(How) Can legislation support smaller languages?

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Language policy goals

"Minimally, ... [goals] should include

- A recognition of who is being targeted primarily
- The level of language proficiency that revitalization is meant to bring about
- The intended domains in which the language will be used." (Grenoble & Whaley 2006: 174)

- In many cases, policy-making proceeds without such clarification ...

  - especially for smaller languages which haven't had much institutional support in the past

- And often no evaluation of effectiveness

Legislation as part of policy-making

- What kind(s) of legislation might be envisaged for small languages?
- Official recognition – what does that mean/entail?
  - Recognising existence as a language (not a dialect or 'patois')?
    - Increases perceived value of a low-status language
  - Translation of official documents/websites?
  - The right to use the language in certain contexts?
- All speakers are now bilingual/dominant in English
  - ➢ Is legislation symbolic rather than functional?
    - ('too late' is a convenient time to recognise minority languages …)
- The right to learn a heritage language (right to revitalise)
  - Education: Immersion, bilingual, curriculum subject, extra-curricular?
  - To what level?
  - Adult education?
  - Teacher training?
  - Does it lead to increased community use?

What is being recognised?

- The European approach presupposes standardised, unitary languages
- But small endangered languages often have no standard
  - Wide range of accents, dialects, language mixing and change
  - Seen as traditionally oral (despite body of literature)
- Standardisation may be necessary for practical reasons
  - ➢ Importance of recording traditional richness and diversity
- European Charter for Regional/Minority Languages: Governments can choose which languages to recognise
- Jèrriais and Guernesiais have often been seen as inferior dialects of French
  - ➢ Some objections to recognising Jèrriais
  - French was *de facto* language of officialdom from 16th to 19th centuries
    - but no legislation defining official language(s)
    - just permitted languages for use in the States

Maintained by the
Public Foundation for European Comparative Minority Research

Supported by the
Council of Europe and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Hungary

Manx Gaelic in the United Kingdom

• Entry into force of the Charter for Manx Gaelic	23 April 2003
• Entry into force for the United Kingdom	1 July 2001
• Status of Manx Gaelic	territorial
• Level of protection for Manx Gaelic	Part II
• Provisions applied to Manx Gaelic	text
• Territorial application	Isle of Man*
• Translation to Manx Gaelic	text
• Other countries where Manx Gaelic is protected under the Charter	none

• Documents of the monitoring process for Manx Gaelic	text
• Recommendations of the Committee of Experts and the Committee of Ministers regarding Manx Gaelic	text

• Other languages under the Charter's protection in the United Kingdom:	Cornish, Irish, Scots, Scottish Gaelic, Ulster-Scots, Welsh

* The declaration whereby the United Kingdom accepted the obligations of the Charter in relation to Manx Gaelic did not specify the territorial scope.

Policy without legislation / recognition?

- In Jersey and Guernsey some political support and funding has been provided without (or before) legislation to officialise indigenous languages
- Government support may not require legislation
  - Or does it imply *de facto* recognition?
- In the Isle of Man there is concern that official recognition would state that English was the main language
  - Manx would only hold a secondary / minority position
- Some fear that legislation might result in less practical support than the language has now
  - Ticking boxes rather than action

'Lé Jèrriais est la langue minnoritaithe officielle dé Jèrri'
— 'Jèrriais is the official **minority** language of Jersey'
(Les Pages Jèrriaises – La Société Jersiaise)

Online information and public services for the island of Jersey
L'înformãtion en lïngne et les sèrvices publyis pouor l'Île dé Jèrri

Jersey government website

AIM:
Language Preservation

Objectives	Partners	Timescale	Actions	Progress
Development of language policy 🟢	Speakers, stakeholders and enthusiasts, Education Department British Irish Council members, Academics & Practitioners	2011	• Research language revitalisation elsewhere	🟢
			• Agree priorities with interested groups & individuals.	🟢
			• Guernésiais recognised as a regional language of Europe.	🟡
Raising the profile, increasing the awareness and use of Guernésiais 🟢	Local Media, States Departments, Parishes, States Departments, private sector, other organisations, sponsors.	2011-2015	• Broadcast and print material in media	🟢
			• Bilingual signs for place names and facilities	🟡
			• "Welcome to Parish" signs	🟢
			• Welcome and Farewell signs at Airport & Harbour.	🟡
			• "Welcome" signs at C&L sites	🟢
			• Increased visibility at events e.g. The West Show & (Lé Festival Sertchais dé Folk (Sark Folk Festival)	🟢
			• Branding of local products.	🟢

🟢 Action is on target for completion within the allotted timeframe, or is progressing to a satisfactory standard in terms of: schedule, finance and resources.

🟠 Action is behind target for completion within the allotted timeframe, but is still progressing at a rate which is not causing financial or resource-driven problems.

🔴 Action is either not on target for completion within allotted timeframe, or is causing major problems with regard to finance and resources. There may be a shortfall of these factors, leading to a rethink of the validity of the original action point.

Is language policy about language?

- 'In a Europe where indigenous minorities are now seen as unthreatening "post-traditional speech communities", micro-states promote and use their languages as symbolic assets for international commercial reasons and legitimising their statehood' (Ó hIfearnáin 2010)

- The Guernsey, Jersey and IoM governments tend to promote linguistic heritage for political distinctiveness

- does not necessarily require fluent use of living languages

Stakeholders in policy-making for small languages

- Traditional native speakers ('the language community')
  - and their descendants
- People who grew up speaking/hearing the language but have lost its use
  - 'latent' or 'passive' speakers, 'rememberers'
- 'New speakers', learners and potential learners
  - often most involved in language campaigning
- Language supporters and enthusiasts
- Teachers
- Politicians, civil servants
- Members of the wider community who do not speak or identify with the language, but who are affected by policies
  - e.g. their taxes might fund policy measures.
- These categories may well overlap in small communities!

Top-down and bottom-up

- Government support can provide more resources and strategic direction than small groups of volunteers
- But over-control can make community members into passive recipients of language policies rather than active participants
  - And can lead to a false sense of security regarding the health of the language
- Government policy may change!
  - Voluntary activists remain committed to their language regardless of political, economic and social circumstances
    (Wilson, Johnson and Sallabank, forthcoming)
- But they may not have a strategic overview or thought-through aims
  - ➢ 'unplanned language planning'

Conclusions

- There is debate about whether language legislation / officialisation is effective / beneficial

    e.g. some claim 'compulsory Irish' turned off a generation;

    Wales: younger generation don't have sense of urgency?

- Importance of explicit aims/goals (and evaluation)

- Official language support can have beneficial effects for communities

    – economic and in terms of self-confidence

    – even if they don't succeed at 'saving the language' (Dorian 1987)

- Importance of building a 'new speaker community'

    – and of giving a voice to future custodians of the language