

## AN ANALYSIS OF TWO BILINGUAL COMMUNITIES: THE IRISH AND GALICIAN CASES

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### 1. Introduction

The analysis I present in this paper is based on the position that contact between different language groups, in bilingual and multilingual settings is frequently associated with situations of conflict and strife. When two or more languages come into contact, tensions can occur due to the existence of a dominant versus a dominated group or a majority versus a minority. Where such power relations exist, one of the language groups will always be subject to stigmatisation/ and or discrimination, with conflict the inevitable result (Nelde, 1997: 294).

Although we talk about “language conflict”, language itself is but a significant secondary sign of more deep-rooted socio-economic or political conflict between opposing language groups in a bilingual context. The language spoken by each group constitutes a symbolic system through which these socio-economic, socio-political, as well as cultural and ideological conflicts can be externalised. A deconstruction of the language contact situation is therefore necessary in order to move behind the language contact situation and to gain a deeper insight into the reasons for conflict in bilingual contexts.

The present article identifies and assesses areas of language conflict in two bilingual communities: the Irish community where Irish is in contact with English and the Galician community where Galician exists alongside Spanish. It involves a deconstruction of each language contact situation through which the historical, political, social and economic factors which led to linguistic conflict in each case are identified. This is followed by an assessment of the degree to which government policy and language planning in each bilingual context has succeeded in neutralising conflict between the language groups in contact.

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## 2. The origins of linguistic strife –some historical perspectives

An analysis of the Irish and Galician language contact situations shows that historically, social conflict between Irish in contact with English and Galician in contact with Spanish developed in similar ways. Political, social and economic interaction with an outside dominant power is closely related to the history of language contact in both cases. In the Irish case, such interaction was between Ireland and the rest of the British Isles, its nearest and most powerful neighbour. In the Galician case, interaction was with the kingdom of Castile, to the south-east of Galicia, emerging as the Spanish State in the fifteenth century. Economic and political dependence, from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by the Irish and Galician communities on a non-autochthonous speaking centre of power had similar effects in shaping the negative social meanings which came to be associated with each autochthonous language in their respective contact situations. The division of labour between Irish in contact with English and Galician in contact with Spanish was hierarchically constructed. Irish and Galician became synonymous with poverty and ignorance while English and Spanish as the dominant languages, emerged as symbols of power and social mobility<sup>2</sup>. As Wall (1969: 82) points out in reference to the Irish case:

By 1800 Irish had ceased to be the language habitually spoken in the homes of those who had already achieved success in the world, or who aspired to improve or even maintain their position politically, socially or economically.

López Valcárcel (1991: 136 cited in del Valle, 2000: 108) also alludes to a similar social divide in the Galician and Spanish language contact situation:

The process of devaluation of Galician is an old one. Its immediate causes are to be found in the historical events that began with the imposition of Castilian in Galicia after the fifteenth century; an imposition which, because it came from the political administrative power, entailed the establishment of a correlation between social class and language that still exists today.

The obvious tensions which emerged from the dominant versus dominated groups in contact, culminated in conflict and struggle between the opposing language groups. In reaction to the dominant/subordinate dichotomy which went beyond linguistic inequalities, individuals and groups in Ireland and Galicia attempted to recreate a consistent ethnic ideology which would reverse the negative meanings which had come to be associated with speaking Irish and Galician. In doing so, Irish and

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<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed historical overview of language contact in the Irish case see Ó'Huallacháin (1994). In the case of Galician refer to Frexeiro Mato (1997).

Galician groups, largely drawn from the educated elite of both societies, were both reflecting and seeking to use the ideology of nationalism present throughout Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In this context, Irish and Galician elite groups hoisted the banner of the autochthonous language as the defining symbol of the people.

What began as a cultural initiative in each case gradually became politicised with a growing demand to tackle the socio-economic grievances of Irish and Galician societies. However, the outcome of the emerging struggles differed in both cases. In the Irish case, political independence from Britain in 1922 eliminated the English-speaking outside dominant power and in doing so, removed what was seen as the source of tensions and social conflict. The Galician case differed in that it was not granted independence from central Spain, but was instead, in 1936, to be given autonomous status, with a form of regional self-government within the Spanish-speaking State. However, the work of Galician nationalist movements came to a halt in 1936, following the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and the forty years of dictatorial rule which followed under the Franco regime. It was not until 1981, six years after the death of Franco that autonomous status was finally granted to Galicia. The Autonomous Statutes granted a form of local self-government to Galicia while still remaining part of the Spanish State. Thus, although the hold of central Spain, the former “enemy”, on Galicia was weakened it still remained. Nevertheless, despite Ireland’s seemingly advantageous position of political independence from Britain in the post-1922 period, language conflict continued to exist in the Irish as well as the Galician case.

### **3. Language conflict in the Irish case**

Political independence in the Irish case in the post 1922 period gave the new Irish government a free hand in determining the future of the autochthonous language. Article 8 of the 1937 Irish Constitution, “*Bunreacht na hÉireann*” granted a privileged position to the Irish language making it the “national language” and “first official language” of the Irish Republic. Such a status, has made it one of the few minority languages in Europe and perhaps in the world with a state “ostensibly dedicated to its protection” (Fishman, 1991: 122).

In post-independent Ireland, one source of language conflict stems from the fact that two different Irish language realities emerged, namely that of the north-western,

western and southern peripheral areas collectively known as the “Gaeltacht” (literally Irish-speaking) and the “Galltacht” (meaning English-speaking). This latter area accounted for over ninety per cent of the country both geographically, demographically and economically. As early as 1851, according to the first census to include a language question in Ireland, only five per cent of the Irish population defined themselves as monolingual Irish speakers (Macnamara, 1971, cited in Bratt Paulston, 1994: 81-82). The census returns for 1891 indicate that eight persons only in every 1,000 were unable to speak English; that 145 persons in every 1,000 were bilingual and that 855 in every 1,000 were unable to speak the language at all (Wall, 1969: 81).

A geographical divide had emerged between the Irish speaking population, largely concentrated along the western and southern seaboard and the English-speaking remainder of the country. In the Gaeltacht areas, poor economic conditions, geographical isolation and rurality had halted linguistic assimilation to the dominant language which had taken place in the rest of the country. New forms of linguistic conflict were set to emerge between the numerically, economically and politically dominant English-speaking population and the socio-demographically subordinate Irish-speaking areas. In a sense the old enemy in the language contact situation was replaced by a new enemy from within, in the form of the English-speaking Irish majority. Conflict was thus internalised and as Fishman (1991: 135) points out “we have met the enemy and they are us”.

Most of the English-speaking Irish majority however, regarded themselves as friends and well wishers rather than foes to the Irish language and its speakers. The majority of those living in the “Galltacht” or English speaking parts of the country continue to favour measures towards the survival of the “Gaeltacht” and consider that if these Irish-speaking communities disappear so too will the language<sup>3</sup>. Irish nationalist movements in the pre-independence stage had succeeded in making the Irish language an important symbol of Irish independence and authenticity. Even in the long term, this symbolic value for the language has been maintained, with consecutive survey reports highlighting the value of the language as a symbol of Irish identity. The findings of the

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<sup>3</sup> In response to the statement “If the Gaeltacht dies out, Irish will die out also”, sociolinguistic surveys carried out since 1973 show strong public support for the maintenance of the Gaeltacht areas increasing from 60% in 1973 to 64% in 1983, followed by a slight drop in 1993 to 62%. Figures from these surveys are taken from Ó’Riagáin (1997: 176).

most recent national sociolinguistic survey (cf. Ó'Riagáin & Ó'Gliasáin, 1994) show that the majority (61%) agree with the statement, "Without Irish, Ireland would certainly lose its identity as a separate culture". Despite this symbolic support for the language, half of those who agree with this view have no speaking ability with respect to Irish themselves. Thus, while the symbolic value attached to the Irish language has acted as a point of unification between the Irish-speaking Gaeltacht and the English-speaking Galltacht, on a practical level English has remained the common denominator language between the two groups.

While at the same time putting in place measures to ensure maintenance of Irish within the Gaeltacht areas, where it had survived as a community language, the second facet of language policy was directed towards revival of the language in areas where it had ceased to be spoken. In this way language policy in the initial years after independence promoted the spread of Irish into the English-speaking parts of the country. Language revival, which was understood as the displacement of English by Irish usage in as many spheres of national life as possible (amongst what was by then largely a monolingual English-speaking population) was to be achieved primarily through the education system. From 1922 onwards Irish was made part of the school curriculum for primary and secondary levels in all recognised schools within the state. In the initial thirty-year period from 1922 to 1950, this objective also included the gradual introduction of bilingual and immersion programmes to all schools.

Some eighty years on it has become clear that linguistic policy has far from achieved its initial goal of displacing English by Irish. From the 1950s the number of bilingual schools declined and Irish was taught as a subject only in most schools. Despite these failures, the education system has however succeeded in creating enough competence in Irish amongst a significant number of the population to create at least a potential for bilingualism. Since the 1926 census, where less than 20 per cent of the Irish population reported linguistic ability in Irish, this figure has since then increased with every census. The most recent figure taken from the 1996 census of population returns 41.1 per cent of those living in the Irish Republic as having an ability to speak Irish. This ability is not uniform across all speakers and ranges from a capacity to speak a few words right up to native speaker ability. According to the findings of the most recent national sociolinguistic survey (cf. Ó'Riagáin & Ó'Gliasáin, 1994), only 2% claim "native speaker ability" in Irish, 9% have sufficient ability for "most

conversations”, 22% “part of conversations”, 17% “a few simple sentences”, 32% have just “the odd word” of the language and 18% are returned as having “no Irish”. Based on linguistic ability alone, communication between the Gaeltacht and Galltacht areas is restricted by the low degrees of bilingual competence which exists in English-speaking parts of the country. Linguistic differences between Irish, a Celtic language in contact with English, which is Germanic eliminate the possibility of passive bilingualism between the speakers of each language group. Consequently, in language contact situations between neo-speakers from Galltacht areas and native speakers from the Gaeltacht, a switch to English is often seen as a more realistic and less time consuming option.

Insufficient competence on the part of those who rely on the education system as a means of learning Irish is not the only cause of tension in language contact situations with native Gaeltacht speakers. Even where a high level of linguistic competence is achieved by speakers living outside the core Gaeltacht areas, their opportunities to put that competence into practice with native Gaeltacht speakers is restricted. According to the CILAR (1975: 38) report, bilingual speakers in Gaeltacht areas follow a set of “social norms” which govern language choice. One such norm relates to whether or not the linguistic competence or attitudes of the other speaker are known. If the latter are not known then English will usually be the language of interaction. It thus follows that strangers to the area will usually be addressed in English. While the majority (93%) of Gaeltacht dwellers do seem committed to using Irish if spoken to in that language (Ó’Riagáin, 1997: 125), the degree to which such a commitment is converted to actual use is perhaps more ambiguous. In his article entitled *Irish Language enthusiasts and native speakers: An uneasy relationship*, Lars Kabel (2000: 136) records one of his visits to the Gaeltacht as a third level student and the refusal of one of the local boys in the house where he was staying to speak in Irish. According to Kabel (2000: 136) it was not due to the lack of linguistic competence on the part of the boy but rather his non-acceptance of what the boy referred to as Kabel’s “Gaeilge Baile Átha Cliath” (Dublin Irish) as “stupid Irish”. According to Kabel (2000: 136), “this incident illustrates the fact that native speakers do not necessarily accept learners as equals and insiders within their group”.

The school based knowledge on which many bilinguals living outside the Gaeltacht depend leads to the use of what native-speakers often brand “book Irish”,

which to them contains archaic vocabulary, phrases and neologisms. This leads to further complications in language contact situations between the two groups. Dialectal variations also exist across the different Gaeltacht areas which can be broadly divided into three types: Donegal Irish, spoken in the northern periphery, Connemara Irish, spoken in the West and Munster Irish, spoken in the south and south west of the country. Standard Irish, which is most often used for educational purposes, draws on the variation used in Munster. However, the type of Irish to which students are exposed through the school system is more often dependent on the variation spoken by the teacher. A neo-speaker with a leaning towards the Connemara dialect could be expected to have comprehension difficulties in a language contact situation with a Donegal speaker. Indeed, given that the Gaeltacht area itself does not constitute one single landmass, dialectal differences across Gaeltacht areas themselves in the past inhibited communication between native speakers from the different Irish speaking areas. This gap has however been narrowed in more recent years following the nationalisation of *Radio na Gaeltachta* and the setting up of an Irish language television station in 1996. Through these initiatives all Irish speakers are exposed to dialects other than their own.

Tensions between native Gaeltacht speakers and those from the English speaking Galltacht can also be related to a number of social considerations. Bilingual competence outside the core Gaeltacht areas tends to be greatest amongst those with highest levels of education and from middle class backgrounds. As access to education is related to social class, highest levels of academic attainment in Irish and as a result highest levels of competence in the language is restricted to those from the higher social categories of Irish society. Although the class dimension of bilingualism outside of the Gaeltacht areas is today less pronounced than in the initial years after independence (following the introduction of free education in the 1960s), the class base of bilingualism continues to be predominantly middle class. Language contact between middle class bilinguals from the Galltacht areas and the less economically favoured Gaeltacht speakers is thus a source of conflict stemming from the social differences between the two groups in contact. Although the economic conditions of the Gaeltacht areas have improved over the past century, by national standards these areas continue to be among the most poorly developed in the country. This unequal distribution of wealth, which exists between the Gaeltacht peripheries and the rest of the country thus continues to be a source of conflict between the two groups.

Ideological differences between Galltacht and Gaeltacht bilinguals also acts as a source of tension between the opposing groups. Opportunities to speak Irish outside the Gaeltacht areas are limited to interaction with other bilingual individuals who are thinly distributed around different parts of the country. Those who use the language at work (generally within public sector employment) or within the family come closest to the ideal of using Irish naturally. The lack of a community based environment in which to use the language on a daily basis, forces those living in Galltacht areas to seek out Irish speakers if they wish to use the language. Comparatively, native Irish speakers within the Gaeltacht areas do not share the belief that the act of speaking Irish is desirable for its own sake and tend to be governed by pragmatism (Kabel, 2000: 135). The idealisation of the Gaeltacht areas as a kind of museum piece where Irish must be preserved at all costs is not always shared by those who actually live in these areas. As Chapman (1978: 208 cited in Ó'Riagáin, 1997: 172) points out: "We find that those Gaels outside the Gaeltacht show a tendency to applaud the "community" while those inside it, particularly the young, are often keen enough to escape it".

Removed from the socio-economic realities of the Gaeltacht, Dublin based middle class bilinguals are very often accused of being out of touch with the difficulties facing the rural-based Gaeltacht and its population.

Although much of the discussion on language conflict in the Irish context has centred on tensions between the Gaeltacht and the Galltacht, within the English-speaking part of the country a source of linguistic strife can also be identified. As previously discussed, emphasis on the education system in the language revival process can be used to explain the middle class structure of bilingualism outside of the Gaeltacht. In the early years of the state, the class bias was more pronounced due to the fee paying nature of schooling. The wealthier sectors of Irish society were amongst those who could avail of education and subsequently linguistic competence in Irish. Educational qualifications could in turn be converted to a form of what Ó'Riagáin (1997) following Bourdieu (1991) refers to as economic capital and used for access to certain sectors of the labour market. Between 1930 and 1973, Irish was a compulsory component in all state examinations and a requirement for entry to civil service posts. Access to higher education was also determined by academic credentials in Irish. Since 1910, the National University of Ireland had adopted a policy which made Irish an essential subject for matriculation. The link between school success and Irish and



subsequently access to sectors of the labour market led to tensions between those who because of their social position, could achieve linguistic competence in Irish and those whose social status denied them access to such competence.

Tensions between higher and lower social groups were alleviated by policy changes in the sixties and seventies. The introduction of free education in the 1960s broadened the social base of bilingualism in Ireland. The link between school success and Irish and subsequently access to sectors of the labour market had up until the mid seventies led to negative attitudes towards the language, particularly amongst lower social class groups. A change in language policy in 1973 removed the compulsory element of the language in state exams and thus further relieved some of the pre-existing tensions linked to school success and Irish. Evidence of this is to be found in the more positive attitudes towards the language which were recorded in the 1983 sociolinguistic survey (cf. Ó'Riagáin & Ó'Gliasáin, 1984). The drop from 77% in 1973 to 40% in 1983 in those agreeing that "Many children fail their exams because of Irish" indicates clearly the way in which the 1973 policy change in relation to "compulsory Irish" had filtered through the public awareness. Although Irish is no longer a compulsory subject in state exams, it continues to be a requirement for matriculation in the four National Universities of Ireland (although not in other third-level colleges and institutes of technology). Even though the numbers of those going onto third level from lower social groups has increased in recent years, the higher social classes continue to dominate. The utilitarian value of Irish is thus higher amongst the upper classes, where the prospects of going on to higher level education are greater than amongst the lower social groups.

Following the decline in bilingual education in the 1960s and its replacement by English language schools with Irish taught as a second language, there has been a resurgence in Irish immersion schools set up through parent rather than government initiatives. The voluntary and self-selected preferences of local parent support groups to establish all Irish primary schools grew out of their dissatisfaction with mainstream schools where Irish was taught only as an additional subject. Although Irish medium education reaches only a limited proportion of all children in the Irish Republic, almost

all of them are restricted to middle-class clienteles<sup>4</sup>. With all-Irish schools being primarily restricted to middle-class children and most working-class children continuing to attend the ordinary schools and learning very little Irish in the process, a degree of social polarisation in the language contact situation has continued to exist.

#### **4. Language conflict in the Galician case**

While the impact of government intervention in the Galician case cannot as yet be fully appreciated, given that language policy spans a mere twenty years, some preliminary comments at least can be made about the degree to which language conflict between Galician and Spanish language groups has been neutralised.

By the time language revival efforts got underway in the Irish case at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the majority of the population had shifted to the dominant language with less than twenty percent returned as Irish speakers in the 1920 census. In contrast, language shift in the Galician case set in at a later stage. Margariños (1979: 70) indicates that up until the nineteenth century, Spanish was only spoken in the Galician cities and amongst sectors of the bourgeoisie including merchants, industrial, administrative and intellectual middle classes. As late as 1900, over ninety per cent of Galicians continued to live in rural areas with the remaining less than ten per cent concentrated in urban centres (Fernández, 1993: 28) This divide can be taken to correspond roughly to the linguistic divide between Galician-speaking rural areas and Spanish-speaking cities. The *Mapa Sociolingüístico de Galicia* (Fernández & Rodríguez, 1995: 52-53) induces from the reported accounts of the language spoken by respondents' grandparents that in 1877, as many as 88.5 per cent of Galicians were monolingual Galician speakers.

The effects of industrialisation and modernisation in the twentieth century led to a decline in the rural population and gradual migration to the predominantly Spanish speaking cities. After the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the coming to power of General Francisco Franco, Spanish spread to all sectors of Galician society, including the rural areas. The increased presence of Spanish was due to the access people then had

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<sup>4</sup> Ó'Riagáin (1997: 249) cites the Ó'Riagáin and Ó'Gliasáin 1977 survey of all-Irish schools in the Dublin area which shows that parents of those attending these schools generally had a higher than average educational level and occupied higher status occupations. Some 65% worked in professional/high administrative, managerial/executive and inspectional/supervisory type occupations.

to the mass media and to schooling, both of which were provided exclusively through Spanish. During the Franco dictatorship, the prestige Galician had managed to restore through the cultural and political action of nineteenth century nationalist movements was lost and Spanish became the only acceptable language for use in public.

However, the legal situation of the language was to change considerably following the death of the Franco and Spain's transition to democracy in 1975. Article 3 of the 1978 Spanish Constitution sought to relieve the former tensions in a state where linguistic and cultural diversity had up until then been ignored. According to a clause in this article "the richness of the different linguistic varieties of Spanish is a cultural patrimony and will be the object of special respect and protection". However, despite the acceptance of the state of such diversity, an earlier point in the same article establishes Spanish as the official language of the state and requires that all Spaniards know the language and have the right to use it. Galician, along with two other regionally spoken languages, Catalan and Basque are according to a further clause in the article, official in their respective Autonomous Communities. This latter point opened the legal door for the communities such as Galicia, where a language other than the official language of the state was spoken and to establish official bilingualism. Although Article 3 of the 1978 Constitution gives Galician official status, this status is only within the territorial confines of the region, outside of which Spanish is the first and only official language. Galicia and Galicians, as part of the Spanish State are obliged to know the official language of the state to which they belong. Galician, in contrast is not an obligation, even within the region itself where it holds co-official status with the language of the state. Although the more tolerant language policy promoted by the Spanish central government relieves some of the former tensions between the centre and the periphery, behind the wording of Article 3, linguistic hierarchies continued to exist albeit in a more subtle and implicit form. At the top of the pyramid is Spanish, as the only official language of all Spaniards within the Spanish State. At a regional level, Spanish, although co-official with the language of the autonomous community, holds a more dominant position due to its status at a national level. Galicians, as Spanish citizens are legally obliged to know the official language of the state. Galician thus takes third place in the hierarchical pyramid holding a co-official position with the nationally spoken language. All Galicians have it as their constitutional right to speak Galician within the territorial confines of the region.

Article 5 of the Galician Statute of Autonomy reinforces the co-existence of Galician and Spanish and advocates the promotion of Galician in all levels of public and cultural life, areas from which it had been previously absent. The Statute of Autonomy replicates the mandate of the Spanish Constitution, confirming the co-official status of both languages and providing speakers of each with the legal protection to use either language.

While this new linguistic framework has addressed some of the former tensions between periphery and state, the possibility of conflict between the two groups is left open by the continued hierarchical positioning of each language. As an Autonomous Community, which grants Galician a form of regional self-government while still remaining within the Spanish state, Galicia continues to be at the same time politically and economically attached to that state. The limitations which this imposes in terms of language policy is evident in the rejection of the 1983 Law of Galician Normalization. This Law attempted to establish the “obligation” for all Galicians (as opposed to the “right”), to know and speak Galician. Although the Law was passed by the Galician Parliament, the Spanish government presented an appeal to the constitutional court in Madrid. This Court pronounced a sentence in favour of the appeal and the “obligation” for all Galicians to know the regional language was declared unconstitutional. Unlike the Irish case where decisions are made by an independent Irish state, Galician language legislation is not at all times independent of the intervention of the Spanish State.

#### **4.1. Internal sources of conflicts**

As Galician has continued throughout its history to be the language of the majority of the population, language policy, since the 1980s has not been faced with the task of widespread revival amongst the population as was the case with Irish. Linguistic similarities between Galician and Spanish (owing to the fact that both come from Latin) allows for almost complete mutual comprehension between the two language groups making almost all Galicians at least passively bilingual in the two languages. Given that almost the entire population is capable of expressing itself in either language, conditions for speakers to remain faithful to their mother tongue would seem optimal. However, the basic sociolinguistic situation is one of inequality regarding the conditions which have existed and which continue to exist, between the two languages in this bilingual community. A sociolinguistic study carried out by Williamson *et al.* (1984) during the

initial post-autonomy stage, shows that lower social classes, rural residence and upper age were associated with Galician. In contrast, Spanish tended to be used by younger people, the middle class and the urban population.

The legal framework (outlined in Article 5 of the Autonomous Statute) seeks to correct existing inequalities between the two language groups in contact by making Galician co-official with Spanish. Galician as well as Spanish speakers are given the legal right to use their respective languages within the territorial confines of what constitutes the Galician Autonomous Community. By guaranteeing the normal and official use of Galician as well as Spanish, public powers in Galicia are raising the status of the autochthonous language to that of the dominant language. An additional clause makes special reference to promoting the use of Galician in all levels of public and cultural life, domains from which were in the past confined to Spanish. The public powers in Galicia are committed by the wording of Article 5 to provide all necessary means to facilitate knowledge of Galician. One such institution which provides such knowledge is the education system. Although the majority of Galicians have high levels of competence at an oral and aural level, the lack of formal education in the language up until the 1980s explains the low levels of literacy in the language (72.9% of the population have poor or no proficiency in writing (Fernández & Rodríguez, 1995). The legislation issued by the Xunta de Galicia (the regional government), *Lei de Normalización Lingüística* (1983) regulates the situation of Galician in the field of education. According to this law, Galician is a compulsory subject at both primary and secondary levels. In keeping with the idea of equality for both languages, the number of hours dedicated to Galician must be the same as the amount dedicated to Spanish. On completion of compulsory formal education, all students are required to have equal competence in both languages. Unlike the Irish system where the initial aim was complete conversion to an all-Irish education, legislation in Galicia works with the idea of establishing the co-existence of the two languages.

Although it may be too early to judge its effectiveness, figures taken from the *Mapa Sociolingüístico de Galicia* (Fernández & Rodríguez, 1995, 1996) show that equal competence in both Galician and Spanish is not achieved at the end of compulsory schooling. The results show that amongst the 16-25 age group of Galicians, the first generation to have undergone the influence of linguistic policy, 20.6% report only poor or no mastery of the spoken language, 27.4% in reading skills and 36.1% in

the written language. As Hermida (2001: 134) points out in her footnotes, although figures for proficiency in the aforementioned fields are not given for Spanish, the assumption that the population is generally proficient in the language can be assumed or at least such proficiency goes unrecognised. The school system is so far unsuccessful in curbing the ongoing threat of language shift towards Spanish amongst the younger generation of Galicians. Intergenerational mother tongue transmission has decreased from 80.6% amongst the older age groups to 36.7% in the 16-25 age bracket. For those who have Galician as their initial language the school often has a *degalicianing* effect given that the average use of Galician with teachers is as low as 1.96 and for writing 1.1 (on a scale which ranges from one to four where one is for Spanish only and four is for Galician only) (Hermida, 2001: 127).

While the new legal framework and its institutions have created a climate which seeks to favour balanced bilingualism, that is the peaceful co-existence of Galician and Spanish in the language contact situation there is evidence of underlying conflict between the language groups in contact. Acknowledgement of the continued social divide between the languages is highlighted in the tendency amongst Galician speakers to switch to Spanish in a language contact situation with a stranger (Fernández & Rodríguez, 1995: 281). This switch to Spanish is seen as a safe option when the linguistic background of the other speaker is unknown. By accommodating their linguistic behaviour towards Spanish, Galician speakers are implicitly recognising the continued dominant/ dominated dichotomy between the language groups in contact. When interaction is with a “*persoa de confianza*” (someone you trust) the social norms which require a switch to Spanish do not apply and even when the language of the other speaker is Spanish, Galician can be maintained.

Given the political conditions in which regional power allocated to Galicia is constrained and controlled by the institutions of the centralist State, the possibility of achieving balanced and harmonious bilingualism, free from conflict is questionable. Article 3 of the 1978 Spanish Constitution, grants Galician co-official status with Spanish but only within the territorial confines of the Galician Autonomous Community. In the context of the Spanish State and Galicia's position as part of this state, Spanish is the only official language and all Spanish citizens, including Galicians are obliged to know and use the language.

This legal framework has therefore concealed rather than neutralised tensions between the two language groups in contact. Within Galicia itself, some eighty-five per cent of the population can speak Galician of which sixty per cent are active users of the language. However, a breakdown of these figures shows that social conflict between Galician and Spanish speakers' stems from the continued unequal distribution of power and wealth between the two groups in contact. In general, Galician speakers are to be found amongst the older generation, from a lower socio-economic background, poorly educated and living in rural areas (Fernández & Rodríguez, 1995: 361). Spanish speakers in contrast, although numerically weaker continue to be socially and economically dominant. Given the unequal distribution of wealth and power at a national as well as at a regional level, the wording of the new legal framework has thus hidden rather than resolved already pre-existing socio-economic and cultural tensions between Galician speaking and Spanish speaking groups.

## 5. Conclusion

The Irish and Galician cases provide examples of the varying degrees of social conflict which very often occur when two or more languages are spoken in a bilingual or multilingual community. A deconstruction of both bilingual community's points to the fact that language is but a secondary sign of the more deeply rooted sources of group conflict such the unequal distribution of wealth and power between the language groups in contact. Subsequently, while linguistic policy often neutralises conflict on a surface level, the social and economic inequalities between the language groups remain. An overview of the Irish and Galician cases shows that despite the implementation of linguistic policy, tensions continue to exist between the language groups in contact albeit in more subtle and implicit form.

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