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Introduction

Since the Gaelic league era, the restoration of the Irish language has been an intrinsic part of a wider cultural revitalisation in re-defining an Irish identity. The language has been central in re-establishing a perceived continuity between an autochthonous population and their cultural past. The historical Irish language activist, Padraig Pearse highlighted the importance of language as a part of nationhood; “*Tír gan teanga, tír gan anam*” ‘a country without a language is a country without a soul’ (Bord na Gaeilge, 1986)

De Freine (1965, p.138) explains the motivation behind the history of Irish language shift as a situation where “people change their language not because it is insufficient for their needs, but because their society is”. Since the end of the 19th century Irish restoration efforts have been ongoing to re-establish the position of the Irish language in Irish society. The aim of this study is essentially to determine the current position of Irish in a community in the Northwest of Ireland. The study will attempt to ascertain how members of the community view the language, and what interrelating factors can influence their feelings. Firstly there will be an observation at the main historical processes that have brought about the current situation.

History of Language loss

The history of the Irish language in Ireland is according to O’Riagain, “closely related to the political, social, and economic interaction between the island and England, it’s more powerful neighbour” (O’Riagain, 1997, p.4). The first linguistic effects of this political struggle were felt in the 11th and 12th after colonisation of the Anglo-Normans, and it is reported that there was some shift from Irish to French and English (O’Laoire, 2005). Although the Anglo-Normans had colonised almost three-quarters of Ireland, they were unable to sustain this presence and by the end of the fifteenth century had been displaced, through cultural assimilation or native attacks (O’Riagain, 1997). Many of the Norman French intermarried with the native Irish and in turn took on the language and culture of the majority (Hindley 1990). According to O’Laoire (2005 p.5) After this initial period of colonisation, “a predominantly Irish speaking Ireland emerged with its cultural traditions remaining distinctive and viable”.

The early seventeenth century is seen as a pivotal point in the history and eventual demise of the Irish language. According to O’Riagain (1997) a series of political changes in Britain resulted in a series of more determined

military campaigns to conquer Ireland. The result was the dispossession of the native aristocracy, and the introduction of new English born landlords. O'Laoire (2005), suggests that this led to the breakdown of the native Irish social, political and cultural institutions and the resulting subordination of Irish from a majority to a minority language.

This transition according to Hindley (1990) was not achieved in one campaign, as the period of colonisation was subject to recurrent native rebellions. Hindley describes the linguistic result of this violent period as being “for about two centuries a quiltwork pattern of English and Irish speaking districts” (Hindley, 1990, p.6). It is also widely accepted that the process of language shift in Ireland was an example of top-down language loss (Nettle and Romaine 2000) The displacement of the Irish language in the native institutions led to the gradual anglization of middle-class Irish society, which is estimated to have been completed by the end of the 18th century. (Wall, 1969, in O'Laoire 2005). However, according to Hindley (1990), the removal of Irish amongst the gentry of landowners did little to affect the linguistic currency amongst the lower classes anywhere in the country.

The language shift became more rapid throughout the 18th century from East to West, from the centres of administration to the more rustic west, which was slower and less penetrable (O’Riagain 1997). English evidently offered greater opportunities as it became the language of the top end of the social scale, and O’Cuiv (1969 p.82) highlights the linguistic pressures imposed on the native Irish; “By 1800 Irish had ceased to be habitually spoken in the homes of all those who had already achieved success in the world, or who aspired to improve or even maintain their position, politically or economically”. Despite the overwhelming diffusion of the English language, O’Riagain (1997) points out that from a Census data of 1851, somewhere in the region of 45% of the population were reported as being Irish speakers. O’Riagain also asserts that, out of an estimated population of nearly eight million this figure constituted a very significant minority of Irish speakers.

The history of Irish language shift thus far has attributed to a number of historical events. However, Hindley (1990) argues that many authors have in the past overemphasized the importance of certain political and legal factors, and should view the repudiation and decline of Irish as a gradual process subject to the environmental pressures of the time. O’Cuiv (1969) on the other hand takes a different perspective and stringently points to a number of

key attributable historical factors. O’Cuiv signifies the importance of schooling during the late 18th and early 19th century, as a major contributor to the demise of Irish. The result being that, parents even among the poorer classes came to recognise the benefits of an English education for their children. O’Cuiv also highlights the linguistic impact of the famine that occurred in Ireland between 1846 and 1851, and accounts for the estimated death of a half a million and emigration of a million others. O’Cuiv further postulates that a great majority of these were Irish speakers, justified by the fact that the famine mostly affected poorer working class in the west of Ireland.

Another notable factor that O’Cuiv (1969) acknowledges as one of the greatest forces to language change was the involvement of the Irish people in politics from the 1790’s. This factor is sometimes overlooked in many discussions on the Irish language but according to O’Cuiv, when Irish people were ostracised from the political scene it helped maintain Irish as their spoken vernacular. A new nationalism escalated throughout the country and according to O’Cuiv it was all propagated through the medium of English, at the detrimental expense of Irish.

By the end of the 19th century a post famine Census revealed the grounding reality of the state of the Irish language. The Census carried out in 1891 accounted for a total of 19.2% Irish speakers, spatially concentrated in the west and current Gaeltacht area. It found that 90% of Irish speakers were located in these areas and a modest 2% were to be found in the Eastern province of Leinster. It was at this point that many among the higher educated classes recognised the need to address the linguistic situation in Ireland, and this was the motivation for the formation of the Gaelic league. (ORiagain, 1997).

The start of the Revival - The Gaelic League

As the 19th century progressed there was a growing endeavour in Ireland toward achieving political independence and home rule. Alongside the many campaigners who sought to establish a free state, there were others who advocated the recognition of an Irish culture and language. A number of groups were formed with the intention of “creating a consistent ethnic ideology”(O’Riagain 1997 p.7) so as to stem the influence of anglicisation and British culture. Their aspiration at the time according to O’Riagain was to “give a cultural, economic or social content to the new society which would arrive with Home Rule” (Tovey 1989:17 in O’Riagain 1997 p.7)

The language revival movement was only one of a number of key objectives among these groups toward achieving an Irish national identity. The first major organisation to address the linguistic situation was a group known as the ‘The Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language’, which was set up on Saint Patrick ’s Day 1877. The founders were a group of educated language enthusiasts and they produced a statement on their aims. Their statement was revolutionary for the time, stating the need to have Irish taught in schools, particularly in Irish speaking areas. It proposed the encouragement of spoken Irish for those with a competency to speak it. (O Tuama 1993). Members of the Society lobbied the British Government into recognising the linguistic needs of Irish and O’Tuama (1993 p.16) states that “1878 marks the date at which the preservation of Irish became one of the objectives of the Irish nationalist movement”.

O’Cuiv (1969 p.94) underlines the success of the society by claiming that “the great achievement of this Society was to secure the acceptance of ‘Celtic’ as a subject of examination by the Intermediate Board. This was in 1878. For the first time ‘Celtic’ was recognised as a subject of academic value”

After the Society split in 1879 a breakaway group known as the Gaelic Union was formed with a greater emphasis on what it felt were more contemporary needs for the language. Undoubtedly its greatest achievement was the foundation of 'The Gaelic Journal' in 1882, described by its founders as "the first printing on Irish ground" (O'Cuiv, 1969, p. 95). The foundation of the Gaelic Journal is seen as a turning point in the whole revival movement and is accredited as a major motivator behind the founding of 'The Gaelic League' (O'Cuiv, 1969)

According to O'Riagain (1997,, p.8) the Gaelic league "went beyond the objectives of organisations. Its goals were the revival of Irish where it had ceased to be spoken and the creation of a new modern literature in Irish, rather than just simply trying to preserve the language". O'Cuiv (1969, p.96) emphasizes the importance of the Gaelic league as having "revolutionised the attitude of the Irish people to their own language".

The League went on to establish branches all over the country, organising cultural events, providing language classes and publishing material in Irish. It successfully managed to lobby the British government into incorporating Irish into the school curriculum. The policies of the Gaelic league were to

form the building blocks of the free state language revival policies in the years following. (O’Riagain, 1997).

The School based revival policy

The new self-governing Ireland of 1922 according to O’Laoire (1995) espoused the Gaelic league’s agenda which had become more political in the years prior to independence. O’Laoire also claims that they lost sight of some of the key notions of the Gaelic league. The amorphous concept of revitalisation resulted in a change from establishing bilingualism to a monolingual Irish society. (O’Laoire 1995) Others have also been highly critical of the government’s restoration policies and the idealistic notions that drove them. Kelly (2002) is particularly condemning of the pressure that was put on the schools and the education system to re-establish Irish as the spoken vernacular of the newly independent nation. Kelly (2002 p.5) states that, “Economics was not recognised as an agent of Linguistic change by the Free state government and the idea that the schools alone had brought about the use of English as a vernacular was the central premise on which the whole revival effort of the Independent Irish government was based”.

The government's hard edged policies of language restoration continued up until the nineteen fifties. The weight of the revival movement had been placed firmly in the hands of the schools for over three decades with only a moderate degree of success. The notion of revival was slowly changing its complexion to one of survival, and the latter end of the twentieth century saw the government take a more passive approach to language policy. (Kelly 2002)

The socio-political trajectory of the Irish language has shaped its meaning and position for people in Irish society. Compulsion in the education system is viewed by many as having been detrimental to the image of Irish. However, in recent years there has been a renewed interest in Irish restoration particularly evident in the growth of the number of all-Irish schools. (O'Reilly 1999). This study will now try to examine this position and renewed importance of Irish in a community in the Northwest of Ireland.

The Study area

The study area is a town called Manorhamilton and is located in the North West of the Republic of Ireland in the County of Leitrim. Leitrim is a County in the Province of Connacht, centred between counties Donegal, Fermanagh, Cavan, Sligo and Roscommon. The County is the smallest in Connacht with a population of 28,950 as ascertained in the most recent Census of 2006.

The County recorded its first population increase since 1841 as calculated from the recent intercensal period between 2002 and 2006. According to this most recent Census Leitrim recorded the highest population growth rate in the province of Connacht, with an increase of 3,151 or 12.2% (National Census figures 2006). This was quite a significant turnaround for the county which has suffered continuous population decline, principally due to emigration. However the county has still the smallest population in the state with an average population density that is three and a half times lower than the state average (Leitrim County Council). Leitrim, according to the local County Council, has the most rurally based population in the whole of the Country. This may prove significant from an Irish language perspective.

The town of Manorhamilton is the principal town in the North of the County, and it has also seen a population increase in recent years largely through migration. There has been a relatively large influx of non-national emigrants into the Manorhamilton area, particularly since the European Union Expansion in May 2004. The majority these emigrants are of Eastern European origin, particularly Polish, and this in turn has had an affect on the linguistic currency of the locality.

The population of Manorhamilton after the 2002 Census was 1,417, 729 males and 688 females approximately. However, this figure has risen to around the 2000 mark since the previous census was carried out. The largest employer in the town is the local Healthboard which employs around 300 people, while there are also four local factories which, combined also employ around 300 people.

The proximity of the area is significant as it is located on one of the national primary routes that runs between Sligo and Belfast. The town of Sligo is the closest major borough and is a centre for employment for the large percentage of the population. Manorhamilton has thus, particularly in recent

years, become a commuter town for many people employed in Sligo and other bigger towns within commuting distance.

Similar to the general trend throughout the Republic of Ireland, the population of North Leitrim has moved from rural to urban. The national Census of 2006 states that the population living in Urban areas has increased at every Census to date, so that the urban population constitutes 61% of the population. This is consistent with many developed countries and has in some way contributed to the large increase in town housing in Manorhamilton. (Leitrim County Council 2007)

The research was carried out over the Christmas period of 2006. This period was felt to be an ideal opportunity to incorporate the opinions of both locals, and natives living outside of the Manorhamilton community.

Ethnography of communication in the Manorhamilton Community

The objective behind compiling an ethnography of speaking in the community in Manorhamilton is essentially, to determine the position of Irish within the day to day life of the community. Moreover, it is an attempt to identify regularities in the use of Irish, and to further correlate these regularities in communicative behaviour with aspects of culture (Saville – Troike 1989). As Irish has limited use in the community the ethnography should prove a useful tool in determining this peripheral status of the language.

Saville – Troike (1989) highlight the principles concerned in conducting an ethnography of communication and particularly stress the importance of taking a holistic approach to the study. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the larger socio-political context of Irish language use in Manorhamilton. In addition, as I am a member of the speech community carrying out introspection, it is obviously essential to make objective judgments on my own speech community. Saville – Troike (1989) also notes how the key to successful objective introspection is centered on the ability to distinguish between ‘ideal’ and ‘real’ behaviours. Saville – Troike (1989) states that ‘ideal’ self-evaluative responses by community members are based on their

formal education. ‘Real’ interpretation of communicative behaviour, on the other hand, has to be acquired by informal modeling because it may not be a conscious event (Saville – Troike 1989). I have therefore attempted to incorporate this approach so as to ensure the objectivity of the evaluation presented.

Finally, it is worth stressing how interesting and beneficial the ethnography is in establishing the role of Irish at societal level in Manorhamilton. It will also be seen further in this study, to serve as an instrumental source for the compilation of an Irish language attitude questionnaire. In the following analysis I have attempted to present the findings in clear distinguishable areas, but there may be overlapping patterns of Irish language use.

Emblematic Irish

The Irish language in the Republic of Ireland has a very strong visual presence in every town and rural area. From signposts to letterheads the government has policies in place to ensure that the language has an everyday presence in the public domain. This will be referred to as ‘emblematic’ language use, and it will be seen to constitute a very large inventory. However, despite this inescapable presence, there is often a lot of speculation as to whether members of the Irish public react or take heed of its presence. (Bord na Gaeilge 1986).

Consistent with the rest of the Republic Irish in Manorhamilton has an undisputed presence all over the community. Many public buildings such as the library, local arts centre and the schools have Irish signage in some form or other. The council have also endorsed the use of Irish signage in new developments both public and private. In their most recent development plan the council have stated that “It is the Council’s policy that new local authority estates are given names in Irish which reflect local history and culture” (Leitrim County Council 2007). The recent growth in housing in Manorhamilton has in turn, led to an increase in the number of housing estates and buildings with Irish names composed by local historians.

The government have also policies in place to ensure that Irish is present on all administrative documents. This transpires in the form of Irish occurring bilingually with English on, application forms, passports, brochures and information leaflets, etc. This is by no means an exhaustive list as the emblematic use of Irish is extremely common.

The biggest sporting organisation in the country, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), actively promotes the use of Irish in the game. Irish is therefore overtly present on all administrative documentation at all levels of participation within the local GAA club in Manorhamilton. Team names are always represented in Irish on fixture lists and other official GAA documents, and all club registration details have to be complete in Irish by prospective applicants. As a large proportion of the community are involved in the local GAA club in some form or other, this entails considerable exposure to Irish through the GAA.

Other instances of emblematic Irish can be found scattered throughout the community, on a local monument, headstones in the local graveyard, coins, beer mats in local pubs, and postboxes on the roadside. There are also Irish

signs marking public restrooms in local pubs and restaurants. Some pubs and restaurants have Irish slogans presented decoratively in Celtic decorative designs.

Saville – Troike (1989 p.201) accounts for this use of language as an “identification badge for both self and outside perception”. Irish in this sense seems to serve as an emblematic badge flagging identity for members of the community, without having any communicative purpose in most examples presented. It should prove interesting later in this report to establish how members of the community feel about the language and its significance as an emblematic marker of Irish identity.

Routines and rituals

The well documented discontinuity in Irish language ability in the post school years highlights the weak position of Irish in the public domain (Bord na Gaeilge 1986 p.32). Having noted this, there is however one frequently active role Irish fills for people in the community. It transpires in the form of what Saville – Troike (1989) refer to as routine and ritualistic language use.

According to Saville – Troike (1989) routines are fixed utterances that carry no communicative function. They are essentially performative in nature and the meaning can only be captured by observing the whole event. Saville – Troike (1989) also describe these routines as a serving a ‘phatic’ function in communication. This entails the use of language to express or share feelings with other members of the same speech community.

Many members of the Manorhamilton community have lamented the fact that fixed routine expressions in Irish, appear to them to constitute the only encounter they have with the language on a regular basis. Such interactions generally seem to largely encompass greetings, complements, and salutations. These are what Saville – Troike (1989) refers to as formulaic language. This type of language is present in many domains in the community. It can be found amongst informal friends saluting in a social setting such as a local pub or restaurant. Alternatively, it occurs in more formal settings such as, GAA meetings and presentation ceremonies, public Council meetings, political rallies, performance introductions in the local arts centre. Interestingly, in the political domain Irish expressions of this kind are common but have long been controversially viewed as being associated with Republicanism and the political party *Sinn Fein*.

Other instances are not as readily identifiable but Irish has a wealth of idiomatic expressions, particularly in relation to weather and landscape. It is reported by community members that older generations have retained many of these expressions and use them consistently within certain contexts such as agriculture.

Rituals on the other hand are a sequence of routines that are used in a ritual context, and therefore carry much more symbolic significance. They are very much context bound and are an expression of cultural identity and shared beliefs. (Saville – Troike 1989). The national anthem provides an example of a ritualistic instance of Irish language use in Manorhamilton. The anthem is consistently played at the end of a night of socializing, by a DJ or a band. The GAA also play the national anthem at the beginning of more significant Gaelic football matches. Other examples are found in the domain of the church where many prayers and songs are in Irish. Less frequent examples are rhymes, poems and some songs that are sung in Irish.

Active use of Irish

“In a multi-lingual speech community, members often share receptive competence in more than one language but vary greatly in relative ability to speak one of the other” (Saville – Troike 1989 p.22). This sentiment is particularly true for members of the community in Manorhamilton. Many leave school with a reasonable competence in the Irish language, but the lack of opportunity outside of the school settings leads to a gradual loss of ability (Bord na Gaeilge 1986). The level of active spoken Irish in Manorhamilton is generally consistent with that of the rest of the Republic of Ireland. Active interaction through Irish generally seems to be restricted to a few demarcated domains of use.

The first readily identifiable domain in which Irish is actively used in the community is through the education system. As education in the Republic of Ireland is compulsory to the age of 15, in theory everybody in the community should have at least ten years of Irish schooling in some form. In both the main primary and secondary school in Manorhamilton, Irish is taught as a subject only, with no form of immersion. This however, still represents the main source of Irish contact for the overwhelming majority. O’Laoire (1995 p.230) noted the source of the problem as being, “The

school-home link was not fostered and schools taught Irish without reference to language use particularly in home-neighborhood domain”. This poor interaction between Irish in the schools and subsequent lack of Irish outside the school doors further enhances the association of Irish with education for most people in the community.

Saville – Troike (1989 p.13) describe how “communication patterns in terms of its functions”. Within the classroom the types of interactions are for the most part formal, teacher driven interactions. The classroom therefore limits the potential for natural language use as it occurs in a more controlled environment.

The second Government based domain for Irish language use in the Manorhamilton Community is in the public sector. This however, has a very much more limited scope than that of the schools. The local regional council actively try to promote the use of Irish throughout the county and in Manorhamilton. In the local councils official act scheme for the 2007 to 2009 period they identify their position with regard to the language. “The primary objective of the Act is to ensure better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish, The Scheme includes a

commitment to assess on an ongoing basis the level of demand for services through Irish and to ensure that the Council continues to meet this demand in a planned, coherent and accessible way” (Leitrim County Council 2007).

Accordingly, the local Council stress the fact that any member of the Manorhamilton community can interact with the regional government through the medium of Irish, given they have the ability to do so. According to the Council’s Mission statement, any written or verbal correspondence can be provided in either English or Irish without undue delay. Public meetings are carried out principally in English but Irish speakers are facilitated. (Leitrim County Council 2007)

Bord na Gaelige (1986 p.26) refer to this type of Irish language use as ‘institutionally based bilingualism’, that generally takes the form of very formal interaction based on roles. They also note the fact that “Irish using institutions have in the past been an important source in forming Irish-using networks” (Bord na Gaeilge 1986 p.26).

It has been difficult to ascertain whether Irish within institutions such as the schools, or local council has an impact on Irish-using networks within the

Manorhamilton community. The apparent lack of opportunity for Irish speakers outside these institutions places Irish in a marginal position in Manorhamilton. One source of opportunity to interact through the medium of Irish is through a voluntary group known as *Ciorcal Cainte* ‘Circle of speech’. This is a group set up by local Irish speakers and language activists to provide opportunities for Irish speakers to meet and converse through Irish. Members of the *Ciorcal Cainte* are from Manorhamilton and further surrounding areas. The group continuously attempts to recruit new members by advertising in local and non-local newspapers, highlighting the largely dispersed position of Irish speakers in a predominantly English speaking society.

The members of *Ciorcal Cainte* seem from the outset to have established a stable Irish speaking network. Many of the members are also involved in the local arts centre which runs Irish activities and plays, and there seems to be regular interaction among the group members. Many are also actively involved in the establishment of a *Gaelscoil*, an all –Irish primary school in Manorhamilton due to be opened in the coming September 2007.

This broadly represents the main instances of Irish language use in the Manorhamilton community. Having established these demarcated domains of language use the next stage in this study is to determine the linguistic attitudes and ideologies among younger members of the Manorhamilton community. In the next section there will be a look at the methodology incorporated to pursue this objective.

Methodology

Having attempted to establish the peripheral position of Irish in the community of Manorhamilton, the next step in this study is to assess how members of the community value the language, and to determine what interrelating factors influence their opinions. To attempt to conduct this study effectively, an attitudinal questionnaire was composed to incorporate any such factors.

There have been many successive sociolinguistic studies on the general public's attitude toward Irish. Among the most influential, was that of the Committee on Irish language attitudes Research (CILAR) carried out in 1973 and published in 1975. The CILAR survey assessed patterns of bilingualism and competence in Ireland and was the first major study to address these issues. Later studies by Instituid Teangeolaíocata Éireann (ITE) in 1975 replicated much of CILAR work. There have also been many studies since, at both national and local level that have incorporated much of CILAR's original design. (O'Riagain 1997)

The ethnography of communication in Manorhamilton provided a platform from which a questionnaire could be composed. Aspects of CILAR's

analysis were adapted and incorporated into the design where felt justifiable. Other pertinent aspects of the linguistic situation in the community were also addressed in the questionnaire. The following is a break down of the layout and rationale behind the design of the questionnaire.

Personal information

The personal information section included some background details on respondents. Age was included but the focus of the study was principally on respondents aged between 15 and 29. Questions on respondent's sex and occupation were included, while some residential information was also added. There was a distinction made between respondents from the area, who live locally and who live outside the locality. This was included as a possible factor that may influence respondent's opinions on the language. A further question on whether the respondents had ever lived abroad was included as a possible influencing factor. This was included mainly due to the fact that this area has been subject to emigration in the past. Therefore it seemed plausible that many respondents will have spent some time abroad.

Ability to speak Irish

Respondents were asked to grade their own self-perceived level of ability in Irish. This was presented on a six point scale from ‘No Irish’ to ‘Native speaker ability’. Level of competence is a particularly contentious area in Irish language research. A methodology of grading ones own perceived competence in particular has been viewed as a misrepresentation of the actual situation (Hindley, 1990). It should therefore prove interesting to discover how individuals in the community grade their own ability in Irish, particularly as the questionnaire is targeted at respondents in the immediate post-schooling period. Self-perceived levels of competency could also be correlated against other factors that could influence individual grading.

Irish in the media

Three main mediums of Irish in the media were incorporated into the questionnaire namely, Irish television, radio, Newspapers and Magazines. TG4 is the official dedicated channel in Ireland and has pitched itself as an alternative television channel where Irish has a central role. It is promotes itself as an Irish television station for the whole country, serving audiences across all age levels and language ability. The broadcast of Gaelic sports is undoubtedly the biggest key to the success of the channel, as it gains

audiences both nationally and non-nationally. The channel does however attempt to broaden their genre of broadcasting, and provide audiences with drama, reality shows, music and entertainment. The channel has been steadily gaining support since its establishment. Respondents were asked on the questionnaire to indicate whether they ‘often’ watched TG4. They were also asked to indicate whether they listened to Irish radio or read Irish material. The presumption was that TG4 would prove to be the most popular form of Irish media.

Irish Social Cultural activities

As highlighted in the ethnography Irish has a strong presence in many cultural and social practices in the community. Respondents were therefore asked to verify whether or not they participated in a number of presented Irish related social and cultural practices. The activities listed were ‘Irish music, dances, sports events, associations, clubs, and private language parties’. It was felt that participation in such events could be a determining factor in respondent’s attitude toward the language. This was felt particularly pertinent, as participation in such activities is presumed conducive to Irish language exposure in some form.

Policy preferences

This section of the questionnaire set about determining the general public and state support for Irish language policies among respondents in Manorhamilton. Respondents were asked to indicate their opinion on a three point likert scale on matters related to certain Irish language policies. These included eight questions on how respondents felt about government revival policies, compulsion of Irish in the state education system and policies to preserve Irish in the Gaeltacht. Respondents were asked to assess how important political matters regarding Irish were to them. There were also two questions regarding Irish and English bilingualism and a question on the link between Irish and Republicanism and nationalism. This latter question was included simply because the *Sinn fein* political party gain considerable support in the area. Therefore this question should prove informative in determining whether members of the Manorhamilton community view Irish as being inherently political or not.

Attitudes to Irish as an ethnic symbol

O’Riagain (1997, p.169) describes the relationship between language and ethnicity as one where “language has a key role in defining or symbolizing community or regional (‘ethnic’) identity and membership”. O’Riagain

(1997) also notes the ambiguous relationship between the two and the ‘fuzziness’ of the term ‘ethnicity’. Therefore, in order to attempt to fully understand how respondents in Manorhamilton view Irish as an ethnic symbol, five questions on ethnicity were included in the questionnaire. Three of the statements related to the view that the Irish language is an integral part of cultural distinctiveness and cultural wealth. The remaining two statements were more ambiguous in nature and attempted to elicit how respondents felt toward the Irish language being a symbol of an Irish identity. The final statement took a reverse approach by suggesting that Irish had no practical function only as a marker of an Irish identity.

Attitudinal statements relating to the viability of Irish:

This final section set about ascertaining how respondents in Manorhamilton felt about the viability of Irish in the community and essentially, the future of the language. The statements served to determine whether individual respondents felt the general public were interested in Irish and its revival in the community. Respondents were also invited to indicate whether they were content with their own levels of competence in Irish and whether they would consider taking Irish classes in the future. The final statement of the questionnaire is in relation to the establishment of a local all-Irish primary

school in Manorhamilton. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they were in favour of its establishment.

Evaluation

This chapter presents the main findings from the study of the Manorhamilton linguistic community. Firstly the general results obtained through the questionnaire will be presented, followed by an evaluation of the overall findings. There will also be an attempt to account for some of the findings by establishing interrelating factors from the corpus data. The questionnaires were distributed over the Christmas period of 2006 and a total of 113 respondents aged between 15 and 29 participated in the study.

Irish language Competence

In the most recent Census report published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO 2006) 1.66 million people in the Republic of Ireland indicated that they were able to speak Irish in 2006. This accounts for 41.9% of the population having sufficient competency to speak Irish. The statistics provided by the CSO do not however distinguish what level of fluency respondents reportedly have. Many including Hindley (1990) have been highly sceptical of Census data and have suggested that the degree of success achieved by the education system has clouded the actual position of Irish. O’Riagain (1997) also suggests that there is a distinct difference in

people’s perception of native speaker ability where Irish is not widely used. This can have an impact on how people assess their own ability in Irish.

Levels of competency in spoken Irish among respondents in Manorhamilton are largely centred in the mid levels of ability. Over 70% of respondents reported having either an “odd word” or a “few simple sentences in Irish”. These levels of ability are most likely the result of school generated competency in the community. This is justified by the fact that there are fewer respondents at either end of the scale of ability.

My level of speaking is

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	no irish	4	3.5
	odd word	40	35.4
	few simple sentences	40	35.4
	parts of conversation	21	18.6
	most conversations	6	5.3
	native speaker ability	2	1.8
	Total	113	100.0

Only 7.1% of respondents reported levels of Irish at the top end of the scale with only 2 respondents claiming to have native speaker ability. Taking O’Riagain’s claim into consideration, it is obviously difficult to predict whether respondents are overshooting their perceived ability in Irish. Overall

the figures could suggest that the local school produces reasonably competent bilinguals but the lack of opportunity in the community limits further development.

The most recent CSO (2006) Irish census figures lend support to this claim. The Census data showed that out of the total 15-19 age cohort, 64.7% were reported as having the ability to speak Irish. This figure drops by 20% to 44.4% in the 20 -24 age cohort, and systematically drops in each subsequent age bracket. The school's direct influence on Irish levels of ability highlights its central role as the main source of Irish language acquisition in a predominantly English speaking environment.

Irish in the media

The leading role initially taken by the government in the revival of the Irish language throughout the early twentieth century petered out to a more passive role in later years. Irish became managed by the government as a minority and marginalised part of Irish heritage and culture. This is thought to have created new opportunities for Irish as a minority and heritage issue, particularly for the media. (Ó hÍfearnáin 2000)

There is a strong assumption that the strength of Irish on the airwaves mirrors its position in Irish society. TG4’s reported national audience figure for 2005 was 3.2% and is consistently on the increase. (TG4 annual report 2005)

The popularity of TG4 in Manorhamilton was one of the most surprising findings in the study, particularly when taking the national statistics into account. A total of 36.3% of respondents aged between 15 and 29 reported that they ‘often’ watched programs in Irish on TV. This figure possibly reflects the popularity of Gaelic sports in the area, although in some cases respondents expressed an appreciation for the station’s authentic and cultural themes.

I often watch programs in Irish on TV

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	yes	41	36.3
	no	72	63.7
	Total	113	100.0

Irish literature and Radio scored much lower than that of television. Only 7.1% of respondents reported listening to radio ‘often’ while the same figure was reported for reading Irish material ‘often’. The lower listenership figure for Irish radio could be attributed to the fact that the primary Irish radio

station is Radio na Gaeltachta (RnaG). The name itself is indicative to the target audience of the radio station, as it is mainly focused toward Irish speakers (Ní Neachtain 2000). Furthermore the levels of Irish competency recorded earlier would suggest that the vast majority of respondents do not have sufficient ability in Irish to listen to radio or perhaps even to read Irish material. TG4 on the other hand provide subtitling to almost all their programs to facilitate those with lower levels of Irish.

Support for Irish language policies

As shown in earlier sections public support for Irish language policies has been far from uniform throughout the population. The government's initial hard edged approach to language policies is thought to be responsible for "molding the way in which Irish people regard the language and modified their view of the nature of bilingualism (Ó hIfearnáin 2000 p.4).

From the findings it is clear that respondents significantly value the importance of the Irish language, as over 90% expressed a reluctance to see Irish disappear. Evidently, the modest levels of ability recorded earlier had little or no impact on how they viewed the importance of the language as a part of Irish society. Likewise, the modest level of opportunity to use Irish in

Manorhamilton seems to have had little effect on the perceived importance of the language.

Irish is a dead language and should be forgotten

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	103	91.2	92.8	92.8
	no opinion	4	3.5	3.6	96.4
	agree	4	3.5	3.6	100.0
	Total	111	98.2	100.0	
Missing	.00	2	1.8		
Total		113	100.0		

With regard to support for Irish in the education system over 80% of respondent were in favour of Irish remaining a compulsory element of schooling. Considering the history of opposition towards compulsory Irish in the education system this statistic is all the more surprising. Only 10.8% were not in favour of Irish being a compulsory subject in state examinations. Interestingly, there was a slight correlation between respondents who reported not enjoying Irish at school and those who were not in favour of Irish as a compulsory subject. Almost 30% of those who expressed dissatisfaction at learning Irish in schools were against compulsion while 93% who enjoyed learning Irish were also in favour of it being a compulsory subject in school. It seems school experience has some bearing on respondents feelings towards the language.

Irish should remain a compulsory subject in exams

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	91	80.5	82.0	82.0
	no opinion	8	7.1	7.2	89.2
	disagree	12	10.6	10.8	100.0
	Total	111	98.2	100.0	
Missing	.00	2	1.8		
Total		113	100.0		

O’Riagain (1997) points out that in the years of stringent compulsion prior to 1973, these policies improved the actual practical economic value of Irish. Although they were widely opposed, any support for compulsion was derived from an economic perspective. Essentially this meant that a good knowledge of Irish improved ones employment credentials.

Nowadays, Irish as a compulsory subject in schools is the main way Irish language policy impinges on people’s everyday lives. It seems to be the case that the large scale support for Irish as a compulsory subject centres on its perceived cultural value. Moreover, when considering the relatively low levels of ability among members, it seems that even a passive knowledge of school acquired Irish is valued as an important cultural asset among respondents.

Spoken Irish should be preserved in the Gaeltacht

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	86	76.1	78.2	78.2
	no opinion	9	8.0	8.2	86.4
	disagree	15	13.3	13.6	100.0
	Total	110	97.3	100.0	
Missing	.00	3	2.7		
Total		113	100.0		

The general support for the preservation of spoken Irish in the Gaeltacht was strong among members of the Manorhamilton community. 78.2% were in favour of its preservation while only 13.6% were against. It would seem that respondents are generally supportive of the government's commitment to preserve the area as an area of spoken Irish. This support may rest on the symbolic significance of the Gaeltacht as an area that emblematises an authentic Irish language and culture. (O'Danachair in O'Cuiv 1969)

Despite the strong support for the Gaeltacht there were still 13.6% of respondents who expressed disfavour with its preservation. When this figure is compared with those who were earlier shown to be generally supportive toward the retention of the Irish language, this figure is all the more interesting.

**Spoken Irish should be preserved in the Gaeltacht * Irish is a dead language and should be forgotten
Crosstabulation**

Count

		Irish is a dead language and should be forgotten			Total
		disagree	no opinion	agree	
spoken Irish should be preserved in the Gaeltacht	agree	81	3	2	86
	no opinion	7	0	2	9
	disagree	15	0	0	15
Total		103	3	4	110

The table shows the cross tabulation of the preservation of Irish in the Gaeltacht and the rest of the country. The discrepancy in the figures lies among the 103 respondents who were opposed to Irish being ‘discarded and forgotten’. Only 78%, 81 of these respondents were in favour of the preservation of spoken Irish in the Gaeltacht. This is significant because the Gaeltacht has always been seen as a platform for the restoration of the Irish language. The viability of Irish is measured against the Gaeltacht and any threat to the Gaeltacht is seen as being detrimental to the language. (O’Laoire 1995) Therefore it seems to be the case that 22% of respondents who value the preservation of Irish do not see the Gaeltacht as being central to its sustainability.

However strong the overall support for spoken Irish in the Gaeltacht this is not mirrored in the support for bilingualism in Manorhamilton. In the two

questions on bilingualism presented to respondents the results were largely inconsistent.

Ireland should be bilingual with Irish as the principal language

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	38	33.6	35.2	35.2
	no opinion	39	34.5	36.1	71.3
	disagree	31	27.4	28.7	100.0
	Total	108	95.6	100.0	
Missing	.00	5	4.4		
Total		113	100.0		

Ireland should be bilingual with English as the principal language

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	19	16.8	17.6	17.6
	no opinion	33	29.2	30.6	48.1
	Agree	56	49.6	51.9	100.0
	Total	108	95.6	100.0	
Missing	.00	5	4.4		
Total		113	100.0		

The results of these two statements highlight the Irish public's ambivalence to the position of the Irish language in society. The wording of the two essentially opposite statements clearly generated different results. Firstly, from the perspective of a bilingual society with Irish as the principal language respondents opinions were broadly scattered. The largest portion of the cohort at 36.1% expressed no opinion. Only slightly more at 6%, supported a bilingual Irish speaking society over those who were against. From the contrary perspective there were overtly more respondents in favour

of a bilingual society with English as the principal language at 51%. There were still however, 30% who expressed no opinion on the matter.

The ambiguous feelings towards bilingualism in Ireland are difficult to account for. O’Laoire (1995) pins it down to the lack of a clear objective in government language policy from the beginning. O’Laoire argues that the government have never made it public what level of bilingualism the revival process set out to achieve. The results on the other hand might also reflect the obvious acknowledged economic benefits of English over Irish, particularly in a time of economic prosperity in Ireland.

With regard to the importance of government actions in support of Irish, 68% of the Manorhamilton respondents felt that it was important to them. In such cases respondents seem to value the language as a cultural possession that needs to be carefully handled to ensure its sustainability.

what the government does about the irish language is not important to me

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	75	66.4	68.2	68.2
	no opinion	18	15.9	16.4	84.5
	Agree	17	15.0	15.5	100.0
	Total	110	97.3	100.0	
Missing	.00	3	2.7		
Total		113	100.0		

The government should do more to promote the Irish language and support language organisations

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	97	85.8	88.2	88.2
	no opinion	7	6.2	6.4	94.5
	Disagree	6	5.3	5.5	100.0
	Total	110	97.3	100.0	
Missing	.00	3	2.7		
Total		113	100.0		

The study also indicates that 88% of the Manorhamilton respondents see the role of the government as central to the viability of the Irish language. This majority evidently believe that more state support should be committed to improve the position of Irish. Bord na Gaeilge (1986) discovered in their study that the public's attitude toward state policy and support was contradictory. When state policy was introduced it impinged on the everyday lives of the public but when removed the public generally felt the government were not doing enough. It seems that the Irish public are willing to place the restoration of Irish firmly in the hands of the government but are themselves not willing to take responsibility for a language that provides limited economic benefits.

Attitudes towards Irish and Politics

The relationship between Irish and republicanism and nationalism has always been a more contentious issue. This is particularly the case for language activists and language organizations who try to improve the image of the language by disassociating it with politics (O'Reilly 1999). Among the Manorhamilton cohort just over half at 52% still feel that there is still an inherent relationship between the two. There was still however a sizeable proportion who expressed no opinion on the issue, highlighting the ambiguous feelings among respondents on the issue.

There is a natural connection between the Irish lang and republicanism and nationalism

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	22	19.5	20.0	20.0
	no opinion	29	25.7	26.4	46.4
	agree	59	52.2	53.6	100.0
	Total	110	97.3	100.0	
Missing	.00	3	2.7		
Total		113	100.0		

A number of interrelating factors were found to have an affect on how respondents responded to this statement. Firstly, respondents who lived abroad were more likely to find a relationship between Irish and nationalism.

A larger percentage of the cohort who had not spent time abroad had expressed no opinion or disagreed with the statement.

There is a natural connection between the Irish lang and republicanism and nationalism * I have lived abroad Crosstabulation

Count

		I have lived abroad		Total
		yes	no	
There is a natural connection between the Irish lang and republicanism and nationalism	disagree	7	15	22
	no opinion	9	20	29
	agree	32	27	59
Total		48	62	110

This could be attributable to the strong sentiments of nationalism that are commonly found among minority Irish groups abroad. Irish in such cases becomes more significant as a marker of identity and becomes further associated with nationalism for these respondents. (Kockel 1995). It was also found that, out of the 38 respondents who agreed that Irish should be the principal language, 26 of this cohort also felt that Irish was connected to nationalism and republicanism. For these respondents the language seems to be more than just a cultural commodity but an essential marker of an Irish identity.

Involvement in Gaelic sports also seems to have a slight bearing on how members of the Manorhamilton community view the relationship between

Irish and nationalism. The study indicated that members involved in Gaelic sports were less likely to view Irish from this political perspective.

There is a natural connection between the Irish lang and republicanism and nationalism * I regularly attend Irish sports Crosstabulation

Count

		I regularly attend Irish sports		Total
		yes	no	
There is a natural connection between the Irish lang and republicanism and nationalism	disagree	19	3	22
	no opinion	20	9	29
	agree	43	16	59
Total		82	28	110

Nearly one quarter at 23%, of respondents involved in Gaelic sports disagreed with the connection between Irish and nationalism, while only 10% of those who do not attend disagreed. This may be due to the fact that those involved in Gaelic sports encounter the language more often in an apolitical perspective within the realm of sports. Having said this, there was still an undisputable large proportion within Gaelic sports who found a tangible relationship between the two.

Irish as an ethnic symbol

Studies of language attitudes have always found that Irish people place considerable value on the role of Irish as a symbol of identity. However, this attitudinal support for the language was never found to have any correlation with language ability or behaviour. (O’Riagain 1997)

Speaking Irish is an expression of Irishness

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	94	83.2	85.5	85.5
	no opinion	8	7.1	7.3	92.7
	disagree	8	7.1	7.3	100.0
	Total	110	97.3	100.0	
Missing	.00	3	2.7		
Total		113	100.0		

In Manorhamilton the strong symbolic significance of Irish as an ethnic marker of identity is obvious. Over 85% viewed the language as an expression of an Irish identity. Similar to O’Riagain’s finding there was no evidence to suggest any correlation between individual levels of competence and their attitude to Irish as an ethnic symbol.

From the question on the importance of Irish in cultural identity it is clear that respondents view Irish as a key factor in distinguishing Ireland as a separate culture. 72% of respondents expressed the view that the loss of Irish would lead to a loss of cultural distinctiveness.

Without irish Ireland would lose its identity as a seperate culture

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	80	70.8	72.7	72.7
	no opinion	10	8.8	9.1	81.8
	disagree	20	17.7	18.2	100.0
	Total	110	97.3	100.0	
Missing	.00	3	2.7		
Total		113	100.0		

However, there was a correlation found between respondents having lived abroad or not. Members of the Manorhamilton community who lived abroad were less likely to perceive the Irish language as a key factor in the identity of an Irish culture.

**Without irish Ireland would lose its identity as a seperate culture * I have lived abroad
Crosstabulation**

Count

		I have lived abroad		Total
		yes	no	
Without irish Ireland would lose its identity as a seperate culture	agree	32	48	80
	no opinion	4	6	10
	disagree	13	7	20
Total		49	61	110

Out of the 61 respondents who never lived abroad 78% agreed and only 11% disagreed with Irish losing its identity as a separate culture with the loss of the language. Out of those respondents who reportedly lived abroad only 65% agreed and 26% disagreed with the same statement. Perhaps, having lived abroad has provided these respondents with a peripheral viewpoint on what constitutes the essential components of an Irish culture. From their

responses it would seem that Irish for them is not the only component in identifying Ireland as a separate culture.

It is also noteworthy that 74% of respondents who felt Irish should remain compulsory in state schooling also felt Irish that is an essential part of Irish cultural identity. The evident cultural importance of Irish for these respondents justifies its compulsion in the education system.

Without Irish Ireland would lose its identity as a separate culture * Irish should remain a compulsory subject in exams Crosstabulation

Count

		Irish should remain a compulsory subject in exams			Total
		agree	no opinion	disagree	
Without Irish Ireland would lose its identity as a separate culture	agree	67	6	7	80
	no opinion	10	0	0	10
	disagree	13	2	5	20
Total		90	8	12	110

Interestingly, respondents did not perceive the ability to speak Irish as being a requisite skill in understanding Irish culture. This is vastly contrary to CILAR's findings on a similar question where 61% of their respondents felt Irish was required to fully understand the Irish culture. (O'Riagain 1997).

To really understand irish culture one must know how to speak Irish

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	27	23.9	24.8	24.8
	no opinion	12	10.6	11.0	35.8
	disagree	70	61.9	64.2	100.0
	Total	109	96.5	100.0	
Missing	.00	4	3.5		
Total		113	100.0		

In Manorhamilton only 24% felt a level of spoken Irish was needed to understand Irish culture and 64% disagreed. This at first appears contradictory to the previous sizeable cohort who viewed Irish as an important factor in an Irish identity. These findings however, would suggest that respondents in Manorhamilton consider Irish important in flagging identity, but not in understanding the characteristics of an Irish identity.

Irish has no other use only as a symbol of Irishness

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	87	77.0	79.1	79.1
	no opinion	12	10.6	10.9	90.0
	agree	11	9.7	10.0	100.0
	Total	110	97.3	100.0	
Missing	.00	3	2.7		
Total		113	100.0		

Despite the low levels of bilingualism in Manorhamilton 79% of respondents disagreed that Irish has only a symbolic function in society.

This is all the more noteworthy when correlating this finding with respondents levels of ability. The study indicates that almost 80% of respondents in the ‘few simple sentences’ level of ability feel that the use of Irish in society stretches beyond a symbolic role. It is therefore clear that ability again has little effect on how respondents perceive the function of Irish in Manorhamilton.

Attitudes toward the viability of Irish

The findings so far have shown that respondents in Manorhamilton have a very favourable attitude toward the Irish both as a marker of identity and as an instrument that expresses a cultural distinctiveness. Respondents have also expressed the need for the government to take a leading role in improving the status of the language. It is interesting now to establish how respondents perceive the attitude of the general public toward Irish and what bearing this may have on the future of the language.

There was a general mixed impression among respondents as to whether the general public cared about the viability of Irish. 44% felt that the public did not care while 38% felt the public were concerned and a further 17% remained undecided.

Most people just don't care about irish

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	42	37.2	38.2	38.2
	no opinion	19	16.8	17.3	55.5
	agree	49	43.4	44.5	100.0
	Total	110	97.3	100.0	
Missing	.00	3	2.7		
Total		113	100.0		

Respondents were also asked if they would consider taking Irish classes in the future and a considerable 54% expressed an interest. The table below shows this correlated against respondent's feelings about general public concern.

**I would be interested in attending Irish class * Most people just don't care about irish
Crosstabulation**

Count		Most people just don't care about irish			
		disagree	no opinion	agree	Total
I would be interested in attending Irish class	agree	30	7	23	60
	no opinion	4	8	6	18
	disagree	8	4	20	32
Total		42	19	49	110

The table shows that out of the 42 respondents who indicated that they felt the public cared, 70% expressed an interest in taking Irish classes. Contrarily, out of the 49 who agreed that the public lacked concern, only 46% indicated that they would be interested in taking Irish classes. It seems

therefore obvious that individual standpoints toward Irish influence how respondents considered others felt toward the language.

With regard to the future of Irish in Manorhamilton respondents clearly felt that without intervention Irish would disappear.

If Irish people don't act to prevent it, Irish will disappear in a generation or two

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	12	10.6	11.0	11.0
	no opinion	9	8.0	8.3	19.3
	agree	88	77.9	80.7	100.0
	Total	109	96.5	100.0	
Missing	.00	4	3.5		
Total		113	100.0		

80% felt that without action by either government or individual bodies Irish would inevitably cease to be. O’Riagain (1997) found that people’s impression on the future of Irish was influenced on the level of Irish in the area. Within the Gaeltacht O’Riagain found respondents were optimistic about the future of the language. It therefore seems obvious to conclude that the low level of bilingualism in Manorhamilton has influenced how respondents view the future of the language. This is particularly pertinent when considering the years of Irish schooling and the fact that respondents were in there initial post school years.

I regret not having a better command of the Irish lang

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	95	84.1	86.4	86.4
	no opinion	6	5.3	5.5	91.8
	disagree	9	8.0	8.2	100.0
	Total	110	97.3	100.0	
Missing	.00	3	2.7		
Total		113	100.0		

Despite the pessimistic feelings among respondents regarding the future of Irish 86% expressed regret at not having a better command of the language.

The study also showed that 55% of this 86% expressed an interest in taking Irish classes to improve ability. Significantly more of these respondents were from the ‘few simple sentences’ level and upward. This also suggests that there is a correlation between slightly higher levels of ability and interest in taking Irish classes among respondents.

I support the establishment of an all-Irish primary school in the local area

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	96	85.0	86.5	86.5
	no opinion	8	7.1	7.2	93.7
	disagree	7	6.2	6.3	100.0
	Total	111	98.2	100.0	
Missing	.00	2	1.8		
Total		113	100.0		

Finally it was found that over 86% of respondents were in favour of the establishment of an all-Irish immersion school due to open in the coming

September. This furthermore emphasizes the large degree of public support for Irish in the Manorhamilton Community.

Conclusion

The peripheral status of Irish in Manorhamilton has been shown to revolve around certain culturally significant domains of use. Despite this peripheral position of Irish on the ground, the cultural symbolic significance of the language is without question, an integral part of the Manorhamilton community.

The poor levels of ability highlight the low levels of bilingualism in the community and firmly point to the schools as the primary source of language competence for most members of the community. There is also evidence to suggest that levels of ability have little influence on the acknowledged valued importance of the language for respondents. The evidence suggests that the value of Irish for respondents in Manorhamilton centres around its perceived role in flagging an ethnic Irish identity.

The evidence also suggests that although respondents expressed regret with their own level of Irish there seems to be little evidence that support for the language will move beyond this symbolic role. Although this symbolic role was highly valued, respondents felt that the language was only part of the cultural make-up of an Irish identity.

Finally, although members of the Manorhamilton community expressed a more favourable attitude toward the Irish language there was little optimism with regard to its future in the community. The large scale support for the establishment of an all-Irish primary school suggests a degree of possible growth of Irish in the community, particularly as a possible source of expansion for already existing networks. Inevitably, the position of Irish in Manorhamilton remains uncertain, particularly as the ideological support for the language and actual linguistic behaviour remains inconsistent.

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