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Review of *Language and the State: Revitalization and Revival in Israel and Eire*, edited by Sue Wright; *The Language Question in the Census of Population*, by Mícheál Ó Gliasáin

Nancy C. Dorian  
Bryn Mawr College

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NANCY C. DORIAN

SUE WRIGHT (ed.), *Language and the state: Revitalization and revival in Israel and Eire*. (*Current Issues in Language and Society*, 2:3.) Clevedon (UK) & Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, 1996. Pp. 75. Hb \$59.00.

MÍCHEÁL Ó GLIASÁIN, *The language question in the census of population / Ceist na teanga sa daonáireamh*. (Research report / Tuarascáil Taighde, 21.) [Dublin]: Linguistics Institute of Ireland / Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann, 1996. Pp. 33, 33. Pb IR£ 5.00.

Reviewed by NANCY C. DORIAN  
Depts. of German & Anthropology  
Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, PA 19010  
dorian@henry.bowdoin.edu

*Language and the state* contains two formal papers, plus the questions and answers that followed each. The occasion was a Current Issues in Language and Society seminar held at the University of Birmingham in September 1995; the speakers were Bernard Spolsky of the Language Policy Research Center, Bar-Ilan University, Israel (“Conditions for language revitalization: A comparison of the cases of Hebrew and Maori”), and Muiris Ó Laoire of the Irish Language Department, University College Galway, Ireland (“An historical perspective on the revival of Irish outside the Gaeltacht, 1880–1930, with reference to the revitalization of Hebrew”). Perhaps because Israel and Ireland constitute a rare pair of cases in which the energies and resources of the state have been devoted to the promotion of a language spoken by relatively few at the time of the state’s official formation, the volume’s title is framed in terms of those two cases alone. But this seriously downplays the value of Spolsky’s discussion of Maori revitalization efforts, which greatly enhances the book’s contribution, and in fact makes this a book that no one deeply concerned with small-language revitalization efforts should miss.

Spolsky uses the term “revitalization” in the literal sense, to indicate restoration of vitality to a language that has lost it or is losing it – in particular, multiplicative restoration via renewed transmission of the language within the home. Because very low-vitality languages typically do not have enough fluent native speakers left within the child-bearing age range to produce by themselves any real increase in new speakers, non-native speakers will necessarily have to play a significant role in transmission in order for the language to thrive. Spolsky sees revitalization as a special case of L2 learning, in which parents or other significant caretakers face a decision about speaking what is for them a second language (or third, or at any rate not primary) to the children in their care. Like other L2 learners, these strategically placed adults are subject, on the one hand, to often conflicting demands of instrumental or pragmatic factors, and on the other hand, to ideological or affective factors (Spolsky also uses the term “spiritual”, not out of place here). The adults’ L2 choice does not, in revitalization settings, enjoy instrumental advantages; hence ideological and affective factors have to be es-

pecially strong in order for that choice to prevail. The adults must also have sufficient confidence in their own success as L2 learners to venture to use the learned language to their infant children. Spolsky looks at the Hebrew and Maori cases with a view to determining what circumstances can be effective in bringing such a choice about.

In New Zealand, language shift had proceeded so strongly in the course of the 20th century that by the 1970s Maori had been all but replaced by English as the primary language of socialization in Maori homes. In response to the threat of massive language loss among the rising generations, Maori leaders at the beginning of the 1980s launched the *kohanga reo* ('language nest') program of pre-school centers staffed by fluent speakers of Maori. With almost 500 centers in operation by 1987, a community that had been nearly bereft of child speakers was soon sending children bilingual in Maori and English on into *kura kaupapa Maori* ('Maori philosophy schools'), in which the curriculum is Maori and the instruction is given in Maori. In the meantime, the position of Maori in the country as a whole was strengthened politically and legally by a 1986 court decision that resulted in Maori being declared an official language of New Zealand, in keeping with British treaty obligations dating from 1840.

The growth in knowledge of the Maori language among ethnically Maori young people, within a span of less than two decades, is stunning simply in a statistical sense. A handful of children under ten years of age were thought to speak fluent Maori in the late 1970s, while most of their age-mates were monolingual in English; by the early 1990s, 3,000 children a year were emerging from *kohanga reo* centers with some knowledge of Maori, and many of them were passing on into programs that either offered Maori as a subject or were taught partly or wholly through Maori. However, school-based transmission of an L2 poses certain problems, no less when the language is ancestral than when it is not, especially when many of the instructors in newly established schools are themselves L2 learners. Children tend to use among themselves, whenever they can, the language in which they are already more proficient; and teachers sometimes resort to the better-understood language in order to clarify instructional material, even when the language of instruction is otherwise the target language. Teachers also have to decide how firmly they can afford to insist that pupils reply in the target language, with grammatical accuracy – lest they discourage children from participating, or diminish the children's pleasure or interest in the learning process and in the target language itself. Characteristic errors of L2 learners, conspicuous in even the best immersion-schooling outcomes, can be dishearteningly persistent across not just the primary-school years, but the secondary-school years as well (see Bernhardt 1992 for general discussion of many of these issues). Critical, in terms of revitalization in Spolsky's sense, is a willingness among L2 learners – both children acquiring Maori in school, and those among their parents who acquired Maori outside the home – to use Maori outside formal learning contexts. Some parents are indeed making that effort; but schoolchildren, according to what Spol-

sky was told on his most recent visit (1995), have not yet begun to use Maori informally with one another outside the classroom.

The Maori revitalization process is young, however, and still very much in progress. Spolsky describes the striking degree to which Maori classrooms, in state-supported but Maori-controlled programs, have been redefined as Maori space. Not only is the language of instruction Maori, but the decoration is Maori art and carving, and admission of visitors is conducted entirely according to Maori traditions for the greeting and reception of guests. Given what has been accomplished in less than two decades, genuine revitalization – including a breakthrough into vernacular use, and ordinary intergenerational transmission in the home – is still an envisionable outcome.

The revitalization of Hebrew, which had never passed out of knowledge but only out of vernacular use, is a more obscure process in its particulars than many suppose, and a less obvious outcome than is often imagined. A decision to teach Hebrew in Hebrew, i.e. via the direct method, was taken at one school in Jerusalem in 1883. As other schools followed this example, some came to teach other subject matter, and eventually all subjects, through Hebrew as well. Hebrew-language preschools and kindergartens sprang up at the turn of the century, and in 1903 the Hebrew Teachers Association accepted Hebrew as the medium of instruction in their schools. On the evidence of various accounts, however, the outcome of this L2 schooling showed the usual limitations: Both teachers and pupils spoke less than fully fluent Hebrew; graduates stopped speaking Hebrew after they left school; and even ideological enthusiasts had difficulty conversing in Hebrew when they were much more at home in other languages.

A new wave of immigration in the first and second decades of the 20th century brought to Palestine more Eastern European Jews, who had stronger educational backgrounds and notable ideological intensity. Among small groups of these immigrants, it seems, Hebrew was first successfully used for daily-living purposes. Use of Hebrew for general education also increased, and the city of Tel Aviv in particular emerged as an urban center in which Hebrew was used for all public business. Spolsky estimates that the initial thrust toward revitalization of Hebrew took place over 20 to 25 years. There were still obstacles to be overcome after that time (e.g. the rival claims of Yiddish, French, and German as potential vernaculars), and there was still much to be done to make Hebrew a fully developed and universally spoken modern language; thus he reckons the time-span for the fuller process of revitalization as 40 years.

In trying to assess the likelihood that the Maori revitalization process can reach a successful outcome in New Zealand, as Hebrew revitalization did in Palestine, Spolsky looks for signs that the strength of Maori ideology and cultural motivation is sufficient to lead educated Maori speakers to shift to regular use of Maori, in spite of the fact that they control it less well than English. He finds encouragement in the fact that the *kohanga reo* movement grew out of the community and has “constantly shied away from too cosy a relationship with gov-

ernment" (22), and in the fact that the Maori have insisted on keeping control of curriculum development. He considers that success will require opting out of the New Zealand mainstream, as well as a commitment to the Maori language, and he takes two developments in particular as positive signs: (a) insistence on treating Maori classrooms as distinctively Maori space; and (b) rapid development of the *kura kaupapa Maori* as Maori institutions, based on Maori ethical and philosophical belief and practice. His assumption is that what have been called "top down" efforts – those initiated and sponsored by governments – are less likely to succeed than is "the activity of minority ethnic-based ideologies working to establish new identities" (26).

Muiris Ó Laoire, considering the beginnings of Irish revivalist hopes and intentions in his lecture, finds that the ideological leaders of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were not always clear about, or in agreement about, what was to be attempted and how to go about it. At any rate, none expected or wished to displace English in Ireland; and all favored the Irish literary revival and "stressed the value of Irish as a means of remaining in communion with the past and as a way of counteracting the stresses engendered by modernisation" (55). The Gaelic League, spearhead of Irish-language promotion efforts, enjoyed real success as a cultural movement, but its success came among middle-income groups; among the masses, where economic pressures were severe and necessarily stood foremost, cultural nationalism had no appeal.

In the years leading up to independence, however, the notion of an Irish Ireland had gained favor, in tandem with opposition to all things British. More faith was placed in the efficacy of Irish-language education, in the newly independent state, than the Gaelic League founders had ever believed was warranted. The schools were given the responsibility for producing Irish speakers without reference to language use in the home or the neighborhood, on the assumption that knowledge of Irish would lead to use of Irish. As in Palestine, the primary-school teachers who were to inculcate the L2 were themselves seldom adequately prepared for the job; perhaps only 10 percent had qualifications in Irish. Teachers complained of the excessive burdens placed on them by reliance on school transmission; they also complained of a lack of clear direction, since no policy was articulated about ultimate goals, i.e. whether societal bilingualism or a shift to Irish monolingualism was the intended outcome for the independent state. From 1922 on, all national schools were instructed to teach Irish or to use it as a medium of instruction for at least half an hour a day. Some schools moved further, to an immersion program, but at no time did more than 12 percent of pupils nationwide experience immersion schooling in Irish. Results were disappointing. Throughout the 1920s the Department of Education reported discouraging results from school programs outside the official Gaeltacht areas. Long-term state policy remained unclear, and no preschool component was added to help in the transition from monolingual homes to schools where Irish instruction was introduced. The Irish language gained in status, because of school adoption, but it did not gain in

popular appeal. Ó Laoire points to the alienation of the general population from the cultural nationalism model that had come to the fore among the leadership, and to the resultant disjunction between school and home in the matter of language use.

One other early language-planning initiative is discussed in Ó Laoire's paper: an attempt to create Gaeltachtaí (Irish-speaking districts) in the east by moving Irish-speaking families from the west to designated locations on the other side of the country. Land was in short supply in the west, while fluent Irish speakers were in short supply in the east. During the 1930s, Irish-speaking families were moved to three locations in County Meath (the county adjacent to Dublin). In the case of Ráth Cairn, settled by 182 people from 27 Connemara families in 1935, the experiment was successful, in that the inhabitants of the community are still Irish-speaking several generations later (see Ó Conghaile 1992 for details of the settlement of Ráth Cairn). But in the cases of Baile Ghib (373 people, representing something like 50 families) and Allenstown (the smallest of the experimental settlements), Irish was not maintained. Ó Laoire points out that the settlers at Ráth Cairn all spoke a single dialect of Irish, whereas the Baile Ghib settlers came from a variety of different western counties speaking mutually unintelligible Irish dialects, so that English was their natural lingua franca. Allenstown was simply too small; its settlers were quickly assimilated. None of the deliberately created eastern Gaeltachtaí had the effect expected by the language planners, who had supposed that natural home use of Irish would spread outward from them into surrounding eastern districts.

As in Palestine, some individual families with strong socio-political ideology were early and persistent in attempting to adopt the ancestral language for home use, and in attempting to forge links with like-minded families. As in Palestine, this aspect of the early attempts at revitalization is poorly documented. Ó Laoire is now engaged in studying surviving members of such "all-Irish" families; but he notes that the Irish home-language efforts outside the Gaeltachtaí were scattered, and they received little support from a government that failed to see the importance of intergenerational transmission to revitalization.

The chief weakness of this valuable little book appears in the discussion sections, where important issues are briefly raised but then quickly dropped as participants raise new questions. Of course, this reflects the reality of such post-presentation discussions, but it leaves the reader wishing that each author had been invited to write a postscript, commenting on issues mentioned in the discussion that especially merited exploration and expansion. For example, there is some brief discussion after the Spolsky talk of the importance of developing in the ancestral language a "youth culture" that can make the ancestral identity attractive to young people who move otherwise in a general culture based on another, more accessible language. (There is very brief mention of the current growth of such a Welsh-language youth culture in Wales.) This strikes me as a

potentially key element in successful revitalization, and I would certainly have welcomed further exploration of the theme. As another example, the intellectual middle class is identified, at one or two points in the discussion, as a typical source of revitalization enthusiasm, while the bourgeois and the upper class are recognized as the usual promoters of linguistic nationalism. But one participant points to the very significant difference between Eire, where the educated middle class is indeed a source of support for Irish-medium schools, and Northern Ireland, where support for Irish-medium schools comes very much from the working class – and, one might add, where an unusually successful L2 home-transmission effort was mounted among families in which the fathers' Irish was learned in prison (see Maguire 1990). These contrary but realistic observations raise the question of whether favorable treatment (up to and including state support) or unfavorable treatment (up to and including state suppression) is more likely to further revitalization efforts among a particular ethnicity, and under what sorts of conditions either policy is likely to have that effect.

Many questions are left barely explored or still unasked at the conclusion of Wright's slender volume, but it remains an exceptionally valuable contribution to the literature of language revitalization. Why and how individuals make the difficult but crucial passage from L2 learner to parental transmitter of an ancestral language within the home is inadequately documented and poorly understood at present, but some important facets of what is currently known about these questions appear in this little book. It will repay the attention of anyone interested in the subject.

Mícheál Ó Gliaáin's research report deals with Ireland alone, but it is of potential interest to any researcher faced with the necessity of relying on national census publications for language data. The interpretation of census inquiries into respondents' knowledge of languages has always been problematic. There seems to be no acceptably brief formulation of any such inquiry that is altogether unambiguous; and successive reformulations, in attempts to eliminate each newly recognized ambiguity, succeed chiefly in making the results of successive census inquiries incomparable with one another.

Ireland has, on the one hand, the boon that census inquiry into knowledge of Irish dates back to 1851; and on the other hand, the disadvantage that the census inquiry has appeared in five different forms, taking only the English-language version into consideration, between 1851 and 1991. From 1926 on, the Census Language Question (CLQ) has been provided in Irish as well as in English, and the Irish versions of the CLQ have shown still more fluctuation than the English versions. The Irish record of census language inquiry is uniquely continuous for Europe, Ó Gliaáin notes, and perhaps for the world. Belgium included a language question in its census five years before such a question was asked in Ireland, but because of persistent controversy it dropped that question after 1947.

Switzerland included a question on the language of the locality as early as 1850, but it first framed the question in terms of individual language knowledge in 1860. Austria and Finland first included a language question in 1880, India and Scotland in 1881, and Wales and the US in 1891. Canada's original census inquiry was into ethnic origin, in 1871; the first specific question on language knowledge came only in 1901.

For those who take an interest in the fortunes of Irish as a state-promoted "minority language" within an independent political territory that officially favors its increased use, Ó Gliaáin's chapters comparing the results of the CLQ with other survey measures of knowledge of Irish, and evaluating the CLQ as a measure of ability in spoken Irish, will be the chief attractions of the report. Thanks to state sponsorship of Irish in Ireland and a corresponding availability of funding for various sorts of surveys, there is a considerable array of measures other than the CLQ that assess citizens' knowledge of Irish. There have been three language surveys conducted by the Market Research Bureau of Ireland, two by the Linguistics Institute of Ireland, and several others undertaken by various official bodies, all within the period from 1968 to 1993. This permits comparison of these other survey results with one another, and with responses to the CLQ in the national censuses of 1971, 1981, 1986, and 1991. The comparison is necessarily rough, given the different wordings of the language question in the various instruments. However, it appears that responses from those aged 18 and above to the census category "can speak Irish" accord reasonably well with response categories that indicate fair to full knowledge of Irish among adults in other surveys; somewhat more than a quarter of the adult population describe themselves in those terms.

The grouping of respondents by age and by region in the national census sheds considerable light on the way in which Irish is acquired in contemporary Ireland. In the 1981 census, more fully discussed in Ó Gliaáin's report than are the other censuses, the number of 3- to 4-year old speakers of Irish is low, well below 10 percent of the age cohort; this presumably represents those children who are being raised in families where Irish is the normal language of the home. The importance of schooling to the acquisition of Irish is patent. At school-entry age, the percentage of children returned as Irish-speaking in the census jumps to above 25, and it peaks at above 50 for ages 10 through 19. Moderate decline sets in immediately, with around 40 percent of 20- to 24-year olds returned as Irish speakers; decline then proceeds steadily, if gradually, across each successive decade group. Another indication that Irish is acquired chiefly in the schools as opposed to the home appears in what Ó Gliaáin calls the "levelling out" of knowledge of Irish across the country's various regions. By and large, the counties that include officially designated Gaeltachtaí have a higher percentage over all of residents returned as speaking Irish; but the differences are not especially large, and they are sometimes nonexistent. (The west-coast county of Kerry, with

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several small Gaeltachtaí, had 37.6 percent able to speak Irish in the 1981 census, while Clare, a west-coast county without a Gaeltacht, had 38.2 percent in the same census.) In the six eastern counties with the lowest percentage of respondents able to speak Irish, according to the 1981 census, 25 percent or better were nonetheless Irish speakers except in Wicklow (24.6%) and Wexford (24.8%).

The Irish census authorities themselves have been among the most cautious and skeptical of interpreters of CLQ results – regularly issuing warnings and disclaimers about the value of census returns in determining knowledge of Irish within the population, but noting their general usefulness in comparing one part of the country with another and one point in time with another. Making reasonable use of the non-census surveys that are unusually abundant in Ireland, Ó Gliasáin usefully establishes that information derived from the census is in general terms compatible with information from other sources, so that the census authorities' cautions are perhaps more stringent than they need be.

As to what the report reveals about the long-term fortunes of the Irish language, and about the success or failure of official efforts to promote it, there is a mix of favorable and unfavorable news. On the one hand, it is clear that the school rather than the family is the usual medium for transmission of Irish in contemporary Ireland, with all the reservations that fact suggests about degree of proficiency and incidence of actual use. On the other hand, the tiny percentage of the population that is highly fluent in Irish seems to have held reasonably steady over the decades between 1968 and 1989; and a forty-year comparison of percentage of Irish speakers by region, 1946 through 1986, indicates that the most Irish-speaking region in the country, a west-coast district comprised of the counties of Mayo and Galway, was 39 percent Irish-speaking both in 1946 and in 1986, despite a rise in population numbers over all during that period (Figure 4, p. 18). To anyone familiar with the stunning speed at which a language with a small population base and relatively little instrumental value can pass out of use altogether, this level of maintenance is no small achievement.

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