**LANGUAGE POLICY**

**SOME GLOBAL CONTEXTS**

*Siehe, es ist einerlei Volk und einerlei Sprache unter ihnen ……………lasst uns herniederfahren und dort ihre Sprache verwirren, dass keiner des andern Sprache verstehen. Genesis 11 (1 and 7).*

Language policies, which are key parts of national development strategies, evolve now in a changing global context. The globalisation of trade and investment, multinational activities, universal access to communications technologies and the international movement of labour, all drive a global need for the elimination of barriers to communication. Throughout the world nations and organisations are adopting language policies to meet these future contexts.There is widespreadchange in language use and learning. This note, in drawing attention to some language issues, seeks to contribute to the discussion of Ireland’s language policies.

This note begins with a quotation, referring to the Tower of Babel episode, from Luther’s translation of the Bible. At first it says mankind had just one language. Later, when multilingual, they did not understand one another!Luther’s Bible, exploiting a new communications technology, printing, contributed to the standardisation of the German language. Communications technology, language standardisation and mutual understanding are major global themes to-day.

**CLASSIFICATION OF LANGUAGES.** By some estimates there are now up to 6,000 languages in use. These can be classified in a number of ways. One classification divides languages into three categories: World Languages, Regional or Supra-Regional and Local Languages.

* **World Languages**. These are distinguished by their large number of users, both first-language and non-native users, across international boundaries. They are official languages in a number of countries and are the languages of international organisations. They are languages in use for all of mankind’s activities including the most sophisticated. English is now, by many measures, the top ranked World Language.
* **Regional Languages**. These languages may have tens of millions of users but lack the international reach of World Languages. Examples are Romanian, Korean, Tamil. This classification is disputed by some languages claiming World Status.
* **Local Languages**. Most languages are Local. It is estimated that 96% of the world’s languages are spoken by 4% of the world’s population. Many are endangered. Local languages have important social and cultural significance. They are important to the identities of their user groups and as repositories of history and tradition.

Ireland is a multilingual State. Census 2011 revealed over 0.5m.residents whose home language is other than English or Irish, Ireland’s official languages. Language planning in Ireland needs to address the achievement of the highest global standards in the world language English. It needs to address the local national language Irish, the languages of Ireland’s immigrant population and the languages of strategic importance to Ireland’s future and that of its citizens.

**WORLD LANGUAGES**. The six official languages of the United Nations are Arabic, Chinese (Standard), English, French, Russian and Spanish. Other languages are occasionally proposed for official status. The UN has drawn criticism for relying too much on English. The UN Secretariat has two working languages, English and French. Five of the six UN languages can be taken at Leaving Certificate level.

**English** is the largest language in use globally. It is the most studied language. It is the official language in more countries than any other language. It is the language of the world’s greatest economy, the US. It is an official language of many international organisations. It is the sole official language in organisations as diverse as the Commonwealth of Nations, OPEC, ASEAN, the World Bank, IMF.

The three largest languages in use globally are **English**, **Mandarin Chinese** and **Spanish.** Mandarin dialects are spoken by a majority of the Chinese people and in Taiwan and Singapore. Spanish is the language of Latin and Central America. The United States has 37.5m.native Spanish speakers and 2.5m.speakers of Chinese languages.

Other globally important European languages include:

* **French**. French, the former language of diplomacy, is an official language in many international organisations. It is an official language of France, Belgium, Switzerland, Canada and many African countries.
* **Portuguese**. Portuguese has over 200m. native speakers in 10 countries and territories on 4 continents. It is the language of Brazil, a future major Atlantic economy.
* **German.** German has the largest number of native speakers in the EU. It is the language of Europe’s largest economy, Germany.
* **Russian.** Russian is an important language from Eastern Europe to the Manchurian border.

**Arabic**, an official UN language, has speakers of its dialects from Morocco to Oman.

The Indian subcontinent has many languages, many used by tens of millions of people. **Hindi** and **Urdu**, mutually understandable, have over 350m.users. Other major languages of the subcontinent are **Bengali**, **Punjabi** and **Tamil,** which have from 300+m. to 70+m. speakers.

**EUROPEAN UNION LANGUAGES**. The 28 EU countries have 24 official languages with Latin, Cyrillic (Bulgarian) and Greek alphabets. There are also many other unofficial languages and dialects. In 2004 the EU adopted the ambition that each citizen should speak two other languages in addition to their mother tongue. The EU has a Charter on Minority Languages. Table 1 gives the top 6 EU official languages by number of speakers, both first-language speakers and additional language users.

**Table 1: EU Languages, by Speakers as a % of EU population**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | First language | Additional language | total |
| **English**  **German**  **French**  **Italian**  **Spanish**  **Polish** | 13%  18%  12%  13%  8%  8% | 38%  14%  12%  03%  07%  01% | 51%  32%  24%  16%  15%  09% |

* English has the highest number of speakers in the EU28 because it has, by far, the largest number of second language speakers.
* The EU runs major translation and interpretation services. Of the documents translated in 1997 45% were written in English, 40% in French, 5.5% in German and the remainder in other languages. The greater volume of documents translated in 2010 had 77% in English. French accounted for just 7%, German 2% and 14% other languages.
* This supremacy of English within the EU is due to increase. Eurostat’s Key Data on Teaching Languages reveals that in 2011 in upper secondary (ISCED Level 3) a remarkable 93.8% of EU school students were studying English as an additional language. In contrast 23.0% were studying French and 21.1% were studying German – both languages reduced since 2006.
* German has the highest number, 18%, of first language speakers in the EU28.
* Of the 24 official EU languages nine had each less than 1% of EU speakers. (This, of course, includes Irish.) A further seven had each less than 3% of EU speakers.
* Romanian and Dutch had 5% each. Russian, not an official EU language, had 6% of EU speakers reflecting the Russian population in Eastern Europe and language policies there prior to 1989.
* European native speakers of the “smaller” languages have a strong incentive to master a world language such as English. Countries such as Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands have the highest standards of English.
* The risk for Anglophone institutions or individuals is complacency in relation to English standards and the learning of other languages. The British Academy (2008) cites “the perceived global dominance of English” for language weakness in UK education.
* The “Languages Learning in Scotland” 2012 Report speaks of the “prevailing culture” where people believe that English alone is sufficient. Language learning had declined in Scotland. The Report recommends a “1+2 approach”, the EU approach, of phased tri-lingualism of mother tongue plus two other languages.
* Joseph Lo Bianco in his 2009 report “Second Languages and Australian Schooling” states “a deep and persistent malaise affects language education in Australia, regrettably shared with other English-speaking nations”. His report advocates a focus in Australia on seven languages: Chinese (Mandarin), French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese and Spanish. The 2012 Australian Report “Australia in the Asian Century” advocates that all students have access to one priority Asian language from Mandarin, Hindi, Indonesian and Japanese.

**ENGLISH AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION**. There are a number of global ranking systems of Universities using a range of criteria including international profile. The 2014 THE ranking revealed the following information:

* The top ten Universities in the world were all in Anglophone countries (7 US, 3 UK).
* Of the top 25 ranked Universities 22 were in Anglophone countries.
* Of the top 50 Universities 40 (80%) were in Anglophone countries.
* Of the top 100 65% were in Anglophone countries as were 61% of the top 200.

Clearly students wishing to study at undergraduate or postgraduate level at a top University globally have a strong incentive to perfect their English. The US is the country attracting the highest number of international students. The top countries attracting international students are, in order, the US, the UK, France, Australia and Germany. A 2014 THE survey shows concern for the standard of English of some international students in the UK. The two countries providing the highest number of international students are China and India.

Because China and India are the countries of largest population in the world their language policies are of major interest. They will account for about 28% and 11% respectively of world GDP in 2030.

* China is a country of many languages and dialects. Standardised Mandarin has become the dominant language. Urban children begin English studies in 3rd form and English is a matriculation subject for Higher Education entry. In Taiwan English is actively promoted as the international language. In Singapore English is the official language with Mandarin, Malay or Tamil as languages for the majority Chinese and the Malay and Indian minorities.
* India has 35 States and Territories each with its own language policy. 75 languages are taught in total in a three language phased system and 31 languages of instruction in total are used. The 4 most popular school languages across India are Hindi, English, Urdu and Sanskrit. English dominates Higher Education in India.

In Higher Education it is significant that “International” courses are frequently intended to mean courses conducted through English. Universities in non-Anglophone countries know that international students can be attracted by offering courses through English rather than their own language. For example in Germany, a country with Engineering and Science renown, the DAAD are offering in 2015 over 500 Masters Programmes in German Universities in Engineering and Science with English as the language of instruction. In the Netherlands English is encouraged at Master’s level. English medium instruction (EMI) is expanding globally.

“International schools” are the names given to schools with instruction through English in non-Anglophone countries, founded largely in the past to give instruction to the children of expatriates towards British, US and International Baccalaureate qualifications. A major global demand is growing for education through English and not just for expatriates. International schools are growing rapidly. Around the world 5,500 of them educate almost 3m. students. The Middle East has 1,200 of them, Eastern Asia has nearly 1,000.

In some developing countries with many languages, language policies are of strategic importance, critical to development success. Such countries can face serious educational challenges of resource and qualified teacher availability, of learning materials and pedagogy. Policy involves decisions in relation to mother tongues and the phased introduction of other languages and of languages of instruction. In many such countries English has emerged as a Lingua Franca and as the language of Higher Education. In some developing countries it is alleged that private education maintains the position of an English speaking elite.

**MULTINATIONAL ENTERPRISES**. The global economy is strongly influenced by the activities of multinational or transnational enterprises. Such enterprises operating across many language areas need to adopt language policies. Such policies can be a source of competitive advantage. They can ensure the optimum use and availability of talent, the cross-pollination of ideas and innovation and coordination between the functions of the enterprise, from product research through production to marketing and sales. They can ensure an understanding of local cultures and needs. English may facilitate buying but selling is more successful in the local language!

Table 2 gives the top ten countries in 2014 by the origin of companies in the Fortune 500 list by size of annual revenues. This includes commodity, industrial, financial and service enterprises. In this Table of 420 companies 166 originate from Anglophone countries, and 113 are from Europe. The locus of economic activity is shifting. The McKinsey Consultants predict that by 2025 45% of the Fortune 500 list will be from emerging countries.

Ireland has attracted inward investment largely from Anglophone countries (US and UK). Ireland’s language policy can be a major factor in attracting investment and tourists from non-Anglophone regions .It can also be a factor in promoting the capacity of Irish enterprises and entrepreneurs to exploit markets, including major emerging markets, in non-Anglophone countries. The Forfás “Key Skills for Enterprise to Trade Internationally” Report 2012 advocates a “national foreign language education policy”.

**Table 2: Top Ten Countries by Number of Fortune 500 Companies 2014**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Rank | Country | No. | Rank | Country | No. |
| **1**  **2**  **3**  **4**  **5** | **US**  **China**  **Japan**  **France**  **UK** | 128  95  57  31  28 | **6**  **7**  **8**  **9**  **10** | **Germany**  **South Korea**  **Switzerland**  **Netherlands**  **Canada** | 28  17  13  13  10 |

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Language change itself also generates enterprise and employment. There is a vast global market for quality English courses, for qualified teachers of English, for quality English Teacher Training and for the learning materials and delivery methods of English language learning. The global growth of English speakers expands the market for cultural products - literature, publishing, film, TV and internet products in that language.

**THE UNITED KINGDOM**: The British Council in its report “Languages for the Future” sought to identify the languages that “the UK needs most and why”. It did so using a range of weighted criteria both economic and otherwise. It concluded that for economic purposes the languages of most importance to the UK were (in order): German, French, Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, Dutch, Portuguese, Russian, Swedish and Polish. When all purposes are included the order is: Spanish, Arabic, French, Mandarin, German, Portuguese, Italian, Russian, Turkish and Japanese. It concluded that “the UK needs to develop its citizens’ competence in a wider range of languages and in far greater numbers in order to reap the economic and cultural benefits”.

At A-Level in the UK in 2014 the top foreign languages were French (F: 7,131, M: 3,302), Spanish (F: 4,946, M: 2,655) and German (F: 2,523, M: 1,664). In Scottish Highers in 2014 the entries were: French (F: 3,184, M: 973), Spanish (F: 1,387, M: 493), German (F: 689, M: 317). Females dominate UK and Scottish language entries. The BA 2013 report “Languages: The State of the Nation” highlights the decline in GCSE Language entries and states “the UK is suffering from a growing deficit in foreign language skills at a time when global demand for language skills is expanding”.

The British Council in its report “The English Effect” claims that the English language now gives the UK “a strong competitive advantage in culture, diplomacy, commerce, media, academia and IT”.

**LANGUAGES IN IRISH SCHOOLS**. The Irish school programme facilitates a broad span of subjects and the study of languages. Typically full time students sit seven Leaving Certificate subjects and English is a universal subject. The Higher Leaving Certificate represents the highest standard achieved at school and in 2014 students sat examinations in 9 other languages at that level. Languages constituted 30.2% of all Leaving Certificate entries at Higher Level. Additionally, and importantly, students sat in 11 further languages – the non-curricular EU languages of Ireland’s immigrant communities.

**Table 3: Leaving Certificate Higher Entries: Languages 2014**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Total | **Subjects** | **Male** **Female** |
| 35,121 | **English** | 15,976 (45.5%) 19,145 (54.5%) |
| 18,134 | **Irish** | 6,726 (37.1%) 11,408 (62.9%) |
| 15,014  4,723  3,397 | **French**  **German**  **Spanish** | 5,792 (38.6%) 9,222 (61.4%)  1,984 (42.0%) 2,739 (58.0%)  1,294 (38.1%) 2,103 (61.9%) |
| 292  689 | **Russian**  **Others (4)** | 145 (49.7%) 147 (50.3%)  296 ( 43.0%) 393 (57.0%) |
| 750  710 | **Non-Curricular**  **Polish**  **Others (10)** | 346 (46.1%) 404 (53.9%)  320 (45.1%) 390 54.9%) |

* **English**. The 2014 National Assessment of English Reading and Mathematics confirmed that significant improvement had been made in Second and Sixth primary classes since 2009. In the PISA tests of 2012 Irish 15 year olds performed strongly in Reading Literacy compared to OECD average scores and those of our neighbours in the UK. The standards of English,that growing world language, is a matter of the utmost strategic importance to Ireland and its citizens. In the 2014 Leaving Certificate examination 35,121 students sat Higher English from the total of 52,274 English candidates – the largest entry for a Higher Level subject by far. The standards of the curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment of this subject, by global comparison, are of critical importance. The entire Leaving Certificate programme and assessment should promote excellence in English and an intolerance of poor English usage.
* **Irish**. Irish is a language studied at primary and second level. It is compulsory and used as a language of instruction in some schools. For entry to the National University of Ireland Irish students are required in 2015 to have at least Ordinary Grade D in the Irish language, a standard achieved by 40,529 in 2014. Irish is the second largest language taken at Higher Level (Table 3). It is distinguished amongst languages by having the smallest proportion of examination entrants (40.1%) taking the Higher level and also by having the smallest proportion of males (37.1%) taking that level. No distinction is or was made in curriculum or assessment between those for whom Irish is their native language and those for whom it is a second language. A recent report “Iniúchadh ar an gCumas Dátheangach” on Gaeltacht children found “gur fearr go mór a gcumas sa Bhéarla ná a gcumas sa Ghaeilge”. Major issues for the language include the disconnection between the major investment in Irish in the educational system and its use in society. Census 2011 revealed that 77,000 people spoke Irish daily outside the educational system. Colin Baker in “Foundations of Bilingual Education “, 2011, has written “Education by itself cannot enable a minority language to become revitalized”. Language policy must address these issues.
* **French/German/Spanish**. French is the dominant European language in the Irish second-level system for reasons more linked to history than strategic planning. It accounts for 62.3% of all Higher entries in such languages. French is also the largest language in the UK school system. In contrast to the UK and Scotland, where it is second, Spanish lies in third place here but has grown by 41.1% at Higher Leaving Certificate level since 2011. German is second in Ireland, third in the UK. There were more Higher Leaving entries in Ireland in French and German in 2014 than A-level entries in the UK in these languages.
* The other languages studied for the Leaving Certificate are important but attract small numbers. **Russian** had 292 Higher entries, **Japanese** 224, **Arabic** 108. A once dominant language across European and Irish schools, **Latin**, attracted 108 entries in 2014. It leaves its legacy languages Italian, Spanish, French, Italian and Romanian.
* **Polish**, an important European language, is the biggest language amongst the non-curricular languages with **Lithuanian** second. The world/ Atlantic language **Portuguese** had 67 entries.

**CONCLUSION**. In a changing global context the Language Policy of Ireland should occur more centrally in national strategic planning.

Ireland’s Language Policy should aspire to the highest global standards in English, the dominant world language. The targets for English literacy in the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy 2011-2020 should be raised. The school English curriculum, its teaching, learning and assessment should aspire to the highest global standards.

There is a global demand for the quality teaching of English and English as a second language. In this Ireland should aspire to playing a leading role. Ireland’s Development Aid should include an emphasis on quality English language teacher training and quality English learning. Providers of second language English courses in Ireland should be regulated to the highest quality standards.

National Language Policy should identify those languages of greatest future strategic interest to Ireland and its citizens. The five languages German, French, Spanish, Mandarin and Portuguese should be defined as Ireland’s **Strategic Languages**. French is the largest Strategic Language in Irish schools followed by German and Spanish. Language Policy should discourage the use of the word “foreign” in relation to languages.

Thousands of young Irish people pass language examinations, mostly at Higher Level, in the Leaving Certificate each year (Table 3). Higher Education institutions, employers and the State should encourage the transformation of that achievement, with other skills acquisition, into a professional functionality, fluency and active language use. The national availability, through ETBs for example, of Level 6 language courses with that objective could enable a widespread upgrading of language skills in Ireland and the elimination of language dormancy.

A Language Policy should consider an advocacy of the EU 1+2 proposal that a phased mastery of three languages be acquired by all young adults, mother tongue plus two others. Language Policy should seek to distinguish Ireland amongst Anglophone countries as the one with both the highest standards of English and the highest levels of multilingualism.

The objectives and outcomes of the investment and compulsion associated with the Irish language should be analysed as part of National Language Policy. The disconnection between achievement in school Irish and Irish usage should be examined as part of language planning. Higher male achievement in Irish and languages generally should be part of national language policy.

Ireland is enriched by the languages of its immigrant population. The languages of that immigrant community should be entitled the **Community Languages**. Language Policy should facilitate and encourage the continuity of this richness, where practicable, in the children of immigrants. School cooperation and new arrangements could extend Community Language teaching availability.

National Language Policy should identify languages more appropriately introduced, post-school, in Higher Education. Two Universities should be assigned the function of promoting the study of Mandarin and Portuguese and the cultures and economies of China/Taiwan/Singapore and Brazil/Angola/Portugal respectively.

Language Policy should seek the full exploitation of modern communication technologies in language fluency acquisition. Irish national broadcasting in English and Irish should be characterised internationally by the highest standards of accuracy, elegance and creativity.