Immersion Schools are an educational success, but do they contribute to the revitalisation of Breton and Gaelic as everyday languages?

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Worldwide, against the backdrop of globalisation, minority languages are attracting specialist attention and the field of bilingual education has been of particular interest. Following positive and encouraging studies, more attention is being given to minority education. An increasing number of parents request the opportunity to choose such an education for their children.

The article addresses issues associated with the impact of bilingual education on the vitality of the minority language in the context of language shift (see Fishman (1991, 2001) and the RLS scale (Reversing Language Shift) or Edwards (1994, 2004, 2007)). The focus is on the choice of immersion education teaching through the standard variety of minority languages, specifically Breton and Gaelic.[1] The aim of this paper is to identify the multitude of factors affecting the parental choice and how this choice sits with the revitalisation effort.

The data presented here have emerged from a third inquiry conducted for my doctoral study. It analyses the socioeconomic profile of the parents who have chosen the minority language medium schools or units, their language patterns and whether these parents were native speakers of the minority language. The findings would provide an indication of the impact of the educational programmes on revitalisation.

The data were obtained by means of a semi-structured interview schedule, administered to 51 sets of parents (29 responding Breton households and 22 Scottish households, resulting in data for 58 Breton parents and 44 Scottish parents, i.e. 102 individuals in total). The aim was to obtain information about the parents' choice of school, their language patterns, those of their children and of their own parents.

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[1] These schools or units called Gaelic-medium or Breton-medium schools teach children with or without a minority language background.

The fieldwork was carried out in two locations; for the Scottish inquiry, the Western Isles were chosen because the area is a core Gaelic-speaking rural area in western Scotland (Appendix 1) and in France, I selected a similar rural location in the western part of Brittany (area called *Basse-Bretagne*[2]) with strong links to the Breton language, namely south Finistère (Appendix 2). Both are peripheral areas. Parents whose children were educated in three particular minority language medium schools/units were invited to participate in the study.

Firstly, as a background to this inquiry, some figures will highlight the difficult situation faced by many minority languages, in this case Gaelic and Breton. Besides the institutional improvements intended to improve the language situation, some of the difficulties and issues associated with revitalisation of minority languages will be highlighted. Finally, some findings from the Western Isles and Brittany will be presented.

1   Background
1.1   Generalities

In the past 50 years, there has been an increased interest in minority languages and their fate. As many minority language communities have entered the process of language shift, many of these languages have become endangered. This is a world-wide phenomenon, which happens when communities stop being isolated and their populations are integrated into an inclusive and often centrally-controlled state system. The state usually does not provide a great deal of financial or institutional support for the original languages of these communities, which in effect become minority languages. A frequent consequence is that these languages lose, at first, their prestigious status (or high variety) and often become confined to the home and then to the poorest part of the population. These minority languages become unpopular due to being associated with poverty, insularity or backwardness.

This chain of events can be observed in the case of the Celtic languages. The figures below show a drastic reduction in minority language speakers. Welsh lost half of its speakers in the space of one century. In the same period, the fall in the number of Gaelic speakers was proportionally greater, with Breton losing even more speakers (see Table 1).

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[2] *Basse-Bretagne* refers to the western part of Brittany including the *Départements* of *Finistère*, the western parts of *Côtes-d'Armor* and *Morbihan*, where Breton has traditionally been spoken (see Appendix 2, Figure 16).

WELSH (Office for National Statistics 2004)	1901: **920,824** or 49.9% of the population of Wales
	2001: **582,400** or 20.8% of the population
GAELIC (General Register Office for Scotland 2005a)	1901: **230,806** or 5.57% of the population of Scotland
	2001: **58,652** or 1.21% of the population
BRETON	1905: **1,400,000** or 93% of the population *Basse-Bretagne* (Broudic 1995)
	2007: **172,000** or 13% of the population *Basse-Bretagne* (Broudic 2009a)

Table 1 – Declining figures of bilingual speakers

A closer analysis of the numbers relating to Gaelic and Breton will shed some light on the two language situations of interest to this article.

The 2001 census (General Register Office for Scotland 2005a) recorded 58,652 Gaelic speakers or 1.2% of the Scottish population. The traditional Gaelic-speaking heartlands are mainly located in the Highland territory, although 45% of Gaelic speakers live outside that area. The Western Isles in particular, showed the highest percentage of people with some Gaelic ability, at 70%. At the same time, the census highlighted that this Island Authority had, in the space of 10 years, lost 19.6% of its Gaelic speakers (MacKinnon 2004: 24), reducing the proportion of speakers to 59.66% (Dunbar 2006). The General Register Office for Scotland (2005a) also drew attention to the 'dramatic drop of 53% in the number of 15-24 year old speakers' (2005a: 6). Figures for the Highlands are of a similar order with a drop of 18% of all its Gaelic speakers.

For Breton, in 2007, the number of remaining Breton speakers was estimated at 172,000 with 70% of the speakers older than 60, meaning that each year Breton is losing 12,000 speakers (Broudic 2009a, 2009b; INSEE[3] 2003: 20).[4] Cole and Williams (2004: 557) believe that there will be no remaining native Breton speakers in two or three decades. Breton is

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[3] INSEE: *Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques*.
[4] *Ofis Ar Brezhoneg*'s (2007) estimate was 263,850 and the latest figure on its website is 206,000 (*Ofis Ar Brezhoneg*, n.d.).

classified as 'severely endangered' by the UNESCO Atlas (UNESCO 2010b).

1.1   The decline of intergenerational language transmission

Over the past century, the number of speakers of these two languages has significantly decreased. A factor predicting such a continuing trend is the collapse of the intergenerational transmission of the language, signaling the end of language reproduction.

For many researchers (Hindley 1990; Fishman 1991; Edwards 1994, 2003; Baker 2003; Krauss, 1992, 2007), intergenerational transmission of the language represents the most important source of language reproduction. Romaine (1989) observes that 'the inability to maintain the home as an intact domain for the use of their language has often been decisive in language shift' (1989: 42). This is also Fishman's (1991) view: '[t]he road to societal death is paved by language activity that is not focused on intergenerational continuity' (1991: 91).

1.1.1   Gaelic

In the Western Isles, the total figure for Gaelic speakers aged 3-15 is following a downward trend; in 1981, there were 68%, then 49% in 1991 and 46.3% in 2001 (figures from censuses (1981, 1991 and 2001) cited by Morrison 2006: 141). This regression in language use across the generations in the Western Isles and particularly among the children has been investigated by MacKinnon (1998; 2006a: 55-62; 2006b: 3). Inquiries have shown the weakening of Gaelic use within the community, examples being the SCRE Report (Scottish Council for Research in Education 1961) and MacKinnon (1977). In a comparative exercise, MacKinnon (1977) showed that between the SCRE study conducted in 1957-58 (1961:40) and his own in 1972-3, the level of Gaelic as an active first language in a primary school (P1 and P2) in Harris had dropped from 91.8% to 66.3% (1977: 90). These two inquiries revealed that Gaelic was gradually retreating to being used mainly at home with older generations; its decline was general and it was especially salient within the children's peer-group (between brothers and sisters and in the playground). In 1957-58, 83.2% of the native speakers (1961:41) spoke Gaelic in the playground, whereas by 1972-3, only 17.2% (1977:92) did so.

All of these observations on the decline of Gaelic use point towards 'rapid sequential intergenerational decline' (MacKinnon 2006a: 51). They

also reflect the wider picture of the erosion of Gaelic used as an everyday language within families and communities and the end of language assimilation through the community.

The latest census figures confirmed the continuing decline of the intergenerational transmission of Gaelic. The Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (previously the Western Isles Island Authority) – CnES showed again the highest regression at -2.98% (MacKinnon 2004: 26). Even when both parents were Gaelic speakers the level of transmission in Gaelic-speaking areas reached only 78% (General Register Office for Scotland, 2005a: 17). The weak transmission for households with one Gaelic speaker (17%) is of great concern for the future of Gaelic as a first language, given that it is the prevailing household configuration (55%) for Gaelic speakers throughout Scotland (McLeod 2001: 3).

1.1.2   Breton

Many studies have illustrated the disruption of the intergenerational transmission of Breton, which increased greatly in the early 50s and 60s. For instance, Elégoët (cited by Broudic 1995) found that in a small Breton township, over a period of seven years, the percentage of children with Breton as a first language dropped from 100% in 1945-46 to 10% in 1952. Percentages of a similar nature have been presented by Le Dû 1980; Timm 1980; Williamson *et al* 1983; Kuter 1989; Favereau 1993; Broudic 1995; M.C. Jones 1996; Cole and Williams 2004). All these studies highlighted the breakdown of the intergenerational transmission of the Breton language bringing about the loss of competence in the language among the younger generation.

The total collapse of Breton use within the youngest group of those of child-bearing age was analysed by Broudic (1995: 189-93; 211-48) in three inquiries (1983, 1990, 1997), each one showing a deeper retreat of Breton (see also M.C. Jones 1998a). In the 1997 study, Broudic (1999) estimated that over 88% of Breton speakers born before 1950 had learnt the language from their parents and that only 0.6% of the population born around 1980s had Breton before going to school.

The latest official surveys also indicated the interruption of intergenerational language transmission.[5] Their findings showed a very low

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[5] Unlike in Scotland, censuses in France did not include questions about spoken language until 1999.

level of language reproduction: from zero[6] (INSEE-INED 1993) to 6%[7] (INSEE 2003) and even when the intergenerational transmission occurred, 'it was always on an occasional basis' (2003: 22). That same inquiry established that in the 1920s, 60% of the children with Breton had received the language from their parents. It also estimated that less than 5% of the current Breton speakers were below 40 years of age (INSEE 1999).

2 Legislation

2.1 Institutional improvement for minority languages

Whilst the decline of Breton and Gaelic is well-advanced, only recently, France and the UK have revised their attitude towards the minority languages. In the midst of the general rising interest in matters of ethnicity and cultural diversity, they have attributed positive symbolic characteristics to the minority languages and subsequently, adopted legislative measures to support their revitalisation.

2.1.1 Gaelic

Gaelic has recently benefited from institutional measures put in place by the Scottish Executive and Government (since 2007) with the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. In 2006, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, a statutory non-departmental public body became responsible for promoting Gaelic and Gaelic culture, monitoring its development and the allocation of funds, advising public authorities and other bodies as well as reporting to the Scottish Government. Its remit includes the submission of a National Language Plan, reviewed every five years. In this way, Gaelic will benefit from a coordinated national strategy with national targets. Parts of this plan also include the extension of media and public services in Gaelic and an increase in the provision of Gaelic medium education (GME).

In the Western Isles, the CnES is addressing the issue of the language decline and it has since drawn a 'Gaelic Language Plan 2007-12' (CnES 2005) with the aim of strengthening Gaelic use in the family and community and of increasing the number of Gaelic speakers in the Islands. Recent developments include the CnES intention to introduce a policy of GME as a mainstream primary provision (Scottish Government 2009).

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[6] In their sample, none of the parents with Breton had transmitted the language to their children.
[7] That inquiry did not follow a longitudinal approach, therefore that figure might also include first language French speakers speaking Breton to their children.

In 2010-11, in Scotland, there were 2,722 pupils in Gaelic-medium education (Bòrd na Gaidhlig n.d.). The provision of Gaelic secondary and tertiary education is improving, although still patchy. This creates problems regarding the continuity of a full education through the medium of Gaelic[8] and it has to be emphasised that the number of pupils in the system is very small.

2.1.2 Breton

Positive developments have also occurred in Brittany. In the past 30 years, the French state has changed its attitude toward its regional languages and cultures by recognising their existence at a cultural level. The latest major development is the state-funded Breton language agency, *Ofis Ar Brezhoneg* created in 1999. It is responsible for promoting the use of Breton; it also offers translation services and proposes new terminology. Breton cultural creativity and its diffusion have also improved, although the presence of Breton is still minimal in the media.

In 2004, the Administrative Authority of Brittany (*Conseil régional de Bretagne*) officially recognised Breton as being one of the used languages in Brittany alongside French and Gallo. At national level, in 2008, the French legislative body (*Parlement – Sénat* and *Assemblée nationale*) also amended the French Constitution by adding a new article (75-1) stating that regional languages are part of the heritage of France[9]. This new article is limited in its support for regional languages when compared with the outcome had the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) been ratified. However, the present arrangement does implicitly acknowledge Breton as being officially one of the regional languages of France.

In the education system where it was previously excluded, Breton has also seen advances and now, it is possible to study Breton at every stage of one's education. The emphasis is on nursery and primary education for the development of new Breton speakers. Pupils can attend bilingual units, called *Div Yezh* for the public sector and *Dihun* for the Catholic sector. They can also enroll in immersion schools (*Diwan*), where Breton is used as the medium of education. Numerous adults have also started learning Breton and it should be an encouraging sign that the people mostly in favour of the

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[8] In 2003, only 50% of the primary GME children transferred to a GME secondary (MacKinnon 2006b). A lower figure is presented by McLeod (2003: 125).
[9] *Les langues régionales appartiennent au patrimoine de la France.*

survival of Breton are the Young (*Ofis Ar Brezhoneg*, 2003; see also Hoaré 1999), albeit the overall number of Breton learners remains small. It has now become socially acceptable to learn Breton. Most people recognise it as a proper language that can be used outside the privacy of one's home and in 2001, 92% of the Breton population wished it would survive (Broudic n.d.).

2.2   The growing number of immersion schools/units

The statutory support for minority languages and their increased presence in public bodies represent a positive step in language maintenance policy. The aim of language planning (LP) is to provide access to Gaelic and Breton language and culture, to encourage the minority language speakers to develop and use their language and to increase the number of speakers. One of the LP successes highlighted by the latest census for Gaelic has been the increase of school-aged children learning Gaelic. This increase can be attributed to the education-focused policies aimed at revitalisation. The situation is mirrored for Breton.

The overall number of pupils receiving a minority language education is increasing. In Scotland and in Brittany, bilingual programmes are attracting more and more parents as can be seen in Figures 1 and 2.
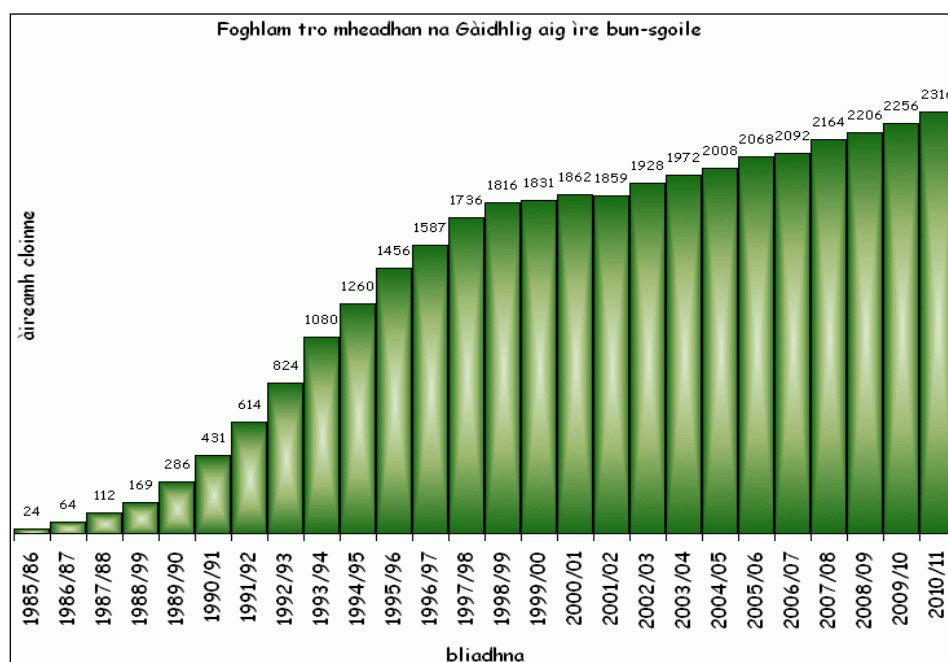

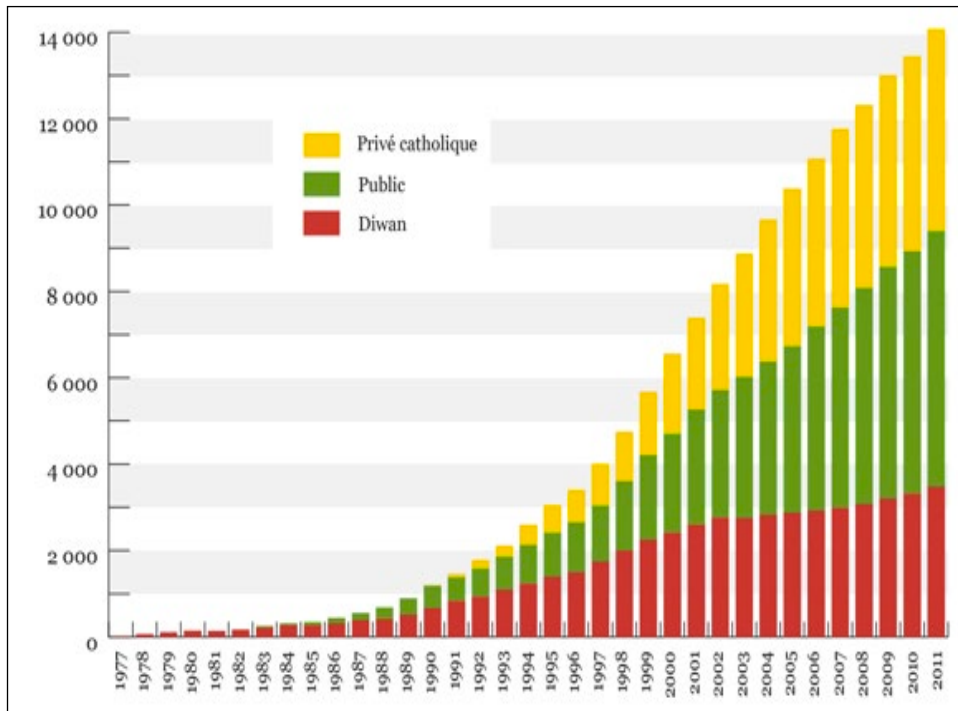**Figure 1 – Pupil Numbers in Gaelic-Medium Primary School Education (CnaG 2012)**

**Figure 2 – Number of Breton pupils in bilingual primary education
(Ofis Ar Brezhoneg 2012)**

Although an increasing number of speakers provides valuable data to assess the vitality of a minority language, one has also to consider the analysis of the social position, the attitudes and beliefs of people towards the minority language and its interpersonal use within the surrounding community. It is also important to identify and characterise those attracted by the revitalisation programmes, in order to understand the reasons for their commitment and their aims for the future of the language.

3   Minority language education: a solution to language shift?

Many researchers think that institutionalisation, greater exposure in the media and education are the best policies for revitalising the minority languages. Granting official status to the language allows the language to become a full working language, which in turn leads to more teaching provision, corpus development, bilingual road signs, etc. The policies that follow from an official recognition help to set up provisions at institutional

level for minority language speakers. This also helps to promote the visibility of the language and give it a new modern appealing image. The intention of these policies is to encourage people to transmit their language to the younger generations as well as to attract learners.

Researchers advocating official bilingualism and seeing it as the most effective revitalisation strategy tend to subscribe to a culturally orientated viewpoint, i.e. the respect for diversity and the nurturing of cultural identities. This approach is linked to the development of the cultural aspect of Human Rights in Conventions, Charters and Declarations. These documents are there to guarantee respect and tolerance, to give credit to cultural conceptions and maintain cultural differences.

From a linguistic and humanitarian point of view, all languages are equal. However, from a social, economic and political perspective, some languages are perceived to be more valuable than others. Preserving and maintaining a language is more difficult than it appears because a language is tied to its speakers. Minority language speakers are constantly reassessing (not necessarily in a conscious manner) their situation in relation to wider society, their social opportunities and restructuring their language resources accordingly. Language is part of a society, evolving alongside economic, social and institutional parameters. It is a collective product that has no dynamic existence outside of language communities.

For language planners, bilingual programmes may be the easiest, most practical and quantifiable way to instill or reinforce the minority language among young populations. Baker (2003: 101) believes that bilingual education provides a way to plan when intergenerational transmission is failing: 'where there is such a shortfall in language maintenance in families, education becomes the principal means of producing more language speakers'. This is also Dorian's (2004: 455-6) view: 'in particular immersion schooling, for the relatively rapid multiplicative effect it can produce: a handful of dedicated and well-trained teachers…can produce scores of new minority-language speakers over a period of several years'. MacKinnon (2006a: 52) as well thinks that '[e]ducation may provide an effective means of reproducing the language in the younger generation even though its position in the home is weakening' (see also MacCaluim 2007).

Fifteen years ago, during my first inquiry, I too believed that minority language medium education was the solution to language shift. Like many researchers, I was a fervent 'supporter[] of bilingual education,

ethnic diversity, minority language rights and cultural pluralism. [I was] convinced of the correctness of [my] beliefs' (*adapted from* Baker 2001: 232). At that time, I was extremely upbeat about how the institutionalisation of Breton and its teaching would save the language.

However, the findings of that inquiry focusing on the parents who chose a Breton-medium education for their children disappointed me; no native Breton speakers had chosen to send their children to the Breton medium schools. Moreover, none of the surveyed households used Breton as a medium of communication. I realised that support for Breton education did not come from its core-speaking community. I also noticed the disparity between the positive attitude showed by the parents towards the Breton language and the lack of fluency in Breton of most of them.[10] Their enthusiasm did not lead them to learn the language beyond a basic level or use it within their household.

The parents rated the bilingual programmes highly. They were all delighted by the school experience. Listening to them during the fieldwork as they focused so much on the advantages their children could gain from learning a second language at a young age, i.e. early bilingualism, made me question how high a priority the minority language *per se* was for the parents. In general, bilingual schools have a reputation for achieving high academic standards, which is surely the primary aim of any school. Was the revitalisation of the Breton language a significant factor in the parents' choice or was the schools' academic reputation the main consideration? Was the situation mirrored for other minority languages, e.g. Gaelic?

At that point, I started to consider that the decision to send children to a bilingual school could be polysemic and arise for reasons beyond the language planners' intentions. It may not be primarily motivated by language maintenance and other more sociological factors are needed to understand parental choice.

The provision of minority language schools is intended to educate, maintain and/or revitalise minority languages. Its main aim is to help children to become fully bilingual, either by expanding and reinforcing a grasp of the language for the native speakers or by enabling children who are majority speakers to become fully fluent in the minority language. It has also been praised for its beneficial outcomes on the child's intellectual capacities (Baker 1995, 2001, 2007; Cummins 1995, 2000; Hagège 1999;

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[10] '[A] disparity between expressed ideals and actual support' (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1998: 67).

Dalgadian 2000; Wei 2000; Bialystok 2001). In the case of majority language children, medium or bilingual education represents an enrichment programme that can only add value to their development with no detrimental effect on the development of the majority language (McCarty 1997; Johnstone *et al* 1999; Cummins 2003; O'Hanlon *et al* 2010).

Whilst it sounds ideal, choosing this kind of education is not free from meaning. It is an objectified practice, which satisfies parental aspirations and concerns regarding their children's education and as such, it is informed by the parents' values and principles. 'Even when they [practices] give every appearance of disinterest because they escape the logic of 'economic' interest (in the narrow sense) and are oriented towards non-material stakes that are not easily quantified, as in…the cultural sphere of capitalist societies, practices never cease to comply with an economic logic' (Thompson 1991: 16) (see also Lamarre, 2003: 63).

The educational field is an area where such strategic and socially orientated choices can be witnessed, with many parents calculating and evaluating the best options for their children (Goldthorpe 1996). 'Elite schooling is…an effective means to store value, which can later be released as surplus meaning…cultural capital' (Ball, 2003: 86). Choosing a school represents an investment strategy with a long-term view of future benefits (Gewirtz *et al* 1995; Ball 2003; Power *et al* 2003). Schooling offers knowledge and skills, which in turn open opportunities for children. Obtaining these rewards usually guides the educational choices parents make for their children.

As a result of bilingual education, children have additive skills compared to others thanks to their parents' choice of a specialised trajectory. These languages are considered as valuable assets – especially when rare; moreover, they have the advantage of stretching pupils' attainment through bilingualism and they present a tactical value, by grouping good pupils together. In addition, the cultural element enriches the lives of the pupils.

Evaluating schools in order to select the best one for their children is facilitated when the parents are endowed with a high cultural, social and economic capital (see Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Several researchers acknowledged that this model of bilingual education attracts middle-class parents (Edwards 1994; Skutnabb-Kangas 1996; Ó Riagáin 1997; Willemyns 1997; Heller 1999a, 1999b, 2003; May 2008).

In this new light, choosing a school offering a bilingual education becomes an indicator of parental aspirations for their children and the educational interest could explain to some extent the reasons why so many parents are 'lobbying' for the development of minority language education.[11] Parental choice can be influenced by an array of reasons: cultural, social, psychological, etc. Re-identification with ethnic values or a positive attitude towards the language might go with the reactivation of the language. These markers do exist, but to interpret them as a sign of revival or revitalisation denotes a superficial reading of a deeply complex situation fraught with power struggles, class and confidence issues. The best way to understand what is at play is through a strong social framework in analysis and interpretation.

4   Issues arising
4.1   Learners and native speakers
Changes in legislation have resulted in an increased provision for the teaching of minority languages. These have also had a positive effect on the image of the languages resulting in 'green shoots' (MacKinnon 2004: 27) for the language. Recent figures for Gaelic and Breton show a rise in speakers in certain sections of the population: for instance, these languages appear to have regained some vitality among school-aged children and among urban dwellers. These increases mainly apply to secondary speakers of the language. The growing number of school learners provides a partial response to reversing language shift and it needs to be scrutinised.

Firstly, the increase in numbers of learners does not balance out the loss of Gaelic and Breton speakers through natural demography. Last year, at the start of the school year (2011), only 14,082 pupils were learning Breton in a bilingual primary school, representing hardly 1.6% of all Breton pupils. Gaelic adult learners rarely reach fluency. McLeod (2001: 19) estimated that only around 1500 learners reached fluency in Gaelic;

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[11] For Gaelic-medium education, see McLeod (2003: 3-4), Nisbet (2003: 49), Ward (2003: 45), Rogers and McLeod (2006: 368).
For Welsh-medium education, see Rawkins (1987), Baker (1997: 132).
For Irish-medium education, see Ó Riagáin (1997: 248-9), Hickey (1997: 17).
For Basque-medium education, see Garmendia and Agote (1997: 101).
For French-medium education in Canada, see Swain (1997: 262), Erfurt (1999: 63), Heller (2003: 86).
For Quechua-medium education, see Hornberger and King (1996: 432).

MacCaluim (2007) believed the figure to be '700 fluent learners *in total*' (*emphasis original* 231).

Secondly, while the gradual retreat of Gaelic still continues further westwards and northwards, Gaelic has recently gained some speakers especially among the 3-15 year old age group, in Lowland urban areas known as non-traditional Gaelic-speaking. This contradictory situation is described by MacNiven (General Register Office for Scotland, 2005b) as follows: 'Gaelic is thriving as well as declining…Gaelic is declining in its traditional heartlands, particularly in the Western Isles, but growing in many other parts of Scotland – and among young people'. It has to be emphasised that this geolinguistic redistribution of speakers concerns mostly children who are secondary Gaelic speakers receiving GME. So far, the revitalisation of Gaelic appears to have taken place outside the Gaelic heartlands with learners and school-aged children.

Other issues regarding those parents more likely to choose a GME are puzzling; Stockdale *et al* (2003) have observed that it was especially parents with high levels of qualification who selected a Gaelic-medium education (see also MacNeil 1993: 25). In addition, they noted that 'the more Gaelic the area, the less likely children [were] to attend Gaelic-medium' (Stockdale *et al* 2003: 8). They also commented on the 'strong antipathy from first generation non Gaelic-speakers to Gaelic-medium' (Stockdale *et al* 2003: 9). This pattern was also noted by McLeod (2003: 12). In Edinburgh, McLeod (2005) found that '86% of the fluent native speakers with children of school age did not have them enrolled in GME' (v). Rogers and McLeod (2006: 367) questioned the reasons why in the Western Isles only 25% of the primary children were enrolled in Gaelic-medium units. Similar points have been highlighted in Brittany by (McDonald 1989; Humphreys 1991; INSEE 2003; Guéguen 2006).

In Brittany, the steps towards revitalising Breton are equally fraught with difficulties. Firstly, a recurrent theme in studies about Breton is the distance of standardised Breton from the varieties used daily by first language speakers (amongst many: Timm 1980; Le Berre and Le Dû 1997; McDonald 1989; Kuter 1989; M.C. Jones 1998b; Le Dû 1999; Romaine 2000).

This distance with spoken varieties means that most native speakers do not feel comfortable with the taught Breton standard. Not only do they perceive their own variety to be '*du mauvais Breton*' (bad Breton) (M.C. Jones 1995: 430; Wmffre 2004: 168), but they also feel that it sounds too

remote from their own local vernacular.[12] Alhough, German (2007) found that 'native speakers tend to exaggerate problems of intercomprehension between dialect areas' (153).[13]

Another difficulty is that *néo-breton* speakers and traditional speakers are divided 'in terms of their geographical location, social backgrounds, the nature of the variety they speak and even their reasons for speaking it' (M.C. Jones 2000: 186). Kuter (1989: 84) also noticed the same opposition: '[i]t is ironic…that it has been members of the upper and middle-classes, often learning Breton as a second language, who…promote the language, while rural native speakers have, on the whole, attempted to rid themselves of this language as part of a negative Breton identity' (see also Timm 1980). As Broudic (1995: 335 *my translation*) sees it, there is 'not only a hiatus, but a real fracture, between the Breton revival movement and the whole of the Breton population'[14].

Learners are interested in seeing the use of Breton extended to institutional levels, while the native rural speakers, although not necessarily against its use, do not value Breton as a useful language. Moreover, they would certainly not consider using it outside their close network of friends.

This shows how the diglossic position of the minority language is still embedded within the social and symbolic construction of the remaining first language speakers. For many native speakers of minority languages, a deeply ingrained mental representation links the majority language with an image of modernity and social promotion while the other language/s channeling identity is/are associated with a low market value and the past. People 'interpret their own language as socially different from the new norm' (Hartig 1985: 68). This distance, whilst perhaps not a sociolinguistic reality, is, however, perceived as a 'sociolinguistic barrier' (Grillo 1989: 200).[15]

Teaching the minority language at school undoubtedly boosts the number of speakers or potential speakers. It is critical that this increase is

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[12] This situation occurs frequently with a minority language in a diglossic position versus the taught standardised version (see Jaffe 1999: 276 for an informative and entertaining account about Corsican).

[13] This attitude has also been noted by King (2000: 117): 'speakers of threatened languages often tend to accentuate the differences between their variety and another'.

[14] 'non seulement un hiatus, mais une véritable fracture, entre le mouvement breton et la population bretonne prise dans son ensemble'.

[15] This is also Fishman's (1985: 94) view: ''objectively small differences' may yet have subjectively huge consequences and, indeed, be experienced by insiders as objectively huge'.

assessed within the reality of the social utilisation of the language, as this will set the context of language use and its real vitality in everyday sociocommunication (Mann 2000). This process represents a shift from a societal language transmission or socialisation to an individually-based acquired competence, which offers no guarantee of a social use of the language.

Proficiency in a language does not imply regular/active use of the learnt language in the community. Language instruction does not necessary lead to production or language retention and internalisation; there is no 'correlation between the amount of exposure to, and degree of proficiency in, L2' (UNESCO 2010a: 28). Many studies have shown evidence of a lack of actual use of the learnt language outside the school premises (amongst many: Genesee 1978, 1995; Harris and Murtagh 1999; Heller 1999a, 1999b, 2003; Mougeon and Beniak 1989; Jaffe 1999; Hamers and Blanc 2000; Clément and Gardner 2001; Harris, 2002). B.M. Jones (1992: 103) argues that 'high exposure to Welsh in the curriculum does not significantly raise performance of low users. That is, the curriculum cannot do the job which is fulfilled traditionally by a speech community' (see also Baker 2006). Research on Gaelic use found that knowing the language did not necessarily result in its use outside school (MacNeil and Stradling 2000; McLeod 2003; Morrison 2006; Müller 2006). Ward (2003) reports that even when children are fluent Gaelic speakers, their preferred language often remains English in the playground. Overall, interpersonal Gaelic use is also very low among children (Western Isles Language Plan Project, 2005: 21).

Edwards (2004: 11) also points to the inappropriateness of mixing people whose bilingualism results from upbringing with those who learnt the language at school because one is a case of individual bilingualism, whereas the other case is diglossia (see also Skutnabb-Kangas 1996; Hickey 2001; Wiley 2008).

Crucially, educational programmes still need to have the support of the minority language speakers in order to have any lasting impact on language revitalisation and provide a stable basis for the continuity of language transmission and spread. Language planners need to understand the social context within which language decline takes place and interpret carefully the growth of learners of minority languages. Increasingly favourable attitudes towards minority languages and an apparent growing number of speakers cannot be used as reliable predictors of the future of the language.

5   Some findings

5.1   The level of qualification of the Western Isles and Breton parents

Overall, as Figure 3 below shows, the parents were highly qualified with university or other secondary or tertiary degrees.
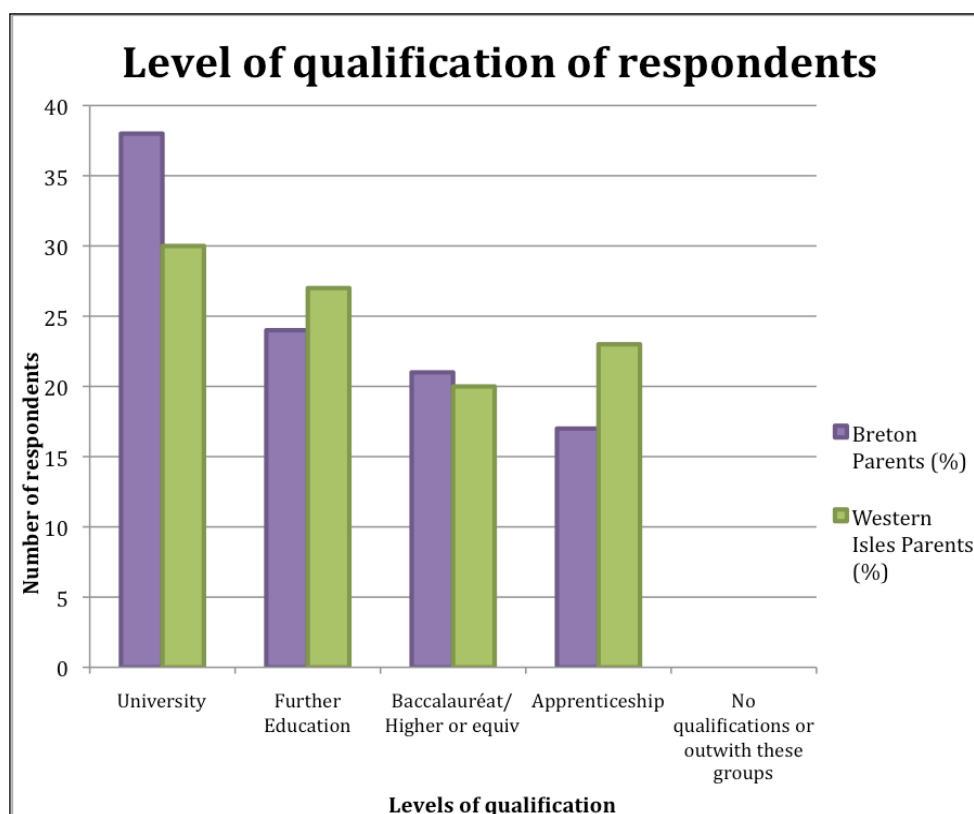

Figure 3 – Level of qualification of respondents (N of parents: 102)

To put this in context for the Western Isles and later for Brittany, a comparison of the respondents' education level with that of the local population (from the Census 2001 –output area specific to the selected fieldwork area; Table UV21: Qualifications) shows that proportionally, the level of education of the Western Isles parents was not representative of the local population (the scale is nearly in reverse order, see Figure 4). They were significantly more qualified compared to the local population. The parents without any qualifications were not represented in my sample.

Level of qualification of the Western Isles parents compared to 2001 Census data
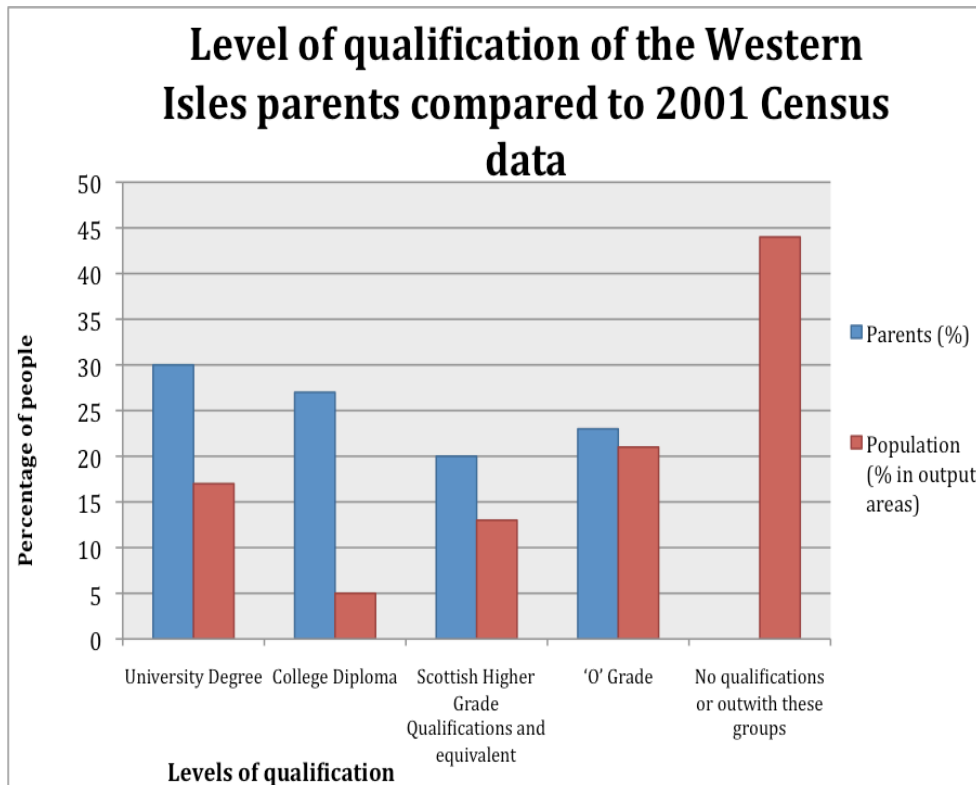
Figure 4 – Level of qualification of the Western Isles parents compared to 2001 Census data (N of parents: 44)

For Brittany, the findings were similar; Breton respondents were highly qualified. The comparison of their level of qualification with the rest of the population in Brittany also showed that proportionally respondents were more highly qualified than the population as a whole. None of the parents in this sample was without formal educational qualifications (See Figure 5).
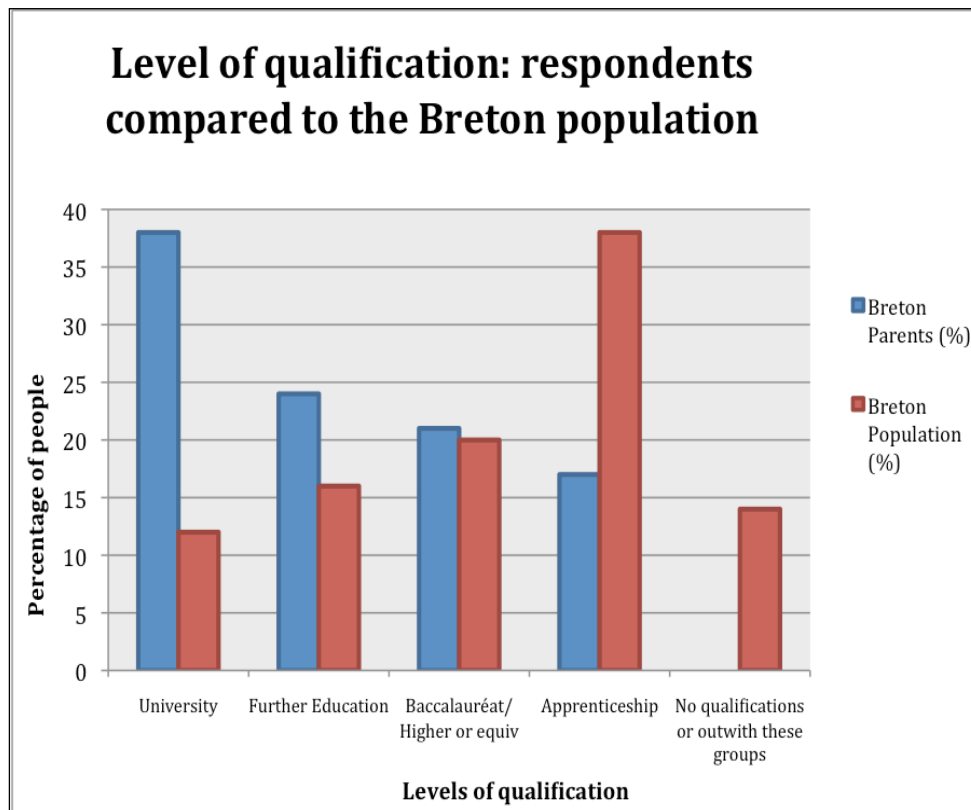
Figure 5 – Level of qualification of the Breton parents compared to the Breton population (N of parents: 58)
(Data for the level of qualification of the Breton population
from INSEE (2008) document)

In both areas, the findings appear to indicate that parents with a higher educational status were more inclined to choose the option of minority language medium education.

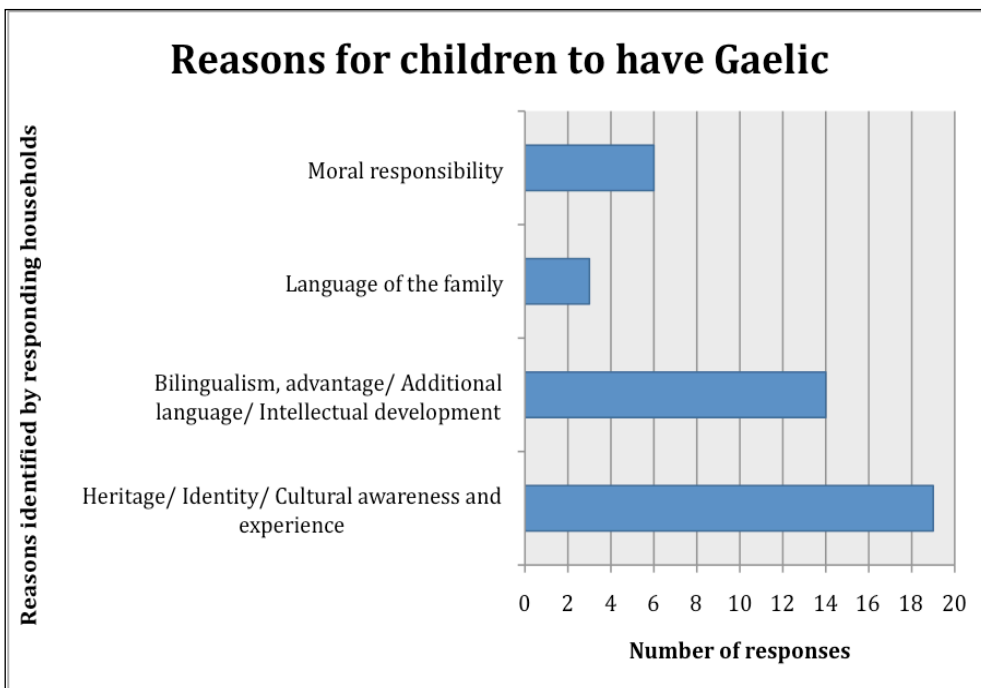### 5.2   Reasons for the school choice
The responses offered by parents regarding their reasons for their school choice can be classified as follows:

- the educational advantages (eg. the classroom conditions and school ethos);
- the cultural heritage and linguistic choice, the latter point being less frequently mentioned by both sets of parents.

In the Western Isles and especially in Brittany, for a majority of parents early bilingualism was the deciding factor for their choice. They all praised the intellectual benefits. For them, the intellectual stimulation develops children's cognitive abilities and predisposes them to acquire more knowledge. Some parents said: 'At that age, they are like sponges, they absorb anything'; 'It increases the connections in the brain and that's good for maths'; 'After my child will easily learn a third, a fourth, a fifth…well, plenty languages'.

Some parents thought that these schools were 'better than mainstream', they provided 'a superior education' because the curriculum was delivered through the medium of two languages and often had smaller classes.

The majority of parents linked their choice with heritage and identity in a general sense. For instance, they believed that such an education would strengthen their children's cultural roots and open up their curiosity to cultural differences. Only a few parents specifically mentioned the acquisition or reinforcement of the Gaelic or Breton language. (See Figures 6 and 7 below.)

Figure 6 – Reasons for children to have Gaelic
(N of responding households: 22; N of responses 42)
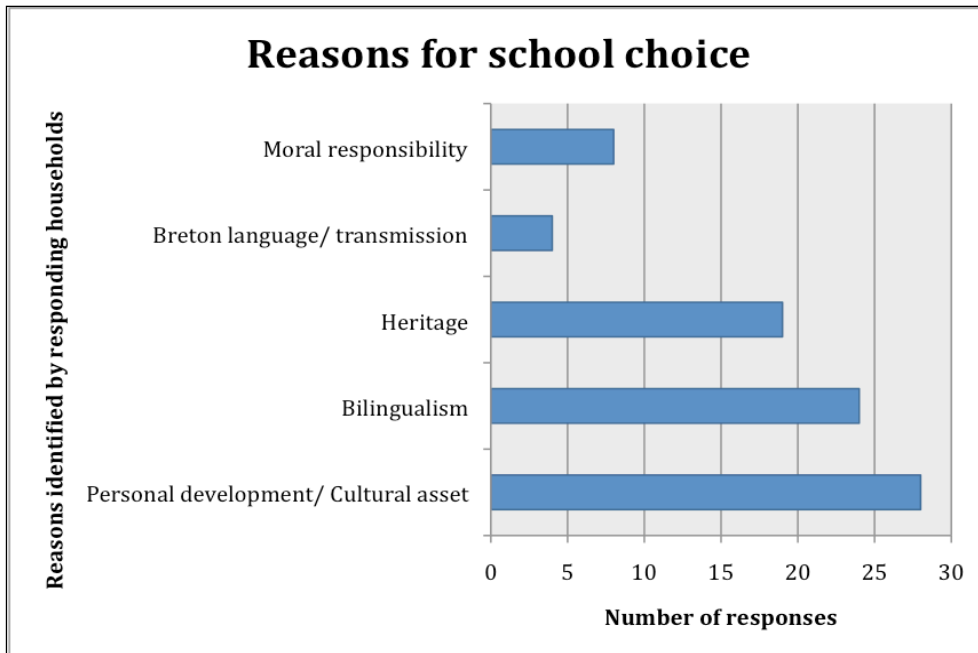
**Figure 7 – Breton parents and reasons for school choice
(N of responding households: 29; N of responses: 83)**

During the fieldwork, my impression was that these parents appeared to be very well-informed about educational practices and development. They were aware of the advantages early bilingualism is supposed to have on children, but the links to the minority language as a basis for their choice did not come across as a priority for many parents.

In fact, fairly often in Brittany, some parents were very open about the reasons guiding their choice. Some of the following quotes from parents are telling. 'For me, it's only for bilingualism without being necessarily focused on the language'; 'It's not for Breton in particular, but for the skill it brings'; 'In the private school up the road, it's Chinese, at Diwan, it's Breton, but I couldn't care less about the future of Breton; the important is to have cultural roots to go far.'

So, most of the parents seemed to be more interested in the educational advantages of a bilingual education and its potential benefits than in the language itself.

5.3   First language, language competence and language use

5.3.1   First language of the parents

Amongst the Western Isles parents, just under two fifths of the respondents had Gaelic as their first language, mainly fathers (see figure below).
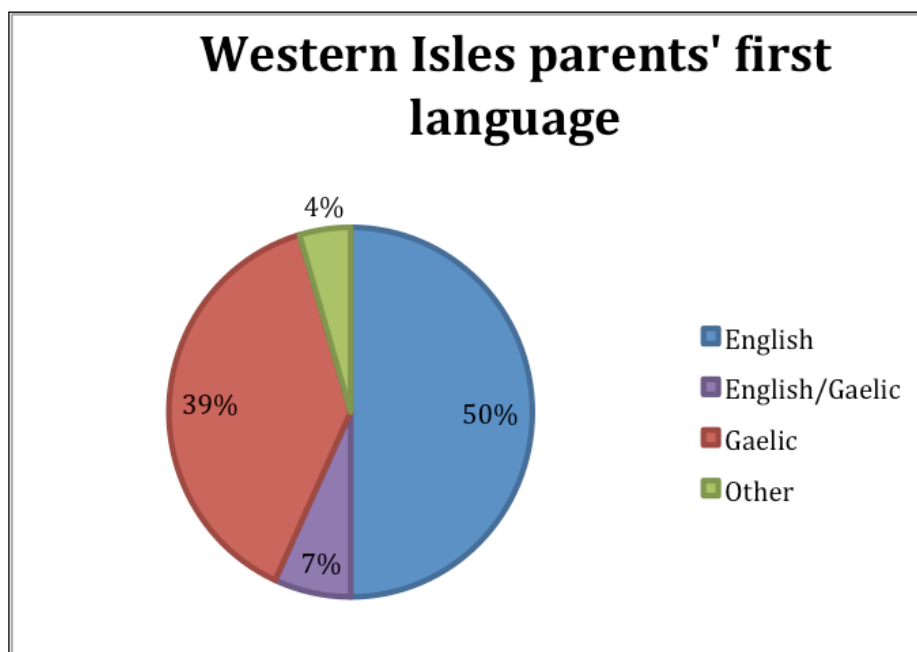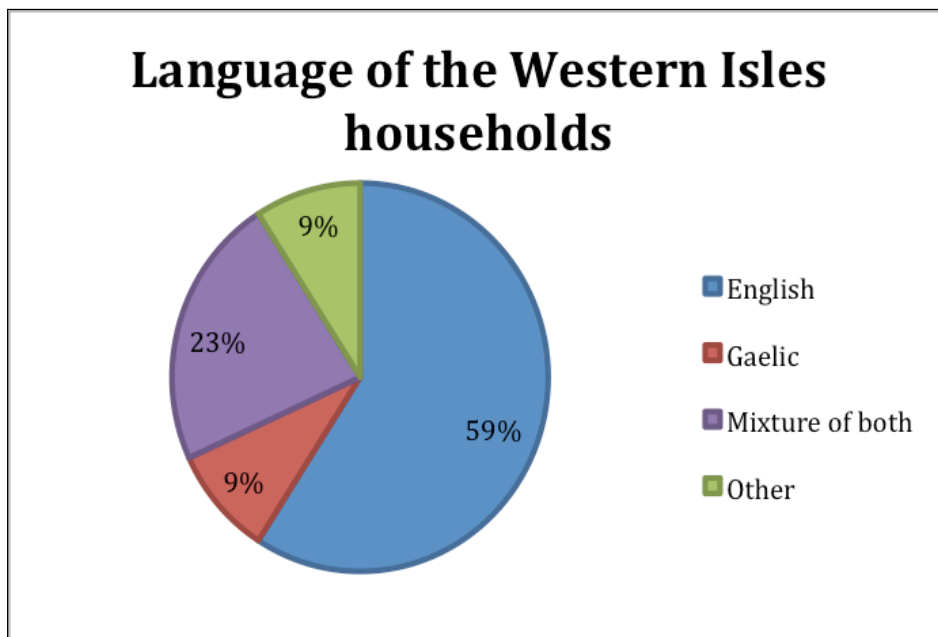

Figure 8 – First language of the Western Isles parents (N of parents: 44)

Just over half of the parents self-reported good understanding and speaking skills in Gaelic, here again fathers faring better. But overall, the respondents were far less proficient at reading and writing, showing the diglossic position of Gaelic and its use mainly as a low register.

This meant that slightly over half of the parents could use Gaelic as an everyday language; for the others, their language skills were too basic.

5.3.2   Language use within the household

Nearly a third of the households used Gaelic as an everyday language to some extent (see Figure 9 below).

**Figure 9: Language of the Western Isles households
(N of responding households: 22)**

In Brittany, hardly any parents were native Breton speakers (see Figure 10). In fact, only one parent had received Breton directly from his parents, for the other native Breton speaker, the transmission had been via her grandparents. Nearly half of the respondents had themselves at least one parent with skills in Breton[16]. This shows the collapse of the intergenerational transmission of Breton from grandparents to parents.

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[16] Many respondents who stated that their own parents were native speakers added that they were no longer necessarily fluent in Breton due to lack of practice.
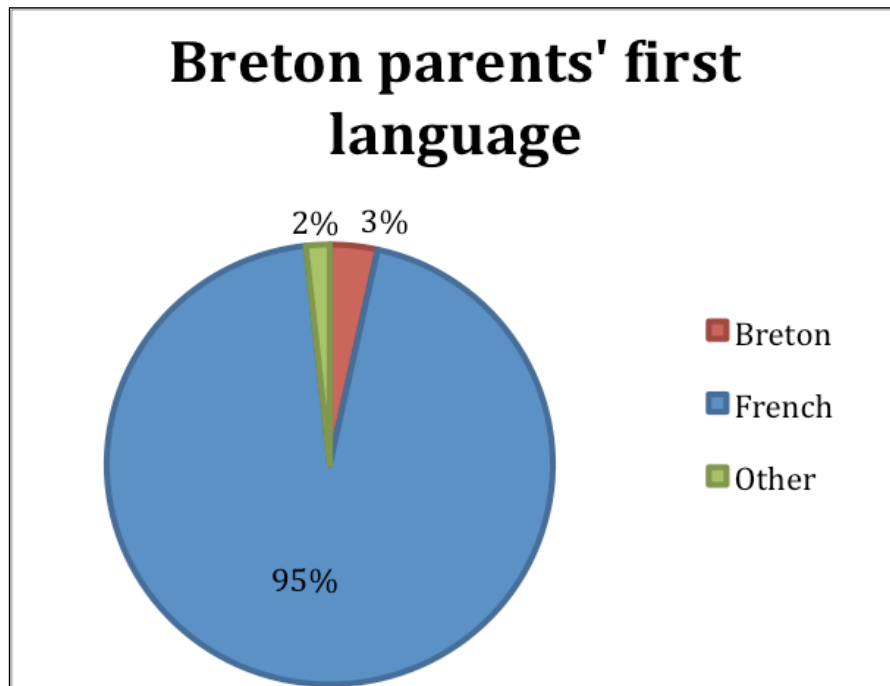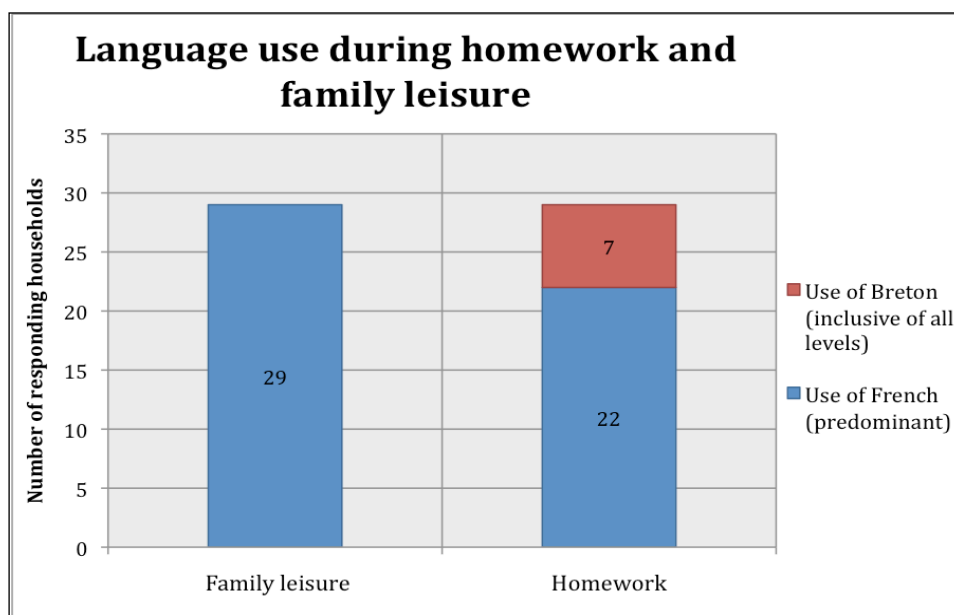
Breton parents' first language

2% 3%

Breton
French
Other

95%

Figure 10 – Breton parents' first language (N of respondents: 58)

In terms of their understanding and speaking skills**,** three quarters of the Breton parents could at best understand 'Restricted messages' in Breton. The level was even lower for the speaking skills. This meant that the parents rarely used Breton; their language skills were too basic. Virtually no Breton parents reported a sustained use of Breton at home.

Even during homework-time, the use of Breton by the respondents did not significantly increase, although a few families reported using 'Breton to some extent' (see Figure 11). When asked to describe their use of Breton, I realised that it was only set phrases or commands, which do not qualify as interactive language use. This figure also shows that the language used for leisure is French within all the households.

Despite their lack of Breton skills, the overwhelming majority (nine in 10 parents) had no intention of improving their Breton skills. This was also the case for the Scottish parents, even those with poor competence in Gaelic.

Figure 11 – Language use during homework and family leisure (N of responding households: 29)

5.3.3 Children's first language and language use according to parental evaluation

In the Western Isles, two thirds of children learnt Gaelic at nursery, while the others did so at home with their parents. The children who learnt Gaelic at home belonged to families where both parents as well as both sets of grandparents were native Gaelic speakers. Only these children used Gaelic as a vernacular with their relatives, especially with the older generations. (See Figure 12.)
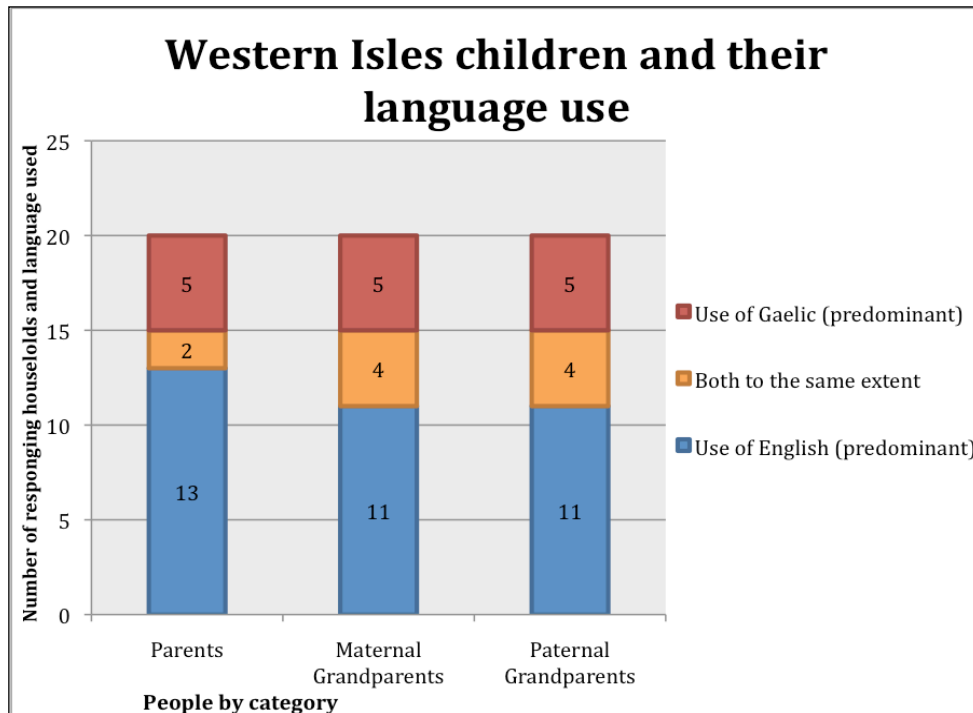
Figure 12 – Western Isles children and their language use with relatives according to parental evaluation (N of responding households: 22)

According to the parents' evaluation of their children's Gaelic language use, the children never use Gaelic within their own age group, which could be interpreted as the total collapse of Gaelic as a vernacular (see Figure13).
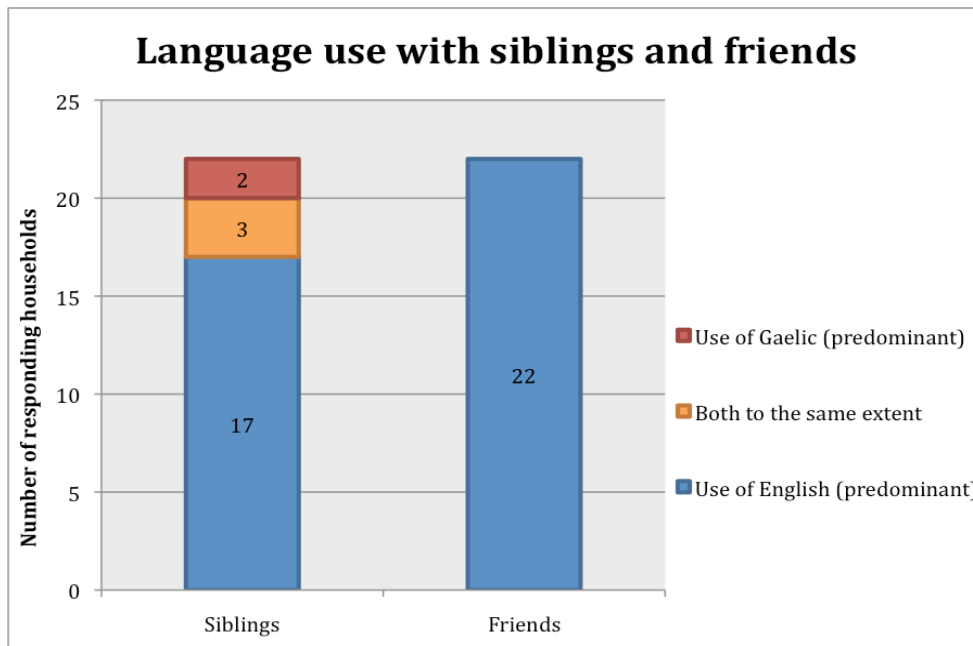
Language use with siblings and friends

Figure 13 – Western Isles children and their language use with siblings and friends according to parental evaluation (N of responding households: 22)

For the Breton children, the overwhelming majority used French to interact with the people close to them. No use of Breton was reported for the variables 'Siblings' or 'Friends'. (See Figure 14.) Children may well be proficient in Breton in the classroom, however they are not active speakers outside the teacher-pupil relationship.
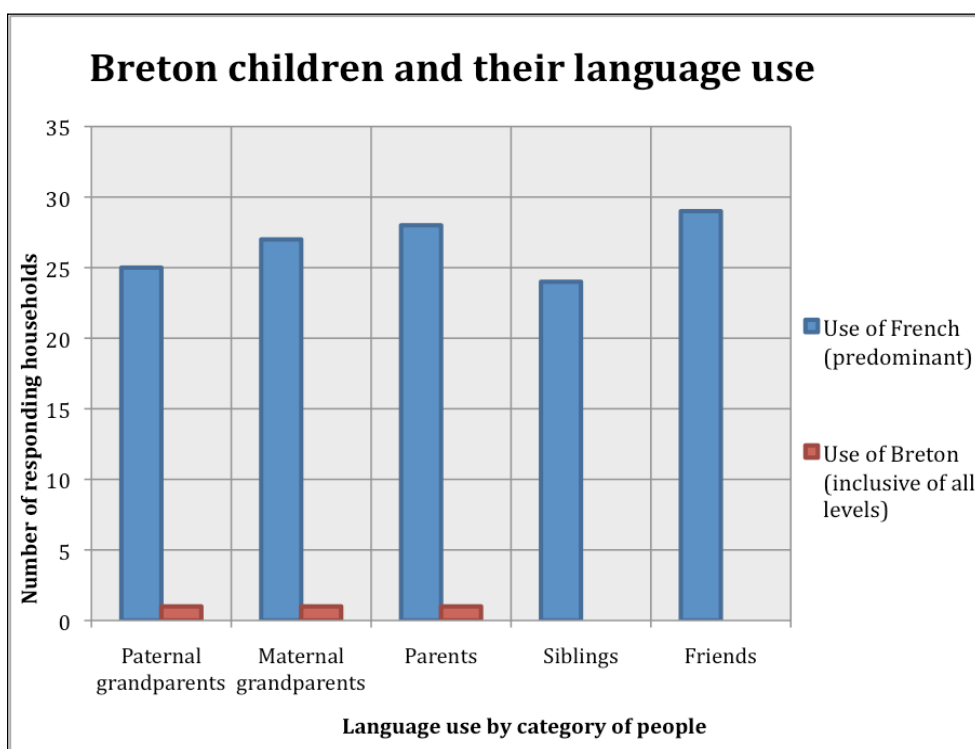
Breton children and their language use

**Figure 14 – Breton children and their language use according to
parental evaluation (N of responding households: 29)**

6   Conclusion

Despite the fact that the languages were at different stages in the process of
language shift, strong common themes emerged regarding the situations of
Gaelic and Breton.

The findings show that parents of medium education pupils are
highly qualified, aware of educational developments and keen to offer the
best education available to their children within an excellent school
environment. The additional skill of bilingualism is desired for the
perceived benefits to their children's intellectual development; it also brings
a sympathetic cultural awareness to the children's education. The parents in
this case were mainly seeking additive bilingualism with the aim of
enrichment.

For the overwhelming majority of parents, there was no expectation
that Breton or Gaelic would be the main language of the home or the
vernacular used by children among themselves. This suggests that knowing

the minority language does not lead to its use outside the formal setting of the classroom and that minority language medium schools do not provide a way to produce active speakers while intergenerational transmission is failing.

So, it seems that despite bilingual provisions, language revitalisation on a societal basis does not take place. The minority language continues to recede from familial and social networks, even though its use is increasing in more formal domains (work, public services, education, etc.). Revitalisation requires more than institutional recognition and language skills retention. Learners need to add the language to their repertoire and internalise the language as a vernacular through integration in meaningful and durable networks or communities. These provide opportunities for interpersonal minority language use beyond the classroom environment and thus the language becomes more than an individually-based competence.

Parental preference for bilingual education in order to access what they believe to be better schools represents an unintended consequence for language planners. Attributing more prestigious functions to a minority language may only superimpose measures on a diglossic situation with little effect on the reversal of language shift. Drafting effective language revitalisation policies requires a deep understanding of the attitudes ordinary people have towards their native language and of the political and social context within which the process of language shift takes place. Unless this understanding is achieved, a growing number of minority language medium schools or units will only provide a partial and short-lived solution to the decline of the language, resulting in a superficial bilingualism without any real impact at community levels.

APPENDIX 1
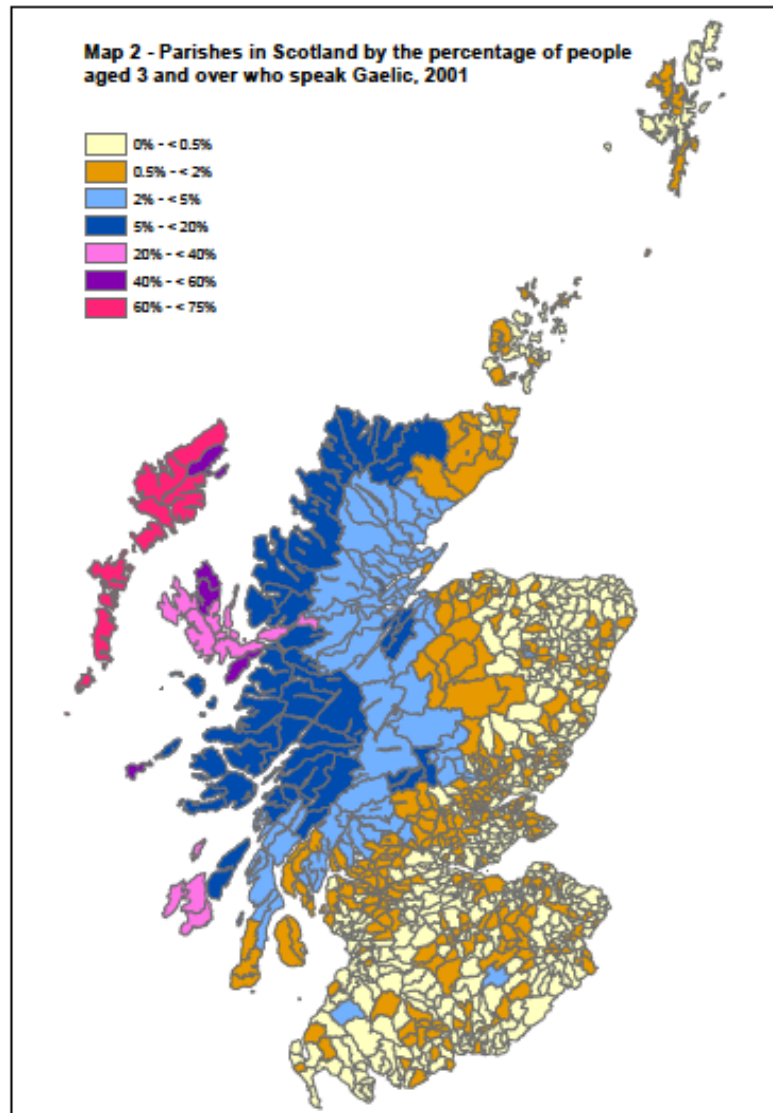**PERCENTAGE OF GAELIC SPEAKERS BY AREA IN SCOTLAND (2001)**

Figure 15 – Parishes in Scotland by the percentage of people aged 3 and over who spoke Gaelic in 2001 (General Register Office for Scotland, 2005a)

APPENDIX 2
GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION OF FINISTERE AND PERCENTAGE
OF BRETON SPEAKERS

Figure 16 – Finistère within Brittany regional territory
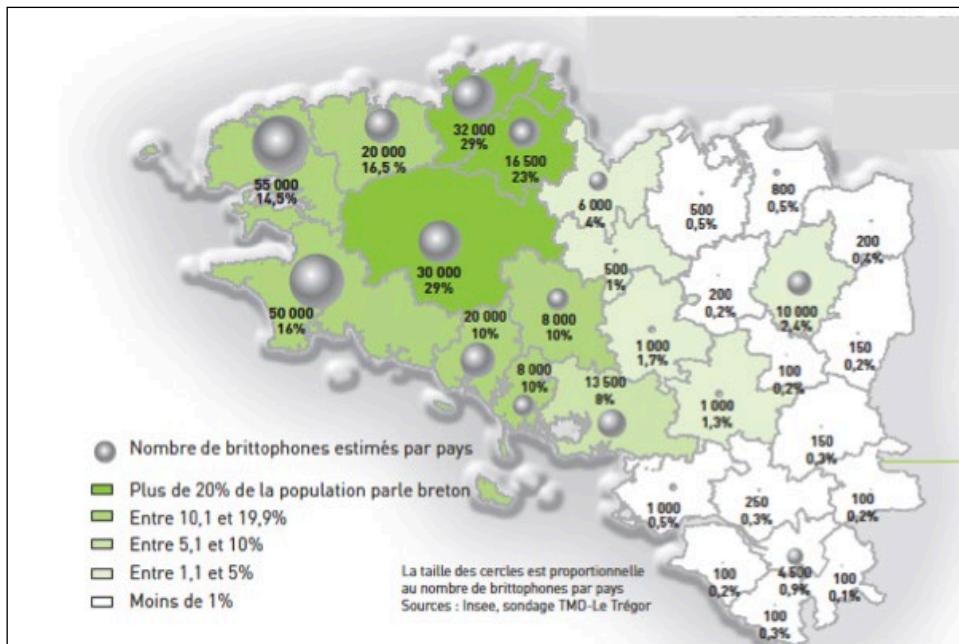**(Wikipedia, 2012)**

Figure 17 – Areas in Brittany by estimated percentage of population
who speak Breton (*Ofis Ar Brezhoneg*, 2007: 13)

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