

***Languages Connect* and the Languages of the New Irish: Potential responses from the Higher Education Sector – A Discussion Paper**

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Abstract

Ireland's linguistic profile has been enriched by the arrival of the New Irish. It is incumbent upon the higher education sector to harness and support this linguistic diversity to aid the social, cultural and economic development of Ireland and all its people. Therefore, consideration should be given to new degree programmes and to the inclusion of *Language Management Strategies* in existing programmes.

Keywords: *Languages Connect; multilingualism; Higher Education; minority languages; language provision*

1. Introduction

Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017–2026 (Department of Education and Skills (DES) 2017) emerged in 2017 from an extensive period of consultation and collaboration with those involved in language education in Ireland at all levels as well as those with a vested interest in its outcomes. This long-awaited strategy is rooted in relevant research into language education and displays a clear-sighted understanding of the complexities of the Irish linguistic landscape. Its vision and four key goals (Table 1) are laudable.

The focus of this paper is on measures which could assist in the achievement of the second of the above goals. Specifically, the paper highlights some potential initiatives within the higher education sector which could begin to achieve the objective of diversifying and increasing the uptake of languages learned in a higher education context in part by cultivating the languages of

the new Irish. Before presenting these initiatives, the following section contextualises the environment within which the initiatives are proposed.

<p>Vision</p> <p>‘...that Ireland’s education system will promote a society where the ability to learn and use at least one foreign language is taken for granted, because of its inherent value for individuals, society and the economy’.</p> <p>Goals</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improving language proficiency by creating a more engaging learning environment. 2. Diversify and increase the uptake of languages learned and cultivate the languages of the new Irish. 3. Increase awareness of the importance of language learning to encourage the wider use of foreign languages. 4. Enhance employer engagement in the development and use of trade languages.

Table 1: Languages Connect. Vision and overarching goals - Source: DES 2017, pp. 7–8

2. The Languages of Ireland and the New Irish

Ireland has a long and rich tradition of bilingualism in Irish and English. Further enriching Ireland’s linguistic profile are the languages of the immigrant communities which, as observed in Languages Connect, constitute more than 11% of Ireland’s population (DES 2017, p. 5). The most recent Irish Census (2016) also records significant percentages of the Irish population who speak a language other than English or Irish at home as follows (Table 2):

Language	Numbers
Polish	135, 895
Lithuanian	35,362
Russian	21,707
Portuguese	20,833
Chinese	17,584

Table 2: Numbers speaking a language other than English or Irish at home - Source: 2016 Census, CSO, Ireland; DES 2016, p. 28

The census also records the presence of significant numbers of additional nationalities, a trend highlighted previously by Carson and Extra (2010) and more recently by Kirwan and Little (2019) in relation to the primary school sector. Figures from the 2016 census include 29,186 Romanians, 19,933 Latvians, 13,640 Brazilians, 12,112 Spaniards and 11,732 Italians. Thus, Ireland can be described as linguistically diverse in terms of the linguistic repertoires and first languages of a substantial percentage of its population.

However, this linguistic diversity is not yet adequately reflected in Ireland's education system. As a result, language maintenance may not occur among the New Irish over the coming generations (Kirwan 2019). For example, in Ireland, pupils normally enter primary education at the ages of either four or five having, in some cases, completed an optional pre-school education. Since the ending, in 2012, of the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (Bruen 2013; Harris and Conway 2002), English and Irish, are the only languages currently taught in mainstream Irish pre-school or primary schools. This is despite the arguments made by the Council of Europe and the then Department of Education and Science in their Language Education Policy Profile of Ireland (2005–2007) (CoE/DES 2006, pp. 22–23) that any foreign languages taught at primary level should be fully integrated into primary school curricula and that a more holistic approach to the teaching of languages, be they English, Irish or foreign languages, is needed at this level.

At second level, normally for pupils aged between 12 or 13 and 17–19, a limited range of languages is widely available. These enjoy a relatively strong uptake with 90% of Irish pupils taking a foreign language for their Junior Certificate examination after three years of secondary education and 70% taking a language in the final secondary school examination, the Leaving Certificate (DES 2017, p. 27). However, the range of languages offered to secondary school pupils is not sufficiently diverse. There is a strong uptake of French followed by German and Spanish with relatively small numbers taking Italian, Russian, Japanese and Arabic. This situation arises partially as a result of a shortage of qualified teachers of some foreign languages as well as the traditional dominance of French (DES 2017, p. 26).

Some improvements are gradually being seen at second level with the (proposed) introduction of new curricular languages to include Chinese (non-native), Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese (heritage) and short courses (DES 2019). However, the small numbers (approximately 4% of students in 2018) electing to continue with the study of a limited range of languages in higher education means that there is a lack of qualified teachers for these languages and a lack of foreign language capacity more generally with all of the associated personal, social and economic drawbacks (Bruen, forthcoming).

3. Diversification of language offerings in the Higher Education Sector

Diversification of language offerings at third level poses many challenges. However, it retains the potential to offer rich rewards. Offering a greater range of languages including those already present in Ireland among the New Irish would allow those who already have a high degree of perhaps, in some cases, primarily spoken fluency in the language to develop their proficiency in the language further and enjoy enhanced career prospects. These could be, for example, within the teaching profession, or within broader social or economic spheres, thus strengthening Ireland's language capacity and linguistic diversity as well as increasing the personal fulfilment and quality of life of its citizens.

Specifically, in order to address the shortage of teachers, Higher Education Institutions in conjunction with the *Teaching Council of Ireland* are well placed to explore the ramifications of designing new postgraduate qualifications in teaching. These could be designed to enable those with a native-speaker like degree of proficiency in a language to teach that language in secondary schools without the additional requirement for an undergraduate degree specifically containing that language. Such courses could mirror those of existing *Professional Masters in Education* already offered by Irish HEIs while incorporating modules on the pedagogy of the language in question. Consideration should also be given to the addition of, for example, Portuguese, Lithuanian and Polish into concurrent initial teacher education degrees. Planning for the development of such programmes should take place in tandem with the ongoing diversification of curricular and non-curricular language offerings at second level.

Enterprise Ireland, the government agency responsible for developing and growing Irish enterprises in world markets, has identified eight languages as key in terms of Ireland's future skills needs (DES 2017, p. 13). These are Arabic, French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Mandarin Chinese and Spanish. Of these, Portuguese, Russian, and Chinese, for example, are not widely taught in Irish Higher Education Institutions but are present among the New Irish. Consideration should be given to the development of both postgraduate teaching qualifications and specialist language degrees in these languages, as well as degrees combining these languages with another discipline such as business or law.

In addition, with a possibly hard BREXIT on the horizon, Ireland's international trade will face significant challenges as 20% of Irish services depend on the UK market (Lynch 2016). As Carthy (2019) stresses, exploration of potential new markets is therefore essential. One way to respond to this need in the higher education sector would be to place increased emphasis on the concept of *Language Management Strategies* (LMS) in undergraduate and postgraduate business and language degrees as well as in executive education courses. LMSs have been defined in a number of ways including 'a package of measures to deal with international linguistic and cultural barriers before they arise' (Hagen 2011, p. 13) or 'the planned adoption of a range of techniques to facilitate effective communication with clients and suppliers abroad' (Hagen 2011, p. 13). Such techniques include the use of local agents, linguistic audits of existing staff, the use professional translators/interpreters, language training and cultural briefing schemes; as well as an employee selection and recruitment policy cognisant of an organisation's current and future language needs including native speaker recruitment. Large-scale European research studies including the ELAN (2006) and PIMLICO (2011) studies indicate significantly stronger performances internationally by enterprises which have LMSs in place (Hagen 2011). While some Irish degree programmes, in the area of international business primarily, offer modules in global, cross-cultural and intercultural business management and/or marketing which explore the cultural barriers to entry during the internationalisation process, an explicit reference to the fundamental role of language is generally not made and is deserving of greater attention. Examples of best practice in the design of such modules relating to the development and implementation of LMSs

are not readily available in an Irish or European context. However, one international example includes the following undergraduate module offered by the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies at Australia's largest tertiary institution, the *Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology* (RMIT):

<p>Course Description</p> <p>The course covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• language and culture related issues which impact on the management of international organisations• strategies for language management in multinational and international organisations• case studies in both Asian and Western organisations and the impact of language diversity on global operations. <p>Topics will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• language as a management concept - a knowledge management perspective• the relationship of language, culture and management in the development of language strategies for international organisations• inter-unit communication in multinational organisations• managing language diversity in global business teams• language management strategies for foreign subsidiaries• translation markets and language management; the implications for global/local marketing• linguistic auditing; matching an organisation's language capabilities with its strategic needs <p>Objectives/Learning Outcomes/Capability Development</p> <p>Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• understand the importance of language management for international communication• analyse and evaluate the range of strategic options available to international organisations to manage language more professionally• conduct independent research and evaluate the global/local issues related to language management in multinational organisations• become more employable in an English language related business area• interact and communicate in the international workplace using appropriate modes of communication including electronic, written, graphic, oral and aural forms• act with responsibility and integrity, in international and cross-cultural settings
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Figure 1: Language Management in International Organisations: Indicative Course Outline - Source: Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology <http://www1.rmit.edu.au/courses/014641>

4. Conclusion

As observed in the second section above (The languages of Ireland and the new Irish), Ireland's already rich linguistic profile has been further enriched by the arrival of the New Irish with their many languages. It is incumbent upon the higher education sector to harness and support this linguistic diversity to aid the social, cultural and economic development of Ireland and all its people in uncertain times. This paper proposes the consideration of new degree programmes as well as the integration of the study of *Language Management Strategies* into existing programmes. *Teanga* and this author welcome the views of others on this topic.

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