

# ULRR

## Institutionalising language policy: mismatches in community and national goals

Item Type	Book chapter
Authors	Ó hIfearnáin, Tadhg
Citation	Coimhearsnachd na Gáidhlig an-Diugh Gaelic Communities Today, Munro, Gillian & Mac an Táilleir, Iain, (eds);chapter 3, pp. 35-47
Publisher	Dunedin Academic Press
Download date	2026-05-20 13:03:50
Item License	<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/1.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/1.0/</a>
Link to Item	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/10344/4221">https://hdl.handle.net/10344/4221</a>

### 3 **Institutionalising Language Policy: Mismatches in Community and National Goals**

*Tadhg Ó hIfearnáin*

#### **Institutionalising a language profile**

The national profile of Gaelic in Scotland has changed in recent years. The profile, or image, of the language in the public space is a reflection of the way in which the majority of the population who do not speak Gaelic support a form of Gaelic presence in their lives, or at the very least tolerate it. In some respects this is a major achievement for those who have been working for a turn-around in the public perception of the language outside the language community. The general population's view of Gaelic undoubtedly influences attitudes towards the native language from within the Gaelic-speaking population as well, and so action in this domain is a central part of the overall policy implicit in the National Plan for Gaelic, 2007–2012 (Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2007a). The arrival of Gaelic on the national stage has been a long process, which started to gather momentum some 30 years ago, but which has made significant national impact particularly since the turn of the century. Gaelic has acquired a limited form of official status after the enactment of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. It has seen advances, albeit modest ones, in public educational provision at all levels (Rogers & McLeod, 2007), and an expanded broadcast media presence. It has a visible presence on directional and informational road signage in what have been regarded as its traditional areas as well as in some of the major towns and within institutions of state. It is not at all certain, however, if any of these developments will have a positive impact on the number of active Gaelic speakers, nor if they will of themselves cause any resurgence in intergenerational transmission of the language from adult speakers and their communities to their children.

Despite widespread assumptions to the contrary, Cormack (2007), for example, has argued that the role that the broadcast media can play in direct forms of language maintenance should not be over-estimated. He postulated that it is possible that the broadcast media can play a role if they are highly participatory and can give 'people a reason for adopting, or asserting, the identity of being a minority language speaker'

(*ibid.*, p. 66), but that in reality not enough research has been carried out in bilingual community situations to establish this.

Education is a key area of the National Plan for Gaelic. Again, the evidence as to the impact that this will have on intergenerational transmission and the creation of new fluent speakers, even if very successful from an educational and language learning perspective, is uncertain. The evidence from long practice in Ireland is ambiguous. While the compulsory teaching of Irish as a subject and Irish medium education provision ranging from the teaching of some subjects through Irish to full immersion and Irish medium education for Irish speakers from primary through to tertiary level have all been important features of schooling in Ireland for nearly a century, the impact on intergenerational transmission of the language is difficult to ascertain. According to the 2006 census of population in the Republic, some 72,148 people claimed to speak Irish daily outside the education system. Just under a third of them (22,515 people) lived in the official Gaeltacht regions. These figures do need some qualification. There are many more very good speakers of Irish than those who recorded their usage as being of a daily frequency, although the exact number is hard to quantify. There are lots of reasons, from personal circumstances or choices through to isolation and the lack of contact with other speakers for fluent speakers not to return themselves as daily speakers. The fact remains, nevertheless, that even after a century of language promotion through education among native speakers, revival speakers and general learners alike, the overall number of frequent speakers of the language who are not actually at school remains in the same order as speakers of Scottish Gaelic, being 58,652 according to the 2001 census, with a little over 34,000 others who confirmed passive abilities in the language. Probably more than 90% of these individuals gained their knowledge of Gaelic from their family background (McLeod, 2004). Although little research has been carried out in Ireland, anecdotal evidence would seem to indicate that a very high percentage of habitual Irish speakers also acquired their linguistic abilities from their personal relationships with relatives and friends, even if these families and networks are more often than not supported by the education system. Irish is under severe pressure from English as a first language in the bilingual setting of all the Gaeltacht areas despite the positive action on policy level through education and status planning. Ó Giollagáin (2002), for example, discussed the linguistic profile of the Ráth Chairn Gaeltacht area in Co. Meath and Ó hÍfearnáin (2006, p. 21), the first language of the most fluent Irish speakers in the Múscraí Gaeltacht region in Co. Cork, both showing the weakening grip of Irish as a mother tongue in the younger generations. The pattern varies in all the Irish Gaeltacht regions, but the trends are the same. MacKinnon (2004b) made the case that although the overall picture of intergenerational transmission among Scottish Gaelic speakers seems bleak, particularly in the Islands and West Highlands, there are some signs of a language revival, but these are very small numbers indeed. The biggest difference between the position of Irish in Ireland and

Gaelic in Scotland is that the majority of the Irish population accept that Irish is the *national language*, to use the terminology of the state's Constitution. Some 1,203,583 people claimed to speak Irish outside of the school system in the 2006 census. A further 453,207 speak Irish at school. Around 90% of the population has some knowledge of Irish because they attended school within the state. An astonishing 14% of Irish people claimed that Irish was their 'mother tongue' in the Eurobarometer survey on the knowledge of languages in the EU (Eurobarometer, 2003). As this figure is far higher than the percentage of people in the country we know to be highly fluent in the language, and is around seven times the number of daily speakers according to the census, it must reflect the fact that a significant proportion of the population believe that Irish is their 'mother tongue', even if they cannot speak it well or did not acquire it in their childhood from their parents. The strength of this language ideology, to use Spolsky's (2004) definition of ideology as what people believe about the languages they use as opposed to objective facts, is definitely a product of the position that Irish has achieved since the foundation of the state, when the vast majority of the 18% or so of the population who spoke the language at the time were actually native speakers, compared to the *c.*2% who speak Irish daily now. The *linguistic landscape* (Landry & Bourhis, 1997) of Ireland changed in favour of Irish, as Scotland's is doing now.

The linguistic landscape functions as an informational and symbolic marker of the relative power and status of languages spoken in a territory. There is a burgeoning literature in this area of language policy and sociolinguistic studies. Backhaus (2007), for example, has explored the representation and use of indigenous and foreign languages in the visible public space in Tokyo to reveal insights about the real position of languages in that society. Cenoz & Gorter (2006), in a study of the linguistic landscape in the Basque Country and Friesland, have shown that minority languages which are spoken in bilingual or multilingual settings can position themselves in status-power relationships within the linguistics of society by overt planning which engenders popular usage. The linguistic landscape is not simply a matter of signage, but is really part of the linguistic environment within which citizens live. The presence of Gaelic on television and in the education system, on road signs and on the websites of government agencies is not simply a passive reflection of the current state of popular opinion towards the language. It is a key element of policy, participating in, generating and giving legitimacy to particular linguistic practices. As the number of venues expand for Gaelic in the public space, and the form that Gaelic usage takes in these places develops, monitoring its effect on the consciousness of Gaelic speakers will be a fruitful domain of research. The institutionalisation of Gaelic in the public domain may lead to more confidence in the community of speakers, in turn leading to more usage and transmission to the youth and learners, but unless the development of this area of public policy is managed with this in mind, the linguistic landscape may simply come to reflect the position that Gaelic already has in the lives of the

vast majority of the population. In Ireland, national language policy is reflected in the linguistic landscape which assigns a role to Irish in the public space which is based on the way that the majority of the population, who are non-speakers, see it in their own lives. It is present, but provides additional information, often of a peripheral or heritage nature. The Official Languages Act (2003) sets out to give Irish more prominence on bilingual road signage, but at present the Irish is written in smaller letters, in italics, above the Anglicised names. The Irish is frequently spelt incorrectly or has typing and grammar errors. This gives a clear though subconscious message to speakers and non-speakers alike about the status of Irish in the bilingual power relationship. In the Gaeltacht regions, where directional signage and signs indicating the start of villages and townlands are only in Irish, the style used is nearly always the small italic letters on their own, without the English version, as if to say that something important is missing from the information. Gaeltacht people are expected to have good eyesight and to walk and drive with a permanent crick in their neck, reading slanting letters while musing about the important English information that is missing from their signage. This analogy can be carried over to a majority of fields where Irish has a presence in the everyday lives of citizens, be it education, written and broadcast media or the use of Irish in entertainment.

Nationwide policies which were designed in the early part of the 20th century with language maintenance and revival in mind have reached a plateau and now only echo the position that the majority population ascribe to Irish as a heritage issue rather than enhancing the needs and ambitions that Irish speakers might cultivate for themselves and their language. The institutionalisation of Irish has indeed led to substantial benefits for Irish speakers due to the interest and energy that the rest of the population has vested in learning the language and holding it in high esteem. The nature of that esteem is, however, paradoxical. Despite the language revival project falling short of making Irish the majority language in the country, from the national perspective the last hundred years have been far from a failure. The problem is that the aims and linguistic desires of the national collective do not necessarily coincide with those of the residual habitual Irish-speaking population, in the Gaeltacht and elsewhere. Subtle mismatches in the aims and objectives of language management initiatives which favour the national language ideology over that of the Irish-speaking core have led to situations where policies in favour of promoting Irish as a community language may actually have contributed to its decline. The state's encouragement of Gaeltacht families not to speak any English at home while insisting that Gaeltacht schools use only Irish, in the absence of any explanation as to the benefits of these policies for bilingualism and while non-Gaeltacht population remains free to speak English or send their children to English or Irish language schools, is a case in point (Ó hÍfearnain, 2007). A positive connection between the national institutionalisation of Scottish Gaelic on the one hand and its vitality as a community language in the Islands and

parts of the Highlands on the other is a challenge for language policy itself, for its makers and its implementation, just as it has been in Ireland.

### The nature of language policy

The paradigm set out by Spolsky (2004) and expanded by Shohamy (2006) divides language policy into three elements. All speakers of all languages have beliefs about the languages that they speak. Irish and Scottish Gaelic speakers, for example, often believe that their local variety is not as pure or developed as that spoken in another area. Sometimes they believe the reverse. They have deep-seated beliefs about the value that they attach to their language. These can be positive, such as the way that they associate their Gaelic with family, locality, history, song and story tradition, their formal religion and other beliefs. They can also be negative. Many speakers still believe that their marginalised languages have no practical use, that they are destined to pass, that English is inherently superior for all matters of education and science. The things that people believe about the languages they speak are not necessarily founded on objective facts, nor are they always articulated in any formal way. Nevertheless, they are very powerful elements of community culture. These beliefs are language ideology, the first element in the language policy paradigm. If communities have recognisable ideologies, so do families, individuals and polities. The polity, however, differs from community in that it more often than not has an overt position on ideological matters in the linguistic domain, which may be similar to that of the speech community in an open democratic society, but can equally be quite unlike it. Language shift from Irish or Scottish Gaelic to English can be characterised, for example, by the subversion of community language ideology by one of the state or other institutions such as the church, which compounded beliefs about language with broader questions of cultural and economic values. Moulding pre-existent language ideologies in the marginalised Gaelic cultures of Ireland, Scotland and Isle of Man from the 17th century onwards, economic development, social advancement, education, Christian knowledge and democratic citizenship were linked with English by state modernisers and religious reformers alike (Durkacz, 1983). As one informant from the Gaeltacht study cited below said as late as 2002, '*Mura bhfuil a fhios acu ach an Ghaoluinn, fáigfar ann iad. Ní labharfar í amach anso, pé scéal é.*' [If they (*informant's children*) only speak Irish they will be left behind. It will not be spoken in the future anyway.]

The second element is the language practices of the speech community. This means how people actually use their linguistic repertoire, both within the language and the way and extent to which they use the other language or languages that their speech community share. The unwritten rules about code-switching are a good example, determining how much English is acceptable within Gaelic speech acts, or when it is appropriate to use Gaelic or English or both. Language ideology and practices do not

necessarily coincide. In recent work in the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht in Kerry, for example, a discussion amongst young mothers revealed that the group believed that speaking only Irish with their children was the best way to ensure that the children gained a thorough knowledge of Irish, and so would become fully bilingual. Those present believed that they did speak only Irish with their children. This ideology was contradicted on further discussion though when an ever-extending list of exceptions to the rule in actual linguistic practice gradually emerged. If neighbours or relatives who could not speak Irish well were in the house, English might be spoken while they were there, as it might be when watching an English television programme, or discussing something read in the newspaper or heard on the radio in English. The ideology certainly drove the practice, but was often overtaken by circumstance.

The last element in the paradigm is language management, often called language planning. Language management is a term which has strong associations with language policy and politics in the non-English dominated world, and in continental European schools of applied sociolinguistics in particular. Language management is the intervention in the linguistic ideology and practices of a speech community with the aim of achieving specific goals by enhancing those practices and beliefs which help to accomplish the aims while curtailing or changing those which work against it. As is the case with the other elements in this paradigm, language management can be accomplished by politics, but also by communities or individuals within communities. Individuals or a particular subgroup of people within a speech community might be described as 'language managers' if their ideology and practice are different to the established pattern within the community and also influence the wider community, precipitating change. Language shift in Gaelic communities can be shown to happen in this way. Typically and historically, although men have been the first to learn English in a contact situation, through work and commerce, young women have been the early adopters of English as a language to speak among themselves. Published collections of folklore gathered in the period between the 1920s and 1960s in the weaker Gaeltacht regions in Ireland, for example, frequently note that although all other members of a tradition bearer's household would speak Irish, young girls and new wives of sons would often only speak English, even though they would understand Irish. These women were influential in their communities' language habits and were at the forefront of language shift, and so can be seen as language managers. This is a trend common to both Scotland and Ireland observed, for instance, among young mothers in Lewis in a recent television programme, *Is a-màireach*. In addition, the 2007 survey of 27 Irish Gaeltacht districts for Údarás na Gaeltachta's *Gaeilge 2010* project highlighted the mothers' low ability and usage of Irish compared to that of fathers (Ó hIfearnáin, 2008b).

The paradigm explained briefly above is very much related to the model of cognitive language acquisition, which seeks to build on beliefs and practices about the

target language. Apart from long-established interests in the languages of Israel and minorities elsewhere, both Spolsky and Shohamy do have an academic background in language testing. The model is also very close to the diverse French, Iberian, Russian and Soviet approaches to language planning, amongst others, which give primacy to actions in the politics and policy of language management before the more abstract notions of status, corpus and acquisition planning which have dominated the field in the English-speaking world since Haugen (1966) and his colleagues first set out their language planning paradigm. The key element in this approach is that it shows that in order to undertake successful language management from the institutional point of view, such as an official national language plan, it is first important to understand the linguistic beliefs and practices of the speech community so as to be able to steer them towards productive measures. Language planning for marginalised languages has too often been undertaken within the context of a particular language ideology that has national goals which may not be appropriate to the smaller residual speech community.

### **A paradoxical aim in language policy**

When the Irish language movement laid the foundation for the revival project in the late 19th century, it came to agree a certain number of fundamental values about the nature of the language which was to be maintained, cultivated and taught to the population which had already gone through the shift to English. After considerable and heated debate, the revival movement decided to base itself on *caint na ndaoine*, the language of the people, rather than the literary standard which was largely based on an adaptation of the high register language of the 17th century, which was practised by scribes and a limited number of creative writers throughout the 18th and into the early 19th century. A language based on the traditional form would have had some considerable advantage had Ireland's Irish speakers been literate at the time. It could have been fairly neutral from a dialectal point of view, and provide continuity with the literary tradition of the earlier period. The *caint na ndaoine* argument was stronger in that it was based on the natural language of the Gaeltacht, still quite an extensive territory over a hundred years ago, and could provide a suitable target language for the learner in that it was based on community speech. The problem was in the paradox that a new national standard language was envisaged, though not fully codified until the 1950s, that would be based on *caint na ndaoine*, which was a diversity of often very distant dialects with a very limited spread of register, style and domains. Irish corpus language policy, being work on the language itself, has struggled with the difference between Gaeltacht varieties and the national standard language ever since. While dialect diversity is not so marked in Scotland, the National Plan for Gaelic does envisage that there should be 'an increase in the attention given to the relevance and consistency of the Gaelic language' (Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2007a, p. 13).

This 'consistency' is a reference to the need to have an authoritative spelling system and variety for national rather than local usage. As the number of opportunities for employment in the public space expands, by which I mean in education, the media and public administration, a sort of standard Scottish Gaelic has already started to emerge. Grant (2004, p. 70), writing about the Gaelic of Islay, has pointed out that there is an unwritten and informal agreement that the Gaelic variety spoken in the central part of the Western Isles has become a quasi standard or prestige variety, leading broadcasters in particular to adopt what they think would be the usage of speakers of this variety. In his opinion, arising from this hierarchy of speech, pronunciations or usages which differ from the perceived centre of the northern Hebrides are regarded by many Scottish Gaelic speakers as deviant or eccentric. Nancy Dorian (1987, p. 59) has observed that teaching a grammatically standardised prestige version of a language to a community who speak a tangibly different variety may only emphasise the marginal nature of their own dialect in their eyes and further undermine their belief in the language's role and legitimacy. In establishing the consistency necessary for the use of Scottish Gaelic as a national language, the language managers need to be very careful not to undermine any legitimate language variety which is used in any part of the speech community. The official Irish Standard, *an Caighdeán Oifigiúil*, specifically says that although it recommends certain forms, it does not remove the validity of other correct forms nor forbid their usage (Rannóg an Aistriúcháin, 1958, p. viii). I have argued, based on fieldwork (Ó hIfearnáin, 2006, 2008a) that the standard variety of Irish has its own power and that even if it was never designed to do so, it actually replaces the local language variety in some domains and undermines it in others, particularly in regions of Ireland where Irish is not strong as a local language. Even in areas where the language is strong, such as Iorras Aithneach in Conamara, younger speakers in particular no longer have such a depth of knowledge of the local traditional variety of earlier generations (Ó Curnáin, 2007), and have to expend a lot of energy to learn the standard language which can combine with the dominance of English to further subvert their home variety, which is, paradoxically, the local speech on which the revitalisation was supposed to be based.

### **Divergence between Gaeltacht language ideology and national language policy**

Between 2000 and 2004 I conducted a sociolinguistic survey to investigate the language practices and beliefs in one particular Gaeltacht region. The Múscraí Gaeltacht region is a landlocked mountainous area in south-western Ireland, on the Cork side of the boundary between Cork and Kerry. Múscraí was a core area of the *fíorGhaeltacht* when the first Gaeltacht Commission published its map of the proposed Gaeltacht regions in 1926. It was surrounded by *breacGhaeltacht* regions on all sides. It was part of a large continuous geographic Gaeltacht region, connected to others across western

Munster: Béarra further west, straddling the Kerry–Cork boundary; Uíbh Ráthach in south Kerry; and Corca Dhuibhne further north in western Kerry. The *breacGhaeltacht* of Cairbre on the southern Cork coast and the *fíorGhaeltacht* of Cléire offshore were only a short distance from the southern tip of Múscraí. Natives of Múscraí and the area itself played an important part in the language revival period from the late 19th to the early 20th century. Many revivalists attended summer colleges there from the earliest stage of the revival period. Peadar Ua Laoghaire, born at Lios Carragáin, was one of many writers from the area and one of the leaders of the *caint na ndaoine* movement. Coimisiún Béaloideasa Éireann [the Irish Folklore Commission] has collected a large amount of material from story tellers and tradition bearers in all parts of Múscraí. The influential post-war poet Seán Ó Ríordáin hailed from here, and it was also home to Seán Ó Riada who led the development of traditional and classical Irish music in the second half of the 20th century. Because of the decline of Irish as a community language since 1926, particularly in the *breacGhaeltacht* areas, by the time the Gaeltacht was defined by statute in 1956 for the purpose of giving an area of jurisdiction to the newly formed *Roimn na Gaeltachta* [Department of the Gaeltacht], Múscraí was physically isolated from other Gaeltacht regions, and remains so.

The area had a population of 3,401 according to the 2002 Census of Ireland. The same source indicated that some 2,707 or 79.6% of the total population claim to be able to speak Irish, but only 1,207 (35.5%) said they did so, on a daily basis. As is the case with all other official Gaeltacht areas, there is considerable variation in ability and usage within this small region. The area can be divided into four linguistic zones according to the percentage of daily users of Irish.

The strongest Irish-speaking areas are to the north-west and south-west of the region. The area around Cúil-Aodha, in the district electoral division of Gort na Tiobradan, a rural area in the north-west of the region with a population of 438, is the strongest Irish-speaking community, with some 83.3% who claim to speak Irish, 246 or 56.2% of whom say they do so on a daily basis. The second most strongly Irish-speaking subdivision is Béal Átha an Ghaorthaidh in the south-west, a village and surrounding mountainous countryside with a population of 863, where some 40.6% claim to use Irish on a daily basis. The intergenerational transmission of the language is under great pressure in Béal Átha an Ghaorthaidh, and all informants in the present study placed great importance on schooling and social clubs in maintaining Irish as a community language among the young. Somewhat surprisingly, the school-going populations of these two areas, although physically in proximity, rarely meet as they attend their local primary schools and then secondary schools in Baile Bhuirne and Béal Átha an Ghaorthaidh respectively. As a result, the small group of 39 Irish speakers in the 15–19 year old cohort from Cúil Aodha and the 72 in Béal Átha an Ghaorthaidh remain linguistically isolated.

To the east of these two core areas lies Baile Bhuirne/Baile Mhic Íre, an urbanised area on the main Cork to Killarney road with a population of 1,297 and some 34.4%

daily Irish speakers. Further east and to the south lies a fourth area in the electoral divisions of Cill na Martra, Doire Finín and Ceann Droma where only 25.7% of the 820 people claim to use Irish daily, a figure which drops to below the non-Gaeltacht average in some parts among certain age groups. Even though census figures can only be the starting point for any discussion, it is clear that although a substantial part of the population use the language regularly, Irish is marginalized as a community language in much of Múscraí.

The study focused on the attitudes, ability and practices of Irish speakers in this Gaeltacht region, not of the local population as a whole. This emphasis on the most fluent speakers is an important difference between this survey and most other language-use surveys conducted in Ireland. The aim was to speak to approximately one third of all the fluent speakers in the area. To do this an estimate of numbers was made using census statistics for daily speakers over 15 years old, the sample being constructed to reflect the numbers in each geographical subdivision, by age cohort and further divided according to gender. Informants were approached through local knowledge and then asked to name others in their area. This method, known as 'snowballing' or 'friend of a friend', has the advantage that nobody refused to participate in the study. The fact that opinions expressed might have reflected only a limited range due to informants knowing each other well and having a similar linguistic profile was not interpreted as being problematic in itself as this was an investigation of the ideologies and practices of a particular group within the population: the most fluent Irish speakers in the area. The final valid sample was of 239 people, described in Table 1.

*Table 1.* Census data for daily users of Irish in each area by age group and gender (male: female) and the final survey sample.

Area	15–19 yrs	20–29 yrs	30–44 yrs	45–59 yrs	60 + yrs
1. Cúil Aodha <i>Sample: 56</i>	13:12 3:5	14:14 10:7	18:22 4:6	19:15 3:4	16:21 8:6
2. Béal Átha an Ghaorthaidh <i>Sample: 89</i>	22:26 6:9	6:16 10:7	29:35 15:10	16:25 6:7	21:24 9:10
3. Baile Mhic Íre <i>Sample: 75</i>	30:37 9:7	6:19 7:2	34:31 8:13	37:32 9:8	31:35 3:9
4. Cill na Martra <i>Sample: 19</i>	13:12 4:3	5:8 1:2	12:13 1:3	8:10 1:2	9:14 1:1

Source of Census Statistics: Special Calculation by Central Statistics Office from Census 2002.

This study highlighted a number of disagreements or mismatches between national language policy on the one hand, which has a particular set of ideology and practices aimed at national language maintenance and revitalisation, and the linguistic ambitions and practices of the most fluent Gaeltacht speakers on the other. The government's consistent policy since the 1930s of encouraging Gaeltacht families to speak only Irish with their children was a particular area of controversy. Discussed in detail

in Ó hÍfearnáin (2007), the survey showed that both the local parents and the state wanted the children to be Irish speakers in the context of balanced bilingualism. The state's emphasis on Irish-only home language usage through *Scéim Labhairt na Gaeilge* (a scheme which gives a yearly grant of 260 euro to each household that satisfies the inspectorate's criteria of being Irish-speaking) and its reinforcement by Irish-only schooling in the Gaeltacht were seen to be counterproductive to a degree as the policies were never fully explained and implemented as a language management exercise consistent with local language ideology and practices. Even after the scheme has been in operation in various guises for more than 70 years, or three or more generations, many parents still choose to speak both Irish and English with their children fearing that the Irish-only policy of school and state would actually damage their children's linguistic development. With hindsight parents in the Múscraí study realised that speaking both languages as a strategy to enhance bilingualism actually favoured English and that they should have spoken more Irish with their children in order to make certain that they had a strong command of Irish. Despite widespread acknowledgement from older parents that this was the case, younger parents and the most strongly Irish-speaking families still worried about their children's acquisition of English. A more refined language management implementation that would take into account the fears of the parents while maintaining the state's aims would have been much more effective in strengthening the local language variety and position of Irish in relation to English.

There are many other examples from this study of how the national perception of the Gaeltacht and of the aims of national language policy differ from those held by fluent Gaeltacht Irish speakers themselves. A central tenet of Irish language policy alluded to above is that the state, which is the institutional incarnation of the majority opinion of the Irish population, regards Irish as the national language, and that as a consequence all Irish people share ownership of the language. In the Múscraí study, there was some level of disagreement with this proposition. Some 75.7% of the informants believed that the people of the Gaeltacht form a distinct cultural minority (101 people 'agreed' while 80 of the 239 surveyed 'strongly agreed' with the statement). This very large majority opinion among Gaeltacht Irish speakers has serious consequences for language management in that the population clearly sees itself as different from the majority national population in matters of linguistic identity and consequently its needs from a language management perspective. This local language-centred identity in the Gaeltacht has gone un-noticed in discourse on language policy in Ireland because it runs against a fundamental element of national language ideology. Observers such as Hindley (1990, p. 208) deny that there is any particular Gaeltacht identity. This is a misunderstanding of the nature of Gaeltacht identity among Irish speakers that arises from English-medium research in which no distinction is made among the linguistic competences of Gaeltacht residents. It is certainly true that people identify

with their wider region, their county, their province and their nation, but there is little doubt among Irish-speaking Gaeltacht people about their linguistic minority status. Even in this small and relatively weak Irish-speaking district, there was little support to redraw the Gaeltacht boundary (10%) to concentrate work in areas where Irish was strongest. It was clear that informants understood themselves to be a linguistic minority within a wider Gaeltacht community, that has both linguistic members and more passive participants, to adapt Dorian's (1981, 1982) terms.

Údarás na Gaeltachta, the pan-Gaeltacht authority which has both an economic and cultural development role, was seen by nearly all informants as the legitimate institutional expression of their civic identity as Gaeltacht people. Some 82.4% agreed (92 informants) or agreed strongly (105 people) that for Irish to survive it was essential that the Údarás be strong. Only 5% of Irish speakers in the study thought that Irish speakers should not be privileged above non-Irish speakers in state-backed job creation in the Gaeltacht.

There was much more ambiguity as to the tangible benefits or failures of government policy towards the Gaeltacht and its people. Some 38% believed that recent governments had enacted the right policies while 39% believed that they had not. Some 47.3% disagreed that the people of the Gaeltacht did not enjoy a full set of rights because they were Irish speakers, while 33.5% agreed. Although the greater opinion was that their rights were not infringed for linguistic reasons, it should nevertheless be a cause for concern at national level in the context of language maintenance and revitalisation policy that over a third of Irish-speaking Gaeltacht respondents did feel this to be the case. A particularly important revelation of this study was the feeling of solidarity that Gaeltacht speakers felt with Irish speakers spread throughout the country: 197 informants (82.8%) believed that all the institutional support mechanisms and schemes which have been developed for the Gaeltacht by national government and local initiative should also be available to Irish speakers and Irish-speaking families throughout the country. The Irish-speaking population, a national minority within a complex bilingual setting, identifies itself as being wider than the limits of the Gaeltacht. This is a challenge to prevailing national language management policies which have in the past 80 years tended to view the Gaeltacht population and speakers outside the Gaeltacht as very different entities.

### **Lessons for Scottish Gaelic language planning on a national level?**

Every linguistic situation has its own particularities, and so no case study can be directly transferred from one country to another. The Scottish and Irish situations do however have many underlying parallels. Thorough analysis of Irish language policy at the level of community and state, along the lines of the paradigms elucidated above, reveal a much more complex situation in Ireland than that which is superficially obvious. National language policy in favour of Irish has not been the failure that

is so often mooted. There have been major achievements in the development of the language as a subtle tool for the modern world, and there is little doubt of what Dorian (1987) described paradoxically as the very real. The position of Irish in the national psyche is complex, but firmly embedded. The language is still spoken by thousands as a main language of home and by many in their work, and there are millions of learners who achieve varying degrees of ability from complete fluency and literacy down to a level of passive linguistic awareness. Where the danger has arisen is in the subtle differentiation between the needs and linguistic ambitions of fluent Irish speakers from the Gaeltacht or elsewhere on the one hand and the position ascribed to Irish by the majority English-speaking population on the other. In formulating astute language policies for Scottish Gaelic in the coming decades that will enable both maintenance and development of the core Gaelic communities and a new role for the language in the national arena, language managers must tread a careful path in finding the appropriate balance.