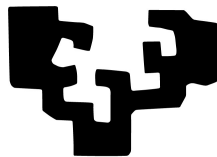# Ó Labhraísí mé!:
THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE
OF THE IRISH LANGUAGE

Author: Mikel Utrera Puelles
Tutor: Xabier Zabaltza Pérez-Nievas
Degree in English Studies – 2018/2019
Department of Contemporary History

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Universidad del País Vasco   Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea

LETREN FAKULTATEA
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Irish	English
Is mise an Ghaeilge	I am Irish
Is mise do theanga	I am your language
Is mise do chultúr	I am your culture
D'úsáid na filí mé	The poets used me
D'úsáid na huaisle	The nobles used me
D'úsáid na daoine mé	The people used me
Is d'úsáid na leanaí	And the children used me
Go bródúil a bhí siad	Proud they were
Agus mise faoi réim.	And I flourished.
Ach tháinig an strainséir	But the stranger came
Chuir sé faoi chois mé	He suppressed me
Is rud ní ba mheasa	Something worse than that was
Níor mhaith le mo chlann mé	My own people rejected me
Anois táim lag	Now I am weak
Anois táim tréith	Now I am feeble
Ach fós táim libh	But still I am with you
Is beidh mé go beo.	And I will be forever.
Tóg suas mo cheann	Raise up my head
Cuir áthas ar mo chroí	Put joy in my heart
Labhraigí mé	Speak me
Ó labhraigí mé!	Oh speak me!

— Anonymous

ABSTRACT

The case of the Irish language could be considered an anomaly – a nation that, in most of its territory, achieved its independence about 100 years ago should, on paper, not speak the language of their colonizers. However, this is not the case in Ireland. The most accepted theory on the poor state of the language is that the nationalists who kick started the Irish national movement gave more importance to religion than to culture and language, thus linking a free Ireland with the Catholic fate and leaving the Gaelic language and culture aside. However true these words may be, and however important the history of a language may be to understand its current situation, this explanation is an oversimplification, and this paper will attempt to complete and correct this theory and try to prove that without a social backing and without greater involvement of the speakers themselves, no governmental action shall salvage Irish Gaelic. This weak support for the language has many factors, such as historical stigmas, unsuccessful policies, geographical and economic issues, and a deficient educational system. This paper argues that it is especially this last reason which has had a negative influence in the minds of many Irish people, creating some sort of resentment towards their language in the Republic of Ireland. In Northern Ireland, where the linguistic situation is even worse for Irish Gaelic, I will argue that the language has taken a political tinge, and that depending on who is asked, Irish will be of more or less importance for their national identity. This paper also points at the problems that the governments of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, may be able to fix before the seemingly impending doom that augurs Irish if nothing changes in the next few years.

Key words: Ireland, Irish Gaelic, language, national identity, history.

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper will try to analyse the past, explain the present and explore the future of a nation divided socially, politically and linguistically – Ireland. The case of Ireland is quite uncommon: a nation that has been (mostly) independent for more than a century should in theory speak its own language, but, in the Republic of Ireland, English is still the most spoken language by a landslide. In spite of the independence of the Republic, the official recognition of Irish as the first language of the country, the government's efforts to revitalise the nigh extinct language, and its inclusion in the education system, Irish Gaelic is spoken by very few Irish people on a daily basis. The reason behind this is in part that the past (and to a lesser extent present) of an Ireland under British rule has been one of imposition, but I will argue that it is in fact the negligence of Irish society (including many Gaelic speakers) which caused the decline in the use of the language. Many have argued that the relegation of language in the building of the Irish nation in favour of the religious question is to blame for the poor state of the language, but, and in spite of the truth in those words, I will reject this idea by defending that the question is more complex and cannot be summarized in just this statement. To back these claims, I will look at the use of Irish in schools and on the streets, both in the recent past and present, as well as the politics of conservation and revival involving Irish.

I will begin by writing about the history of the Irish language in the first three chapters, explaining the origins of the language, its evolution and its decline in the most recent centuries. I will then elaborate a chapter about the importance of language in national identity, and I will apply the conclusions that I have drawn to assess the Irish national sentiment in regards to their language before going on to locate the living, breathing language nowadays, in addition to introducing the collectives and organisations which have helped and help the survival of the language. I will finally explore the language development policies made in the recent past, as well as the challenges and obstacles Irish will have to face in the future.

Before finishing this introduction a few lines should be said on the methodology of this work. Being a student of the Degree in English Studies, I have combined both historical and sociolinguistic methods. Most of the sources used are published academic books and articles. In order to complete them, I have contacted institutions and associations that work for the Irish language, as well as some political parties, both in

the Republic and Northern Ireland, although not all of them have answered my questions. All sources appear promptly cited.

2. IRISH BEFORE MODERN IRISH (BEFORE 12TH C.)

The Irish language (*Gaeilge*) as such can be traced back as far as 400-600 AD, when Christianity was introduced in Ireland (*Éire*). With Christianity Latin and the Latin alphabet came, and Old Irish began to be written using this new set of letters in the beginning of the 7th century (Doyle, 2015:11). However, an even older predecessor of Irish was spoken before this: Primitive Irish.

Primitive Irish comes from a proto-Irish language called Goidelic, and this word is now used to make a distinction between different branches of the Celtic family – there are the Brittonic Celtic languages (Welsh, Breton and Cornish) and Goidelic Celtic languages (Irish, Scottish and Manx). In the 4th century a kingdom called Dal Riata was established from north eastern Ireland (today co. Antrim/Aontroim) to the south western coast of Scotland. The kingdom would remain until the 9th century, when it merged with the Kingdom of Alba, the Scottish name for Scotland, and the language spoken in this kingdom was Goidelic. Historically it has been believed that Irish immigrants (which were called *Scotti* by classical authors of late antiquity (Campbell, 2001:286) established the kingdom displacing the autochthonous Pictish inhabitants, as reported by the *Duan Albanach*, which is "one of the most interesting [...] early Irish sources for Scottish history," written possibly in the middle of the 12th century (Jackson, 1957:125-7). However, later archaeological investigations have dismissed this theory, as there is no real evidence of any takeover by the Irish in Scotland, even if many authors have spoken of "Irish colonies in Britain" (Campbell, 2001:286).

Coming back to Primitive Irish, not many manuscripts can be found in the language; only a handful inscriptions on stone in an old writing system called the Ogham Alphabet (*Ogam* in Old Irish), which consisted of a long, straight line onto which dents and marks would be carved, and, depending on the amount and shape of said dents, they would represent different letters (Stifter, 1993:55). These inscriptions typically contained a name, followed by a patronymic name in the genitive case. Seldom do these yield more information.

Enough records of Old Irish have survived for there to be much more

information about the formal characteristics of the language, which evolved from Primitive Irish through a middle step that scholars call Archaic Irish, being the oldest Celtic language for which a significant corpus remains to date (Stifter, 1993:59). However, the compilation of Old Irish works is a very thematically restricted one: as it was the clerics who began going abroad in an evangelising mission who adopted the Latin alphabet that they had learned in continental Europe, most of the works are from an ecclesiastic field (Doyle, 2015:11). Today, most of the corpus can be found in the continent, such as in Saint Gall (Switzerland), Würzburg (Germany) and Milan (Italy) (Stifter, 1993:59; Doyle, 2015:11), in the form of annotations with explanations or translations of Latin phrases written on the borders of manuscripts.

On the other hand, the corpus of Old Irish works is bigger than in other European cultures because of the fact that literates began using Old Irish for longer texts in the 8th century, whilst most of the rest of Europe kept writing in Latin at the time (Doyle, 2015:12). It was around the time when the first external attacks in Ireland happened. Around the year 800, Vikings from Scandinavia and Scotland began plundering the island in brief raids, but soon began to stay for longer times (Doyle, 2015:12). In these longer spells, the Norse founded many cities including Dublin/Baile Átha Cliath, Cork/Corcaigh, Galway/Gaillimh, Waterford/Port Láirge, Wexford/Loch Garman and Limerick/Luimneach, the last three having Norse-derived names (Hindley, 1990:3). Even if Old Norse, the language spoken by the Vikings, was spoken in certain areas of the island, its influence was never strong enough to surpass Old Irish (in fact, bilingualism was quite common) (Doyle, 2015:12). In a couple of centuries the Norsemen raiders were almost completely assimilated into Irish society, probably due to their low numbers and lack of women (Hindley, 1990:3).

After the Viking raids, three centuries of social and political turmoil came: alliance formed between Gaelic and Viking clans in order to conquer as much land as possible, so internal fights were very common from c. 900 to c. 1200 AD. This period is referred to as Middle Irish, as drastic changes occurred to the language spoken in the island, which are believed to be in part driven by the social instability of the period (Doyle, 2015:12).

A wide range of Middle Irish works remain in the present, with a much wider scope in topics than in Old Irish (such as the *Ulster Cycle/an Rúraíocht,* one of the most

important bodies in medieval Irish heroic sagas, or the *Lebor Bretnach*, a translation of the *Historia Brittonum*, a historical work about the indigenous inhabitants of Britain (Fitzpatrick-Matthews, 2007), but describing a complete list of the formal features of Middle Irish is quite hard. This is due to the fact that scribes committed many hypercorrections in their writing, as they aimed their works to sound as academic as possible. These hypercorrections are the main cause why it is difficult to estimate whether or not any given word in Middle English was used in regular spoken speech (Stifter, 1993:110).

3. EARLY HISTORY OF MODERN IRISH (12TH C. – 19TH C.)
3.1. ENGLISH INVASION & RULE (12TH C. – 18TH C.)

After Vikings were assimilated, the dominance of Irish would not be challenged until the Anglo-Norman invasion, which began in 1169. Doyle (2015:14) states that, "in military terms the invasion was highly successful": only six years after the arrival of the conquerors, Henry II of England was recognised as Lord of Ireland. Many settlers came to the island and established themselves, especially in urban centres.

However, and in spite of conquering the whole territory and imposing Norman French for almost all juridical purposes (which would be later displaced by English), the same as with the Norse happened: the lack of number in Anglo-Norman invaders in comparison with the native Irish made intermarrying inevitable, and these Englishmen became as Irish as the Norsemen who had preceded them. Seventeenth-century historian John Lynch/Seán Ó Loingsigh, when describing these "Old English" (who, like the rest of the population, were Catholic), used the phrase *Hibernicis ipsis Hiberniores*, or "more Irish than the Irish" (Doyle, 2015:15).

Surprisingly enough, Ulster/Ulaidh was the least anglicised province. This is due to the fact that the Northerners received help from their Scottish neighbours. As seen in chapter 2, northern Ireland and south western Scotland were part of the same kingdom for centuries, creating a bond between both regions. Moreover, it was on the interest of Scotland to divert the attention of the English elsewhere, as there had been threats to the independence of the Scottish state by their southern neighbours (Hindley, 1990:14-5).

It was not until the Tudors when Ireland became widely anglicised. In 1556, under Mary I's rule, the first "modern-style attempt at English colonization" occurred

outside the already fully English Pale region (today co. Dublin/Baile Átha Cliath and parts of co. Kildare/Cill Dara and co. Wiclow/Cill Mhantáin) (Hindley, 1990:5). This attempt at colonization consisted on the removal of native Irish peasants from certain areas to establish "plantations," i.e., areas in which English settlers would establish themselves. These invasions were responded with violent resistance. This, in addition to the fact that Ireland had never been an attractive destination to English farmers and peasants because of its damper weather, caused the plantations to be unsuccessful ways for the English to establish themselves (Hindley, 1990:5).

This was not the case, however, with Scottish peasants, who, after the union between the English and Scottish crowns (1603), embarked on a joined British exploration of Ireland and its natural resources (Hindley, 1990:5). These new settlers, called "New English" (despite most being Scottish), were not assimilated into Irish society because, unlike the "Old English", they were protestant. The uprising of the Earl of Tyrone/Tír Eoghain and the King of Tyrconnell/Tír Chonaill from 1593 to 1607 is usually considered as the last and desperate act of Goidelic resistance.

The linguistic result of this was that for the next two centuries English and Irish speaking districts would be scattered around the area, changing places and borders with every revolt. These uprisings caused the exclusion of most Catholic landowners especially in Ulster/Ulaidh, many of them changed their religion in order to preserve their lands (Hindley, 1990:6-7).

After many internal affairs (such as the 1641 insurrection and the Cromwellian wars from 1649 to 1653) (Canny, 2001:535), it was not until 1800, two years after the uprising of the United Irishmen, that the British enforced the Acts of Union to create the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, which would remain until Irish independence in the beginning of the 20th century.

3.2. DECLINE IN THE USE OF IRISH IN THE 19TH CENTURY

It is hard to pinpoint the decline of the Irish language after the 1800 Acts of Union to a single reason. As seen above, the conversion of many Catholic landowners into Protestantism came with the consequent swap in language, adopting English as their tongue. By the beginning of the 19th century, English had become the second language of most Eastern Irishmen, and only-Irish speakers became a minority (Hindley,

1990:13). The replacement of Irish in favour of English in schools, made proficiency in Irish difficult for all those who had had English spoken to them since birth (Kennedy, 2015). Under the Penal Laws, established in 1695, and even more after the uprising of 1798, Catholics were excluded from political life. Therefore most efforts were made to promote the emancipation of Catholics, relegating the linguistic question to a second plane (Mezo, 2008:61; Hindley, 1990:14). Daniel O'Connell/Dónall Ó Conaill, the main figurehead of the movement for emancipation (finally obtained in 1829), himself a Gaelic speaker, was instrumental in identifying Irish identity with Catholicism.

However, a new definition of Irish nation arose in the early 1840s with the creation of a group of protestant nationalists called Young Ireland/Éire Óg, led by Thomas Davis/Tomás Dáibhis. They rejected the idea of Catholicism being the common factor of the Irish, he instead followed German romantic nationalism in stating that what defines a nation is, in fact, its culture; i.e., its history, literature and, above all, language. In Davis/Dáibhis' words, "A people without a language of its own is only half a nation. A nation should guard its language more than its territories, 'tis a surer barrier and a more important frontier than mountain or river" (Mezo, 2008:61). With this, a dichotomy emerges in understanding what Irish nationality is: the religious (Catholic/Protestant) and the cultural (English/Irish Gaelic). A constant paradox in Irish history is that many defenders of the Gaelic language (such as Davis/Dáibhis) usually only speak English, while many Gaelic speakers (such as O'Connell/Ó Conaill) do not attach much importance to their mother tongue.

The Great Famine, perhaps the most serious event in Irish history (1845-1849), especially affected Gaelic speakers, who by that time occupied the lowest social strata and therefore they were more vulnerable. One million people died and other 2.5 million migrated, mostly to the United States. The total population of the island was reduced by 20 to 25% (Dorney, 2016). The poor management of the situation by British rulers in the issue would turn into fuel for the Fenians in America and their partners in Ireland, the Irish Republican Brotherhood/Bráithreachas Phoblacht na hÉireann (1858), organisations that would use violence to gain independence and can be considered as the immediate precedents of the Irish Republican Army/Óglaigh na hÉireann (1919).

By the end of the century, however, an attempt in the revival of the very malnourished language was on course. The *Conradh na Gaeilge* (or Gaelic League) was

born in 1893. It is not at all a coincidence that it was a Protestant, Douglas Hyde/ Dubhghlas de Híde, the founder and main inspirer of the League. He realised that Protestants would find themselves in a minority in an autonomous Ireland and, like Davis/Dáibhis fifty years before, advocated Gaelic as a means to overcome sectarian divisions. The declared aims of the Gaelic League/Conradh na Gaeilge were "the preservation of Irish as the national language of Ireland and the extension of its use as a spoken tongue, together with the promotion of historic Gaelic literature and the cultivation of a modern Irish literature in Irish" (Hindley, 1990:24). In the beginning, it had very little support, but the flowering of great Anglo-Irish authors and dramatists such as Yeats, Lady Gregory or Synge revived the interest of the people in the Irish culture. As such, by 1904 the League had 50,000 members scattered in 600 branches. People from all over the island were learning the language and half of the schools in the "truly" Irish-speaking areas instructed in Irish (Hindley, 1990:23-4).

4. HISTORY OF IRISH IN THE 20TH CENTURY

The modern history of Ireland begins when the aforementioned Great Famine and neglect from the British government had created an anti-British sentiment in the minds of many Irish people, which would be mixed with the Gaelic Revival, thus leading to the demand for *Home Rule*. It was another Protestant, Charles Stewart Parnell, who since the 1870s united in his person the claim of fairer rents for Catholic peasants and the peaceful struggle for autonomy. In 1905, Arthur Griffith/Art Ó Gríofa, a Catholic, would create *Sinn Féin* (meaning "we ourselves"), asking for a parliament in Dublin/Baile Átha Cliath, and the idea of *Home Rule* gained adepts rapidly, but not among Protestants, who were the majority in most Ulster/Ulaidh and increasingly feared Catholic power in an autonomous Ireland (*Home Rule* was branded as *Rome Hule*) (Ruddy, 2018). The tension between Northern and Southern Irish rose to the brink of a civil war. Boyce suggests that this is a sign that the idea of unifying all confessions in an Irish state was failing (1982:277-82)[1].

In 1916, in the middle of the First World War, the Irish Republic was proclaimed during the Easter Rising. Its balance was brutal –485 civilians were killed, and more than 2,500 injured (Ruddy, 2018). In the aftermath of the events, the rebels surrendered

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[1] As cited in Mezo, 2008:68.

and were promptly prosecuted. Historians estimate that over 3,000 people were put on trial, 1,800 were dispersed to England and Wales and 15 were executed (Mezo, 2008:68). The repression by the British against those who had participated in the Rising caused Catholic public opinion (which until then had been mostly indifferent) to sympathise with the rebels and their cause. The leader and martyr of the insurrection, Patrick Pearse/Pádraig Mac Piarais, was a prominent member of the Gaelic League/Conradh na Gaeilge, which by then was controlled by the Republicans and had adopted a clear pro-independence bias.

The War of Independence followed this failed uprising and ended in 1921, with the partition of Ireland into two separate entities by the Anglo-Irish Treaty. While Northern Ireland (i.e. six of the nine counties of Ulster/Ulaidh) remained part of the United Kingdom, the rest of Ireland (26 counties) became independent. However, the Irish Free State would remain part of the Commonwealth, so the King of England would still be the *de iure* head of state (Ruddy, 2018). This was unacceptable for many leaders of the nationalist movement of Ireland and the Irish Civil War would begin in 1922. With regard to the language, there was no difference between supporters and detractors of the Treaty (winners and losers in the war respectively) and there were Gaelic speakers on both sides. The Irish Free State would become the Republic of Ireland in 1948.

This very tumultuous beginning of the century halted the revival and spread of the Irish language in the last two decades of the 19th century, but the establishment of the Irish Free State was a kick start for the inclusion of Irish in schools. The Irish school system consisted on the infant (ages 4-6, but most would enter at age 6), primary (ages 7-16, most would leave at age 14) and secondary education. Even if the ban on teaching Irish in schools was lifted by the British government in 1900, very few schools adopted Irish as a subject (let alone as the vehicular language), but that changed when, after independence, the Irish National Teachers Organization/Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann elaborated the national education programme, in which they sought an "Irish tone" (Mezo, 2008:85-8). As such, History and Geography were reduced to the history and geography of Ireland, Choir (a compulsory subject at the time) had to be taught with Irish songs and Physical Education had to include exercises taken from traditional Irish dance. Irish became compulsory in every level of education, and no less than an hour a

day should be devoted to the subject.

In the Irish Free State secondary education was privately managed, but had to comply with the rules and regulations of the Irish government. The *Dáil Éireann* (the Irish parliament) had created, with the aid of the Gaelic League/Conradh na Gaeilge and the Irish National Teachers Organization/Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann, a Comission of Secondary Education, in which they decided how long a regular Secondary Education would be. In 1934, with the Irish conservatives Fianna Fáil in the government, passing the subject of Irish became a *sine qua non* requirement to get the Leaving Certificate, necessary to access to third-level education (Mezo, 2008:91-2).

By 1926, the Gaelic League/Conradh na Gaeilge succeeded in increasing the knowledge of Irish by 10% in the easternmost part of Ireland where the language had previously been lost. However, by looking at the age-grouped statistics from the 1926 census from the Irish Free State (Northern Ireland never carried out a language census), we can see that, while the number of Irish speaking schooled children doubled, and while Irish speakers under 20 years old increased by 103,000, the amount of Irish speakers over 20 decreased by 112,000 people. Hindley (1990:27) calls this the "school-age bulge," which distorted all statistics on the Irish language at the time, and he affirms that older generations who had not been exposed to the new Irish education system did not see any increase in the use and knowledge of Irish. In addition to that, the census noted that there had been a loss of ability on speakers who had in previous censuses figured as fluent in Irish. Furthermore, Hindley (1990: 27) states that:

> The point usually made is that census figures represent *self*-estimates of language ability, as the enumerator collects the returns from heads of households. Obviously, this never in fact represents self-assessment for schoolchildren, for their language abilities are assessed by their parents, and over-generous estimation is therefore particularly likely compared with the normal level of optimism about command of language which might be expected from children themselves once adult and in charge of their own returns.

Another strategy to revitalize the language was the establishment of the *Gaeltacht*, i.e., the area in Ireland where Irish is still predominant over English. From 1921 onwards, the protection of the native speaking heartlands have been understood to be essential in order to keep Irish alive – these places served as "inspiration to Irish learners elsewhere in the country" (Bradley, 2014:541). In the beginning of the century

the *Gaeltacht* covered the western third of Ireland, and its population was that of 1.5 million people. However, the only three main *Gaeltachtaí* that remain today are isolated areas in Donegal/Dhún na nGall, Galway/Gaillimh and Kerry/Chiarraí, in addition to the smaller *Gaeltachtaí* in Mayo/Mhaigh Eo, Cork/Corcaigh, Waterford/Port Láirge and Meath/An Mhí. The geographical isolation and lack of opportunities have led many young people to leave the *Gaeltachtaí* in favour of bigger cities, "jeopardizing [their] very existence" (Bradley, 2014:541). As we shall see, despite the means dedicated to this cause, neither the Irish Free State nor the Republic of Ireland were able to end the identification between Gaelic and poverty.

The government rapidly understood that this migration had to be halted one way or another, and began paying a small grant, the *deontas*, literally meaning "grant," to Irish speakers who wished to live and work in the *Gaeltacht*. However, this financial incentive proved to be insufficient, and by 1958, they proposed promoting and developing the rural industry in Western Ireland. In addition to this, poor infrastructure forced the government to take over many projects, and the initiative was hampered until the creation of the *Údarás na Gaeltachta* (meaning "Authority of the *Gaeltacht*") in 1980, which was made responsible for the development of the Irish speaking areas in terms of not only socioeconomics, but also culturally. Currently, over 7,000 workers are employed by companies supported by the *Údarás*, ranging from fish processing plants to engineering companies (Bradley, 2014:541). The economic investment did increase the population of *Gaeltachtaí* from 78,000 in 1961 to over 100,000 in 2011, but in spite of the demographic survival of the Irish speaking areas seeming guaranteed, the fact that it will remain Irish speaking is not (O'Cinneide, 1985)[2], as these economic incentives have attracted non-Irish speakers to the *Gaeltachtaí*. For instance, some *Údarás*-backed companies hired English speaking managers because "they were unable to find suitably qualified Irish speakers." This, as well as the fact that returning former emigrants brought back non-Irish speaking partners and children (Bradley, 2014:541), estimations from the end of the century were rather pessimistic, such as Hindley's (1990), who stated that only 10,000 "genuine Irish speakers" were left.

In the 2011 census, 66,238 out of the approximately 100,000 people in the *Gaeltachtaí* stated they were "Irish speakers," but figures estimate that only 55% of

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[2] As cited in Bradley, 2014:541.

school children came from Irish speaking homes (which should have been around 70% taking into account the number of people who reported to be speakers of Irish), and that only 37% of the parents of said school children classified themselves as "native Irish speakers."

This, in addition to the views on the teachers from *Gaeltachtaí* that feel that "there ha[s] been a decline in their pupil's standard of Irish over the previous 15 years" (Bradley, 2014:542), leave the language in a very poor state. The failed policies in adopting Irish as the vehicular language through education (Mezo, 2008:144) and the decrease of speakers in the Irish-speaking cores of the country (Bradley, 2014:542) have led to the current situation, in which neither the development nor the survival of the language are guaranteed on the long run.

5. IRISH NATIONAL IDENTITY & IRISH GAELIC
5.1. LANGUAGES & NATIONS

Languages are often called just ways to communicate. If this definition is accepted, then the best course of action society (or societies) could take would be to give up all languages but one, a *lingua franca* (say, English, for instance), and just use it to communicate with each other. This definition, however, is an oversimplification of what languages really are.

Languages are much more than that. Languages are an essential part of the identity of the individual, a source of diversity between different cultures, and a pillar of nations. However, not every nation corresponds to the political borders of nowadays world map. In Europe, only Denmark, Iceland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Portugal can be considered nations which contain a single ethnic group within their borders (Connor, 1984: 155)[3]. However, some of those states cannot be considered to hold such a description (while Denmark proper may be considered mono-ethnic by Connor, the Kingdom of Denmark rules on the Faroe Islands and Greenland, which have their own ethnic groups), nor do they represent 100% of the speakers of a language (if Faroese, Galician and Flemish are to be considered dialects of Icelandic, Portuguese and Dutch respectively, there would be Icelandic, Portuguese and Dutch speakers in European nations outside their respective countries). Additionally, because of

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[3] As cited in Zabaltza, 2006: 63.

immigration, virtually no country in the world can be considered fully monolingual.

One of the words that can describe a nation in which more than one language is spoken is diglossia. Diglossia was a term coined in English by Ferguson in an article homonymous to what it is explaining (1959: 325-340), in which he describes the concept as the use of two varieties of the same language by a speaker, depending on who they speak to. In his words,

> Diglossia is a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation. (Ferguson, 1959: 336)

Diglossia is, hence, understood as a matter of register by Ferguson. However, he did make a distinction between high (H) and low (L) dialects that, albeit from the same language, were different varieties. The definition of diglossia evolved when Fishman (1967) further developed Ferguson's term to also encompass the distribution of not only varieties of the same language but also different languages altogether. For him, diglossia and bilingualism are separate features of a speech community, and he presents a classification of speech communities as seen in table 1.

TABLE 1. Relationship between bilingualism and diglossia (Fishman, 1967: 30)

	DIGLOSSIA	NO DIGLOSSIA
BILINGUALISM	[+D] [+B]	[-D] [+B]
NO BILINGUALISM	[+D] [-B]	[-D] [-B]

In [+D][+B] communities, virtually every speaker speaks two or more languages, but these languages will be in a state of inequality in terms of prestige and status. Such as the case as Paraguay, where Spanish and Guarani are spoken by virtually all people but used for different purposes (Spanish is used to talk and write about culture, education and politics while Guarani is used in the intimacy) (Fishman, 1967:

31-33).

[-D][+B] communities are those in which an A and a B languages will be in balance, as neither A nor B will be used as an H or an L. However, these communities often have some people speaking one language and other people speaking the other language, but not many speaking both. This is the case in Belgium with the Flemish, French and German speaking communities, where Brussels, the capital city, acts like a *de iure* bilingual enclave in the Flemish speaking part of the country (even though 95.55% of the population speaks fluent French in contrast to the only 28.23% that speaks Flemish (Janssens, 2008: 3). In these communities, a group of bilingual speakers emerges to act as interpreters between the members of the community.

It is difficult to imagine a community in which there is no diglossia nor bilingualism ([-D][-B]). Even if we only consider different languages (and not varieties of the same language, as Ferguson did), there are not many linguistic groups isolated enough for no contact with another language to have happened. Such isolation tends to be "self-liquidating" for said communities (Fishman, 1967: 37).

Finally, [+D][-B] communities often create marginal group of speakers are bilingual (therefore [+B]) while the majority of the population is monolingual[4]. These communities are the source of minority languages. This is the case of Spain, where groups of people speak Catalan, Galician, Basque, and to a lesser extent Asturian and Aragonese, but the rest of the country is monolingual in Spanish. The official recognition of the first three languages in (most) of the territories within the Spanish Kingdom where they are spoken has led to the conversion of those regions into [-D][+B] or [+D][+B].

The Republic of Ireland would be another example of this type of community, although different. Ireland, unlike Spain, is bilingual in theory, as Irish and English (in that order, *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, art. 8) are the official languages of the whole country (therefore it should be a [-D][+B]). However, Irish is only spoken by a minority, and

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[4] Fishman does take into account the definition that Ferguson gave of diglossia as the use of H and L varieties of the same language. I have taken a different approach to diglossia and only considered the relationship between different languages altogether. Therefore, [+D] communities will be those where language A and language B will be used for different purposes, and not an H and an L of a same language (this latter definition would render [-D] communities an oddity, as virtually every language in the world has more than one register). This interpretation of diglossia was drawn in a lecture by Professor Mari Jose Ezeizabarrena about the basics of linguistics in 2015.

this is causes a severe unbalance in the status of the two main languages in Ireland.

5.2. IRISH GAELIC & "IRISHNESS"

There is a strong association between language and national identity that goes both ways. The case of Irish, however, could be seen as an anomaly – a nation with a language that has survived while being colonised is in most cases going to revert to its autochthonous language once independence is gained.

The truth in the matter is that in the building of the Irish nation, religion was a far more important aspect than language. However, the question is much more complex than just saying that nationalists did not care much for the Irish language, as seen in the two (paradoxical) interpretations of "Irishness" that arose in the 19th century: Gaelic speaker O'Connell/Ó Conaill's Catholic Ireland and English speaker Davis/Dáibhis' Gaelic Ireland (as seen in chapter 3).

Irish was swiftly included in the educational system of Ireland upon independence, and there was a "clear national conviction" on that any political leader who attempted to halt or reverse the language politics adopted by the new government would immediately fail in their electoral efforts (Mezo, 2008:253). However, after the enthusiasm towards the revival of the language died out in the 1920s, "apathy" towards the language began to loom in the streets, especially among parents of students, many of whom had complained that the insistence on teaching in Irish was detrimental to other subjects. Mezo (2008: 254) adds that:

> The most critical interpreted that the population's support for the Irish language was "more sentimental than real" and that the language policy was an exercise of hypocrisy, in which the majority of the population would be intimately against the imposition of Irish, even if they would not dare say so in fear of differing from the dominant discourse.[5]

Another strong negative feeling towards Irish was maintained from the 20s up to the 70s because of the educational system. As seen in chapter 4, passing an Irish exam was necessary to get a higher-learning certificate and access to university, which, coupled with the "exceedingly bad pedagogical methods in the teaching of Irish," has created resentment among those who were obliged to learn Irish as a school subject

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[5] The translation is mine.

(Shah, 2014:70-1).

This is further explained by the stigmas that Irish had carried with it since the times of the Plantations, such as the fact that Irish was the language of the peasantry, and speaking the language was associated with being uneducated and poor. Also, religious missionaries "beat [Irish] out of children" in the middle of the last century (Shah, 2014:71). Shah compares this with the missionary in Africa, who converted the autochthonous people into Christianity by oppression and suppression of their cultures, thus "curing" the Irish of their "ignorant and barbaric tongue" through English. According to him,

> [t]he result was devastating to the language: Irish became stigmatized and speaking it carried a strong negative connotation. This attitude, although somewhat counteracted by the association of the language with republicanism and national pride, continues to this day for many people (Shah, 2014:71).

Today, as the September 2016 report constructed by the *Oireachtas*' (the parliament and senate of the Republic of Ireland) Library and Research Service (L&RS) states:

> [A]ttitudes towards the Irish language among primary and post-primary students in the Republic are often negative. However, the report finds widespread support for the language among the adult population – 67% of the respondents in the Republic (and 45% from Northern Ireland) felt positive about the Irish language. The analysis shows that attitudes to, and the use of the Irish language are influenced by a combination of factors including the education system, attitudes and language behaviour at home as well as opportunities to speak the language (L&RS, 2016:4-5).

Historically, ethnicity has not played much of a role in national identity in Ireland, as there is no "ethnic" difference between Catholic and Protestant Irishmen and women. In fact, many of the present day Nationalists in Northern Ireland might be descendants of the "Old English", who were Catholic, and many Unionists might be descendants of Goidelics converted to Protestantism, also known as "Soupers" (Zabaltza, 2006:109).

As much as language has not been an important factor in Irish national identity throughout history, it is true that today, the knowledge of Irish has become a symbol of "Irishness." In Northern Ireland, Irish is linked to the Nationalist community, as 26% of

Catholics declare they know some Irish as opposed to only 2% of Protestants (Zabaltza, 2006:110).

This can be seen in the programmes of the main political parties in Northern Ireland. Sinn Féin has an "all-Ireland approach" to the promotion of Irish language. As Sinn Féin's National Irish Language Officer Johnny McGibbon explained in an email, "although languages know no borders, due to the British government's partition of our country different political realities have had their impact on the Irish Language and on language planning" (J. McGibbon, personal communication, April 26, 2019). The Republicans are concerned with the rights of the speakers of the language both in the Republic and in the Six Counties (Sinn Féin, 2016:21). As expected, Unionist parties have different points of view.

The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) is "committed to establishing the Institute of Ulster-Scots[6] to drive forward a positive research and educational agenda for this vital strand of Northern Ireland's identity" (DUP, n.d.), even if in the 2011 census both the amount of people who reported being fluent ("being able to speak, read, write and understand") and the amount of people who reported having any knowledge of Irish was higher than in the case of Ulster-Scots (fluency: 3.7% for Irish, 0.9% for Ulster-Scots; any knowledge: 11% for Irish, 8.1% for Ulster-Scots) (NISRA, 2012:18). Considering this data, and taking into account how critical the DUP are against the use of funds to protect and develop the Irish language (DUP, 2017), I asked them if they would consider backing any policy in favour of the development of Irish in an email, but I received no response.

The Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV) and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) agree with the DUP in that the Irish Language Legislation in Northern Ireland is unacceptable. The TUV state that Irish-medium schools have unfair advantages (one school opened with only 12 pupils, which is something that could never happen for an English-medium school, they argue), a "lavishly funded" all-Ireland organization for the promotion of Irish already exists, and Irish street signage is already in place when needed (TUV, 2019); and the UUP diverts the linguistic question to a different topic altogether – the British/Irish Sign Language Act (UUP, 2017).

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[6] Scots (not to be confused with Scottish Gaelic) is a Germanic language, often called a dialect of English, and Ulster-Scots is the (sub-)dialect of Scots that is spoken in the province of Ulster/Ulaidh. It is mainly spoken by Protestants, and, just as Irish Gaelic is somewhat linked to Nationalism, Ulster-Scots is linked to Unionism in Northern Ireland.

6. THE PRESENT & FUTURE OF IRISH

6.1. CURRENT LINGUISTIC SITUATION

Depending on different sources, different figures on the amount of Irish speakers appear, so I will base my calculations only in the official censuses of both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. According to the 2016 census in the Republic of Ireland, Irish Gaelic was able to be spoken by 1,761,420 people (CSO, 2017:66). However, as seen in chapter 4, the self-estimation factor of the question "Can you speak Irish?" (which is exactly the question that the census asked) makes this figure quite unreliable. The number we should take a look at is 73,803, who are the people who reported speaking Irish on the daily and outside the education system. 27.9% of these Irish speakers came from the *Gaeltachtaí* (20,586 people). All these figures are below those in the 2011 census, but not significantly (CSO, 2017:66, 69).

TABLE 2. Irish speakers according to the 2016 Republic of Ireland and the 2011 Northern Ireland censuses.

	Passive speakers[7]	**Active speakers**[8]	Passive and active speakers	Percentage of all speakers	**Percentage of active speakers**
Republic of Ireland	1,687,617	**73,803**	1,761,420	35.44	**1.55**
↪*Gaeltachtaí*	*43,078*	*20,586*	*63,664*	*66.25*	*21.42*
Northern Ireland	142,491	**4,200**	146,691	8.1	**0.2**
TOTAL	1,830,108	**78,003**	1,908,111	29.03	**1.19**

In Northern Ireland, no census was taken in 2016, the most recent one being the 2011 census that I have already used before. In that census, 4,200 people (0.2%) reported Irish being their "main language," making it the fourth most used language in

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[7] I call "passive speakers" all those who stated "being able to speak Irish" but not doing so in their everyday lives for the 2016 Republic of Ireland census and those who reported having "some ability" in Irish for the 2011 Northern Ireland census.

[8] I call "active speakers" all those who reported speaking Irish "daily outside the educational system" for the 2016 Republic of Ireland census and those whose "main language" was Irish in the 2011 Northern Ireland census.

Northern Ireland (behind English, Polish and Lithuanian). However, 3.7% of the population was "able to speak, read, write and understand" Irish. (NISRA, 2012:16, 18). As we can see, a 29% of the approximately 6,572,865 people living in Ireland in the early to mid 2010s could (theoretically) speak Irish, but only slightly over 1% was speaking Irish in their everyday lives (outside the educational system).

As stated before, Irish is the official language of the Republic of Ireland, according to its Constitution (*Bunreacht na hÉireann*, art. 8). This means that Irish is used in all official documents issued by the government, and that every Irish person may use Irish in every public service and for any purpose, as well as that education in Irish is guaranteed to every child. However, the language's status in Northern Ireland is not that of an official language, but of a language recognised in the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, as well as Ulster-Scots. This means that the Northern Irish government "recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity" (Department for Communities, n.d.a). However, the Department of Communities itself admits that "[t]he Charter does not establish any individual or collective rights for the speakers of regional or minority languages. The Charter's overriding purpose is cultural" (Department for Communities, n.d.b), and from the Belfast/Béal Feirste office of the Gaelic League/Conradh na Gaeilge they agree that "[t]he Irish language in the North [Northern Ireland] has no governmental status or legislative protection," and that in Northern Ireland "Irish is merely given as an optional subject in English-speaking schools, meaning that children are not obligated to learn the language," as was it explained to me in an email by the Gaelic League/Conradh na Gaeilge itself (C. N. Liam, personal communication, July 16, 2019).

6.2. LINGUISTIC RESTORATION & DEVELOPMENT POLICIES, FUTURE CHALLENGES

Currently both governments in Ireland and many organizations are actively trying to protect and develop the use of Irish though policies, projects and campaigns. The Republic of Ireland *Oireachtas*, for instance, has a 20-year strategy for the development of the language (L&RS, 2016:19).

In the Republic of Ireland, of the biggest three political parties, the one that

gives more importance to the linguistic question is the aforementioned Sinn Féin (left-wing nationalists). The other two (Fine Gael, centre-right liberal-conservatives, and Fianna Fáil, centre-right conservatives) do not have a section on Irish Gaelic on their webpage, hinting at the identity tinge that the language has taken over the years.

Sinn Féin, who operate in a 32 county basis, states that they will work in order to: 1) recognise Irish as an official language in the whole island, as well as to recognise the linguistic rights of its speakers, 2) protect language rights through public authorities, 3) repeal the 1737 Administration of Justice Act that prohibits Irish in judicial processes in the North, and 4) require organisations using online services to facilitate the use of Irish spelling (Sinn Féin, 2016:21). They also have policies on the use of Irish in the public sector, the legal system and the media, as well as developing the *Gaeltacht* areas, as they believe that "the future of Irish language depends on the continued survival of sustainable Gaeltacht" (Sinn Féin, 2016:20).

When looking at their policies on Irish in the education system, the main points made are about funding and minimum qualifications for teachers and students. However, very few points are given to the methods and quality of the teaching of the language (Sinn Féin, 2016:26-7). This feels like a big oversight, considering that the responsible for the lack of social support which is essential for the survival of the language is mainly the poor methodology on teaching Irish.

In Northern Ireland, Irish has no official recognition, but that can change if the Irish Language Act (ILA) is carried forward. The 2006 St Andrew's Agreement, signed by the British and Irish governments, stipulates that an ILA "based on the experiences in Wales and Ireland" needed to be implemented, but this was put on hold by the government until the present day (CnaG, 2019:12). Many people who oppose the ILA have argued that it would be useless or even outright unfair to English-only speakers, defending that things like the implementation of signs in Irish could create "cold-houses" for Unionists. However, and according to the Human Rights Commission, creating linguistic pluralism can never be considered to create tension or be an act of discrimination towards the users of more widely used languages (CnaG, 2019:32). To address the claims that an ILA and the education of and in Irish would be and is "lavishly overfunded," the Gaelic League/Conradh na Gaeilge, which is campaigning for the implementation of the Act with the campaign "#AchtAnois," responds that the

additional spending on Irish-medium education has been that of £6.6 million in the last 6 years (as opposed to the £150 million claimed by other sources) in order to "address the lack of resources and teaching aids" (CnaG, 2019:36-7).

The Gaelic League/Conradh na Gaeilge states that people who do not wish to engage with the language will not need to do so (CnaG, 2019:14, 20, 32, 42), and that without the official recognition of the language "any potential ILA would be practically worthless" (CnaG, 2019:50).

7. CONCLUSION

As stated before, the case of Irish may be considered an anomaly. Ireland will celebrate the centenary of its independence in 3 years, and yet the majority of its population is unable to speak the Irish language. It is a fact that O'Connell/Ó Conaill's Catholic vs. Protestant dichotomy rose over Davis/Dáibhis' idea of Irishness being defined by culture and not religion.

In this paper I have tried to demonstrate that history does indeed have a direct correlation with the present situation; that is unarguably true. However, I have also tried to dismiss the over repeated mantra that states that Irish Gaelic is not spoken because over a century ago people did not care about the language.

No doubt the starting point was not the most desirable. The Irish language was in decline at least since the "Plantations" of the 16th and 17th centuries, not to mention the Great Famine of the mid-nineteenth century. The Irish experience shows that the will of the political class to recover and normalise a language is not enough, especially if politicians themselves do not usually speak the language they are said to promote. Despite all the means invested, the Irish Free State first and the Republic of Ireland later were unable to reverse the linguistic situation. Today, for a significant part of Irish society, Gaelic is something useless, except for the minimum knowledge, often reduced to greeting formulas (*cúpla focal*), which is required to access to university or become a civil servant.

Attitudinal factors play an important role in the acquisition of a language, and "learners who have favourable attitudes towards a language and towards its speakers and their culture tend to be more successful in their learning than those who have

negative attitudes" (Rosalind, Pritchard & Loulidi, 1994)[9]. I believe that one reason for this apathy towards Irish has been caused by the stigma that the language had carried along (i.e., the relation between Irish Gaelic and poverty), in addition to years of bad educational methods when teaching Irish in the Republic of Ireland, as well as the weak support for the language's development by many political parties in Northern Ireland. Moreover, the identification of the language with the most radical (and until recently, violent) version of Irish nationalism has not helped at all its acceptance by the Unionist community in Northern Ireland.

Changing the method of teaching Irish is primordial for the survival of the language. That is clear. But it is not enough. One must also ask to what extent the effort of trying to recover Gaelic in places where it was no longer spoken has been beneficial for the language, instead of concentrating on the *Gaeltacht*, the area where it is naturally used. As the Basque writer Joxean Artze masterfully expressed, "*hizkuntza bat ez da galtzen ez dakitenek ikasten ez dutelako, dakitenek hitz egiten ez dutelako baizik*," that is to say "a language does not get lost because those who cannot speak it do not learn it, but because those who can, do not."

It is in the hands of the Gaelic speakers to keep their language alive. As the poem I named this paper after reads: *is mise an Ghaeilge, labhraígí mé*. Speak me.

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[9] As cited in Shah, 2014:71.

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