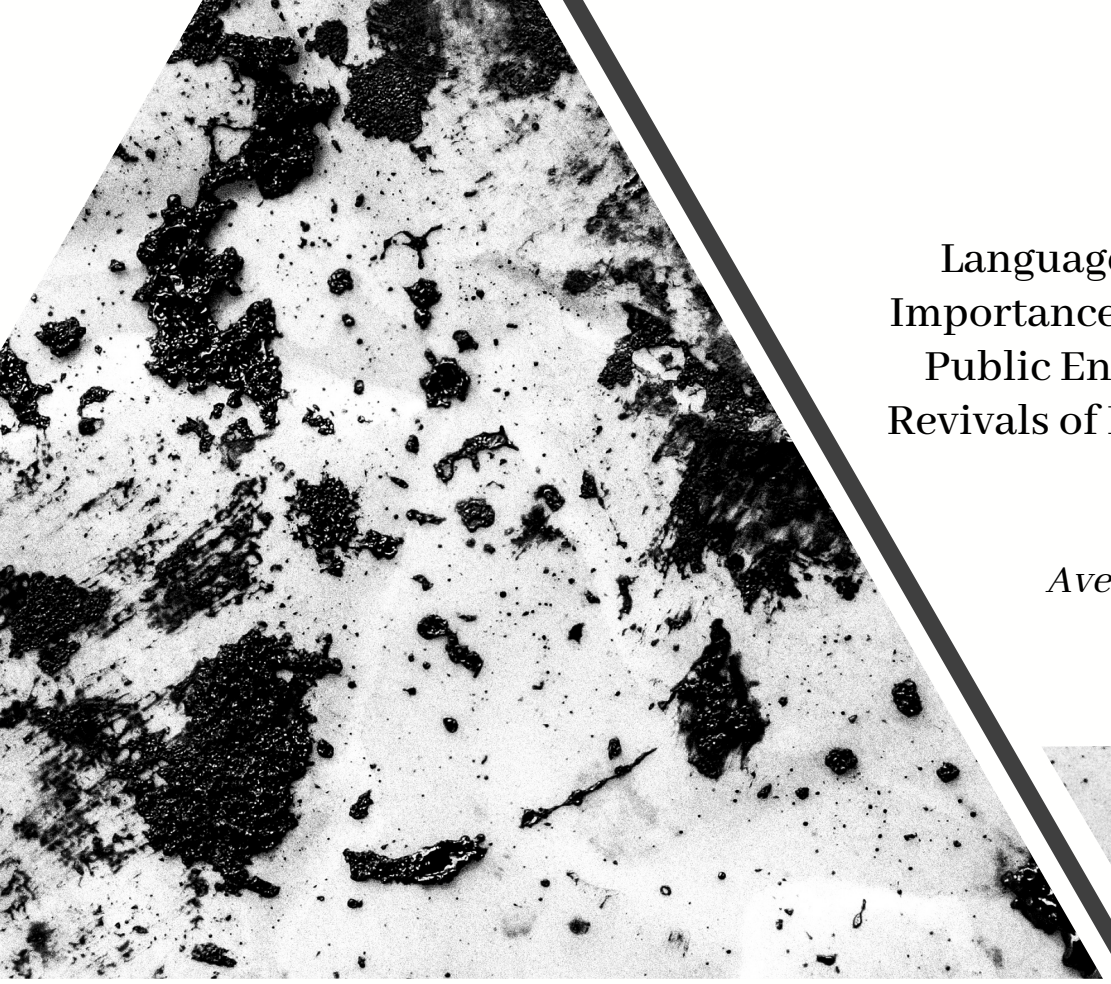

Language Planning: The Importance of Statehood and Public Engagement in the Revivals of Irish, Catalan, and Sámi

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Abstract

In contact situations, when a minority language is falling into disuse in favour of the dominant language, parties seeking to reverse this shift may implement language planning strategies. Language planning consists of policies and campaigns intended to sustain or revive a language by targeting multiple aspects of its structure and usage. This paper investigates how the efficacy of such action is impacted by two contextual factors: the political autonomy of the interested parties and the engagement of its general population with revitalization measures. It analyzes historical accounts of three minority language situations — Irish in the Republic of Ireland, Catalan in Catalonia, Spain and Sámi in Norway — and compares their sociopolitical features and policy outcomes. From this analysis, the paper concludes that each factor has a unique impact on the results of language planning: the political autonomy of the linguistic group delimits what level of revitalization is possible, while the commitment of the general public determines to what extent, within this boundary, revitalization is ultimately achieved.

1 Introduction

The efficacy of language planning is one of the most relevant areas of study in the field of sociolinguistics in today's age of globalization and multiculturalism. Language planning is the implementation of action plans and policies that seek to sustain or revive a language by targeting multiple aspects of its structure and usage. It is often undertaken by the government of the country in which the language originated or is politically relevant; however, various other groups, including special interest groups, councils, academics, and linguists, carry out language planning as well (Ager, 2001).

When any element of the language itself is being changed or influenced, such as its pronunciations, orthography or lexicon, the process is called corpus planning (Baldaulf, 1989). One of the most common goals of corpus planning is the standardization of a given language: differences between varieties are reduced by declaring certain variants to be that of the "official" or "standard" language, and this standard is then implemented in a broad range of contexts (Deument, 2002). Alternatively, the functions of a language can be targeted for expansion; referred to as status planning, this is when new policies seek to regulate the domains in which a language is used, and therefore increase the prestige with which it is associated (Ager, 2001).

There are potent political and social advantages for linguistic groups that can maintain a thriving, widely-used language – strong shared cultural identity, greater influence in academic and diplomatic domains, more rights and prestige nationally and internationally, et cetera. Hence, language planning and policy is employed to some extent in virtually all regions of the world. Revival of traditional languages in decolonized areas, maintenance of minority languages in multi-ethnic and multicultural contexts, and updating languages to accommodate developing fields of study such as science and technology are some of the most common contexts in which language planning is used today (Wardaugh, 2010).

The efficacy of language planning is most easily addressed by evaluating past attempts and determining which factors could have predicted their success or failure. It is the question of efficacy I seek to explore with the following comparative look into the published research on three instances of language planning: Irish in the Republic of Ireland, Catalan in Catalonia, Spain, and Sámi in Norway. Between these minority language situations, I compare their relative levels of political autonomy and public engagement in order to assess how consequential each of these factors are for language policy outcomes. From this analysis, I conclude that each factor has a unique impact on the results of language planning: the political autonomy of the linguistic group delimits what level of revitalization is possible, while the commitment of the general public determines to what extent, within this boundary, revitalization is ultimately achieved.

2 Irish in the Republic of Ireland

In *The Language Planning Situation in Ireland,* Muiris Ó Laoire gives a thorough review of the history of the Irish language from its fall from dominance in the 18th century to the time of publication in 2005. He illustrates that the fate of Irish has ultimately been determined by the general public's reluctance to engage with policies implemented by the government of Ireland to reincorporate Irish into daily life.

Ó Laoire starts by explaining how Irish initially lost its place as the main language of the Irish people (2005). Starting with the English conquest of Ireland in 1603, and the consequent anglicization of Irish institutions, Irish was already very much reduced by the 19th century. Then, the economic collapse and famine in 1845 and the concomitant mass emigration expedited the process by causing drastic decreases in the Irish speaking population. By the end of the 19th century, the number of Irish speakers was around as low as it is in present day – between 3 and 5% of the population (Ó Laoire, 2005: 255). However, the beginnings of Irish nationalism were forming concurrently, and with that came The Gaelic League whose purpose was to revitalize their recently diminished language. They promoted the idea of a language revival to the public, provided Irish language classes, and helped make Irish the "national language" of the new Republic of Ireland according to the constitution in 1922 (256).

However, it appears that the achievement of independence in 1922 resulted in a loss of the language revival movement's *raison d'être.* From the 1920s to the 1960s, the government put sustained effort into bringing Irish back to dominant usage among its people, only to be met with an underwhelming response. Ó Laoire cites a number of reasons for the lack of public support; mainly, the lofty goal of Irish monolingualism was proposed largely by middle-class nationalists and was no longer relatable for the working-class majority in an already independent Irish state (261). Also, much of the language shift reversal policies were to be enacted through the education system, but they were ill-conceived. For instance, the teachers that were expected to teach children Irish were not proficient in Irish themselves (262). In the 1960s, after decades of disappointing results, the standards for success were lowered from achieving monolingualism to achieving a strong English-Irish bilingualism. They started promoting everyday use of Irish in the home with a widespread selection of Irish media (268). Though this was met with relatively more engagement from the general public, as seen in the strong support of the Gaelic Television Station in 1996 (Ó Laoire, 2005: 289), it remains evident that this realignment did not ultimately succeed either.

The article concludes with a review of the more recent advancements in the language revival movement, including the Official Languages Act of 2003 which outlines the further expansion of Irish in public services and advertising, Irish's status as an official language of the European Union, and the effects of immigration and increased multilingualism (Ó Laoire, 2005: 304). According to Ó Laoire, it is the last of these three that has the greatest capacity to change the course of Irish language planning, as an increase in the languages present in Ireland could possibly reignite an identity-driven motivation to protect the land's traditional language (308).

The second piece of literature on the Irish language that informed my analysis was *'You Might All Be Speaking Swedish Today': language change in 19th-century Finland and Ireland* by Michael C. Coleman (2010). In this essay, Coleman details the opposite progressions of Finnish and Irish from 1800 (a time when Irish had four times as many speakers as Finnish) onwards, comparing each language step by step until they each achieved independence in the early 1900s (2010). He determines consequential events in the nations' respective histories, such as Finland's transfer from Swedish to Russian control in 1809 and Ireland's destructive famine and emigration in 1845. In particular, he stresses Ireland's close proximity to English, and Finland's lack of such an obvious alternative. Coleman concludes that both chance and the priorities of the population in question play an influential role in language vitality (2010).

Though I accept Coleman's assertion that independent contingencies of history can indeed impact the fate of a language, I question if this is a worthwhile remark – it is arguably the case that every aspect of human history is highly contingent. However, I strongly agree with his second argument for the decisive power of the public's priorities. Coleman stresses that while the Irish people could not control the British imperialism that was taking away their language at an institutional level, they did make pragmatic decisions regarding their own language use that countered endeavours to revive Irish. For one, many of their own nationalist movement groups in the early 20th century operated in English (49). Further examples included Irish speaking parents teaching their children English instead of Irish so that they would have more opportunities in Dublin and internationally (48), and letting the Catholic Church adopt English in its seminaries and services to strengthen it against the threat of encroaching Protestantism (51).

The prioritization of factors other than their own language (independence, opportunities for their children, religion, et cetera) can be seen in Ó Laoire's account as well; throughout the text, Ó Laoire mentions that when polled, the Irish indicated a general interest in reviving their language (2005), yet their resistance to the various iterations of language policy from the government indicates a divide between their language-related ideals and what they were actually willing to put into practice. Their very close proximity to the world's most dominant language, and the ease and opportunities this affords them in a world quickly becoming more internationally-oriented, ensures that this conflict of interest will persist.

3 Catalan in Catalonia, Spain

In *Balancing Language Planning and Language Rights: Catalonia's Uneasy Juggling Act* by Charlotte Hoffmann (2000), the Catalans are defined as an atypical minority. Due to the fact that Catalonia itself was a powerful state from the 12th to the 15th century, Catalans have always been the majority group within Catalonia and they have a history of "stubborn resistance to political and cultural assimilation" (426). However, they spent years under the rule of Castilian Spanish rulers, including the time of the dictatorial Franco Regime until 1975. This left Catalan in a diglossic position with a reduced number of speakers, using it only for oral communication. It was also "Castilianised" because it had not had the opportunity to develop modern vocabulary independently (427).

Opportunity for change came from the Spanish Constitution of 1978. It allowed the Catalan Autonomous Community the right to have Catalan as one of its official languages (though not an official language of Spain on the whole) and the right to invest resources in an extensive language revival policy. Also beneficial was that the time spent oppressed by the Castilian Spanish dictatorship gave the use of Catalan a covert prestige in its rebellion against Franco; the importance of this symbol to the Catalan population helped jumpstart public support for the Catalan Autonomous Community's language planning right away (427). According to Hoffman's review, the language policy itself was very thorough: it included corpus planning in the 1983 Law of Linguistic Normalisation for the development of linguistic norms and the extension of the language into international domains like science and technology, and status planning as it was implemented in all public institutions, including Catalan government services

and education (429). De Bres (2008) outlines how Catalan language authorities kept their campaigns relevant by adapting them to contemporary issues. For example, in 2003, when immigration into Catalonia was increasingly salient in public consciousness, the campaign slogan "Tu ets mestre" ("You are a teacher") was used to promote teaching Catalan to immigrants to help them better integrate into society (476) and, presumably, to tempt them away from the allure of Castilian Spanish. By 1996, the amount of Catalan residents able to read and write Catalan had increased from roughly 60 to 80% for both, though Hoffmann notes that this does not reliably represent everyday usage and therefore does not fully encapsulate an increase in vitality (430).

Notwithstanding, the above increases are far beyond any improvements that were made by the Irish language planning attempts. The account of language planning in Catalonia by Hoffmann clearly illustrates that Catalonia boasts both strong public support and effective, consistent language promotion policy. But are there no limitations regarding the fact that it is not an autonomous state and is still ultimately at the mercy of Spanish legislature which has been apathetic at best towards the Catalan language?

Albert Bastardas-Boada addresses these questions in *Language and identity policies in the 'glocal' age. New processes, effects, and principles of organization* (2012). This case study examines Catalonia's language policy as that of a subnational actor in the international system. In this view, Bastardas-Boada recognizes many areas in which Catalonia's lack of statehood is inhibiting Catalan's progression to complete language revival. First, there is no required use of Catalan in Spanish government offices or on official documents because, as mentioned above, Catalan is only an official language of the Catalan Autonomous Community, not Spain as a nation-state. Bastardas-Boada puts this in perspective by relating the fact that the very small Romansh speaking population has this right in Switzerland (2012: 137). Second, Catalan is struggling to receive the status of an official language of the European Union, as this is generally reserved for nation-states (138). Again, the disparity here is clear when we consider that Irish has this status due to Ireland's statehood despite having a much smaller and much less passionate linguistic group overall. Because of these restrictions on the Catalan language, it is limited in its growth beyond the borders of Catalonia and is weakened in its competition with Castilian Spanish for the attention of second language learners immigrating to Spain.

Although the above considerations do not detract from the distinct value of public enthusiasm and a thorough language planning policy, as highlighted in the historical account by Hoffmann, the points that Bastardas-Boada raises are worth noting. Statehood alone was not enough to guarantee the revival of Irish in a post-colonization context; however, there are many rights and advantages granted to languages directly affiliated with a nation-state. Benefits such as national and international official status and connections across policy areas like education and immigration have been outlined above. These affordances do not determine how successful language policies are in the end, but they may set the boundaries for how successful they can be given a high level of public engagement. To further investigate this proposition, I will discuss a linguistic group whose political autonomy is more severely restricted than Catalonia's.

4 Sámi in Norway

In Norway, the Sámi indigenous group has been struggling with the diminished use of their various Sámi languages. Tove Bull, in *The Sámi Language(s), Maintenance and Intellectualisation* (2002), establishes the recent history of the Sámi people as a minority group, assimilated into Norwegian culture as part of the unfortunately familiar pattern of colonization and state building in the 19th century, as the basis for Sámi language planning. In the 19th century, when Norway was in its peak period of nationalism and "Norwegianalization", a destructive set of policies were imposed on the Sámi populations to assimilate them into Norway's mono-culturalism, including a residential school system that separated Sámi children from their heritage and property laws barring those who could not speak Norwegian proficiently from owning property (Bull, 2002: 32). This decimation of Sámi culture continued until after World War II when increased immigration allowed the idea of multiculturalism to re-emerge (Bull, 2002: 32) and when Norway started seeking influence in the United Nations by presenting itself as a leader in humanitarian issues (Bucken-Knapp, 2003: 117).

With the relaxation of the previously militant assimilation of minority cultures came improved political representation for the Sámi people. A major milestone was in 1989 when the first Sámi parliament was formed and the "Sámi Act", which outlined their linguistic rights, followed shortly after (Bull, 2002: 33). This act explicitly stated that Sámi and Norwegian are equal languages in Norway, allowed for the establishment of a Sámi-language teaching college – which remains the only indigenous language higher education institution in the world at the time of writing – and, most importantly, led to the creation of the Sámi Language Council in 1992 (Bull, 2002). This council's agenda is to sustain the Sámi languages by increasing their visibility to the public, leading national and international discourse on their management, and standardizing them by creating new vocabulary in areas such as medicine, sports, and technology (Bull, 2002: 37).

Of the three nations we have looked at thus far, the Sámi people have the least political autonomy, being a minority population without a distinct region over which to govern. Though it does have its own parliament, and within it a Language Council that is mostly in charge of Sámi language legislature, this parliament is technically only "consultative" and depends largely on its ability to influence Norwegian government without actual constitutional rights to do so (Bull, 2002: 34). Crucially, their lack of true independence hinders their attempts at language revival because of the Norwegian territorialization of Sámi language rights, as described in *Your language or ours? Inclusion and exclusion of non-indigenous majorities in Māori and Sámi language revitalization policy* by Nathan John Albury (2015). The Sámi Language Council has the right to implement its policies in "Sámi Administrative areas"; unfortunately for the great many urban-situated Sámi people, large cities like Oslo and Bergen are not part of these areas (Albury, 2015: 326). Therefore, policies that are important to the revitalization of Sámi, like the right for Sámi parents to choose whether their children are taught in Sámi or Norwegian, are not available to considerable portions of the population.

I tentatively concluded above that political autonomy sets the ceiling for potential language revival. In the Catalan Autonomous Community, Catalan language rights are being met, and the language's vitality appears to leave little to be desired; however, when they move

beyond these intra-state borders, there is still a clear disparity between their language and the language of the Castilian Spanish majority. They are also struggling to gain official recognition internationally. Resistance arises outside the domain of control, and the case of Sámi further confirms this conclusion. The impositions of the Norwegian government on their linguistic development and preservation obstructs their progress at a more critical level: they do not have a single contiguous territory over which to administer their language policies, and without widespread support from the national government, much of their population thus lives outside of scope of these initiatives.

While the statehood of a linguistic group does not entail the success of language planning policies (as is evident in the lack of success by the Republic of Ireland), autonomy at a national level provides a solid foundation of rights on which to form an effective language policy. Crucially, a lack of autonomy makes a population seeking linguistic change much more vulnerable to factors outside of their control, such as the particular type of involvement from the overarching government. On the one hand, a thorough language planning strategy, with the support of a nation-state's resources (or at least its grant of freedom), can provide important first steps towards successful language shift reversal. On the other hand, restrictions from above, such as the territorialization of language rights in Norway and the resistance of the European Union to officially recognize Catalan, can become virtually unyielding obstacles.

To evaluate cross-case variation in public engagement among linguistic groups, I return to Bull's account of Sámi. In her concluding remarks, Bull highlights the active and enthusiastic use of Sámi in densely populated Sámi regions across administrative, educational, and family institutions (2002: 38). Most importantly, they have continued intergenerational transfer of their language; in fact, the prevalence of intergenerational transfer with the current generation is stronger than any of the three generations previous (38). Bull also mentions an increasing use of traditional Sámi geographical names (38), for which, interestingly, there was a perfectly opposing situation in Ireland in 2005. The Official Languages Act of 2003 stated that place names shall be shown in Irish and English on public signage, and this was met with what Ó Laoire deems "bottom-up resistance to top-down planning" when citizens protested, citing concerns that it would interfere with local business and tourism (2005: 304). This example brings two important points to the forefront: firstly, the Sámi people are not faced with the worldwide hegemony of the English language on a day to day basis the way the Irish are and always have been; secondly, this very difference, like any contextual variable in diverse language planning situations, is indicative of the priorities of the general population, and thus, the success of the language policy within the limits their autonomy affords.

5 Conclusion

To summarize, the time of most widespread interest in the revival of Irish, according to Ó Laoire's account (2005), was before the independent Republic of Ireland was born, when the priorities of the Irish people centred around what was theirs alone, not Britain's. After the creation of the Irish state, the desire for the Irish language as a separate entity from national independence was not strong enough to trump the benefits and easy accessibility of the English language. Thus, ongoing attempts of governing bodies to revive the language have been altogether unsuccessful.

In contrast, for the Catalan people, the years spent under dictatorship sharpened their centuries old sense of Catalan identity and led them to prioritize the revitalization of their language, despite the analogous-to-English ease with which they could have deferred to Castilian Spanish. This commitment resulted in an incredibly successful language policy and has remained fundamental, as evidenced by the importance of the Catalan language to their struggle for national independence from Spain (Minder, 2017). Whether the same level of enthusiasm would persist after separating from Spain — that is to say, how they compare following further in the footsteps of Ireland — would be an interesting opportunity for further analysis. Furthermore, the Sámi people, with significantly less political power in Norway, are maintaining a healthy language vitality to the limited extent their dispersed policies allow, perhaps because they too associate language strongly with their identity and there is less linguistic competition in the region. In conclusion, the language planning situations in Ireland, Catalonia, and Norway prove that while the presence and nature of an overarching government greatly influence the degree to which language policies may ideally succeed, it is the commitment of the general public that will ultimately determine, within their abilities, whether or not their language will be successfully revitalized to a sustainable and lasting level of stability.

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