

BILINGUALISM IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION THE CASE OF IRELAND

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The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief description of some of the policies and problems arising from the need to use two languages in a single system of public administration, that of the Republic of Ireland. Before reviewing the subject in detail, it may be useful for readers outside Ireland to consider the linguistic background.

Language Situation

Two languages —English and Irish— are in current use in Ireland (total population 3.2 million). The language most commonly used is English which is a Germanic language of world-wide communication. Irish is a Celtic language now used as an everyday vernacular in limited areas (mainly along the western seaboard) which are known collectively as the *Gaeltacht*. The total number of native speakers living in *Gaeltacht* areas is estimated at about 55,000. In addition, 25 %-30 % of the total population claim to have some competence in Irish, derived mainly from the educational system.

The Irish language has been spoken in Ireland since the beginning of recorded history. It was the language of the majority of the population until the first half of the 19th century. Since then it lost ground steadily to English, until it reached the stage when it occupied little more than a marginal place in the sociolinguistic pattern of Irish society.

The continuing decline of the Irish language was observed with regret by many Irishmen. From the end of the 18th century sporadic efforts were made to halt, and even reverse, the trend. It was not however until the end of the 19th century that a language revival movement began which was strong enough to make an impact on the country as a whole. The movement was promoted mainly by an organisation known as the Gaelic League. This in turn became closely related to the nationalist revolutionary movement which succeeded in

1922 in securing the establishment of the Irish Free State. In 1949, that State became the Republic of Ireland.

Constitutional Position

With the foundation of the Irish Free State, the Irish language acquired official status. It was given a new constitutional position as a national language. Its restoration as a general medium of communication became State policy and efforts began to be made by the State to extend its use in the public domains and in particular in public administration.

The present Constitution, which dates from 1937, declares:

«The Irish language as the national language is the first official language. The English language is recognised as a second official language.» (Article 8, sections 1 and 2).

The primacy of status given here to the Irish language derives of course from historical and nationalist considerations but it has also been official policy to encourage the extension of a practical knowledge and use of the language.

The first official efforts in favour of the Irish language were made mainly through the educational system. The teaching of Irish was made obligatory at primary and secondary levels and a knowledge of Irish became necessary in order to pass the principal State examinations. Progressively also a satisfactory knowledge of Irish was made an essential prerequisite for employment and promotion in the central civil service. This policy became known as «compulsory Irish» and became the subject of some public and political controversy in the late 1960s.

Public opinion

In recent decades, the concepts of language planning and the practicalities of public attitudes, rather than the dogmas of the revolutionary era, have increasingly been taken as the guide-lines for language policy. A major research study was undertaken between 1970 and 1975 which had as its aim an examination of

- i) current attitudes towards the Irish language and towards efforts to restore it as a general means of communication, and
- ii) the extent to which the public would support policy developments which seemed to offer a greater change of achieving the aim of restoring Irish as a general means of communication in a significant range of language functions.

The research found that there was a general and widespread support for a bilingual objective, based on a widely shared set of beliefs about the cultural and ethnic value of the Irish language. However, it also found that a signifi-

cant majority objected to compulsory policies, including the further use of Irish in the selection of recruits to the civil service or in decisions about career promotions within the service. On the other hand, a substantial majority of the country's population believed that Irish speakers have a right to expect civil servants to be able to use Irish in their business with them.

Coming now to the current situation, I propose to consider various practical aspects of the use of the Irish language in public administration.

Formal use

The primacy of the constitutional position of the Irish language is most clearly reflected in its use in the formal symbols and ceremony of the State. Coins bear only Irish inscriptions and legal tender notes and postage stamps have a minimum of English on them. In Parliament, formal prayers and motions are usually in Irish while statutes are published in completely bilingual versions and debates are almost entirely in English. Most State boards and companies have Irish titles (usually chosen so as to be easily pronounceable by those without a knowledge of Irish).

On official notepaper, the Irish version of the title and address is usually in larger letters than the English version.

Bilingual competence among officials

Because of the relative weakness of the Irish language, special arrangements have been made to ensure that most civil service officials have a certain degree of competence in both official languages. Irish is essential for certain posts in the civil service e.g. Schools Inspector, Junior Translator. When Irish is not essential for a post, candidate's knowledge of Irish is taken into account as follows:

- where the post is to be filled by written examination, Irish and English are subjects in the examination; candidates who take and qualify in both subjects are given credit for both
- where the post is to be filled by interview, candidates may have an assessment made of their knowledge of Irish and English. Those who are deemed to be proficient in both languages are awarded extra marks in respect of such proficiency.

Irish is not now obligatory for promotion in the civil service except where Irish is essential for the performance of the duties of the post. A knowledge of Irish is, however, one of the factors taken into account in selecting staff for promotion. The Civil Service Commissioners hold tests in Irish (oral and written) to give officers, who wish to do so, an opportunity of having their knowledge of Irish assessed for promotion purposes.

A special language teaching institute, known as *Gaeleagras na Seirbhíse Poiblí*, has been set up to provide opportunities and to encourage people in the public service to learn Irish or improve their knowledge of the language through courses and seminars. Both day and evening courses are available to civil servants who are anxious to improve their knowledge of Irish. The courses are based on the principles of applied linguistics as originally used in the elaboration of *Le Français Fondamental*. A special survey was made of the words and structures most frequently required in official work and the results were used to prepare a series of graded lessons, drills and exercises, together with a wide range of sample conversations. For more advanced students of Irish, scholarships are available to enable them to spend some time in the *Gaeltacht* areas.

Language norms

One of the obstacles in the way of a greater use of the Irish language for official purposes was the absence of generally accepted language norms. This meant that a single word could be spelt in many ways and that there was no standard grammar. In 1945, at the request of the Prime Minister, Mr de Valera, the Parliamentary translation office produced a simplified spelling and in 1953 it produced a simplified and standardised grammar. The standardisation of grammar was based on four principles.

1. As far as possible, to adopt no form or rule which was not well authenticated in the living speech of the *Gaeltacht*
2. To choose the forms which were most widely used in the *Gaeltacht*
3. To pay due attention to the history and literature of the Irish language
4. To seek regularity and simplicity.

The standardised spelling and grammar have now been officially adopted for all purposes.

A problem which English and Irish share with many other languages is the increasing use of bureaucratic jargon —inflated, involved and obscure verbiage often borrowed from the law or from the social sciences. Steps have therefore been taken to improve the standard of written communication in the civil service. Training courses in effective writing have been provided and booklets —one in Irish and one in English— have been provided for officials who have to do a fair amount of writing.

Forms and documents

The good design of official forms —which are frequently bilingual— is receiving increased attention in recent years. Courses in forms design are provided centrally. Technological developments in the use of word-processors, pho-

tocopiers and phototypesetting give greater flexibility in the design and revision of forms and other documents going to the public.

Future plans

The most recent development has been that the entire subject of bilingualism in the public service has been reviewed by Bord na Gaeilge, a special board which was established under an Act of Parliament to extend the use of the Irish language as a general means of communication. In its *Action Plan for Irish, 1983-1986*, the Bord has recommended that each Department of State should draw up a detailed plan for the development of Irish in its work. These plans should concentrate on

- a) giving effect to the principle of bilingualism in all areas of operation and activity; and in particular should ensure that signalisation, notices, forms and printed material be provided in bilingual form (apart from some exceptional cases)
- b) generating public demand for services wholly or partly through Irish (in consultation with Bord na Gaeilge)
- c) providing the necessary facilities to ensure that service through Irish, whether by telephone, correspondence or personal contact, is available as quickly and efficiently as in English; and ensuring public awareness of this position
- d) ensuring that staff in all offices dealing directly with *Gaeltacht* communities or services are willing and able to carry out their duties through Irish
- e) identifying units or branches in the various Departments in which it might be natural to carry out a certain amount of work through Irish, and directing personnel with Irish towards such units
- f) making specific arrangements to ensure that there are sufficient officers with good Irish to deal with public demand for services in Irish and to encourage and increase such demand.
- g) developing a bilingual environment within the Department by associating Irish with both social and official activities.

Conclusion

The Republic of Ireland recognises two official languages —one (English) is a highly-developed language of world-wide communication and the other (Irish) is a traditional language of local communication which requires supportive measures to maintain its position. We share various aspects of this general linguistic situation with other nation states (e.g. Canada, Belgium) and nationalities (e.g. Wales) which are at an advanced stage of development

and also with many of the new nations which are beginning to develop their economies and systems of public administration.

The subject of bilingualism in public administration, combining a wide range of topics and situations with a great variety of language use, is more complicated than might appear at first view. It involves constitutional, legal, social, administrative, pedagogic and planning factors. There is a need for more factual information about it both from case studies of particular administrations and from comparative interdisciplinary studies across administrations. Analysis of such information could make an important contribution to the wider study of language planning processes which include policy formulation, elaboration and codification, implementation, evaluation and feedback.

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TRADUCCIÓ RESUMIDA:

EL BILINGÜISME A L'ADMINISTRACIÓ PÚBLICA. EL CAS D'IRLANDA

La finalitat de l'article és de fer una descripció breu dels sistemes i dels problemes de l'ús de dos idiomes en una única administració pública, la de la República d'Irlanda.

A Irlanda (3,2 milions d'habitants) s'utilitza majoritàriament l'anglès mentre que l'irlandès s'usa com a llengua vernacle en àrees determinades, especialment les de la costa oest, conegudes com a *Gaeltacht* (amb uns 55.000 habitants de parla irlandesa aproximadament). D'altra banda, entre un 25 % i un 30 % de la població total té coneixements d'irlandès, derivats especialment del sistema escolar.

L'irlandès, llengua majoritària de la població fins a la primera meitat del segle XIX, es troba actualment reduït, per la pressió de l'anglès, a una situació marginal en el model sociolingüístic de la societat irlandesa.

L'any 1922 el moviment nacionalista revolucionari aconseguí la proclamació de l'*Irish Free State* (el qual esdevingué República d'Irlanda el 1949): l'irlandès va adquirir status oficial com a llengua nacional. La constitució actual (1937) declara:

«La llengua irlandesa, com a llengua nacional, és la primera llengua oficial. La llengua anglesa és reconeguda com a segona llengua oficial.»
(Article 8, apartats 1 i 2.)

L'Estat, sobretot a través del sistema educatiu, començà a esforçar-se per estendre l'ús i el coneixement de l'irlandès. Pel que fa a l'administració pública, un coneixement satisfactori de la llengua irlandesa esdevingué un requisit essencial per treballar i promoure's dins l'administració central (irlandès obligatori).

Un estudi de l'opinió pública entre els anys 1970-75 va assenyalar que hi havia un suport ampli i general per a objectius bilingües, que una majoria significativa s'oposava a una política obligatòria, incloent-hi l'ús de l'irlandès per a la selecció o promoció de personal dins l'administració, mentre que, d'altra

banda, una majoria substancial pensava que la població de parla irlandesa tenia dret d'esperar que existís funcionariat que pogués utilitzar l'irlandès.

Pel que fa a l'ús formal, es reflecteix la prioritat de la posició constitucional de l'irlandès en els símbols formals i en la cerimònia de l'Estat.

A causa de la feblesa relativa de l'irlandès, s'han pres disposicions especials per tal d'assegurar que la majoria de funcionaris tinguin un cert grau de coneixements en ambdues llengües oficials. Per ocupar alguns llocs (inspector d'escola, per exemple) l'irlandès és essencial i, en conseqüència, obligatori. Per als llocs on no és absolutament necessari, i per tant no és obligatori, es valora el coneixement d'ambdues llengües. El coneixement de l'irlandès és un dels factors que es tenen en compte per a la promoció de personal. Així els Civil Service Commissioners fan exàmens, orals i escrits, per al funcionariat que desitja fer constar el seu grau de coneixements de l'irlandès amb finalitats de promoció.

Una escola especial, la *Gaeleagras na Seirbhíse Poiblí*, va ésser creada per donar oportunitats al personal al servei de l'administració pública per aprendre o millorar el seu coneixement de la llengua a través de cursos i de seminaris. Els cursos es basen en els principis de lingüística aplicada. Hom va examinar especialment el vocabulari i les estructures que sovintegen més en el treball oficial i els resultats van servir per preparar sèries de lliçons escalonades i exercicis, juntament amb una àmplia varietat de models de conversació. Existeix la possibilitat, per a alumnes avançats d'irlandès, d'obtenir beques per passar una temporada a les zones *Gaeltacht*.

Fins l'any 1953 no trobem una gramàtica i una ortografia estandarditzades, fetes per l'oficina del Parlament i adoptades després per a ús general. L'estandardització de la gramàtica es basà en quatre principis: la no adopció de formes o regles que no fossin verificades a la parla de la zona *Gaeltacht*; la tria de formes usades més sovint a la zona *Gaeltacht*; l'estudi de la història i de la literatura de la llengua irlandesa; la regularitat i la simplificació.

D'altra banda, hom promou la millora de la comunicació escrita dins l'administració a través de cursos i de llibres en irlandès i en anglès i també es para esment en el disseny de documents oficials, sovint bilingües.

Recentment, la qüestió del bilingüisme a l'administració pública ha estat examinada per *Bord na Gaeilge*, un comitè especial establert per una llei del Parlament per estendre l'irlandès com a mitjà de comunicació pública. En el seu *Action Plan for Irish 1983-1986*, el Bord va recomanar l'establiment d'un pla d'acció detallat a cada Departament d'Estat. Els plans s'haurien de centrar en els aspectes següents:

a) l'aplicació del principi de bilingüisme en tots els camps, especialment en la senyalització, notes, documents i material imprès;

b) generar demanda per a serveis totalment o parcial en irlandès;

c) donar facilitats perquè el servei en irlandès (telefònic, escrit o contacte personal) sigui tan ràpid i eficient com en anglès i, alhora, assegurar la consciència pública d'aquest fet;

d) assegurar que el personal de totes les oficines en contacte amb les zones *Gaeltacht* puguin dur a terme la seva tasca en irlandès;

e) triar personal que conegui l'irlandès per als llocs on es podria fer feina en irlandès;

f) assegurar que hi hagi prou personal amb un bon coneixement de l'irlandès per atendre la demanda pública per als serveis en irlandès i fer augmentar aquesta demanda;

g) desenvolupament d'un context bilingüe dins del Departament a través de la inclusió de l'irlandès en les activitats socials i oficials.

Conclusió

La República d'Irlanda reconeix dues llengües oficials: l'anglès, d'àmbit internacional, i l'irlandès, la llengua tradicional de comunicació local, que necessita mesures de suport per mantenir la seva posició.

La qüestió del bilingüisme a l'administració pública és més complicada del que sembla a primer cop d'ull ja que inclou factors constitucionals, legals, socials, administratius, pedagògics i de planificació. Cal més informació tant de l'estudi d'administracions concretes com d'estudis comparatius interdisciplinaris de les administracions: aquesta informació seria una contribució important als processos de planificació de la llengua.

Traducció resumida a cura de M. Assumpció Montagut i Freixas