

“BUT THE LANGUAGE HAS GOT CHILDREN NOW”

Language Revitalisation and Education Planning in the Isle of Man

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I'm totally optimistic about Manx... It's huge strides ahead in the schools, compared to what it was. It can go one way or the other, but it's got a chance now that it hasn't had for a long time. Old fogies like myself, it doesn't matter – we hope to be translated into the spirit before long. But the language has got children now. (Leslie Quirk in Abley, 2004: 110)

Abstract

This article examines the revitalisation of Manx Gaelic, the indigenous language of the Isle of Man, through acquisition or education planning (one of a number of planning strategies used to preserve and promote endangered languages). Language scholars argue that the key to 'Reversing Language Shift' is to encourage language development in the domestic sphere (in the home and community) rather than (solely) in the education system. In the Isle of Man, however, the specific emphasis on education planning initiatives was a response to the dearth of fluent speakers and a complete absence of native speakers¹. This break in intergenerational continuity necessitated the development of a solid cohort of younger speakers before revitalisation could even begin to take place in the domestic sphere. While the creation of a Manx medium primary school in 2001, as well as other educational initiatives at the pre-school, primary, secondary and adult levels have instigated a revival of Manx, providing opportunities for the growing cohort of Manx speakers to use the language outside of school remains contentious and will pose the single biggest challenge for the linguistic revitalisation process in the future.

Keywords

Reversing Language Shift; language revitalisation; education planning; *Bunscoill Ghaelgagh*

Introduction

The Isle of Man, a self-governing Dependency of the British Crown, is located in the Irish Sea, roughly equidistant between England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. The island's rich and varied cultural heritage is based primarily on Celtic traditions but it has

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also been influenced by successive waves of migration from Scandinavia and the British Isles. Politically, the Isle of Man weathered periods of alternating dominance by the Norse, the Scots and the English before becoming formally annexed to the British Crown in 1765 (Wilson, 2005: 136). The present day population is approximately 80,000. Just under half of the population was born on the island, with the remainder being mostly comprised of migrants from England and other parts of the British Isles. Despite the ubiquity of English as the language of everyday speech, communication and commerce, the island's indigenous language is Manx Gaelic (Manx).

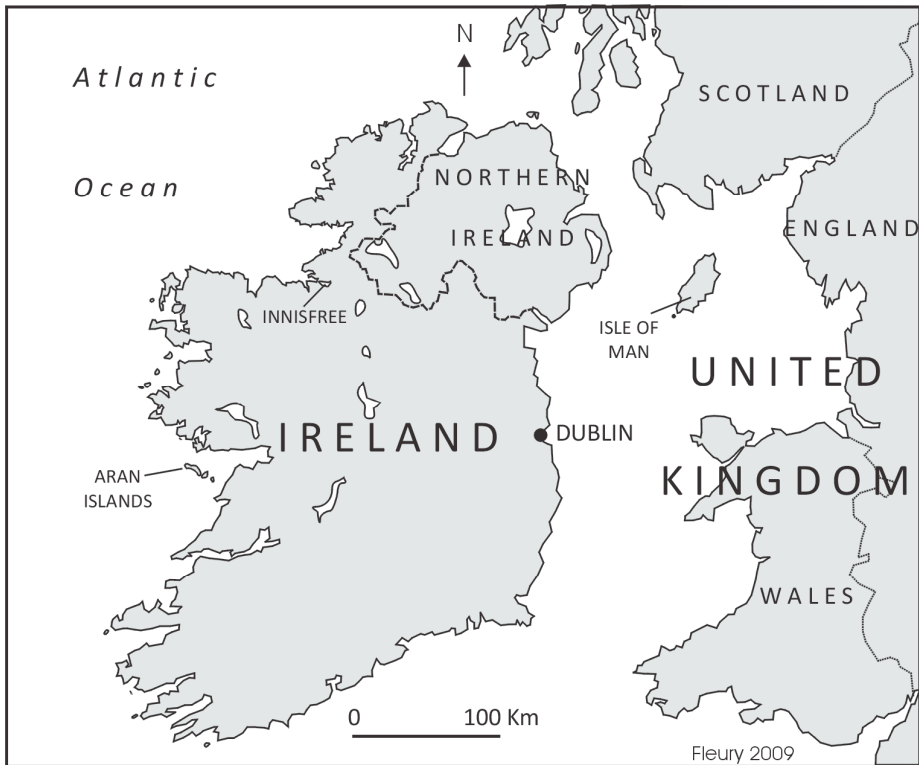


Figure 1 – Map of Isle of Man and its location in the British Isles (Christian Fleury)

The titles of a number of recent articles and book chapters on the status of Manx have tended to emphasise the precariousness of the language's existence (Abley, 2004; Tanner, 2004). Indeed, opinions on the future of Manx range from hopeful optimism to blunt pessimism, and even incredulity and abject cynicism. While it is true that Manx came face to face with extinction, following the gradual decline of the language in the 19th and 20th centuries and the death of the last 'native' speaker in 1974, this near death experience also sparked a remarkable process of revitalisation. For much of the past several decades this process has been driven in large part by grassroots activists and language enthusiasts, none of whom are native speakers (Wilson, 2008). More recently, the Isle of Man Government, in particular through the Department of Education, has played an important role in what language planning scholars refer to as Reversing Language Shift (RLS) (Fishman, 1991).

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This article explores efforts to revitalise Manx through acquisition or education planning, one of a number of planning strategies used to preserve and promote endangered languages. In the Isle of Man, education programs at the pre-school, primary, secondary and adult levels have been at the forefront of the language revitalisation process. The centerpiece of Manx language education programming on the island has been the *Bunscoill Ghaelgagh (Bunscoill)*, the Manx medium (immersion) primary school. Since 2001, children at the *Bunscoill* between the ages of 4 and 11 have been educated in Manx.

Despite the fact that the *Bunscoill* has existed for less than a decade, it has already succeeded in developing a cohort of competent, young Manx speakers. In most cases, however, the parents of these children are not fluent in the language and opportunities to speak Manx outside the school are limited. The literature on language planning argues that whereas formal language education is an important component of a broader RLS strategy, the primary focus of any language revitalisation effort should be to “grow” the language in the domestic sphere (the home and the community) (Cooper, 1989; Fishman, 1991; Crystal, 2000). As Fishman notes: “The utilization of the school for RLS purposes must increasingly become merely only one step in an integrated, stagewise progression of steps, rather than the first, last and most crucial step that it has often been made out in the past.” (1991: 377-8)

Language planning scholars would argue that the lack of a Manx medium environment outside the school, especially in the domestic sphere, will severely limit the development of the language on the island. This may indeed be the case. In the Isle of Man, however, the emphasis on education planning initiatives was a specific response to the particular circumstances facing the language at the turn of the last century. The break in intergenerational linguistic continuity, as evidenced by the small number of fluent speakers and the complete absence of native speakers, necessitated the development of a solid cohort of younger speakers before revitalisation could even begin to take place in the domestic sphere. While it remains to be seen whether this strategy will work, the number of students taking Manx, either as an optional subject or in an immersion program, is growing. Nevertheless, the issue of providing opportunities for the growing cohort of Manx speakers, young and old, to use the language in their daily lives outside school remains contentious and will pose the single biggest challenge for the language in the future.

Although the revitalisation of Manx is still at a very early stage, the purpose of this article is to offer some preliminary observations on the role that language education is playing in this process. Part One discusses the merits of studying language change in a small island context. Part Two reviews the literature on language planning in order to outline the benefits and challenges of using education planning as a focal point for language revitalisation efforts. Part Three examines recent education planning initiatives on the Isle of Man and efforts to develop a cohort of young Manx language speakers, through educational institutions such as the *Bunscoill*. Interviews conducted with the parents of children attending the *Bunscoill* in the summer of 2008, as well as earlier parental surveys, provide an interesting series of perspectives on issues raised in the literature on language and education planning, including the motivations for choosing a Manx immersion program, the challenges of using Manx in the domestic sphere, concerns about the future of Manx language education and general attitudes regarding the position of Manx in the broader society.

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Language Revitalisation in Small Island Contexts

It has been observed that the specific contextual features of small islands can influence the development of language as well as the study of this development. In his work on language development among the Ogasawara (Bonin) islanders, Daniel Long asks:

What roles do island factors like isolation from the outside world and intense inner-contact among islanders play in language change? In other words, there is the question of whether island languages are more or less likely to change as compared to their mainland counterparts. (2007: 15)

Isolation can certainly allow distinct languages to emerge and develop; as was the case with Manx Gaelic in the Isle of Man.² It can also mean that the number of speakers is relatively small and that there is little possibility for the expansion of the language. Moreover, once isolation is broken, such languages can be particularly susceptible to assimilation because the number of speakers is small and geographically concentrated. In the Isle of Man, the opening up of the island to tourism and immigration from English-speaking parts of the United Kingdom in the 19th and 20th centuries was one of a number of factors that had a detrimental effect on the Manx language (Wilson, 2008: 76). In the space of a century, Manx went from being spoken universally on the island to being spoken by a small minority.

Living on a small island can engender a strong sense of national or cultural identity among indigenous inhabitants and newcomers alike. For indigenous peoples, small island cultures and languages represent a tangible and spiritual connection to their past. Although it is often the case that this connection has been severely weakened and even broken through policies of assimilation into a dominant and hegemonic culture, there are countless examples of small islanders attempting to resurrect their languages and cultures.³ This is certainly true in the Isle of Man, where grassroots cultural and linguistic enthusiasts, supported by government, have waged a difficult and on-going battle to protect and, in the case of the Manx language, to resurrect the island's cultural inheritance. In the Isle of Man, as in other small islands, though, it is also important to note that some of the most hostile opponents of cultural and linguistic revitalisation are people who would consider themselves to be indigenous to the island. Such hostility is an historical product of assimilation policies that projected an image of Manx culture as inferior and worthless, and discouraged and even punished people (especially children in school) for speaking the language in public.

In certain cases, newcomers to an island, with no previous connection to the island or its culture, can also embrace the indigenous culture. The compact and unique features of many small island cultures are particularly appealing to people who come from larger, more heterogeneous (and anonymous) places, or for people who are attempting to immerse themselves (and their children) in the culture of their new home. Historically, newcomers (or *come-overs*, as they are known on the island) have become important champions of Manx culture (Kewley Draskau, 2006). More recently, such cultural dedication on the part of newcomers to the island was also observed among parents of the *Bunscoil* children who have no ancestral connection to the island.

In addition to providing a setting in which language and culture can develop, the experience and features of small islands are also useful to researchers who study such

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developments. Peter Mühlhäusler (2002: 167), for example, asserts that “islands lend themselves particularly well to understanding the processes of language change, decline and revival because the number of parameters involved is much smaller than in most other situations of language change.” Long likens islands to linguistic “pressure cookers” (as opposed to mainland melting pots) that allow us “to observe language changes over a few generations that might well have taken centuries in mainland situations.” (2007: 17)

The wealth of recent literature on small island languages provides a firm foundation on which to study the revitalisation of Manx in the Isle of Man. The cases are geographically diverse, ranging from New Zealand and Hawai'i to islands in Europe, Japan and throughout the South Pacific. Particularly relevant to the Isle of Man case, however, is the work of Channel Island researchers. The two largest Channel Islands, Jersey and Guernsey, are similar in many respects to the Isle of Man. Like the Isle of Man, they are Dependencies of British Crown and offshore banking and financial services centers that have prospered politically and economically in recent years. The indigenous languages of these two Channel Islands, which are variants of Norman French (Jèrriais and Guernesiais), have also endured a similar pattern of decline as Manx, as well as a comparable process of recent grassroots revitalisation (Sallabank, 2005; Johnson, 2008; Johnson, 2005; Fleury, 2009). In addition to these comparative cases, the study of the Isle of Man case is supplemented by a growing body of literature on the historical and contemporary evolution of the Manx language, both within the education system (McArdle, 2005; Clague, 2007; Richardson, 2008) and the broader society of the Isle of Man (Stowell and Ó Bréasláin, 1996; Máté, 1997; Thomson, 2000, Gawne, 2002; Abley, 2004; Tanner, 2004; Krewley Draskau, 2006; Wilson, 2008)

Reversing Language Shift: The Role of Planning

In his seminal book, *Language Planning and Social Change*, Robert Cooper (1989) identifies three categories of language planning which are used to strengthen and promote minority and/or endangered languages: status planning; corpus planning; and acquisition or education planning. Status planning concerns the official status or position of a language within a particular society or political jurisdiction. Corpus planning involves the graphisation, standardisation, modernisation and renovation of a particular language (Cooper, 1989: 125). Education planning focuses on language instruction and growth through the formal education system. Another category, that of prestige planning, “was coined by Haarmann to differentiate activities aimed at promoting a positive view of a language from those concerned with political status or functions” (Sallabank, 2005: 49). Dennis Ager has further sub-divided this category into prestige and image planning, with the latter striving to increase “confidence and goodwill towards a language” (ibid).

While all of these planning activities are critical to the revitalisation of endangered languages, this article will focus on education planning in the Isle of Man because of the important role that formal education initiatives have played in the revitalisation process on the island. As previously noted, education planning from pre-school to adult levels has been at the forefront of revitalisation efforts over the past two decades. This is a controversial approach; in fact, most language planning scholars would argue that the Isle of Man is putting the cart before the horse by emphasising language education over the development of the language in the domestic sphere. In some ways, however, the

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specific and unique circumstances facing the Manx language in the latter decades of the 20th Century has justified this approach. While there were some cases of families and even isolated communities conducting their daily domestic affairs in Manx, the language had little or no domestic presence among the general population on the island.⁴ As such, education represented the best hope for resuscitating the language and developing a critical mass of speakers who could then eventually take on the difficult task of growing the language in the domestic sphere.

The question that remains is can the Isle of Man build on its success in the primary education system? Can it provide linguistic opportunities for immersion students at higher levels of education and the society at large, so that Manx can eventually develop in the domestic sphere? Such future planning will be critical if the island is to address Cooper's concern that "no matter how accomplished the schools are in imparting language acquisition, they are unlikely to lead the language's use outside the classroom unless there are practical reasons for such use" (Cooper, 1989: 161 – author's italics).

The Isle of Man's emphasis on creating a young cohort of language speakers through the formal education system is a strategy that has been used in other cases of language revitalisation, especially in small island contexts. In his work on Māori in New Zealand, Bernard Spolsky noted the significant increase in the number of children who were exposed to some form of Māori-medium education in the last two decades of the 20th century (Spolsky, 2004: 201). Citing a study done in 2001 by Richard A. Benton and Nena Benton, however, Spolsky states that by the end of the 1990s:

Few children appeared to be using the language in daily life. There had been little development of Māori literacy, apart from that associated directly with school use. There was also little evidence of the use of Māori in the workplace, except in the public sector, where there was increasing pressure to provide documents and access in Māori. (2004: 201)

This seeming 'lack' of progress was partially addressed by government policies enacted in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which were designed to promote the language within the broader society. This combination of "educational and political efforts," Spolsky concludes, "is having an important effect in regenerating the language and its status" (ibid: 202).

An even more analogous case is that of Hawai'i. During the 19th and 20th centuries, Hawaiian, like Manx, went from being a universally spoken language to a severely endangered language spoken only by a few hundred people (Nettle and Romaine, 2000: 179). As was the case in the Isle of Man, the crusade to save Hawaiian from extinction began in the 1970s and centered around the creation of pre-school immersion programs (Pūnana Leo) that, incidentally, were modeled on the *Māori Kōhanga Reo* (language nest) program in New Zealand (Nettle and Romaine, 2000: 180). According to Nettle and Romaine, "[t]hese efforts undertaken on behalf of the Hawaiian language rightly concentrated first on the youngest generation in an attempt to create a sheltered environment in which they can learn the language" (2000: 182). In addition to growing the language among children, the *Pūnana Leo* program also required that parents enroll in language education programs (ibid).

Unlike the Maori and Hawaiian cases, there were no native Manx speakers when the Isle of Man's formal education planning strategy commenced. Nevertheless, the Isle of Man

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has pursued a similar educational strategy through the creation of the *Mooinjer Veggey* (Manx medium pre-school) and the *Bunscoill*, with the former acting as an important source of students for the latter. Adult lessons in Manx are available and supported by the government. Recent research indicates that most of the parents of the children at the *Bunscoill* have taken or are taking Manx language lessons; although this is not a requirement as it is in Hawai'i.

“But the Language Has Got Children Now”: the *Bunscoill Ghaelgagh*

In recent years, language planning in the Isle of Man has proceeded on a number of fronts. Status planning has been bolstered through the government's increased involvement in promoting the language and, in particular, by the appointment of a Manx Language Officer (*Yn Greinneyder*). The Isle of Man Government and the Manx Language Officer have also been heavily involved in image and prestige planning. According to the Manx Heritage Foundation (online), a foundation created to support all aspects of Manx culture, the role of the Manx Language Officer “is to raise the profile of Manx Gaelic both within the Island and internationally and to assist organisations who work to support the language.” The Isle of Man government has also recently embarked on a high-profile branding exercise in which the Manx language features quite prominently as a distinctive characteristic of the island. As Wilson notes, “the Isle of Man Government clearly views Manx as one of a number of ways of distinguishing the island from its global competitors, especially in the banking and [financial] services sector” (2008: 78).

Corpus planning has been managed largely by the work of the Manx Language Society (*Yn Çheshaght Ghailckagh*), an organisation that has been at the forefront of Manx language preservation and promotion since its creation in 1899 (Kewley Draskau, 2006). In the education sphere, the work of the Manx Language Society has been supplemented by language enthusiasts, as well as teachers at the *Bunscoill* who, because of the lack of educational materials in Manx, have been forced to create and to translate from English and other Gaelic languages materials for use in the classroom.⁵

It is in the area of education planning, however, that the island has targeted its revitalisation efforts. During the past decade, a number of educational initiatives have attempted to foster the development of Manx, especially among the younger generation. At the core of this planning strategy have been the *Bunscoill* and the *Mooinjer Veggey*, both of which provide education through the medium of Manx.⁶ Manx is also taught on an optional basis in many English-language primary schools and offered in some secondary schools. Teaching in the English-language primary and secondary schools is coordinated by the Manx Gaelic Peripatetic Teacher's Unit (*Yn Unnid Gaelgagh*). There are a number of educational opportunities for adult learners, ranging from formal evening classes to informal meetings, as well as lessons offered through the workplace. The Manx Language Officer has been particularly active in this area of education planning.

At the moment, there are about 1000 students learning Manx in the primary and secondary school systems.⁷ The majority of these are taking Manx in the primary schools, either in an immersion program such as the *Bunscoill* or as an optional course in an English language school. A smaller number are enrolled in Manx courses at the secondary school level. As of September 2009, there will be 66 children enrolled at the

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Bunscoill, a modest number by primary school standards, but a huge increase from the 9 students that started when the *Bunscoill* opened in 2001.⁸ Four children graduated from the *Bunscoill* in 2007 and four graduated in 2008.

The *Bunscoill* has been the focus, not only of efforts to regenerate Manx through education planning, but also of studies on language revitalisation on the island. Over the past couple of years, language education scholars have conducted written surveys of the parents of children at the school (Clague, 2007; Richardson, 2008). These surveys reveal a wealth of information on the reasons that motivated the parents to send their children to a Manx medium school, as well as other important perspectives on immersion education, the use of Manx in the home, and the place (and future) of Manx on the island. In order to expand upon the information yielded in the earlier surveys, and obtain more specific information and perspectives on Manx educational programming and the revitalisation of Manx, I conducted semi-structured interviews with parents of children attending the *Bunscoill*.⁹ The interviewees were asked a similar set of questions and their responses were taped and later transcribed in order to facilitate analysis.¹⁰ These interviews, together with the earlier surveys, provide a number of important insights into the issues discussed earlier in the literature on planning and language revitalisation.

Parental Motivations for Choosing a Manx Medium Education Program

Earlier studies have focused on the reasons that motivated the parents of the children of the *Bunscoill* to attend a Manx medium school. These studies have revealed that among a number of stated reasons for choosing the *Bunscoill* over an English language primary school, the benefits of a bilingual education (both pedagogical and skill-related) and the opportunity to develop a greater sense of cultural and linguistic identity were the primary motivations for the majority of parents (Clague, 2007: 5; Richardson, 2008: 28). These reasons are largely consistent with the findings of studies in other Gaelic communities (Richardson, 2008: 11) and with the literature that is distributed by the Manx Heritage Foundation through the Manx Language Officer, which emphasises the future benefits of being able to speak two languages (Manx Heritage Foundation). Other, secondary reasons were mostly pedagogical in nature: the benefits of attending a school with smaller class sizes; a desire to build upon the success of the *Mooijer Veggey* pre-school program; satisfaction with the education that older siblings had received at the *Bunscoill*; the quality of the teachers at the school; and dissatisfaction with the mainstream educational system or with the local English language primary school.¹¹

Generally speaking, these findings were confirmed in interviews that were conducted in the summer of 2008. The interviews provided the parents with an opportunity to elaborate about their motivations, as well as the hopes and concerns that they had when they decided to enroll their children in the *Bunscoill*. Many parents felt that a Manx language education would give their children a better sense of place or belonging and that this identity would help them to develop as well-rounded and confident individuals in the future. As one parent noted “[t]hat sense of place is becoming rare or rarer among people. Here there is an opportunity to develop that and I think going to the *Bunscoill* and learning the language and being involved in the culture will give them a feeling of place later.” Some parents even compared, in positive terms, the growing sense of

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Manx identity to the weakening of national and regional identities in England and other larger countries.

An additional motivation that surfaced in discussions with several parents was that the *Bunscoill* provided their children with an educational opportunity that was not available to them when they were children. Many of the parents who grew up on the island recalled that when they and their parents were young, Manx was disparaged and thought of as a backwards language. These negative attitudes towards the language were a product of the longer-term decline of Manx as a working language in the 19th and 20th centuries. In the post-war period, Manx simply was not spoken any more in the domestic sphere, so it was looked down upon as an archaic and useless language. Despite the revival of the language in recent years, such attitudes are still prevalent among many people on the island, especially the older generation, who had been socialised to believe that Manx had little or no value.

When asked about the reaction of family and friends to their decision to send their child to the *Bunscoill*, many parents responded that the initial reactions had ranged from overtly hostile and quizzical to supportive and enthusiastic. One parent remarked “[a] lot of [our friends] think we’re very brave and a lot think we’re very stupid.” Interestingly, family members who were Manx “born and bred” were often among those who reacted most negatively to the idea, while friends and family who were not Manx, or who did not live on the island, tended to see the decision in a positive or neutral light. In several cases, some of the harshest skepticism and concern came from friends who were teachers. Although some parents admitted that they continue to face opposition, a number reported that the attitudes of family and friends changed once they learned more about the school.

The Challenges of Using Manx in the Domestic Sphere

The general picture of the precarious health of Manx in the domestic sphere was confirmed by both the surveys and the interviews. Richardson (2008: 27) found that Manx was spoken all the time in the home in only 5% of the cases she surveyed. In the majority of homes (66%) Manx was spoken sometimes and rarely in 29% of the cases. This trend was also evident in Clague’s earlier survey (2007: 7). Of the children in her study, Clague concluded that:

those with family members speaking only a ‘few words’ of Manx are clearly in the majority which necessarily entails that few of the children have access to the language in the home...It is clear that even if the parents are themselves Manx speakers, they generally do not habitually speak Manx in the home. (ibid: 7-8)

Most of the parents who were interviewed indicated that they were learning Manx through adult education programs. When asked if they spoke Manx in the home with their children, as with the previous surveys, the general response was ‘sometimes.’ Many said that they tried to initiate conversations in Manx at home with their children. Often this was in response to the fact that their children (especially the older children) would rarely initiate a conversation in Manx and even sometimes seemed hostile to attempts on the part of the parents to do so. Clague (2007: 9) has noted that such negative attitudes have been observed in older children enrolled in immersion programs

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in other Gaelic speaking countries, but that her initial survey research did not reveal such tendencies. The parents also said that initiating the conversation allowed them to steer the topic into an area where they felt more comfortable and able to participate. Many of the parents recounted stories of children taking great delight in correcting them when they made a mistake. On the one hand, this is a measurement of the success of the *Bunscoill* in terms of growing a cohort of competent, young and confident Manx speakers. On the other hand, however, it underscores the difficulties facing Manx in terms of the language being used outside the school as the primary language of interaction and communication. Unlike other examples of language revitalisation, where older speakers have led the way in terms of promoting the use of the language in the domestic sphere, in the Isle of Man, many in the older generation find that they are being surpassed by the younger generation of the Manx speaking community. In an interesting example of role reversal, the children are acting (sometimes reluctantly) as teachers to their older family members.¹²

Increasingly, there are more opportunities to speak Manx in the broader community. Many of the families whose children attend the *Bunscoill* are actively involved in cultural events on the island and indicated that they thought this was an important part of cultivating a Manx identity. As the number of Manx speakers grows, such events may become more commonplace and Manx may play a greater role in them. Clearly, however, this is an area of language planning where more development is needed if the revitalisation of Manx is to continue.

Concerns about the Future of Manx Language Education

Now that the first cohorts of children educated at the *Bunscoill* have completed their primary school education, more attention is being focused on the future of Manx language education at the secondary school level. As noted above, some steps have already been taken to build a program of language education in the island's secondary schools. The Queen Elizabeth II Secondary School in Peel, the closest secondary school to the *Bunscoill*, offers a modified Manx medium program for students from the *Bunscoill*. Manx can be taken as a GCSE¹³ subject in some of the other secondary schools on the island and Manx language instruction is also offered as an optional subject and taught by teachers connected with the peripatetic unit.

While the surveys and interviews indicated that parents are generally supportive of an expansion of Manx language programming at the secondary school level, some concerns were expressed. The parents recognised the difficulties of finding teachers who were competent in Manx and able to teach the array of subjects on offer at the secondary level. Others wondered whether learning highly technical subjects such as maths and sciences in Manx would affect the children's ability to move on in their education at the post-secondary level. Conversations with Manx language educators revealed that many parents of children in the English language schools, both at the primary and secondary levels, are concerned that lessons in Manx would conflict with other "more important" subjects. As such, many parents are reluctant to allow their children to take Manx lessons, even though they are supportive of efforts to revitalise the language. In some cases, Manx classes in the English language schools have been marginalised (both in terms when and where the courses are offered), making them less appealing to students and their parents.

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Considering the lack of opportunities to interact on a regular basis in Manx in the domestic sphere, bridging the gap between primary school and adulthood will constitute one of the most important challenges in the language's road to recovery. As noted above, older school aged speakers seem to be more reluctant to engage with the language than younger speakers. There is a risk that some of these older children will lose some of their language skills during their teenage years, thereby hindering the longer term revival of the Manx. In addition to providing more opportunities to continue one's Manx language education at the secondary level and speak the language at home and in the community, another possible solution to this issue is to popularise the use of the language among young people at this vulnerable age. Given the lack of adult speakers, for example, the language could be promoted among young speakers as a 'cool' (and confidential) means of communication.

The issue of limited resources was a common theme in the interviews. While the parents were aware of the general paucity of qualified teachers who speak Manx, this issue is not as acute at the *Bunscoill*, which has expanded its complement of teachers since the school was opened in 2001.¹⁴ However, it could become an issue if the demand for Manx medium education grows. There was a general perception among the parents interviewed that the *Bunscoill* is under-resourced by the Department of Education. Whether this is true or not is beyond the scope of this research, but such perceptions are connected to issues such as the lack of educational materials in Manx, the quality of the facilities, and the fact that until recently the school was not listed on the Department of Education's website or in the telephone book.¹⁵

Given the growth in interest in Manx medium education on the island, some parents wondered whether this would precipitate the creation of a second *Bunscoill* in another part of the island. The current school is located in St. Johns, in the west of the island. Although the island is small, some children live quite far away from the school and this constitutes a significant burden on them and their parents. In addition to the challenges of finding infrastructure and staff to operate a second *Bunscoill*, there is also a concern that if this happened, the existing, limited resources might be stretched too thin.

Attitudes Regarding the Position of Manx within the Broader Society

One would expect that parents who send their children to a Manx medium primary school would support the revitalisation of the Manx language and culture throughout the island. For the most part, the parents felt that attending the *Bunscoill* would enhance their children's sense of Manx identity; although some parents made a point of saying that learning a second language was an overwhelming priority and if there had been other immersion programs available in the island's educational system, for example in other European languages, then they may have considered sending their children to these programs rather than the *Bunscoill*.

When asked about the place of Manx within the broader society, many parents said they had seen a significant change over the last couple of decades, especially in terms of the external profile of Manx on road signs, in the media and in business. Some saw this as a positive development, while others felt that much more needs to be done and that a Manx road sign is really just paying "lip service" to the language. One parent commented that they were more aware of the language and culture, but could not say

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whether that was because their child attended the *Bunscoill* or because the profile of Manx has increased in recent years.

While the attitudes of the parents are skewed towards a favourable view of the Manx language and culture and may not be reflective of any broader trends within the island society (beyond an increasing interest in Manx language education), the interviews did reveal some interesting reflections on societal attitudes towards Manx (both contemporary and historical), as well as attitudes towards the island's changing demographic realities. As noted earlier, many members of the older generation of islanders have a decidedly negative attitude towards the language. In some respects, these negative and hostile attitudes also extend into the middle-aged and even younger generations. The stigma of Manx as a 'dead' language that is not relevant in the modern world still has deep roots on the island. One parent even said that a family member (who did not speak Manx) questioned whether the Manx being taught at the school was the "proper" Manx that was spoken on the island when there were native speakers. It was speculated that such an attitude might stem from the fact that in the past speaking Manx was frowned upon. But it also might be a reaction to the fact that some in the younger generations are rejecting this cultural stigma, tinged with a degree of resentment on the part of the family member that such educational opportunities were not available to the older generation when they were children.

Like many western societies, the Isle of Man is also experiencing profound demographic change as a result of globalisation. Such change is particularly evident in the Isle of Man because of the prominent role that the financial services sector has been playing in the island's economy for the past several decades. Indeed, Wilson (2008) notes that successive waves of globalisation since the 19th Century have had both negative and, more recently, positive impacts on the island's culture. One important impact of globalisation on the island is an increasing number of immigrants. Manx nationalists have expressed concerns that immigrants (in particular highly paid workers in the financial services industry) are raising the cost of living and making it difficult for "ordinary" Manx families to live a comfortable life on the island (Wilson, 2005: 135). They have also suggested that that immigration should be controlled to protect the cultural sustainability of the island. According to *Mec Vannin*, the Manx Nationalist Party:

In a small island nation such as ours, in default of policies to control the growth of the finance sector, policies to control the size of the population are essential for the achievement of economic, ecological and cultural sustainability. The rapid and unnatural population increase, due to an open door policy on immigration, has increased the burden on the island's infrastructure and environment whilst eroding the fabric of community life. As a result, Mec Vannin believes the immediate introduction of immigration controls to be a priority. (Mec Vannin: online)

Although most parents did not disclose their political views in the interviews, some commented on broader political issues related to immigration and its impact on Manx culture. Several parents noted that ethnic Manx are increasingly becoming a minority in their own 'country' and that linguistic and cultural revitalisation and promotion was necessary, not only to preserve the cultural traditions of the island and pass them on to the next generation, but also to inform immigrants about their new home. Looking at the general ethnic profile of the parents, it appears that a significant number have no family

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connections to the island. More often than not, it was the case that one parent had family connections to the island and the other did not. Nevertheless, many of the non-Manx parents felt that it was important for their children, who were born and raised on the island, to have a strong sense of their Manx identity. One parent, who was not originally from the island, commented that they wanted their children to “feel attached to the island and that they have an identity and they feel Manx. And I think the language and culture that comes with it has a big impact on that.” As Kewley Draskau (2006) points out, non-Manx have played a very important role in the preservation and revitalisation of the Manx language and culture. Therefore such commitment to the language and culture on the part of non-Manx parents is not inconsistent with the recent history of the language. It is important to note, however, that some of the (Manx) parents who were interviewed wondered about the reasons why non-Manx parents would adopt a language and culture to which they had no ancestral connection.

Conclusions

This study reveals that education planning has played an important role in language revitalisation efforts in the Isle of Man. As part of a suite of language planning strategies, education planning addresses the need to grow a cohort of younger speakers through formal education and instruction in an indigenous language in the hope that they will provide a solid foundation for the future regeneration of the language. The *Bunscoill Ghaelgagh*, in conjunction with the *Mooijer Veggey* and the efforts of the Manx Gaelic Peripatetic Teachers Unit and the Manx Language Officer, has been at the forefront of the Manx revitalisation efforts. Hope for the future of Manx Gaelic has risen dramatically in recent years because, in the words of Leslie Quirk, the noted Manx language activist, “the language has got children now”.

Language planning scholars argue that while education planning is a key component of the overall planning process, it is much more important for the language to grow in the home and community rather than relying on the education system to transmit the language to the next generation of competent younger speakers. Under normal circumstances, where native speakers and fluent non-native speakers are still active, this is certainly the case. In other island communities, such as Hawai'i and New Zealand, efforts to revitalise indigenous languages have used educational planning strategies to complement language development in the domestic sphere. However, the lack of fluent Manx speakers in the Isle of Man, coupled with the complete absence of native speakers has pushed educational planning to the forefront of the revitalisation agenda. Children have to learn the language in the education system because the possibilities of learning in the home, from their parents, grandparents or other relatives, are extremely limited.

Despite the initial success of education planning through primary education institutions such as the *Bunscoill Ghaelgagh*, attention must now turn to the development of the Manx language within the broader society and, specifically, to the task of continuing to cultivate the new cohort of young Manx speakers. While opportunities to do so in the home still remain limited¹⁶, further steps must be taken to provide a broader range of opportunities to interact in Manx within the secondary education system and in the community. It is then and only then that Manx will truly be on the road to recovery.

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Endnotes:

¹ This term refers to a speaker who acquired the language as their primary/first language during childhood.

² Manx Gaelic is a distinct member of the Gaelic language family, and is particularly close to Scottish Gaelic and Irish. It has been (wrongly) criticised as being an Anglicised and watered-down version of Gaelic.

³ The literature on post-materialism (Inglehart, 1977, 1990) argues that there may be a connection between cultural revitalisation and the economic stability and growth that has existed in the post-war period. General economic stability and growth has allowed people in the developed world to place less emphasis on so-called basic values and needs such as food and shelter and more value on so-called higher values and needs such as culture and rights.

⁴ In some cases, parents who were fluent in Manx raised their children in the language. The village of Cregneash, in the south of the island, also served as a last remaining outpost of the Manx language.

⁵ Nettle and Romaine (2000: 182) observed a similar process in Hawai'i.

⁶ The *Bunscoill Ghaelgagh* is an immersion primary school where Manx is the language of instruction. The *Mooijer Veggey* actually consists of several different pre-schools with differing levels of Manx medium instruction.

⁷ The primary and secondary school population in the Isle of Man is just over 12,500 (p.c. Rosemary Derbyshire, Head of the Manx Gaelic Peripatetic Teachers' Unit, July 2009).

⁸ Of these 9 students, 4 were in Year 1 and 5 were in the reception year.

⁹ Fifteen parents in total agreed to be interviewed over the course of one week in the summer of 2008.

¹⁰ The parents were contacted with the help of Julie Matthews, the Head Teacher of the *Bunscoill* and Janice Quilliam, an instructor at the school and at the *Mooijer Veggey*. Parents who indicated a willingness to be interviewed were contacted by the researcher. The research project was approved by the University of Northern British Columbia's Research Ethics Board.

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¹¹ In the Isle of Man, children usually attend schools in their local catchment area, but every child on the island has the right to attend the *Bunscoill*. Children at the school come from all over the island.

¹² As my colleague Jørgen Rasmussen pointed out, this is not unlike the phenomena of children showing their parents and older relatives how to use modern technology such as computers (p.c. June 2009).

¹³ General Certificate of Secondary Education.

¹⁴ Although, it is important to note that the number of students has also risen considerably.

¹⁵ As noted earlier, the teachers at the *Bunscoill* have unselfishly committed a great deal of extra time preparing materials in Manx for use in the classroom. In the summer of 2008, the school buildings, which date from Victorian times, underwent some much-needed renovations.

¹⁶ In part this is because many of the parents are not yet fluent Manx speakers, but it is also because the graduates of the *Bunscoill* have not yet had children of their own to whom they could pass on the language.

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