Protestants and the Irish Language:
Historical Heritage and Current Attitudes in Northern Ireland

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The Irish language has long been regarded in the popular mind as a correlate of Irish nationalism. A model expounded by the sociolinguist, Joshua Fishman, is applied to the evolution of Irish as a nationalist icon, and it is demonstrated that its divisive potential developed only gradually. In fact, it was an object of affection and admiration for many influential 19th century Protestants and unionists. In the 20th century, the language became increasingly polarised for political ends, and after Partition was largely rejected in the education system as experienced by unionist children in Northern Ireland. It is argued that such an overwhelmingly anglocentric orientation, not just in language, but also in history and geography, has paradoxically served to exacerbate the Troubles. It has alienated unionists from cultural capital which rightfully and historically belongs to both traditions, and in so doing has promoted a ‘frontier mentality’ among them. Somewhat in a spirit of definition by opposition, they are currently turning to Ulster-Scots; yet by adopting a more positive attitude towards Irish, unionists would simultaneously reconnect with their historical roots, and might deprive the language of its potential as a political weapon to be used against them.

Keywords: Protestants, Irish language, Northern Ireland

Irish – A Cultural Challenge to Unionists

On 10th April 1998 a political and cultural Agreement was signed between the governments of the United Kingdom and of Ireland in which the British government undertook to give special consideration to the Irish language. A statutory duty was placed on the Department of Education Northern Ireland to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education in line with current provision for integrated education. The government assumed a commitment to try to remove, where possible, restrictions which would discourage or work against the maintenance of the Irish language. It was to seek more effective ways to encourage and provide financial support for Irish language film and television production in Northern Ireland. It promised to undertake resolute action to promote the Irish language ‘where appropriate and where people so desire it’. The Irish language has become largely a cultural issue in the Republic of Ireland where it is officially enshrined as the national language, but in Northern Ireland it has been politically linked to republicanism at various points and is currently an important basis of Irish nationalism. The support given to it may therefore be regarded as vexatious by unionists.
(mostly Protestant). Yet in the past, Protestants have done much to promote Irish. The purpose of the present paper is first of all to analyse the historical role of Protestants vis-à-vis the Irish language, particularly in the 19th century, and then to discuss current Protestant reactions towards government attempts to promote it in post-Agreement Northern Ireland.

Joshua Fishman’s Model

Fishman’s model of the relationship between Language and Nationalism (Fishman, 1971/1989) will be used as a terminological and conceptual framework for the present paper. Although he illustrates his ideas in Language and Nationalism by referring to examples from Africa and Asia, his model fits the Irish experience very well as Fishman visited Ireland on several occasions from the mid-1960s to 1970s in his capacity as an advisor to the Irish government on language policy. He defines ‘nationality’ as relating to sociocultural units that have developed beyond primarily local self-concepts, concerns and integrative bonds. It denotes a more advanced degree of effective organisation and of elaborate beliefs than pertain to mere ethnic groups, but does not necessarily imply a corresponding political unit. Indeed it is possible to have multi-nation states or empires rather than a single-nationality state. Fishman’s main points in Language and Nationalism can be subsumed under the following headings which are summarised at the beginning of each section below and followed by a discussion applying them to the Irish context:

1. Nationalism seeks and creates a usable past;
2. Nationalism and proto-elites;
3. Urban versus rural cultures; modernity versus authenticity;

Nationalism seeks and creates a usable past

For Fishman (1971: 8), the past is a kind of treasure trove which is ‘mined, ideologised and symbolically elaborated in order to provide determination, even more than direction, with respect to current and future challenges’. That is, nationalism creates from the past a unifying and energising power.

The implication of Fishman’s argument is that although ‘truth’ and ‘history’ may be subjective rather than objective or absolute, they are nevertheless very powerful in buttressing nationalism. Nationalism is socially constructed in the manner that all reality is socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). What is written or believed about it does not need to be objectively ‘true’ to be ‘useful’ for purposes of building an ideology. This is reflected in other authors’ chapter headings such as Michael Hughes ‘Myth as History’ (1994), and Eyler and Garratt’s ‘The Uses of the Past’ (1988). In order to avoid cognitive dissonance, uncomfortable evidence can, indeed must, be ignored. The Celtic revival began in Wales and in Scotland, not in the first instance in Ireland, and was promoted by means of one of the most famous literary hoaxes. James Macpherson forged translations from the Gaelic resulting in a number of fakes of which the best known was Ossian (1762). This and other works inaugurated a vogue for the primitive and Celtic, achieving fame at home and abroad (Deane, 1986: 61). Such works eventually served to promote
Irish nationalism. Attempts are often made to identify the ‘true’ Irish people with the Celts and by extension with Catholicism, but Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh (1988) in his paper ‘The Celts II’ reminds us that in terms of race (though itself a contentious notion), some of the Scottish planters and the industrious Calvinists in the North-East had an impeccably Celtic ancestry. The proponents of the Irish language and the Catholic religion did not always reinforce each other. Indeed at first, the Catholic Church was suspicious of Protestant pre-eminence in the Gaelic revival, and feared the prospect of an Irish Ireland separate from a Catholic state. Later, however, ‘Catholic leaders exploited the Gaelic revival’s anglophobia and diverted its hope for a culturally monolithic, religiously pluralistic Irish Ireland into an essentially Catholic Irish Ireland’ (McCaffrey, 1989: 15). The Catholic Church’s eventual endorsement of the Gaelic League (by about 1900) contributed enormously to making the language accepted as an essential element in the national identity (Comerford, 1989: 37).

The obstacles to the process of ‘manufacturing’ and promoting nationalism are sometimes underestimated. In the mid-19th century, the problem facing organisations such as the Fenian Movement, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and the Land League was the apparent lack of a collective sense of identity around which to reconstruct the political movement for national independence (Sugden & Bairner, 1993). Therefore, a Gaelic identity had to be revived and popularised through the Catholic faith, the Irish language, Irish music, Irish dance and Gaelic sports. Sugden and Bairner are concerned with sport, particularly the establishment of the Gaelic Athletic Association as a weapon in the intellectual warfare between the two cultures, British and Irish. In this, they took a leaf out of the book of the coloniser, Britain, which had reinforced its imperialist expansion by cultural and ideological means – for example English games (Sugden & Bairner, 1993: 11). The GAA was intended to militate against the Anglicisation of Ireland in language, culture and politics, and was nationalist at the political level. At the sporting level, however, it was influenced by British emphasis on the moral, physical and character-building qualities of organised sport (Sugden & Bairner, 1993: 30); in a way, therefore, the colonised and the coloniser fed off each other.

The GAA thus successfully mobilised support for Gaelic sports and tied this explicitly to nationalism; the same work of sociopolitical mobilisation needed to be applied to language and this too was not without its problems. In the 19th century, the Irish in large numbers forsook their native language and ways, and began to emulate the English to whom they were politically and religiously opposed – to the chagrin of those who were trying to use Irish for the purposes of national consciousness building. The Great Hunger of 1845–49 impacted negatively in the short-term on nationalism by damaging Gaelic culture, and establishing an emigration tradition. This led to a protracted population decline and built up a reservoir of anti-British opinion among the Irish in the USA, Canada and Australia, thus reinforcing the Fenian movement and fuelling a political anger that in the long-term encouraged nationalism (Hughes, 1994: 13). For many people, however, the Irish language was associated with poverty and struggle, whereas the English language was the tongue of convenience and opportunity. As Comerford (1989: 22–23) puts it:
The Irish national collectivity of the 19th century . . . chose English rather than Irish as its uniforming tongue. . . . The determining factor in the case of Ireland in the early nineteenth century was not the weakness of Irish but the strength of English.

Nationalism and proto-elites

Early nationalist elites often stemmed from backgrounds different to those they sought to organise. Many were intelligentsia who were even alienated from their own society, and initially experienced difficulty in communicating their vision to others, but it was their very apartness which enabled them to envisage broader unities and deeper authenticities (Fishman, 1971: 17). Nobility and clergy, especially, were often conscious of their broader roles. The lower classes were excluded from a real stake in the national economy and a real role in the determination of the proto-nation. Nationalist doctrines were often initially rejected because they were interpreted as self-serving, upper-class, intellectual or urban fabrications. At first, proto-elites themselves did not know the vernacular, but subsequently they or their successors became linguistically re-ethnicised. To activate the population, they needed the vernacular which was crucial for the arousal and maintenance of nationalism. The proto-elites were the essential synthesisers, separators, popularisers and organisers on whom the spread of nationalism depended (Fishman, 1971: 16).

Until the late 19th or early 20th century the majority of the elite in Ireland tended to stem from the Anglo-Irish tradition that has existed in Ireland for hundreds of years. Most post-Reformation Anglo-Irish belonged to the Anglican Church of Ireland, and believed that their tradition reached back even beyond the first arrival of the Anglo-Normans (Beckett, 1976: 109). By no means all Anglo-Irish were nobility or gentry: if it is correct to refer to the elite as the Ascendancy, it must also be correct to refer to a Sub-Ascendancy that would have broadly shared the values, but not the money and the background of the gentry. The Anglo-Irish extended over the whole economic and social range, but Beckett (1976: 65) writes that it was generally safe to assume that an Irish gentleman was a Protestant, and tempting to reverse the order and assume that an Irish Protestant was a gentleman. It was this class of people who did most to promote Irish nationalism in its formative stages. The founder of the Home Rule movement, Isaac Butt, was the Protestant son of a country rector, and another Protestant, Charles Stewart Parnell, was its greatest leader. In the field of literature, distinguished members of the Anglican Church included WB Yeats, ‘AE’ (George Russell), Sir Standish O’Grady, J.M. Synge, Douglas Hyde, Lady Gregory and S. O’Casey (the first five of these were either sons or grandsons of Protestant clergymen); Beckett (1976: 138) goes so far as to say that throughout the 19th century, the task of representing the life of Ireland in fiction was left almost entirely to writers of the Anglo-Irish tradition. The fact that Old and Middle Irish scholarship was dominated by Anglican clergymen until well into the 20th century (MacDonough, 1983) is reasonably consonant with Fishman’s characterisation of the elite (nobility and clergy).

There is, however, another tradition whose members did much to promote the Irish language but whose roots were not particularly ‘elite’: that of the
Dissenters. Like the Catholic population, they suffered under a penal code; their marriages were stigmatised, their children classified as illegitimate, and they had to pay tithes to the Established Church. For a while, they came close to Catholics in their grievances, but after the 1798 Rebellion of the United Irishmen and the Act of Union which was a reaction to it, they drew closer to the Episcopalians through institutions such as the Orange Order (Blaney, 1996: 4). They were interested in the Irish language for reasons of antiquarianism and romanticism, and for purposes of both education and proselytisation; they set up bodies such as the Presbyterian Home Mission (ca 1830) which was modelled upon the Irish Society for Promoting the Education of the Native Irish through the Medium of their Own Language (founded 1816). There was a great demand for religious works in Irish, and the historical deficit becomes obvious when it is pointed out that not until 1981 was a full version of the Bible published in Irish (the Maynooth Bible) (Blaney, 1996: 80). The Presbyterians included luminaries such as the Bryson family, William Neilson, W.H. Drummond, Samuel Ferguson, Robert MacAdam and R.J.Bryce – the last two being joint founders/co-secretaries of the Ulster Gaelic Society (est. 1828).

Ireland in the 1800s demonstrates the spectacle of activists who sought to preserve and promote Irish, yet were at first incompletely ethnicised in a linguistic sense. Thomas Davis (1814–1845), leader of the Young Ireland group and founder of The Nation, tried to reverse the Anglicisation of Irish culture and argued for the preservation and revival of the Irish language. He whipped up a climate of cultural hostility towards the colonial power, and forged Irish into an offensive weapon and an instrument of separatism. Yet his father was an English army surgeon, and Thomas Davis himself was an Anglican who was almost ignorant of Irish. The Celtic Twilight movement did much to develop national consciousness, and the Protestant William Butler Yeats – a progenitor of the Irish literary revival – drew upon the concept of a mythic religion and a collective unconscious which would recollect the fragmented communities of the land (Kearney, 1997: 114). He immersed himself in Irish folklore, and addressed himself to those young men whom the emotion of patriotism ‘has lifted into that world of selfless passion in which heroic deeds are possible and heroic poetry credible’ (Jeffares, 1982: 150). His studies of Gaelic myths and legends were, however, all read in translation because he knew little or no Irish. He thus constitutes an example of an elite member who helped popularise the vernacular without himself mastering it, and in this respect conforms to Fishman’s model. Yeats was deeply disappointed by the fact that the Irish literary revival inaugurated by himself, Synge and Lady Gregory came to be spurned by the Gaelic Leaguers, the Catholic middle classes, and many republican nationalists (Kearney, 1997: 114). His ideological successors, however, became re-ethnicised and acquired the ability to speak the Irish language. Douglas Hyde, son of a Protestant rector in Irish-speaking Frenchpark, Co. Roscommon, founded the Gaelic League in 1893. He had learned Irish from the people at home, like James (Seamus) Hart, keeper of the bogs, and Mrs William Connolly who milked the cows, and from the age of 14 had taught himself to read and write it. In his historic speech on ‘The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland’ he wrote: ‘I believe it is our Gaelic past which, though the Irish race does not recognise it just at present, is really
at the bottom of the Irish heart...; do what they may, the race of today cannot wholly divest itself from the mantle of its own past’ (Daly, 1974: 2–3, 42). By his authentic grasp of the vernacular, he positioned himself in the vanguard of a new elite which superseded the older proto-elite.

**Demands of modernisation versus authenticity: Urban versus rural cultures**

Nationalism seeks broad unity and authenticity in a pre-urban past which may actually include anti-urban components. In most countries, it is the lower classes and the peasantry who are most isolated from foreign fads and influences, and who enshrine the real heart of national creativity (Fishman, 1971). It is the noble and uncontaminated peasants who have kept the language pure. Language can provide a secular symbol of nationalism. Language, par excellence, is felt to contain a people’s cultural identity, and may even be ascribed to supernatural forces in order to make it holy. As Fishman puts it, elites and masses alike extrapolate from linguistic differentiation and literary uniqueness to sociocultural and political independence. The vernacular becomes a symbol of nationalism and a carrier of all the other notions and symbols advanced by nationalism. Urban centres supersede the countryside as the loci of power. Cities are the vortex of social change, affecting those who are displaced from the countryside and putting them in touch with each other, thereby creating a new force in social, political and cultural affairs. Nationalism, Fishman believes, centres on the town which he regards as the very symbol of national existence, notwithstanding the fact that some cities, like Vienna, served several different nationalist causes at one and the same time. The hitherto largely rural ethnocultural groups utilised the city to promote their own greater ethnocultural unity, authenticity and modernity, and this remained true even when they included strongly anti-urban ideological components (Fishman, 1971: 18–20).

The Gaelic revival was based on a process of acquisition and study of early Irish manuscripts which provided material for an eventual cultural renaissance. This work of literary archaeology exemplifies very well the recourse to rural roots necessary for authentification. It was conducted by an elite in which Protestants were collectively more strongly represented than Catholics; indeed it has been said that Catholic interest in the preservation or renewal of Gaelic was slight until late in the 19th century (MacDonough, 1983: 108). George Petrie, a Protestant, played a leading part in the collection of such materials, as did Sir Standish O’Grady and above all, Sir Samuel Ferguson who exercised such a seminal influence on William Butler Yeats as to produce the following lavish tribute: Ferguson was, Yeats wrote, ‘the greatest poet Ireland has produced, because the most central and most Celtic’ (quoted by Beckett, 1976: 139).

It would not be too much to say that Ferguson was the discoverer of the early Irish poetry and legend upon which the later literary renaissance was based. The reasons for his dedication were related to the macropolitical situation in which he lived, and eschewed nationalism or secession. For him and Standish O’Grady, Irish identity was an alternative rather than a supplement to political nationalism. McCaffrey (1989: 13) thinks they even hoped
that admiration for the aristocratic character of the Gaelic heritage would
wean Catholics from nationalism, reviving deference for the traditional
Ascendancy. MacDonough (1983) sees such Protestant commitment to Gaelic-
sation as a response to growing political insecurity as existing discrimination
against Catholics decreased. Catholic self-assurance due to the Catholic Relief
Act (1829), the disestablishment of the Anglican Church of Ireland (1869), the
opening to Catholics of legal and political offices, and ownership of land
added greatly to their power and increased the threat to Irish Protestants.
Those of a unionist persuasion like Ferguson took refuge in an escape to an
ancient indigenous civilisation which dwarfed all modern differences and
helped the Protestants to save themselves by identifying with the Irish pre-
Tridentine past (MacDonagh, 1983: 106–107). Thus for him and some of his
ilk, Gaelicism became a means of self-authentification.

Traditionalists are sometimes closer to our own times chronologically than
are modernisers. Although separated in birth by more than a century, the great
Catholic liberator, Daniel O’Connell (born 1775), was ‘modern’ and ‘urban’ in
relation to the Irish language, whereas Éamon de Valera (born 1883) was ‘tra-
ditionalist’ and ‘rural’. During the first four years of his life, O’Connell was
fostered out to an Irish-speaking herdsman on his father’s land. His early
childhood gave him a profound knowledge of Irish peasant attitudes and
aspirations, and a deep intuitive sympathy with the heart of the Irish people
(MacDonough, 1991). Yet in later life, O’Connell spoke Irish only when neces-
sary to be understood, and when confronted with an Irish-English dictionary
in 1824 he dismissed the author as ‘an old fool to have spent so much of his life
on so useless a work’ (MacDonough, 1991: 11). When asked in 1833 whether
the use of Irish was diminishing among the peasantry, he produced the
following much quoted words:

Yes, and I am sufficiently utilitarian not to regret its gradual abandon-
ment. A diversity of tongues is no benefit; it was first imposed on man-
kind as a curse, at the building of Babel. It would be of vast advantage to
mankind if all the inhabitants of the earth spoke the same language.
Therefore, although the Irish language is connected with many recollec-
tions that twine around the hearts of Irishmen, yet the superior utility of
the English tongue, as the medium of all modern communication, is so
great that I can witness without a sigh the gradual disuse of Irish.
(MacDonough, 1991: 11)

O’Connell believed he had found in early Christian Ireland and above all in
Catholicism much more powerful sources of nationalist ideology than the Irish
language. He perceived Irish as being associated with ignorance, indigence,
struggle and distress, whereas English was the language of administration,
law, politics, commerce, money-making and the towns (MacDonough, 1991:
13). His vision was thus a modernist rather than a traditionalist one.

Over a century later, Éamon de Valera – paradoxically a passionate follower
of that colonist’s sport, rugby union! – met his future wife while attending
Irish classes at the Gaelic League. The League’s avowed mission was to render
the present a rational continuation of the Gaelic past, and to de-anglicise
Ireland by promotion of the Irish language (Bromage, 1956). He made Irish
a centrepiece of his folk or peasant society and in 1935 established the Irish Folklore Commission (IFC). The IFC had a scholarly role: to gather as much as possible of Irish oral tradition while the older native Irish-speakers in the Gaeltacht were still alive, and its collectors’ notebooks ‘are in effect records of social history for much of Irish-speaking rural Ireland in the first half of the twentieth century’ (Buttimer, 2003: 563). The new state was committed to the gaelicisation of Irish society, and sought to insulate the population against the products of foreign culture (Cathcart, 2003: 677). De Valera himself had a vision of cozy homesteads, bright fields and homely firesides which he later evoked in his famous St Patrick’s Day speech of 1943 (Moynihan, 1980: 466); but this stance has latterly been condemned as hopelessly ‘retro’: James Connolly is on record as stating that the worship of the past is really an idealisation of the mediocrity of the present (quoted by Kiberd, 1988: 30), and Ó Cruílaoich (1986: 50, 61) argues that this antiquarian folk ideology was based on a static conception deriving from 18th century romanticism and appealing to a pre-modern mentality. It ran counter to the message of economic self-sufficiency propounded by Fianna Féil and was out of sympathy with the life experience of the Irish diaspora abroad: however, it bore witness to the spirituality and selflessness of the Irish people and postured as morally superior to the modern commercial world (Ó Cruílaoich, 1986: 49, 53). Such a vision clearly served the purpose of authentification, but was anti-modernist and even pernicious in that it made the present appear necessarily inferior to an ideologised, mythologised, golden, Gaelic past. Perhaps de Valera’s vigour in championing Irish language and folk culture had something of the convert’s fervour – after all, he was born in the United States of a Spanish father. At any rate, Oliver MacDonough (1983: 14) dismisses de Valera’s self-vaunted insight into the aspirations of the Irish population as ‘no more than a conscientious artefact’.

Nationalism as a means of combatting anomie

Nationalism can give emotional comfort overcoming lack of identity and rootlessness. The rise of nationalism owes much to the decline of religious affiliation as the primary integrative bond. It is linked too to the doctrine of the rights of man and to democratisation (Fishman, 1971: 18). Economic transformations like the Industrial Revolution cause the breakup of traditional communities when masses of people come to cities looking for work; they impact on the prior affiliative bonds of the past (Gemeinschaft) and cause fragmentation and loss of identity (anomie). Nationalism appears as a cure for malaise: the restoration of more meaningful and appropriate loyalties to help replace those which have been disrupted. Nationalism transforms the separation and particularism of rural populations into something greater than themselves. It aims to reverse the affective imbalance which comes with a transition from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft, from primary integrative bonds to a post-traditional life style. Yet in all of this, Fishman is careful to remind us that ‘Broader ethnocultural similarity is not a natural basis of human grouping; certainly it is not the prime basis for political integration throughout human history’ (Fishman, 1971: 7).
Fishman’s 1971 model contains many tensions and he himself draws attention to the dialectic inherent in it. In a later work, he points out that the ongoing modernisation of Ireland’s most Irish-speaking region, the Gaeltacht, involves industrialisation and the attraction of English speakers who benefit from special economic opportunities; the result is an accelerated trend towards anglification (Fishman, 1991). The rural past and its power to provide authentification are in tension with urbanism and modernism. Authentification relies on population groups which are usually located at the periphery rather than at the centre of a country. Their very distinctiveness and cohesiveness can pose a threat to national unity – sometimes even resulting in demands for secession. Yet if there is extreme stress on unification and uniformity, authentification can suffer.

In other former British colonies such as Malaysia and Sri Lanka the colonial heritage tends to be valued as an asset, but in Ireland it is much more controversial, and bitterness towards Britain endures to this day. The tragedy of the famine in the mid-19th century dealt a blow to the entire fabric of society, and did much to engender a deep and enduring sense of historical injustice. As Hutchinson (1987: 114) states, this translated into an important nationalist legacy:

For it created a reservoir of hatred against the British state as a malign agency seeking the extirpation of the Irish people, and it formed a huge Irish diaspora in America, Britain and the colonies, which became a dynamic force for the remedy of Irish grievances, supplying moral and material support for Irish nationalist movements and acting as a continuous spur to action.4

This hatred fuelled republicanism; republicanism fuelled separatism; and national independence (eventually) gave rise to feelings of pride and euphoria in which respect was paid to the Irish language, and loyal gratitude to the Catholic Church, since both of these institutions had initially been crucial to the building of identity and the struggle to throw off the British yoke. A sense of not being at home in one’s own country had been overcome with the attainment of national autonomy. Yet the position of both these important institutions changed in the late 20th century resulting in a lower status for them in Irish national life; and the demographic decline of the Protestant minority in the south served as a sober warning to the majoritarian Protestants in the North of what their fate was likely to be if they joined a united Ireland where they would constitute only 20% of the population.

The relationship of many Catholic citizens to their Church has changed dramatically. A survey (MacGreil, 1989/90) concluded that Catholics educated to third level were increasingly becoming à la carte Catholics, especially about Confession. A poll (Pollak, 1996) carried out for The Irish Times found that only 21% of Catholics claimed to follow their Church’s teaching when it came to making serious moral decisions, compared with 78% who followed their own consciences. Only 27% of those polled believed that the great majority of people in Ireland would still practise Catholicism in 20 years’ time; 69% thought people would be Catholic in name only. Religious observance was much stronger in rural than in urban areas (51% of Dubliners, compared with
70% of those in Munster and 87% in Connaught-Ulster said they attended Mass at least once a week (The Irish Times, 16.12.96). In another survey (Ireland on Sunday, 12.10.97) two thirds of the respondents thought the Church should ordain women priests, and about the same proportion disagreed with its stance on artificial contraception (Mullen, 1997). The Church has suffered too from paedophilia scandals in which clergy have been involved, and vocations are falling dramatically: in 1999, just one priest was ordained in the Dublin diocese compared with 8 who started work 10 years before that and 16 in 1979 (McAleer & McNeice, 1.8.1999).

The Irish language displays a complex mixture of success and failure, despite the fact that all children at primary and secondary level are required to follow courses in the language. Ó Riagáin (1997) in his study Language Policy and Social Reproduction demonstrates that there is a tendency towards social polarisation of Irish. The social basis of competent bilinguals is firmly located within white collar occupations (Ó Riagáin, 1997: 227), so it has become a middle-class interest. In the traditional Gaeltacht areas, the Irish-speaking communities are very scattered, and account for less than 2% of the population; there are few self-sustaining Irish-speaking communities outside this area, and the language is largely dependent upon the formal education system for its self-reproduction. At school, relatively high levels of Irish are attained, but these become eroded as the cohort moves into adulthood. Census data suggest that the state’s strategy has failed to maintain Irish in the indigenous Irish-speaking areas, and there has not been a general re-establishment of Irish as a community or home language: the incidence of Irish-speaking homes has scarcely moved from the 5% level since the 1920s. Attitudinal support exists for Irish: in surveys (e.g. CILAR, 1975), about two thirds of the respondents stated that they would like to speak both languages, and the largest proportion opted for the equal use of Irish and English, but attitudinal support for Irish fails to translate into practical behaviour consonant with those positive attitudes (CILAR, 1975: 147, 155, 166–167). Teilifis na Gaeilge (now referred to as TG4, set up at a cost of £16m to provide Irish-language programmes) finds that its most popular programmes are in English (Battles, 1998), and Andrews (1978) documents the decline of Irish as a school subject. MacPóilín (1997) points out that the language shift from Irish to English was already well established by the time independence was achieved, and that difficulties facing the revival could no longer be blamed on the British. At the stage of constructing nationalism, Irish was liberating as an oppositional, anti-establishment ideology but after Partition (1922) became oppressive as the official orthodoxy. Having served its purpose of promoting political nationalism, it is less prosperous in its present domain of cultural nationalism. In fact, the poet and Nobel prizewinner, Seamus Heaney, suggests that the time will come when Irish will be only ‘mythically alive’ (McCrum et al., 1986: 182).

Yet the country’s independence, success and modernity are now beyond question. It is no longer predominantly a traditionalist society of ageing citizens living in rural communities. It has become famous as the land of Silicon Valley and the Celtic Tiger. It is a young country: nearly 50% of its population is under 25 years of age (Eurostat, 1992: 82; figures for 1981). The majority of people now live in towns: in 1991 the proportion was 56% compared with
only 42% in 1961. There is even a slight tendency for emigrants to come home again, and in a racially homogeneous society a recent influx of ethnic immigrants, attracted by the image of economic prosperity, has posed a problem of assimilation. This is a profile fairly typical of a modern, successful state. Pádraig Pearse in an article for *The United Irishman* in 1905 claimed that the Irish language is an essential of Irish nationality, and proclaimed that ‘When the Irish language disappears, Irish nationality will ipso facto disappear, and forever’ (quoted by McKee, 1997: 6). The present self-assurance and prosperity of the country, despite the decline or stasis of Irish, belie Pearse’s dictum, and it is certain that the possession of a world language such as English is a material help in trade and commerce. Irish helped to emphasise national distinctiveness, but it was and is only one symbol of Irish identity. Now that independence has been achieved, the importance of the language has receded, and other correlates of national autonomy such as legal sovereignty and economic success have become more important. Irish *did* help in the struggle for independence, and the question must now be asked whether it can promote the same result in achieving a united Ireland, as is the goal of nationalists in the North.

**Use of the Irish Language for Republicanism**

**Irish as a tool against unionism**

The picture that was painted above of Protestant support for the Irish language and culture was correct enough as far as it went – but it did not go far enough. There also existed a passionate and militant non-Protestant tradition that took over the Gaelic culture that had largely been (re-)created by Protestants as a ‘usable past’, and used it to fight effectively for an independent Ireland. It is true that the Protestant Ascendancy and Sub-Ascendancy constituted a kind of elite producing cultural material that helped to forge nationalism, but they were distanced from their fellow countrymen by religion, language, class – and by association in people’s folk memory with an exploitative colonising culture. They were not *the same* as their countrymen, and could not be fully accepted as such. Nor were they *the same* as their ‘mainland’ British counterparts, and their experience when they attempted to integrate fully into ‘mainland’ British society has been termed ‘disillusioned assimilation’ by Hutchinson (1987), inter alia. This was a very long-standing phenomenon: during the Bruce invasion the King of Ulster, addressing Pope John XXII, referred to the Anglo-Irish as ‘the middle nation’ and characterised them as being different from the English of England; and Giraldus Cambrensis, from the other side makes a participant in the Siege of Dublin exclaim: ‘Such is our position now that to the Irish we are English and to the English we are Irish’ (Ó Huallacháin, 1994: 17). Members of the Protestant minority therefore suffered in some respects from anomic themselves, and their attempts to promote Irish language and culture may to some extent be construed as an attempt to overcome this anomic; by their involvement in the Irish language and culture, they were compensating for their marginality in two cultures, British and Irish, and laying claim to Irish ‘cultural capital’.
However, the process of Gaelicisation was de facto used to construct an anti-unionist ideology and, in contravention of its non-political constitution, the Gaelic League became so politicised that Douglas Hyde resigned the presidency in 1915. This was an important milestone in undermining the Irish language as a badge of identity common to both traditions in the country, and Hyde wrote in a private memoir that it had ‘put an end to my dream of using the language as a unifying bond to join all Irishmen together’ (Ó Huallacháin, 1994: 73). Alongside Hyde as an architect of the League was Eoin MacNéill who became the first Minister of Education in the Irish Free State. His concept of the Irish language was non-sectarian, and he sought to make Ireland the locus of a modern democratic culture, in the belief that it had a new civilizing mission because it had not fallen prey to militarism and materialism. But by the manner in which he defined Ireland as a Gaelic rural culture brought to nationhood by a patriotic clergy, and denounced the tradition of political nationalism established in the 18th century, ‘he implicitly subverted the Protestant contribution to Ireland’ (Hutchinson, 1987: 127); and once the movement for political autonomy had been transformed into a radical mass-based Catholic organisation, it was ‘dedicated to the destruction of the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland’ (Hutchinson, 1987: 151). Hutchinson asserts that although for most of the modern period, Protestants were the chief supporters of research into the Celtic past, for example through the Royal Irish Academy, yet they could never fully identify with the native Irish, and their Protestant Irish identity was ‘elitist, unhistoric, cosmopolitan and synthetic in conception’ (Hutchinson, 1987: 216).

Girvin (2003: 142) in a discussion of the republicisation of Irish society states that the 1937 Constitution ‘enshrined an illiberal form of nationalism, invoking indefensible rights that left unionists no legitimate destiny within the Irish nation’ and that certain articles ‘provided a further obstacle to good relations, nor did they help the northern minority’. The attempt of some of the 19th century Protestant elite to place Irish within a framework of Pan-Celticism in order make it inclusive enough to incorporate non-Catholic elements like themselves failed definitively, and nationalism was eventually constructed on a much narrower basis – namely, the Irish language and the Catholic form of Christianity. The fact that this happened constitutes an impediment to Irish unity amongst present-day unionists in Northern Ireland. If these form the cultural basis of independent Ireland, if (as the 1991 Republic of Ireland Census data show) the percentage of Protestants has fallen from about 10% following Partition to less than 3% now, and if (as is the case) Catholics have more numerous families, many Protestants believe that integration into a united Ireland would sound the death-knell for their own distinctive culture. This conviction persists despite the fact that neither the Catholic religion nor the Irish language retain the same high degree of importance in Ireland that they once assumed. Unionist resistance is further strengthened by the fact that the campaign waged by the IRA to achieve a united Ireland has been a violent one; and the attempts of the Catholic church to ensure that children of a mixed Protestant-Catholic marriage are brought up as Catholics still cause family problems. The 1907 Ne Temere degree was ‘considered inherently divisive by many within the Protestant churches, and as providing evidence of the
arrogance and intolerance of the Catholic Church’ (Morgan et al., 1996: 14). Although it was replaced in 1970 by Motu Proprio Matrimonis Mixta ‘the principles remain but the actual procedures have been relaxed’ (Morgan et al., 1996). Studies (e.g. Fulton, 1987; Lee, 1994: 79) indicate that Irish bishops are particularly conservative in their interpretation of Motu Proprio, and the regulations of the Irish Episcopal Conference (1983) still require the Catholic partner to ‘do everything possible, so far as in me lies, to have all the children of our marriage baptised and brought up in the Catholic church’.

Protestant attitudes towards the Irish language in post-Agreement Northern Ireland

From having suffered state discrimination in Northern Ireland, the Irish language has gradually progressed to becoming a state beneficiary. Predating the Agreement was the ULTACH Trust, founded in 1989 and run by a management board comprising both Catholic and Protestant members in roughly equal numbers, and whose terms of reference require it to gain support for the Irish language within the Protestant as well as the Catholic community. It is in receipt of state money, which makes some nationalists feel that it has been ‘bought’ by the other side. ‘Ultach’ is Irish for ‘Ulster’ and the letters also form the English acronym ‘Ulster Language, Traditions and Cultural Heritage’. In 1993, a Committee for the Administration of Justice (CAJ) recommended to the British government that the Irish language should be supported by a range of measures including state-sponsored bilingualism. Later on, as a result of the Agreement, new government bodies were founded to deal with language issues in the province. A Cross-Border Language Body, Forás na Gaeilge, was established in December 1999, and has two offices: the Irish Language Agency and the Ulster Scots Agency. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has a Linguistic Diversity Branch that is responsible for Irish, Ulster Scots and other minority languages, and previously operated within the Central Community Relations Unit. Andrews (1991) states that the British government has passed into a new phase of its relationship towards the Irish language, having moved from ‘planned neglect’ to a more positive stance in which it supports some Irish-medium schools and bilingual units. This section and the next one will consider the role of the Irish language in Northern Ireland in relation to two major questions: (1) how is the Irish language being used in the republican struggle to take Northern Ireland out of the United Kingdom and into the sovereignty of the Republic of Ireland?; and (2) how are Protestants reacting to the promotion of Irish in implementation of the Agreement?

Irish as a tool in the Northern struggle

The most recent period of unrest and violence known as ‘The Troubles’ began in 1968 in Northern Ireland, stimulated by the example of the American Civil Rights movement. Its main objectives were to remove civil discrimination against Catholics or nationalists, and ultimately to achieve Irish unity by taking Northern Ireland out of the United Kingdom and into a united Ireland. During the first decade of this period, nationalists did not show
particular interest in the Irish language, and its cause seemed to be in serious
decline; however, in Long Kesh prison, a group of republican prisoners began
hunger strikes in October 1980, and continued them into 1981 as a political
protest against the 1976 withdrawal of the Political or Special Category Status
that had been accorded 4 years earlier in 1972. It was during this period that 10
men died, the most famous death of all being that of Bobby Sands. Within the
nationalist camp these men were perceived as heroes, and their campaign did
much to build support for the cause of the Irish among members of the com-
community, for example school children. Pritchard (1990: 29), writing about lan-
guage policy in Northern Ireland schools, noted that Irish was the second
language after French in the province. Although the numbers taking certificate
exams in Irish were small, and not particularly boosted by the Troubles, per-
formance in Irish (1982–1987) was consistently superior to that in French,
German or Spanish at GCE ‘O’ level, and at ‘A’ level, boys performed better
in Irish than girls, running contrary to the usual trend in the western world
whereby females out-perform males in languages. Pritchard hypothesised that
the boys were inspired by the macho image of Irish that was spoken by the
republican prisoners as a matter of policy in Long Kesh gaol. A report on Irish
in West Belfast (nationalist), based on 223 respondents, found that the most
popular reason for studying Irish was ‘to strengthen my Irish identity’ (86% of
sample), and 61% maintained that an important factor in encouraging them
to learn Irish was the H-block protests (Glór na nGael, 1984/85). The prisoners
pooled what Irish they had, and tried to share their knowledge, calling to each
other from their cells, and mystifying their gaolers to such an extent that
eventually some of the prison officers too began to learn Irish in order to dis-
cover what plots their prisoners were hatching against them.

McCrum et al. (1986) in a television series, ‘The Story of English’ called Irish
‘the loaded weapon’ (programme 8).6 Sinn Féin (SF) believes that the Irish lan-
guage is a material help in bringing an end to foreign rule in Ireland, and has
claimed that as the Irish influence rises, foreign influence decreases. A Sinn
Féin Cultural Officer stated at a conference in 1984: ‘I don’t think we can exist
as a separate people without our language. Now every phrase you speak is a
bullet in a freedom struggle. Every phrase you use is a brick in a great build-
ing, a rebuilding of the Irish nation.’ In 1987, the SF party adopted the Irish
language as an important part of its electoral strategy, and still maintains this
position (Goldenberg, 2002: 64, 70). Its website (accessed 10.1.2004) claims:
‘Without a vibrant culture – and language is a central and essential ingredient
here – our claims to separate national identity before the world fall down’
(http://sinnfein.org). Naturally, this alienates Protestants and unionists from
Irish, and tends to polarise support for the language.

Protestant reactions to the promotion of Irish by nationalists and the
Good Friday agreement

As we have seen above, Protestants have made an important historical cul-
tural contribution to the preservation and development of the Irish language.
In 1833, the Presbyterian General Assembly gave its teachers an introduction
to Irish which it termed ‘our sweet and memorable mother tongue’
(Ó Snodaigh, 1977: 16), and some Northern Protestants in the 21st century
retain open and positive attitudes towards the language: witness an issue of the [Anglican] Church of Ireland Gazette (4th May 2001) that advertised a cross-community residential course ‘reclaiming together our shared common cultural heritage in Irish Language, Song, Music and Dance’ (RP’s italics). But one reason why this orientation is not widespread in Northern Ireland is because the traditional education in state (controlled) schools has inculcated an ‘integrationist consciousness’ (integration of NI with GB), and pupils have been taught more about the history and geography of Great Britain than of their own locality.

The identity of Ulster unionists – most of whom are Protestants – has been constructed somewhat narrowly in a way that alienates them from their roots and their historical heritage. Until recently, the educational system served to reinforce this alienation by ignoring local factors in the treatment of school subjects. For example in many state schools, the history and geography taught was that of Britain first and Northern Ireland very much second. Over 20 years ago, Rex Cathcart, a professor of Education at Queen’s University, gave a public lecture for history teachers in which he argued that

The continuing dominance of British or more specifically English history is not educationally desirable. … The balance of emphasis between British and Irish history in the CSE and GCE ‘O’ and ‘A’ levels should be almost reversed. … It is obvious that the history teacher dealing with classes younger than [15 or 16 years of age] must concentrate on what is concrete and familiar because the children have scarcely reached the stage when they can appreciate what is abstract or foreign to their experience (Cathcart, 1979).

He himself mounted a pioneering series of schools’ television programmes called ‘Let’s Look at Ulster’ in a conscious attempt to build local identity and pride through environmental studies. Now, however, things have changed for the better with the advent of the National Curriculum making it impossible for children in Northern Ireland to avoid learning Irish history and geography; moreover, cross-curricular themes such as ‘Mutual Understanding in the Local and Wider Community’ are planned and will build upon existing themes such as ‘Education for Mutual Understanding’. Protestant schoolchildren in the past learned little about Irish language and folklore, and this contributed to a narrow basis for the construction of their identity, thereby making them vulnerable to feelings of anomie and a ‘frontier mentality’. Having become alienated from Irish ‘cultural capital’ (even that in which, as we have seen, they have a significant historical stake), they cling all the more passionately to that which they can legitimately call ‘theirs’ (though truncated by denial of the Irish dimension); this accounts for the freneticism with which Orange marches are supported and celebrated on 12th July every year.

However, in Northern Irish society at large, the exclusively British orientation of language and culture may be changing a little. The police have been learning traditional Irish music (Clarke, 11th October 1998), and some Protestants have even been attending Irish classes. Gordon McCoy (1997a, 1997b), himself a Protestant, has developed a typology of reasons why they do so, thereby providing an exposé of the attitudes that people brought into the Agreement. There exist Protestants who espouse the cause of Irish unity, and find in the Irish language a secular symbol to unify a people divided by
religion. This constituency, however, is small: the 1996 Social Attitudes Survey reported that no more than 6% of Protestants favour a united Ireland (Breen, 1996: 36). Some wish to learn Irish for cultural reasons, and reject any connection with nationalism, and some express ‘a syncretic’ cultural identity that draws upon elements of Britishness and Irishness; some middle-class unionist speakers seek to promote the language on the grounds that if working-class learners learn it they will adopt [middle-class] liberal views. McCoy (1997a: 139–141) adds that although he doubts the ‘conversion’ of unionists to nationalism by means of the Irish language, among Protestants who engage with it, ‘there was an almost universal regret that the language had not been introduced to them during their school years’ (cf. Malcolm, 1997). However, he also notes that there is an element of cultural protectionism and ‘ethnic chauvinism’ on the part of nationalists which may lead to a desire on the part of nationalists to keep Protestants away from ‘their’ language, and cites a Catholic who accused Protestants of ‘stealing our language’ even though he did not speak it himself (McCoy, 1997a: 21, 31, 159). Similarly, O’Reilly (1999: 113, 177) observes that attempts to ‘depoliticise’ the language by encouraging Protestants to learn it are controversial on the republican side, lest they deny the validity of nationalist aspirations, or reduce the value of the language as a political tool. For this reason, the administrators of ULTACH are in an almost impossible position, since on the one hand they must take positive action to promote Irish to Protestants, yet on the other avoid undermining nationalist perceptions of the language.

Many Ulster Protestants are actually unaware that Irish is a legitimate part of their cultural heritage, and see it primarily as the tool of Sinn Féin in promoting republicanism. They reject Irish as something that would taint them by association, and are seeking distinctiveness in promotion of Ulster Scots. This has been recognized as a language by the United Kingdom Committee of the European Bureau of Lesser Used Languages (EBLUL), and is mentioned in the Good Friday Agreement in the following terms:

All participants recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland.

The implications of European language policy are potentially far-reaching. Traditionally Irish has been defined as the first official language of the Irish Republic, and in the North, Irish has dominated as a minority language. Now, however, the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1993) recognises that there are two minority tongues in need of protection in Northern Ireland, and the British government has applied parts 2 and 3 of the Charter to Irish and part 2 to Ulster-Scots. The Irish government has not signed the Charter because it does not recognise Irish as a ‘minority’ language in the Republic. It is the national language and the first official language, with English as the second according to the 1937 Constitution. The ‘Europe of the Regions’ strategy is aimed at diminishing nation state identity and increasing regional identities, possibly smoothing the way for a form of European unity; this constitutes a threat to
traditional alignments that is playing itself out with special intensity in Northern Ireland – though of course it affects other countries too (like Greece). The fact that Northern Ireland is a divided community makes it impossible to base citizenship upon consensual nationalist identity politics, and this is conducive to European language policy being exploited by both sides.

The Good Friday Agreement is the first official document that mentions Ulster Scots. Some, despite EBLUL, claim that it is not a real language but only a dialect. Linguistic scientists, however, regard the boundary between language and dialect as a gradient, not a dichotomy, and Montgomery (1999: 89–90) points out that the development of national languages entrains the introduction of an ideology that permeates modern thinking about languages and assigns status to varieties of languages based on considerations such as their identification with the nation state (or with significant groups). In relation to the status of Ulster Scots, he writes:

Unless [it] is seen as a historical entity, the synchronic awareness of language (which is what the public has) inevitably compares it to modern standard variety written English and equates a social fact (that Ulster Scots is a stigmatised rural variety) with a linguistic myth (that Ulster Scots is a modified or debased form of standard English). (Montgomery, 1999: 100)

Kingsmore (1995) in her linguistic researches shows that it has become a private covert language that people modify or stop speaking when they encounter another language variety; but it is not an artificial form of language, and has continued to be a resource for literature written in Ulster or by Ulster natives in the 20th century (authors such as W.H. Marshall and Michael Longley) (Montgomery & Gregg, 1997: 603).

In fact Ulster Scots (also known as Ullans) derives from west Germanic roots, via a lowland Scots variety (Lallans) that came to Ulster in the 14th century, and now has its own dictionary, lexis and grammar (Concise Ulster Dictionary, 1996; Fenton, 1995; Robinson, 1997). In 1992, the Ulster Scots Language Society (USLS) was founded to promote the status and re-establish the dignity of Ulster Scots as a language; it produces books and an annual magazine, Ullans, and lobbies for resources. In July 2002, it brought out a response to the initial periodical report drawn up by the United Kingdom government (1st July 2002) in relation to the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Perhaps unconsciously adopting the ‘discourse of the oppressed’ that has served other minority languages well (Nic Criath, 2002: 48), its supporters complained of the funding differential for Irish and Ulster Scots that in 2002 resulted in the Irish language receiving 7.43 times as much as for the Ulster Scots. For that year, the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure stated that the former would receive £10.55 million, whereas the latter would receive £1.42 million and, in a rhetoric reminiscent of campaigns for Irish, Ullans supporters refer to ‘years of disadvantage’ and ‘discrimination’. These efforts have borne fruit: an Ulster Scots Academy, already operating voluntarily, is to receive a multi-million financial boost and will begin by compiling an etymological dictionary and commissioning a translation of the Bible (Clarke, 9th March 2003).
Ulster Scots is increasingly used by unionists to assert identity in a post-Agreement Northern Ireland that they fear is bent on ‘privileged’ the nationalist Irish contingent. It has benefited from the Council of Europe Charter which seeks to avoid ‘reinforcing disintegrating tendencies’, and instead encourages the groups who speak such languages to ‘put behind them the resentments of the past which prevented them from accepting their place in the country in which they live and in Europe as a whole’ (para. 13). The Charter views minority languages as a means of ensuring greater permeability between language groups, promoting cultural enrichment, enhancing understanding between all groups in the state and militating against language loss (paras 66 and 68). It is impossible to provide an exact breakdown of the percentages of people (unionist and nationalist) affiliating to Irish versus those affiliating to Ulster Scots, but figures do exist to show Protestant sentiment several years after the Agreement. A survey carried out by the Belfast Telegraph discovered that while 53% of Protestants surveyed voted for the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, only 36% of them would do so today. The average level of trust among them has dropped to 17% compared with 34% among Catholics, whereas in 1999, the corresponding figures were 37% and 48%. This represents a profound level of mistrust, especially on the Protestant side (White, 22nd February 2003). Polarisation is also demonstrated by the results of the 2003 election in which a swing to the more extreme political parties, the Democratic Unionist Parties and Sinn Féin took place, and this trend inevitably militates against the possibility of Protestants regarding Irish as a common heritage.

It is true that by laying claim to the Irish language as a legitimate, historical, cultural heritage, unionists might help to depoliticise it. It could probably be transformed into a benign element, vitiating the attempts of political opponents to use it for their own political purposes. Embracing a Protestant Gaelic heritage could help dispel the Catholic or republican image of Irish; but this is not the way things are going at present. Far from accepting a shared heritage, the movement among many Protestants is to assert a distinctive identity by developing Ulster Scots, thereby distancing themselves from what they would see as manipulative attempts to ‘soften them up’ in preparation for a united Ireland. They may even suspect that the European policy of promoting regions and regional languages is a means of undermining national sovereignty and with it the union to which they are devoted. Yet Ulster Scots is spoken by Catholics as well as Protestants, just as we have seen the Irish language ‘belongs’ to both Protestants and Catholics, despite attempts of Sinn Féin/IRA to ‘appropriate’ it for republican ends. Notwithstanding their shared past history, both languages are being mobilised in Northern Ireland in support of either unionist or nationalist political positions. The integrative, inclusive results hoped for by the Council of Europe may be a long time in coming, especially as the motto of the Ulster Scots Academy is thole aye an quhile poustie (perseverance brings strength).

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Notes

1. Known as the Belfast Agreement or the Good Friday Agreement.
2. Michael Cusack, himself from very humble origins, gradually bettered himself and gained access to some of the most exclusive and anglicised sporting clubs of the day; it was here that he derived inspiration for the promotion of the traditional sport of hurling (Ó Huallacháin, 1994: 44).
3. Most of the remaining Catholic elite had fled the country, for example in 1609 in ‘The Flight of the Earls’ and as a result of the penal laws ‘the most active among the Roman catholic gentry took service abroad’ (Beckett, 1952: 99).
4. McCrum et al. (1986) estimate that about 40 million Americans claim Irish descent.
5. The largest single ethnic minority in Northern Ireland is the Chinese population, and when new Law Courts were opened in Belfast, the inscription on the inauguration tablet was in English, Irish and Chinese.
6. Some claim that prison Irish was of execrable quality, but Cnamh (1985) states that about one half of the 500 republican prisoners spoke Irish fluently and the rest reasonably well.
7. In case of conflict between the texts of any copy of the 1937 Constitution, the text in Irish would prevail (Buttimer, 2003: 541).
8. It is worth noting that the University of Ulster has an Academy of Irish Cultural Heritages founded in October 2001, which collaborates closely with its Institute of Ulster-Scots Studies.

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