, the intention of the Government to promote it and if they agree with the fact that Irish is the national language of the country even though everybody speaks English. After analysing the results of the two different groups I will conclude with my personal opinion towards the Irish language, why the number of Irish speakers has decreased so drastically and who is to blame for that. I am also going to compare the Irish situation to the Catalan situation and see which are the similarities and the differences that make a language functional and active or lost with the time.

2. SUMMARY OF IRISH HISTORY

The arrival of the Celts

The Celts arrived in Ireland around 500 BF, although it is unknown where they came from. Jean Markale is one of the most representative writers of the Celtic culture and in 1993 he wrote in his book *The Celts: Uncovering the Mythic and Historic Origins of Western Culture* that they came from Easter Europe. Even though there were already different tribes cohabiting in Ireland when the Celts arrived, the Celts were the ones who left a mark that still remains: the language and the culture.

Their language was known as *Goidelic* and became the basis of what is known as “Primitive Irish”. The first records of the language are from inscriptions on stones of their alphabet of the fourth century AC. More than 300 hundred of these inscriptions have been found in all Ireland (and many more in Scotland and Wales). These inscriptions are the basis of the language we know today as Irish.

Although there were different tribes that came to Ireland, the Celts have had a huge influence towards Irish culture with their legends, their myths and their language. The Celts were known for being a nomad tribe; they rarely remained in one place for a long time, but that changed when they came to Ireland. In that land they made it their new home, and they decided to remain there. During that time, they created new kingdoms that emerged during the fifth century AC, and with the growth of these kingdoms, a new culture flourished. Although there were other cultures and tribes cohabiting in the country, and there is no evidence that they invaded the island, most of the natives decided to adapt their new culture. This Celtic culture remained untouched from the 500 BC to the 400 AC and so did the language. During all those centuries its habitants didn't evolve, they weren't literate and their language was only oral.

The arrival of St. Patrick and the Catholic missionaries

As it is popularly said, St. Patrick and other Catholic missionaries arrived on the island to try to convert the Irish into Christianity. These missionaries went to Ireland willingly, without any orders from Rome, as they thought that their duty was to try to civilize the Celts and make them literate. Patrick preserved the Irish tribal and social patterns and

only changed the ones that conflicted with Christian practices, most of them related to sexuality and religion. He introduced the Roman alphabet to their language, which enabled Irish monks to preserve parts of the Celtic oral literature and legends by converting Primitive Irish to a Latinized alphabet.

The Irish became literate in their own way. The only alphabet they had ever known was the prehistoric Ogham, a cumbersome set of lines incised into the corners of standing stones to turn them into memorials. These inscriptions continued to appear until the early years of the Christian period, but thanks to the missionaries and to Patrick, the Irish became able to write their oral language on paper, evolve their alphabet, as it had Latin origins and preserve it for centuries.

Between 535 and 536 the Celtic culture, and in particular the Druid tradition, started to decline due to the “new faith” of Catholicism. This new faith involved the new study of Latin and the creation of monasteries.

The invasion of the Vikings

During this period, the Vikings arrived from Norway to the coasts of Ireland. They interrupted the golden age of the Christian Irish culture, marking two centuries of wars and waves of Vikings destroying monasteries and towns. They established Viking villages along the coast and even mixed with the Celtic tribes, adopting the name of “Gall-Gaels”. This new tribe extended the vocabulary of the Irish language with words used in navigation. The Vikings never conquered Ireland, although the villages they founded became an important part of the Irish economy of the time.

The invasion of the Normans

In 1155 the country was divided between two main Irish dynasties that were constantly in war: petty kingdoms and over-kingdoms. The head of one of these dynasties, King Diarmait Mac Murchada of Leinster, was forced by the new High King Ruaidri mac Tairrdelbach Ua Conchobair of the Western kingdom of Connacht to exile to Normandy. The exiled king did not waste his time; he obtained the permission and help of the English king of the time, Henry II, who was located in Normandy. The exiled king returned to Ireland with Norman (English), Flemish and Welsh forces to reconquer Ireland. This man will be remembered by Irish history as the person

responsible for letting in the first English soldiers to step on Irish land. The exiled king regained his power and his territory, but the whole country became submitted to new rules of a new English King, Henry II.

Although after the invasion King Henry II proclaimed himself the new King of Ireland, he never conquered the whole country. The Celts and their King, Fineen MacCarthy, fought against the Normans but they did not win. The English wanted to fully invade Ireland but the Celtic kings resisted and wars remained for centuries.

In 1536 Fitzgerald Earl of Kildare was replaced by Henry VIII as the new King of Ireland. This new king was determined to conquer all the territory and proclaim it as a new English Kingdom. During this time there were multiple rebellions of the natives and English lords that didn't agree with the new impositions of the English government.

The final conquest of Ireland

The re-conquest was completed during the reigns of Elisabeth and James I in the seventeenth century. After numerous brutal conflicts that involved several wars, finally, for the first time, the English fully governed the country. They established a central government in Dublin and they became finally able to disarm the native lords who were constantly rebelling against the new English power. From that moment, Ireland was finally part of the Commonwealth.

The 16th and 17th century are known as the *Plantations*, where the English government carried out orders of confiscation and colonisation of the Irish lands. English and Scottish Protestants colonists were sent to the provinces of Munster, Ulster, Laois and Offaly. They replaced the Irish Catholic landowners, who were removed from their lands. They also established the Penal Laws of confiscation.

Marriages between English and Irish or any kind of friendship became forbidden. The native Irish culture and their language were also prohibited and the methods employed by the English forces were brutal. They also tried to convert the Catholics to Protestantism by the martial law. Because the English considered the Irish as savages, Irish prisoners were sold as slaves and, for centuries, murders of Irish were more than justified. In addition, the first Famine between 1740 and 1741 were killed 400.000 Irish people and over 150.000 people were forced to immigrate. As England was suffering a critical economic situation during the 18th century, nearly all the food produced in

Ireland was exported to England, leaving the native Irish with barely anything to survive. The second great Famine, the famous “potato blight”, affected Ireland between 1845 and 1849. This time, emigration was massive and thousands of people starved to death; the population dropped from 8 million people to 4,4 million in 1911.

During the 19th century, the use of Gaelic declined dramatically for two main reasons: the amount of people that emigrated or died because of the famines and the creation of the National School system by the English Government that prohibited Irish. Many people died from the second famine and the people that emigrated to the United States could only do so with the condition of speaking perfectly good English. The reason was because the British wanted people who would arrive in the new land and spread their language, not a Celtic language that wasn’t useful for their empire. They also established a very rigid educational system that only allowed English. Since the landlords were all English, the Irish needed to learn it in order to improve their status. People who did not speak English did not get hired, and as the Irish had no power, they had to adopt the new language.

The independence of Ireland

During the 19th century there were numerous rebellions for the Independence of Ireland, but none of them succeeded. In 1898 the Irish created the Local Government Act which abolished the power of the domination of landlords. For the first time since the English invasion, the decisions were made by democratic control of local affairs and by people who had been elected democratically in Local County Councils. With this new creation, two main ideologies emerged among the Irish: the Irish nationalists and the Irish unionists. Most of the island was nationalist, and they believed that they had to remain economically and politically second-class citizens with self-government. Irish unionist was a group of privileged and well educated members who wanted to keep their status and control the country.

During the First World War, England was too occupied to see that at the same time there was a rebellion in Ireland “War of Independence” which began on January 1919. The War of Independence (1919-1921) was more a guerrilla than an official war that involved the new Irish Independent Army and the British forces.

After three years, in July 1921 the British and Irish governments finally agreed a truce that halted the war and both representatives signed the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The Treaty meant that the UK Parliament accepted to liberate 26 of the 32 counties of Ireland, taking to their position Ulster, what is known today as Northern Ireland. This treat banished the idea of a full Irish Republic. But some people did not agree on that and kept fighting to unify the whole country unsuccessfully. In 1922 the Irish Free State was declared, a self-governing Dominion of the Commonwealth of Nations.

In 1922 Ireland became formally a free state and in 1949 it was declared as “The Republic of Ireland”. Although there have been many wars and fights along the Irish history, they didn’t finish in 1921 with their independence. In Northern Ireland there are still fights between Catholics and Protestants that remain unstopped until our days.

3. THE ORIGINS OF IRISH LANGUAGE

Goidelic languages

The Irish language comes from the Goidelic Languages, which include Scottish, Irish and Manx¹. They are part of the big group of Indo-European languages, and a subdivision of Celtic languages. In the Celtic languages there are two different groups: the Goidelic languages (Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Manx) and the Brythonic languages (Breton, Cornish, and Welsh).

All the Goidelic languages come from the ogham alphabet. It is not clear when it was created, some historians think that it was in the 5th century AD, while others think that it is the 1st century BC. This alphabet was modelled on another script, taking characteristics from the Latin, Classical Greek and even Sanskrit alphabet.

The ogham alphabet was composed basically by names and words that would have been written in stones as a secret language. Some theories say that the druids used this alphabet to communicate between the different tribes about political strategy or religion. The stones were also used as memorials, with the name of the head of the family.

Primitive Irish

Primitive Irish is considered as the first of the Goidelic languages. This language used the ogham alphabet and it's the beginning of the Irish language. It is known basically by some words and fragments, mostly personal names, which were inscribed in stones with the ogham alphabet. The primitive Irish was used all over Ireland and Scotland. Very little remains of this first period of the Irish language because it was only inscribed in stones and because of the simplicity of the language. The Celts didn't give importance to their language, they thought that just by speaking it and by inscribing lines on stones it was enough. Between 500 BC and 400AC culture and language remained untouched until the arrival of the missionaries.

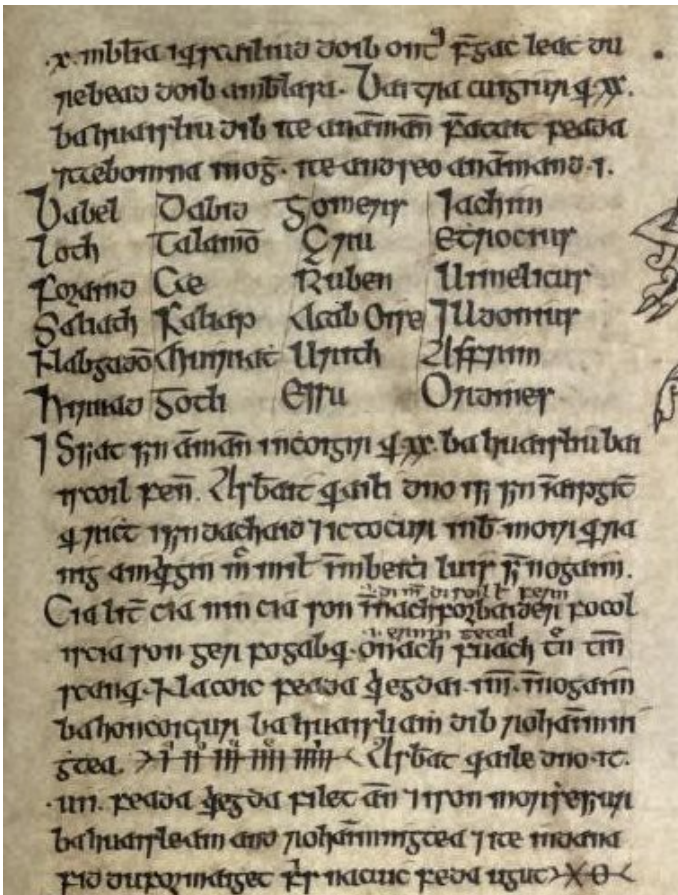
In the image below, there are the words and letters of the ogham alphabet most commonly used in Primitive Irish at that time:

¹Manx: language spoken in the Isle of Man's.

T	Π	ΠΠ	ΠΠΠ	ΠΠΠΠ	┆	┆┆	┆┆┆	┆┆┆┆	┆┆┆┆┆
Beithe birch b	Luis blaze/herb l	Fern alder f	Sail willow s	Nion fork/loft n	Uath fear(?) h	Dair oak d	Tinne rod/metal t	Coll hazel c	Ceirt bush q
⌘	⌘⌘	⌘⌘⌘	⌘⌘⌘⌘	⌘⌘⌘⌘⌘	+	++	+++	++++	+++++
Muin neck m	Gort field g	nGéatal wounding(?) ng	Straif sulphur z	Ruis red(hess) r	Ailm ? a	Onn ash-tree o	Úr earth u	Eadhadh ? e	Iodhadh ? i
✱	◊	⌘	⌘⌘	⌘⌘⌘	==	Y	—	⌘	
Éabhadh ? ea	Ór gold oi	Uilleann elbow ui	Iflin pine ia	Eamhancholl double c ae	Peith soft birch p	Eite feather	Spás space	Eite thuathail reversed feather	

Old Irish

After just a few words and some structures written in stones in different parts of Ireland and Scotland (Primitive Irish), the language evolved to “Old Irish”. Old Irish is the ancestor of all the modern Goidelic Languages: Modern Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Manx. As it happens with Primitive Irish, not much remains as proof to study Old Irish.



The only proof remaining are just a few lines between religious Latin manuscripts from the early Irish missionaries. The oldest passages are the transcripts in the Book of Armagh and the Cambrai Homily, the two most important books of the Irish language and both of them are from the 8th century. The image has been extracted from one of the pages of the Book of Amagh to see the evolution of Irish. These two books were written by Catholic missionaries that used Latin and Irish language to explain what was happening at that time.

Although very little remains of that period, in different libraries of Europe there are some poems written in Old Irish.

Thanks to those missionaries, they evolved the language by adapting Old Irish into a Latinized alphabet and by starting to write the language in books. If missionaries had not arrived in Ireland and hadn't given importance to study the language and to keep the language alive, it would no longer exist.

Middle Irish

Old Irish evolved to Middle Irish from the 10th to the 12th century. This period has, compared to the other two periods of the language, big amounts of books written in Middle Irish. This radical change became possible thanks to the tenacity of a few Irish monks. From that period, Middle Irish started to evolve into three different directions: Modern Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Manx. The creation of all these languages would start in the 13th century, but it was not until the 17th that they were established as different languages.

Although Gaelic, Scottish Gaelic and Manx are different languages, they have remained quite similar, and most of the time there is no need for additional translation for mutual understanding (the similarities are comparable to the situation between German and Dutch).

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the Normans attempted to invade Ireland. Although they had their own language, little by little they adapted the language of their new country. As a result, the Irish language kept some characteristics of French language.

Modern Irish

From the 17th century, during the Elizabethan period, the status of the Irish language was lost, but it was still spoken by the rural population and for some time for the working class in some towns. For many reasons (immigration, prohibitions, status...) between 1846 and 1848 the language was on the point of extinction. However, it all changed thanks to some scholars who reacted in time by becoming interested in the Irish language and literature. In that period the English government and their rules became more flexible towards Irish language and some steps were made; Thomas Davis publically declared in 1843 that Irish was a "national language". This terminology would be later used in the Constitution of 1922 and 1937. In 1876 the Society of

Preservation of the Irish Language was created. This society had the task to recover the Irish recognition at all levels of the educational system. In 1893 Dubhghlas de hÍde, Eoin Mac Néill, Father Eoghan Ó Gramhnaigh and others founded Conradh na Gaeilge² (the Gaelic League). They also brought the grammar aspects to the modern spoken Irish in order to have a more structured language. The result of this grammar was the creation of the Official Standard that was published by the Irish Government in 1958. That initiative was a tremendous help to unify the Irish-speakers and to preserve the language.

Irish dialects and the Gaeltacht

Even though Modern Irish was in danger, it kept evolving and nowadays it is divided in three different dialects that are influenced in grammar and phonology by traditional Irish and by English. The three dialects are concentrated in the provinces of Munster, Connacht and Ulster mostly, and there are also some dialects in Leister. This dialects are now located in the areas know as the Gaeltacht. The Gaeltacht is an Irish word used to refer to the districts where the government recognises that the Irish language is the predominant language spoken at home. There are some areas that have increased the number of Irish speakers and they are considered Neo-Gaeltachtaí, which means that not all the population speaks Irish daily, but an important amount does. This areas are Clare Islands, Dublin (it has the largest number of daily Irish speakers thanks to the Gaelic schools and the new status of Irish language) and Clare. In Northern-Ireland, in

has



² is the democratic forum for the Irish-speaking community and promotes the language throughout the whole of Ireland and around the world. (https://cnag.ie/index.php?page=an_eagraiocht)

some parts of Belfast and County Londonderry it has been notoriously increased the use of the language. The Ulster-Gaelic dialect (only spoken in Donegal) is similar to Scottish Gaelic.

The areas in Ireland today in which native speakers are found in historically continuous communities. Some areas are in a stronger position than others, e.g. North-West Donegal and West Galway have the most vibrant communities whereas North-West & South Mayo, West Kerry, Cape Clear and West Waterford are in a much weaker position. Rathcairn is an entirely transported community (from Galway in the early 20th century).

Curiously, in Canada there has been found a dialect of Irish Munster of the 18th century as a result of the immigration due to the famines and has been designated a Permanent North American Gaeltacht, an area near Ontario. On the map below it shows the different dialects of Ireland and the Gaeltacht area:

Due to the lack of native speakers, in Leinster there is no longer a dialect. Most Irish speakers follow the Lárchanúint (“central dialect”), an artificial dialect created in Dublin. Because of the different variants of the language in the country, it has been created an official standard grammar. The standard version has also been created in order to dissolve the dialects and unify the language.

The Official Standard

An Caighdeán Oifigiúil ("The Official Standard") was published in 1954 and is the version studied in schools, although depending on the areas, there is an influence of a dialect. It was developed to simplify Irish spellings and to give a standard written form that was mutually intelligible to all the speakers of the different dialects. Many aspects of the standard Irish were taken from the Connacht dialect that is spoken in Donegal. The reason why is because this dialect shares different characteristics of the different dialects in the North and South of the country.

The official Irish standard also had the intention to simplify the language and make it more accessible to learn for the majority of English speaking school population. The language has been simplified and slightly modified from traditional Irish. The first developers did not have this purpose, because now the schools teach a version reduced of what the language was, by reducing irregular verbs and personal form of the verbs.

This version is mostly used by non-native speakers that are concentrated in the capital, also called as "Dublin Irish". In some language schools there is the option to learn Gaelscoil Irish, a dialect from Belfast. Although there is an official standard version of the language, as happens in many other languages, the pronunciation of the words is defined by the dialect of the place they live in, but thanks to the standardization of the language it has been possible to unify the language.

Here there is an example extracted from the Official Language Standard to see the final result of the language:

“Le fada siar táthar ag tabhairt cúl le foirmeacha agus rialacha a bhí á gcleachtadh tráth i scríobh na teanga. Ba iad na príomh-chúiseanna a bhí leis sin ársantacht nó anspiantacht áirithe a bheith ag baint leo nó iad a bheith imithe, nó ionann is imithe, as beo-chaint na Gaeltachta. Cheal comhaontú ar na foirmeacha agus na leaganacha a nglacfaí leo ina n-ionad bhí daoine ag déanamh rogha dóibh féin, agus bhí an neamhionannas, agus an neamhchinnteacht a ghabhann leis, ag dul i dtreise sa teanga.”

4. STRATEGIES BY THE GOVERNMENT TO INCREASE THE USE OF IRISH

The article 8 of the Constitution of Ireland states:

“The Irish language as the national language is the first official language.”

In the first part of this chapter I am going to explain the most significant initiatives that have been created by the government in order to increase the use of Irish. In the second part of this chapter I am going to describe a strategy created by the Irish Government with different phases that will take place between 2010 and 2030 to promote the Irish language.

4.1. Strategies already created to increase the use of Irish

In 1922 Ireland became independent and so did its language, but most of its population decided to keep speaking the language of their invaders and forgot about their native language, Irish. Between 1922 and 1954 there were no improvements made related to the Irish language. In 1954 the Irish Standard was created, but the Irish Government continued to not give much importance to the Irish language even though is the national language of the country. That same year Irish was introduced as a compulsory subject in all the schools and the Government thought that it would be enough by including it in the educational system; that little improvement was made thirty-two years after the Irish Independence. Moreover, year by year the number of Irish speakers decreased until 1999 when the Government finally realized about the real situation of the language and decided to change it in order to not lose the language of the country. That same year the Irish and British Governments agreed to revive the language in the whole country, including Northern Ireland, with the Good Friday Agreement. In this Agreement they decided to create new strategies to bring people closer to their official language: create activities, groups and organizations dedicated to increase the use of Irish. In 1999 as a proof to ensure the Good Friday Agreement, the Government created “Foras na Gaeilge”, an organization that has the role of promoting the language in all aspects through the whole island. The same year the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht was also created and is dedicated to promote the Irish language between the different institutions and departments. In the first part of this chapter there is a list of the

initiatives already created by the Government in order to increase the use of Irish. In the second part of this chapter there is a strategy created by the Government with new measures that are to take place between 2010 and 2030.

4.1.1. Education in Ireland

Ireland is a country with an official language “Irish” and a second language “English”. The Government has given a lot of importance to its language in the last few years and that has affected the educational system by trying to increase the use of the language through the new generation. There is also the fact that Ireland is a Catholic country, and compared to other countries with the same religion (Spain, Portugal and Italy), the church still holds a lot of power.

General characteristics

All children must be educated from the age of five until the age of sixteen. In order to go to university, they must complete the studies until the age of eighteen. The Constitution of Ireland stipulates that there is also the possibility to provide education at home.

Since 1973 it is a requirement to pass the Irish language in order to receive a second-level certificate. There is the possibility of obtaining an exemption of learning the language because the student has been abroad for a long time or has learning difficulties. In all the English speaking areas, which is most of the country, English is the language of instruction, and Irish is only spoken while the subject is given. Most of the university degrees are taught in English, but they also offer a little amount of classes taught in Irish.

Types of schools

As I have mentioned before, in Ireland there is a strong tradition and respect towards religion. The Primary School Curriculum is a document created in 1999 and it has a strict description of how the subjects have to be taught in the Irish schools with no exception. What is unusual is that the church authorities have the power to formulate and implement the religious curriculum of the schools they control, which are all the

national schools of the country and 60% of the schools of the country. Although there are different kinds of schools, I am going to focus only on the two most general types.

Types of primary schools

National school

They were firstly introduced in 1831 by the British Government. These schools are public schools directly financed by the state, but they are administrated by the state, a patron body and local representatives (the Catholic Church). In this schools the curriculum, salaries and conditions of the teachers are mostly controlled by the state, through the Department of Education and Science. The minor policies of the school are directed by a member of the clergy.

Although Irish is studied in primary and secondary schools, most of their students barely speak it. The reason why is because all subjects are taught in English, and there is no language immersion. The government has promised to reform the curriculum with the “20 year strategy for the Irish language 2010-2030” that will be described afterwards.

Even though these schools were created by the English more than a century ago, the Irish still follow its original structure by teaching all subjects in English and leaving Irish as only one of the compulsory subjects.

Gaelscoil (Gaelic schools)

Gaelscoil are mostly primary (and some secondary schools) that were created in 1972. Compared to national schools, they initially didn't receive money from the State; they were created and administrated by a genuine community movement who believed in the importance of Irish. This means that the Church doesn't have such a strong influence towards these schools.

But the biggest difference from all the other schools is that their students acquire fluency in Irish through language immersion. These schools teach each and every subject in Irish, and as a result, they produce fluent Irish speakers. English-medium schools, despite teaching Irish as a compulsory subject in primary and secondary schools, produce only a few fluent Irish speakers because they teach all subjects in English, except for Irish.

These schools have become very popular, increasing their initial number of only 11 in 1973 to 172 primary schools and 39 secondary schools in 2013. But because the demand has increased astronomically, it is greater than the supply. Adding similar schools from Northern Ireland, there is a total amount of 298 primary schools and 72 secondary schools in the country. Nowadays there is at least one gaelscoil in each county, and several in large towns and cities.

These schools not only provide a fluency in Irish to their students, but they also have a reputation of providing excellent academic results at a moderate cost. Several analyses show that students who have attended this kind of schools have better than average access to tertiary education and better social and employment opportunities. It has also been argued that the bilingualism acquired is an intellectual benefit and it helps the children to learn a third and even fourth language more easily.

These schools are a clear example of what needs to be done in order to achieve fluency in Irish. However, the number of these schools in Ireland is limited to 172, 15% of the total schools and is not until now, thirty years after they were created, that the Government will adopt their system to obtain more fluency among Irish students.

With the new strategy created by the Government in the next part, they have taken the example of these schools by teaching more subjects in Irish in order to emphasize the importance of promoting bilingualism among all students in Ireland. This new policy would mean that Gaelic schools would no longer be the only ones that promote bilingualism in schoolchildren.

However, these schools have been criticized for their elitism because they are limited to a small number of students and none of their pupils are immigrants.

Secondary schools

In secondary schools students must attend school until the age of 16. From that moment, they can decide to continue studying and go to University or they can get their Junior Leaving Certificate and leave.

For each subject, depending on the degree they want to study, their capacities or if they want to get extra points in their Leaving Certificate exams, they have the possibility to choose between three different levels (advanced, ordinary and foundation level). There is an exception for foundation level, as it can only be taken with Irish, English and

Mathematics. Generally, a higher level of any subject is worth 40 points more than an ordinary level.

As in primary school, Irish is one of the six compulsory subjects and all students have to study it in order to get their Leaving Certificate. Some students can get exempt from studying Irish because they have studied in some part of their lives in another country or because they have some learning difficulties. There is also a third European language that all secondary students must learn, and they also have the possibility to get exempt by the same conditions as Irish. In most of the schools the third language studied is French, although there is also the possibility to study Spanish, German and Italian.

Students can do their Leaving Certificate exams in English or Irish. Students who choose to do their exams in Irish get 10% extra points in their results. For the Leaving Certificate exams students must do an oral, aural and written exam in Irish and French. For the Irish exam, the oral part is 40% of the total mark. Students can attend four different kinds of schools in Ireland depending on their needs:

Voluntary secondary schools

These are public secondary schools that are owned and managed by religious communities or private organizations. In these schools most of their students have attended National schools in primary education. These schools have the same system as the National schools. Most of the funding is from the state, but the church has a great power among them. These schools are controlled by a Board of management or a religious institute and a principal who controls the everyday business.

These schools are attended by 60% of the Irish students. In some cases there are also voluntary secondary schools that are boarding schools. This happens in Northern Ireland where there are only a few schools in some towns and most of the schools in that area are Protestant.

Gaelcholáiste

These schools have the same characteristics as the Gaelic schools of primary education. These schools are located in Ireland and Northern Ireland and Irish is the primary

language of teaching. These schools are represented and supported by the Gaelscoileanna Teo organization, based in Dublin.

Compared to the gaelscoil, there are not many secondary schools with Irish as the first language. Because these schools were created recently, there are only 72 in all the country. Every year new Gaelcholáiste schools are built due to the big demand of students. These schools don't depend on the State or religious communities. However, they are religious schools with the same curriculum as the voluntary secondary schools.

The majority of their students choose to do their Leaving Certificate exams in Irish, and that gives them an advantage of 10% more extra points in their marks. Only students who have attended these kinds of schools have the fluency and skills to do their exams in Irish. These characteristic has caused a lot of controversy, as the number of Gaelcholáiste schools is very limited and offers an advantage to only a few privileged students.

Study at University

The Government has created 25 different graduate and post-graduate studies in Irish so students can have the option to continue studying in their native language.

The government has also created college camps in the Gaeltacht area where students who want to improve the use of Irish can attend Irish summer camps for two weeks or a month. They are very economical in order to promote the use of Irish through university students. However, there are no specific degrees of translation or interpreting from Irish to English even though Irish is the official language of the country and a language of the EU.

Requirements to become a primary school teacher

The government emphasizes the fluency of the primary school teachers in Irish. For this reason, one of the requirements to become a primary school teacher is to have a proficiency level in Irish. They must also complete a 3 year full-time Bachelor degree of Education and a higher diploma in Education or a recognised Graduate/Higher Diploma in Education (Primary) combined with a primary degree at level 8 or 9 qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications. Moreover, to gain a full recognition as a primary school teacher, applicants must pass the written, aural and oral parts of the Scrúdú Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge and also provide a certification that they have completed

an approved three-week course in the Gaeltacht. By contrast, post-primary school teachers do not need any qualifications in Irish; they only need a third level degree in order to teach any of the subjects included in the curriculum.

4.1.2. The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

This department was created in 1999 and among other things, has developed different initiatives relating public affairs through Irish and bilingualism. This department offers different initiatives to the public to choose what language they prefer to deal with their problems and controls the use of the Irish language in all aspects. Because Irish has achieved EU status, they have created tools and mechanisms to follow this new status. They have created a new system for translators and editors in Irish, a new database of terminology in all aspects of the Irish language (legal terminology, placenames, EU terminology). They have also created a helpline in Irish and a customer service action plan. The Government has established as a rule, with the Language Action Plan 2003, that all signs have to be in Irish or bilingual (shops, street signs, companies, official buildings). Public transport has to follow the same rule of bilingualism.

The Government has established as a rule that all of their publications have to be bilingual. All the brochures, information leaflets, application forms and publications are in Irish or bilingual. In the Gaeltacht area, public services in Irish have been provided because they have asked for them.

In order to have an adequate number of staff with proficiency in the Irish language, the government has advertised competitions for staff members to work through Irish (especially in the Gaeltacht communities). There are also trainings and courses for the members of the staff focused on the business and customer needs of the various units across the Department. As the staff has been informed with the new policy related to Irish, staff is encouraged to use Irish among the other members of staff.

4.1.3. Foras na Gaeilge

Foras na Gaeilge is an organization created in 1999 as a result of the Good Friday Agreement and is responsible to promote the Irish language in all aspects (facilitating, encouraging and writing of Irish in the public and private arena) and throughout the whole island. The information below has been extracted from their official webpage.

Foras na Gaeilge advises administrations in North and South, public bodies and other groups in the private and voluntary sectors in all matters relating to the Irish language, as well as undertaking supportive projects and grant-aiding bodies.

General functions:

- Promotion of the Irish language
- Facilitating and encouraging its use in speech and writing in public and private life.
- Advising administrations, public bodies and other groups in the private and voluntary sectors.
- Undertaking research, promotional campaigns, and public and media relations.
- Developing terminology and dictionaries.
- Supporting Irish-medium education and teaching in Irish.

This organization has been extremely supportive with the educational system and education through Irish. They have created sources for primary and secondary schools (books, reading materials, grammars) and the creation of different pages (gaeilge.ie, focal.ie) with information in Irish, Irish courses and teaching resources in every level.

Foras na Gaeilge is supporting business in Irish and also provides help and organizes activities in the different communities along the island.

4.2. The 20-Year Strategy for the Irish language 2010-2030

The current situation is that Irish is barely spoken by its population. Moreover, there is a little amount of books published in Irish and the language is only used daily in the

Gaeltacht, a limited area in Ireland. In order to change this situation, a situation where the official language of a country is hardly spoken, they have created a very ambitious strategy to increase the use of the language.

This strategy has been created by the Government to ensure that as many citizens as possible are bilingual in 2030. The aim of Government policy is also to increase the number of families who use Irish as their daily language, provide linguistic support for the Gaeltacht as an Irish speaking-community, ensure that in public discourse and in public services the use of Irish and English is a choice for the citizen and over time more and more people will choose to do their business in Irish and ensure that Irish becomes more visible in their society, as a spoken language by their citizens and also in areas such as signage and literature. All the information related to the 20 Year Strategy has been extracted from the report published by the Irish Government.

To create this strategy, the Government has realized an analysis of the situation facing the Irish language among the population. According to the Census of Population of Ireland in 2006, 42% of the population have a certain ability to speak Irish, 1.66 million of 4.2 million people. Most of the Irish population believes that Irish is of particular importance for them personally and for the country as a whole, even though only 3% of the population speaks Irish. Also 52.5% of the population want Irish to be preserved in the Gaeltacht and revived for use in arts and culture, while 40.9% want Irish revived and used for public purposes through the state³. The UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger classified Irish as “definitely endangered” ten years ago. This status has been improved to “vulnerable” with the reaction of the Government and the measures taken to support the language in the recent years.

This strategy is a very ambitious project by a long-term commitment to the future of Irish as a living, spoken language focusing on the educational and political system, in public administration and in the Gaeltacht.

The specific objectives of the strategy are to increase the number of Irish speakers on a daily basis outside the educational system from 83.000 to 250.000, to increase the number of speakers who speak Irish on a daily basis in the Gaeltacht by 25%, to increase the number of people that use State services through the Irish language and to

³ The information has been obtained in www.pobail.ie/en/IrishLanguage

have access to television, radio and print media. In order to accomplish these desired objectives the Government has created four different phases:

- **Establishment Phase:** the communication of the goals and content of the Strategy and setting up the required organizational and operational structures.
- **Implementation Phase I – Laying the Foundations:** during the first year long-term measures are put into place. Because educational system will be one of the main goals, the Government needs to ensure the supply of qualified teachers and other specialists available.
- **Implementation Phase II – Expanding and Deeping:** making sure that the results obtained are the desired and increment the techniques.
- **Implementation Phase III – Consolidating:** will be directed towards mainstreaming all measures. It will built on the increased abilities in Irish among their people, expanded opportunities to use Irish and the active encouragement of positive attitudes towards Irish achieved in previous phases.

Although education is one of the priorities, this strategy has been designed to introduce Irish through different areas and as a result, obtain an active language.

4.2.1. Education

The educational system is one of the keys to increase the use of the Irish language and to produce fluent speakers. As it has been mentioned before, with two different structures of schools, the solution would be to introduce Irish through other subjects. That would be a great improvement for the language because Gaelic schools have turned out to be very effective for the language. But every language also needs to have an environment prepared to be spoken in order to keep being alive, evolve and preserve for the next generation. As one of the main problems is that the young generation doesn't use Irish out of school, the Government will continue to develop and improve the Irish summer college system in the Gaeltacht by also creating camps for the whole family so it would become natural to use the language daily. However, these measures will only be effective to people who already have a good level of the language.

Primary and Post- Primary school new system

It has been proposed to increase the use of the language in schools by teaching other subjects through Irish in National schools. Clear examples of success with this system

are the Gaelic Schools. By incrementing the use of Irish with other subjects such as maths, history or P.E, it should improve their level of the language. In order to achieve this initiative, teachers of post-primary schools will have to attend specific courses to have the level desired to teach their subjects in Irish. In Gaeltacht schools, teachers will have to follow a very determinate programme to encourage the use of the language, not only during the classroom, but also outside. Colleges of Education will create a new specialization in Irish-medium primary teaching to guarantee better results among the pupils. The government will establish a National Centre to help and advice Colleges of education and to prepare teachers for the new Irish-medium schools that are going to be established to help and increase the use of the language. In order to guarantee the efficiency of the new educational system, a new Language Authority will be created to make sure that students are achieving a good level of Irish.

Higher-Level Education

As it has been mentioned before, new degrees specialized in education through Irish will be created in order to achieve better results with the language. In 2007 Irish became one of the EU Official languages and outputs of highly qualified graduates with specific skills are needed to serve the national and EU status (translators, interpreters and economists).

Education in the Gaeltacht

The State gives special importance to maintain and reinforce the use of the language in these areas because the use of Irish has decreased to only 3%. These areas are specially located in some towns of the counties of: Donegal, Meath, Mayo, Galway, Kerry, Cork and Waterford. Most of the Irish-speaking towns are concentrated in the counties of Donegal, Mayo and Galway.

Because the Gaeltacht areas are the only ones were Irish still survives, the Government gives special importance to maintain it and to increase it. There are also students from different parts of Ireland that ask to go to Gaeltacht Irish-medium schools in order to become bilinguals. That requires more resources, and the Government is trying to supply this demand by implementing teaching resources. A new language acquisition unit will be created at primary level in the three main regions. Designed inspectors will continue to ensure the level and acquisition of Irish among the students of the Gaeltacht schools and for gaelscoileanna.

Establishment of schools

As it has been mentioned before, there are not enough Gaelic schools for their big demand. The explanation for this issue is that the main objective of the Government is to provide a school to every student in Ireland. The Department of Education and Skills has had to adopt an interim strategy that is only allowing new primary schools to be established to cater for demographic growth in order to deliver the priority that every child has a school place available to them.

In order to supply the great demand of Gaelic schools, the state has created a subdivision of Gaelic schools in already existing English-medium schools: aonad (specialized Irish-medium units attached to an existing English-medium school) and sruth (stream or Irish-speaking class within an English-medium school). They both facilitate the provision of Irish-medium education in cases where there is a significant demand for education in Irish but where this demand would be insufficient for an independent Irish-medium school.

Compared to the rest of European countries, Ireland has a high demography. The population has also increased in the last ten years and it has required providing significant additional school places in some areas of the country. There has also been an increase demand of different types of schools.

4.2.2. The Gaeltacht

One of the main strategies of the government is to empower future generations of young Gaeltacht parents to raise their children through Irish. A comprehensive language planning system at community level in the Gaeltacht will be developed to ensure that Irish survives as the community language in the Gaeltacht. This language planning will not be put into practise in other parts of the island due to the lack of fluency in Irish, and as a result, the division between Irish speaking areas and English speaking areas will remain.

New legislations

As it has been mentioned before, an Irish Language and Gaeltacht Authority with responsibility for Irish matters will be created and its headquarters will be in the Gaeltacht. For language planning and implementation purposes, various types of language maintenance and strategic interventions will be established with the intention of increasing the number of daily Irish speakers.

In the case of majority Irish-speaking communities, the emphasis will be on protecting and strengthening these strong language communities by ensuring the linguistic sustainability of Irish as the community language of those regions. In the case of other Gaeltacht regions where daily Irish speakers are a significant minority, the emphasis will be on strengthening the Irish language community. Habitants of those communities receive and will keep receiving financial help with the intention to keep the Gaeltacht areas populated and the language alive.

Communities that want to acquire this category but cannot comply with the criteria in the new legislation will have a period of two years to develop plans to ensure that they maintain their status as Gaeltacht community. Communities who fail to develop acceptable sustainable plans within the two year period will no longer be included in the Gaeltacht. Plans will be reviewed every seven years. New areas may also be included in the Gaeltacht if they meet the criteria.

The Government now wants to keep the language alive at any cost, a clear example is the financial aids received by the habitants of the Gaeltacht for the mere fact of living in that Irish-speaking area. The Government's intention is to keep the Gaeltacht population in that area so they won't be forced to move elsewhere for economical reasons and will continue speaking the language.

Language planning

A new language planning will be prepared at community level for each Gaeltacht district. This language plans will cover all aspects of the everyday life, from family support planning, youth programmes to promote the language, community development, planning to support all kinds of business. There will also be provided health care services or even religious services in Irish. The Governments intention is to

try to create a natural environment to use the language daily. However, in the rest of the country, this characteristic won't be implemented due to the lack of Irish speakers.

4.2.3. Family transmission of the language – Early Intervention

In order to increase the number of Irish speakers, a natural environment needs to be created. This kind of language transmission in the family is crucial in order to expand the language. Families where parents speak Irish need advice on how to raise their children as balanced bilinguals, especially if only one parent is fluent. The Strategy has proposed different interventions for those parents to raise their children bilingually. The families in the Gaeltacht, as well as their schools will receive the support from specialist on how to teach students in order to be competent in both English and Irish. The intention is to extend this advice to all Irish-medium schools of the country, so everybody can benefit from it. If parents are not fluent in Irish, maybe grandparents are and they can share their knowledge with the new generation by creating activities to enrol the two generations and by benefiting everybody: the youngest will improve their language skills and the oldest will enjoy the experience.

The Government has created Gaeltacht summer colleges for students in order to improve their language skills. However, most of these students don't have anyone at home to practise what they have learned in those camps. To change this situation, and with the intention to create natural networks in the family through Irish, summer camps for the whole family will be created. With this initiative, everybody would improve and practise the language not only in the summer camp but afterwards in their everyday life and, little by little, Irish will gain more presence. Although the educational system is one of the keys to keep the language alive, people need to speak it in order to pass it to the next generation. For this reason, support to families must be also a priority.

4.2.4. Administration services and community

As it has been mentioned before, the Department of Arts, heritage and the Gaeltacht has introduced Irish in different aspects related to the Government. However, there is still a

lot of work to be done in order that Irish achieves the role of the official language of the country.

To change the current situation, the Government has especially created the Language and Gaeltacht Authority, with national responsibility for Irish language matters through the State. A new category of language community will be recognized in order to create new initiatives in Irish through the whole country. Foras na Gaeilge will keep being the responsible of promoting the language and will engage with other agencies to guarantee better results.

But Irish needs to be introduced in all aspects of the country to become a “functional language”. Another step with this strategy will be to introduce Irish into Public Service of the whole country, and to do that some measures need to be created. At the moment, the number of qualified staff members off the different departments outside the Gaeltacht who are able to communicate in Irish is nearly non-existent. In order to improve this matter, language training programmes need to be developed so that a higher proportion of public service staff can truly be functional in Irish and can deliver services in Irish to customers who seek them. Moreover, a national diploma in Bilingualism and Language Practise will be designed and offered, to support the delivery of quality services to the public in Irish and English. If the trainings are efficient, as well as the official diploma, members of the staff should achieve a good level of Irish. These members of staff have already studied Irish for fourteen years and with the reinforcement created by the different departments, the situation towards public service in Irish should change.

To ensure that Irish is present in Ireland, including the Gaeltacht areas, all the counties will have to design, prepare and implement “County Language Plans”. These plans will contain initiatives for every county to increase the percentage and number of daily Irish speakers. These measures will be delivered by stakeholders with the assistance of experts. As Dublin is the capital of the country, it is extremely important to introduce Irish to its population and also to the tourists and visitors as a prove that in Ireland the official language is Irish. At the moment the only way to realize about the existence of Irish in the country is mostly by the signs of the names of the streets and public transport because they have to be bilingual. For this reason, there will be a major Irish language promotion plan to be designed in the capital. The objective will be to increase

each year the number of Irish speakers in Dublin and to provide different opportunities for the daily use of the language in the city.

4.2.5. Media and technology

As it has been mentioned before, there is a very little amount of books published in Irish, and most of the time, only specialized bookshops provide materials in Irish. The Government thinks that an option to solve this problem is to have an easy access to Irish materials (books, magazines and newspapers) connected to new media and technologies. This new system of reading and writing in Irish will be supported with CDs, DVDs, audio books and print media. Moreover, the libraries will create literary events and activities (author readings, listening and reading clubs...). By having an easy access to all kinds of materials in Irish, it should increment the use of the language.

Although there are new improvements towards the language: incrementing the materials in Irish with DVDs and CDs and having access through these materials with new technologies it will not have a great result now or in twenty years. The reason is that this language has always been mostly oral, and even though it was forbidden for a long time, literature has never been a priority. As a result, there is only one award for the Irish arts, Oireachtas na Gaeilge, but a specific event for literature has not been created yet. If there is no recognition for those writers that decide to write in Irish, literature of that field will decline.

There is a national radio RTÉ that supports Irish language by broadcasting half of their programmes in Irish and they will increment it. TG4, the national TV channel that provides services in Irish will increase its daily schedule. The development of the channel also ensures the independent production sector in the Gaeltacht and provides varied employment opportunities. The fact that Irish is present on TV and on the radio has had a positive effect over the last years. The programmes and their modern vision of the language have helped to acquire a more modern and “cool” vision of the Irish language towards the new generation.

4.2.6. Dictionaries

All dictionaries have been created by Foclóir with the support of Foras na Gaeilge. The dictionaries created are only bilingual and on paper. This year they have created an electronic dictionary from their webpage to make the consultation of the language easier. However, as it happened with all kinds of materials related to literature and books there is not a big amount of dictionaries and grammars.

As part of the celebration of the 1916 Easter Ring, the government's aim is to digitise as much Irish national works as possible and publish them on paper and online. As it has also been mentioned before in the historic part of the Irish language, some of the oldest and most important manuscripts written in Irish are not in Ireland but in other libraries all over Europe. With the creation of this programme it will allow central access to Irish language materials of all over the world.

Furthermore, it is very important that all materials are updated and regularized to improve and learn a new language. For this reason, the government has decided to introduce and improve some of the existing materials such as bilingual dictionaries, corpuses and grammars of the Official Standard. Since it has not happened yet, the Royal Irish Academy will finish the Historic Dictionary of the Irish language in 2037. Nevertheless, the existing materials are not adequate for the current position of the language. In addition, EU institutions have the obligation to translate all the official documents into Irish and to achieve that, the Government will have to create the circumstances in which a sufficient number of qualified graduates are in place to meet EU recruitment needs.

As it has been mentioned before, the new strategy has been created by the Government to increment the use and importance of Irish. Even though they are going to make big steps for the language (create adequate materials in order to properly learn the language, create special degrees of translation and interpreting, create summer camps for families and create language plans for all the communities in Ireland...) the Government has waited too long to react. They should have implemented more Irish classes many years ago and they should have given more importance to literature. They will make improvements that will benefit the and increase the number of Irish speakers, but it will take more than only twenty years to achieve the role of an official language.

In the following part, I am going to ask two different groups of Irish people what is their opinion towards the language, the current situation, and the future of the language.

5. STUDY OF THE SITUATION OF IRISH LANGUAGE

Because I had the opportunity to live for a year in Ireland, I have been able to see the current situation of the language and compare it to other bilingual states. With the new vision of the Government and the new strategy ready to put into practise, I wanted to

know the opinion of the Irish towards their language. Because I have been working in a secondary school, Maria Immaculata Community College in Dunmanway, I have been able to ask students and members of staff their opinions towards Irish. This study is divided between two groups of different ages. In the first group the results that I have obtained are from a group of 21 students between the ages of 16 to 18 years old. The second group is composed by eight people between the ages of 27 to 48 years old. The questions being asked are related to the Irish language in different aspects (their opinion towards the language and its real situation, the frequency they use the language the amount of bilinguals they know, the new changes being made by the government and the future of the language). With the results obtained from the two different groups, I am going to compare two different Irish generations and also the situation of Irish now and twenty years ago.

5.1. Interviews to a group of Irish students between 16 and 18 years old

1. Nationality

Irish	20
American	1

Out of 21 students, 20 of them are Irish and they are between 16 and 18 years old.

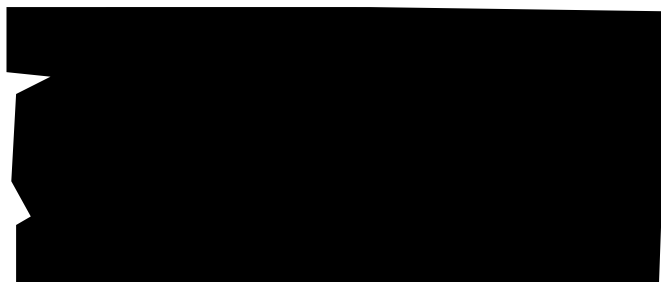
2. What was your opinion about having Irish as a compulsory subject in school?

Positive	17
Negative	3
Neutral	1

More than 80% of the students have a positive opinion about studying Irish as a compulsory subject. Some of them have even mentioned the importance to know and speak their own language and others say that is important to know languages in general.

3. Are you able to speak Irish?

Yes	14
No	0
A bit	7



Although students in Ireland have to study Irish since primary school (14 years in total), more than 33% of the students being asked admitted that they can only speak a little bit of Irish.

4. In which situations do you practice the language?

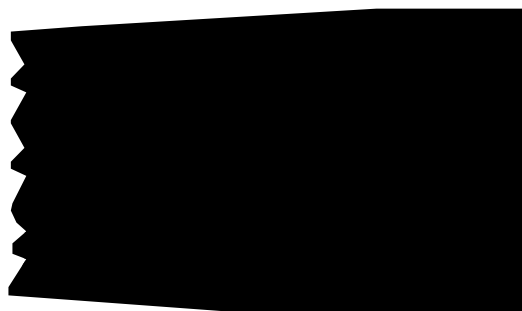
In class	16
At home	1
Never use it	1
Gaeltachts summer camp	3



Most of the students (76%) only use Irish during their Irish lessons. A group of students has practised Irish during the summer to Gaeltach summer camps and only one student out of 21 uses it at home and one doesn't use it at all.

5. How many people do you know that are fluent in Irish?

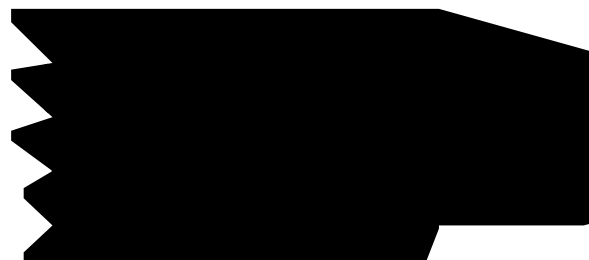
1 or 2	5
3 or 4	1
5 or 6	3
10	3
More than 10 people	4
No one	6



Most of the students who have answered that they know 5 or six Irish speakers; they mostly referred to the Irish teachers that are working in the school. The four students who are in the category "more than ten" said they knew 20 Irish speakers. The students who answered that they don't know anyone fluent in Irish as they have Irish speaking teachers in their secondary school

6. Do you speak other languages apart from English?

French	20
Irish	15
Flemish	1
German	1
None	1



Among 21 students, 20 of them think that they can speak French. By contrast, only 15 of them say that they can speak their native language, Irish. Because of the curriculum, students have to study a third European language, most of the Irish schools only offer the possibility to speak French. The two students who speak another language are from families in which one of their parents comes from Germany and Belgium.

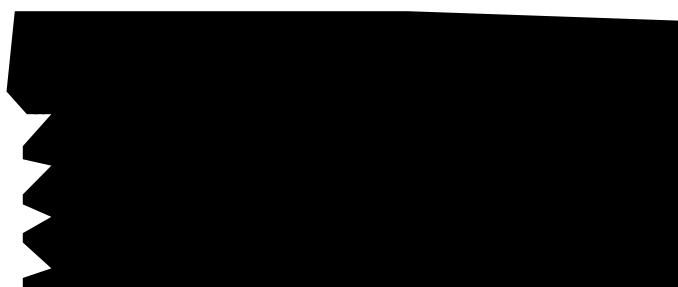
7. Do you agree with the new role and importance of Irish language in Ireland? (Signs in Irish, buses, radio, TV...)

Yes	19
No	0
Doesn't bother me	2

Most of the people, 90%, think that language is important and thanks to all those elements created by the government they learn from them. Only two people are neutral about this new situation.

8. Do you think is worth to spend an amount of money by the government to raise the use of the language?

Agree to keep the language and culture	12
Disagree due to economic problems	4
Disagree because is a waste	1
Should be spend else where	2
Don't bother	1



The results show that students agree with the importance to keep and develop their native language: 57% of the students agree to spend an amount of money to achieve that, 19% think that is not the right moment due to the recession that is suffering the country and 9% think that this money should be spent elsewhere.

9. What do you think is the situation of Irish compared to 20 years ago?

Increased the use of the language	11
Decreased the use of the language	3
Has remained the same	2
More appealing to young generation	2
Don't know	1



Most of the students think that the use of the language has increased in the last 20 years. Most of them have also added that Irish people and especially the new generation are more aware of the importance of their language.

10. Why do you think that only 3% of the population speaks Irish on a daily basis?

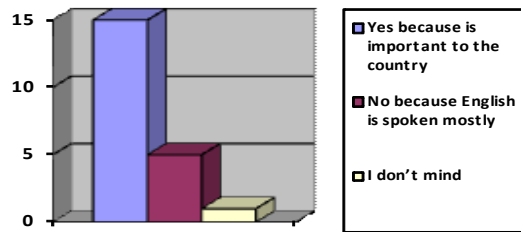
Colonization of the English	3
Importance of the English language	5
Not all the schools are Gaelic	1
The Gaeltach area is very small	2
English is easier	2
Irish isn't emphasized enough	2
Immigration	3
Don't know	1



Students have very diverse opinions towards the reason why the percentage of people who speak Irish daily is so small. Most of them think that it's because English is the most important language nowadays. Others think that it's because of historical reasons and they defend the fact that a lot of people still speak it. With the same proportion, some students think that is due to immigrants who have arrived in the recent years in Ireland and are not able to understand Irish. The same amount claim that English is easier as a language, they blame that is not emphasized enough or that the Gaeltacht areas are too small.

11. Do you agree that Irish is the official language of the country?

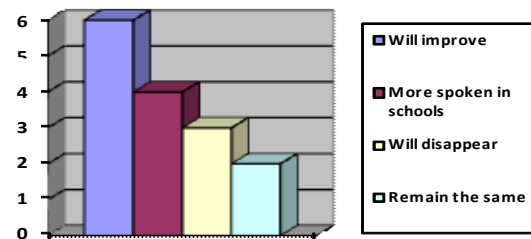
Yes because is important to the country	15
No because English is spoken mostly	5
I don't mind	1



From a total of 21 students, 15 of them (71%) think that it's important that Irish has become the official language again ("because is important for the country, because we live in Ireland, because is a unique language"). Other 5 students think that English is in reality the language spoken for everybody and is more important.

12. What do you think is the future of Irish language?

Will improve	6
More spoken in schools	4
Will disappear	3
Remain the same	2



Most of the students, 28%, think that there is a future for Irish and they think that the situation will improve. Other 19% have answered that Irish will be more spoken in schools in the future, 3 are negative and think that will disappear and two think that it will remain the same.

5.2. Interviews to members of staff of the secondary school

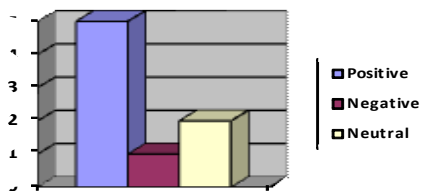
The people being asked, eight in total, are staff members of a secondary school (1 Irish teacher, 1 French teacher, 3 social workers, 3 learning support teachers). Among these eight people, there are many who are fluent in Irish. Because most of them had to study Irish twenty years ago, I will be able to compare what was the situation of Irish twenty years ago from now and what do they think about the new strategy.

1. Nationality

As it has happened before, all the members of the staff that I have interviewed are Irish and most of them are from County Cork.

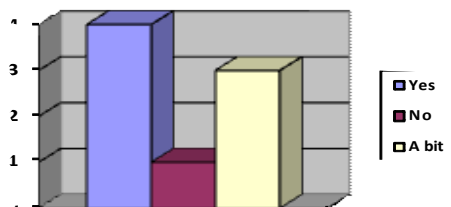
2. What was your opinion about having Irish as a compulsory subject in school?

Positive	5
Negative	1
Neutral	2



All of the people who have answered in a positive way they also said that they were glad they did study it. The two people who have answered neutral (“I didn't mind it, it wasn't my favourite subject but...”) also added that now they have realized they needed to study the language of their country.

3. Are you able to speak the language?

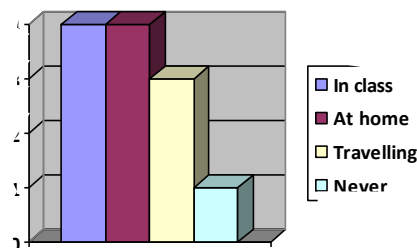


Yes	4
No	1
A bit	3

Even though there is an Irish teacher, who is obviously fluent, three other people consider themselves fluent in Irish. Three think that they can speak a little bit of Irish and only one out of eight doesn't speak the language.

4. In which situations do you practice the language?

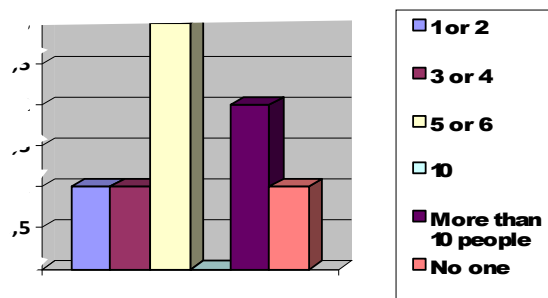
In class	4
At home	4
Travelling	3
Never	1



As there are fluent speakers, they are able to put into practice the language more often (at home, in class, travelling). Even though the three members of the staff consider themselves not fluent, they are able to speak it while they are travelling because no one can understand them and they say that is very handy.

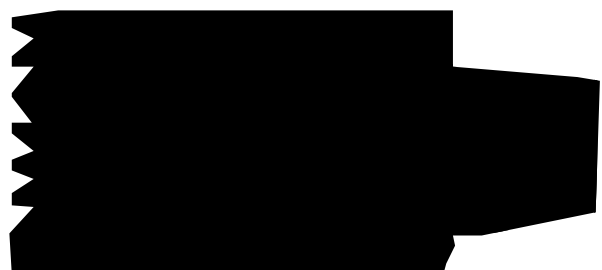
5. How many people do you know that are fluent in Irish?

1 or 2	1
3 or 4	1
5 or 6	3
10	0
More than 10 people	2
No one	1



The people who are fluent know a lot of fluent Irish speakers. The people who have said that only know a little bit of Irish know between 2 and 6 people. The person who has answered “None” hasn't considered all the Irish teachers who are working in the school.

6. Do you speak other languages apart from English



French	7
Irish	7
Spanish	1
None	1

Because French is a compulsory subject, and while they studied in secondary school there wasn't the option to study other European languages, all of them speak or have some notion of French. They also think that they are able to speak Irish except for one.

7. Do you agree with the new role and importance of Irish language in Ireland? (Signs in Irish, buses, radio, TV...)

Yes	6
No	1
Doesn't bother me	1

Everybody agrees with the new role and importance of Irish and they think that thanks to that, people will realize about the importance of their language.

8. Do you think is worth to spend an amount of money by the government to raise the use of the language?

Everybody, except for one person, agrees on the fact that is important to keep the language alive because otherwise it will soon die. However, some of them think that the language shouldn't be imposed or forced to learn because automatically people will reject it.

9. What do you think is the situation of Irish compared to 20 years ago?

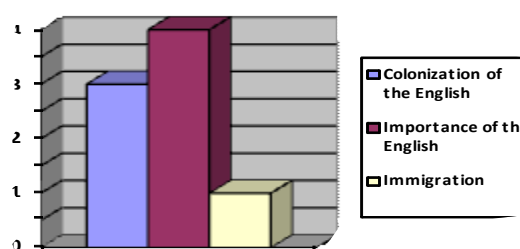
Increased the use of the language	3
More appealing to young generation	2
People is less afraid	1
Decreased the use of the language	1



Most of the members of the staff are positive and think that it has increased the use of the language. Two of them think that Irish is getting more appealing to the young generation, thanks to the media and young writers. A person has referred to historical reasons by “less afraid” of speaking it.

10. Why do you think that only 3% of the population speaks Irish on a daily basis?

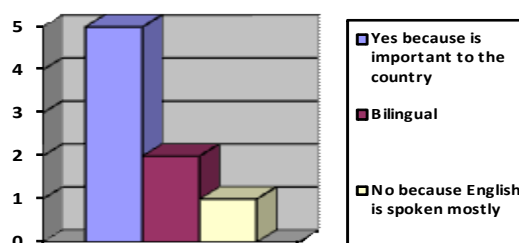
Colonization of the English	3
Importance of the English	4
Immigration	1



Half of the people agree on the importance and influence of English “if you want to book a hotel you need English, all movies and programmes are in English, English is the language of the money”. Three people think that it’s because they had been submitted under English power for 800 years under and it was forbidden to speak their native language. One person thinks that because of the immigration, many people don’t speak the language anymore because they can’t understand it.

11. Do you agree that Irish is the official language of the country?

Yes because is important to the country	5
Bilingual	2
No because English is spoken mostly	1



More than half of the people think that because they are living in the Republic of Ireland, Irish has to be the official language. Others think that it should be bilingual, because even though Irish is their native language, everybody speaks English. One person thinks that it should be only English.

5.3. Conclusions of the study

The two groups of people interviewed belong to two different generations and, in some cases, they have different opinions towards the language. The young generation of students are aware of the importance of the Irish language and they like the fact that is a compulsory subject. On the contrary, most of the members of the older generation confessed that it wasn't their favourite subject, but with the time and the experience they have realized about the importance of studying it.

Most of the members of the staff are fluent or have enough knowledge to have a little conversation in Irish. They also use it quite frequently (at home, in school or travelling), while students strictly speak it when they have to during their Irish class. As it has been said previously, students nowadays have to learn a language from a book and they don't have many natural occasions to speak it. Because they only study three or four times a week, even though they have to study it for fourteen years, it is not enough to achieve a good level for a language so different from English.

Both generations agree on promoting the language with an Irish TV channel, radio channels and signs in Irish. However, when they are asked if the money should be spend on promoting the language, the second group agrees completely, while in the first group there are different answers: more than half of the group agrees, 4 people think that is not the right moment due to economic problems of the country, and three people think that is a waste.

Both generations also agree on the importance of English and that is the main reason why is more used in their country than Irish. But while in the second group most of the people blame the English invasion as the cause of the decrease of the language, in the first group they have more diverse opinions: importance of English, immigration, Irish isn't emphasised and English is easier. In this particular question the difference of answers could be related to the fact that the second group lived more closely the changes of the country while the first group didn't.

Although there are little differences, both groups agree on the new role and status achieved by the Irish language, as being more "fashionable and cool". Both generations

also associate the language to part of their identity, to who they are and to their country by saying that “it’s Ireland, so Irish has to be the official language of the country”. However, some people of both groups is realistic and thinks that English has a huge influence and is more “practical or useful” to speak it or to have it as the official language because only a little amount of people can speak Irish.

6. CONCLUSIONS OF THE SITUATION IN IRELAND

After living in Ireland for a year, it has given me the opportunity to observe the situation of the country and their official language with an impartial vision. Because I have been living in a town close to Cork, I have seen only the perspective of that area, so I am not going to generalize to the whole country.

When I arrived in Ireland a year ago, I did not know about the existence of the Irish language. I noticed it because all signs were in two different languages (English and Irish) and this is the only presence of Irish I have seen for a year in the country.

When I first decided to do the paper about this topic, I didn't think that Irish was in such a bad state compared to other regional languages. To know about a language, it is important to know the origins of the language, its phases and the evolution. It was also crucial to know about the history of the country as it was linked with the use of the Irish language and because is one of the reasons why is in this state. I have also done a research with the improvements that have been made by the Government towards the language and the new initiatives created to encourage the use of the language among its population. Moreover, because I was in the country, I did a questionnaire to people I have worked with (teacher, members of staff, students) in order to know their opinion towards their language, its current situation, the new improvements made and what are their opinions towards their language. With this paper I have ended with some personal conclusions towards the language that inevitably made me compare the Irish language to the current situation of my language, Catalan.

Even though Ireland became independent nearly 100 years ago, the people and its Government have decided to take care of their language only four years ago. During all that time, Irish language was mostly spoken in regional areas and it wasn't studied in schools. After thirty years of their independence, Irish was introduced in the educational system, but English kept being the priority. Twenty years later, in the seventies, the Government decided that all students had to pass Irish in order to get their leaving certificate, and with that new improvement and by studying it three or four times a week it was supposed to be enough. However, a group of people who cared about the language decided to create independent schools where Irish was the priority and all the

subjects were thought in their national language. These schools not only produced bilingual students, but also very efficient students in all fields. However, those results were not enough for the Government to change the educational system if they wanted to increment the number of Irish speakers and the future of the language. Finally, after 77 years of the independence of the country, the Government decided that it was time to react and to try to rescue the language and design new strategies (Good Friday Agreement, Foras na Gaeilge, Department of Arts, heritage and the Gaeltacht) to not lose Irish forever.

I was extremely shocked to see the inefficiency of the Government towards the evolution of the Irish language, the national language of Ireland and a language that only a little percentage of their population can speak. Politicians decide to speak in English when they have to do a speech because they are not fluent enough. However, Irish has become an EU language that none of its politicians is fluent enough to speak. Moreover, there are not enough materials and dictionaries to support this new status or even qualified professionals to be able to translate and interpret if there was anyone who wanted to speak in Irish, which is doubtful.

However, it is not only the Government to blame about the current situation of the language. The Irish population is also guilty for not having any interest of transmitting the language to the next generation. Even though there was the English invasion for 800 years, and adding the fact that Irish is a Celtic language and has different origins compared to the English language, the Irish haven't cared much for their language to get to the point where only 3% of the population is able to speak it.

With this research about the Irish language, it has made me realize about the importance of the Irish language and to keep it alive, because it is the oldest language of Europe and if the situation and its people do not start having an interest for their national language, it will disappear. Although the Strategy of 20 years is very impressive and it will be a reinforcement to increase the language, I think that it will take a long time until Ireland can achieve the situation of regions like Catalonia. It is also not easy in political terms to move from a universal policy, which has been in operation for eighty years to a new policy which emphasizes Irish as a great priority.

One of the keys to keep a language alive is with social networks, interlinked social relationships that may grow out of an institutional setting, but whose survival will

depend on the interest of its population. It seems unlikely that these are strong enough at present to guarantee the reproduction of spoken Irish or its expansion to the next generation. Irish population have the advantage of speaking English perfectly, and they know that they don't really need to speak any other language because everybody will be able to understand them.

This case of bilingualism could be compared to the situation of Catalonia. Catalan has been a forbidden language for many years, it has suffered the power of a dictatorship but it has managed to survive and to keep being a functional and active language. Compared to the situation of Irish, Catalan is a Latin language with similar origins to Spanish. But the most significant difference to the Irish situation is the importance of Catalan to their people to keep it alive for centuries. Even though it was forbidden, grammar was created in order to evolve the language and literature followed. Prizes of arts and literature were also created. After the dictatorship, Catalan was introduced in all schools as the main language, leaving Spanish to a compulsory subject. Because Spain is the official language of the country, most of the media was in the national language and thanks to that and learning it in schools it has been enough to achieve a good level of both languages. Because Catalan has had such an important role through education, by studying all subjects in Catalan from primary schools to university degrees, we have been able to keep the language alive and as a result, nearly all the population can speak it. It's true that the system to keep Catalan alive has been a little bit aggressive, but it has given great results: population bilingual in Spanish and Catalan and with the capacity to be able to study other languages more easily than the rest of the Spanish population.

During this year, I have realized about the importance of my language and about how lucky we are to speak, express, write and sing in our own native language "Catalan" and not a language that it was imposed "Spanish". Although Irish know a lot of their history and their culture, they can only express in the language of their invaders, and this situation will not change for decades. It is sad to see a country that has suffered so much through history with the English invasion, a country that tries to reinforce their culture and their sense of identity with an unspoken language.

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