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Book Review: Language Revitalisation and Social Transformation

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Language Revitalisation and Social Transformation

Edited by Huw Lewis and Wilson McLeod

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The anthology *Language Revitalisation and Social Transformation* is from the Palgrave series on Language and Globalization. This volume, edited by Huw Lewis and Wilson McLeod, offers a comprehensive overview of the contemporary situation of regional and minority language (RML) revitalisation. It is separated into four thematic parts, each of which is comprised of three chapters, the third always being an editors' summary. In the editors' introduction, the volume is situated into the broader discourse of minority languages and language revitalisation. This involves stating that while the challenges faced by RMLs are global, this anthology focuses predominately on efforts in industrialised, Westernised contexts, with an

overwhelmingly emphasis on Celtic languages in Ireland and the United Kingdom. Meanwhile, RMLs of even continental Western Europe are largely absent from the volume's chapters. The editors suggest this is done to allow for meaningful comparisons, referencing the impacts of factors such as colonialism in different contexts, yet they fail to otherwise make clear what commonalities make their selected comparisons significant. Defining this would have been prudent, as RMLs, even within Western Europe, can exist in drastically different political, social, and economic contexts, particularly in the case of RMLs which may be the – or a – national language of another state, as opposed to those which exist largely within a single, subnational geographic area. The introduction also grounds the volume in the existing literature surrounding topics of language revitalisation and language maintenance, particularly as they relate to late American linguist Joshua Fishman. They conclude the introduction with the primary questions they seek to address, which anticipate the four parts: *Communities, Families, Economy, and Governance*.

The first part, *Communities*, explores the challenges faced by RMLs in a world increasingly defined by greater mobility. In the first chapter, *The Geography of Minority Language Use: From Community to Network*, Rhys Jones seeks to expand how RMLs are understood in terms of geographic space. Language policy and planning in Wales, he argues, has focused on Welsh in a limited physical geography, but should be broadened to include the complex networks in which Welsh-speakers live, and thereby modified to include their modern realities of mobility and interconnectivity. The second chapter, *Minority Languages in the Age of Networked Individualism: From Social Networks to Digital Breathing Spaces*, from Daniel Cunliffe, examines the role of digital connectivity for RML communities. While traditional, offline social networks are often a lifeline for RMLs, online social networks provide many of the same avenues for their promotion, to the extent that Cunliffe argues that offline and online networks should be considered as one consummate RML social network. The final chapter, *Communities, Networks and Contemporary Language Revitalisation*, contains an editors' summary which uses the previous two chapters to explore other community-related questions pertaining to language revitalisation by both those engaged in it and by the academic community.

The second part, *Families*, engages with the changing forms of families and childrearing, and how these impact the intergenerational transmission of RMLs. Opening with *Family Language Policy and Language Transmission in Times of Change*, Kendall King and Ling Wang outline how researchers and policy-makers alike must shift away from the

increasingly anachronistic and heteronormative nuclear family in order to better understand linguistically diverse households. This chapter, however, is largely focused on multilingual families in general, and not RML-speaking families specifically, as the additional language(s) may include immigrant and heritage languages. Some exploration of where these may intersect and potentially conflict, such as new migration to RML-speaking areas, would have been an interesting inclusion which would have served to recentre the discussion on RMLs. The second chapter, *Family Language Policy: Promoting Partnership in the Early Years to Support Heritage Languages* from Tina Hickey, addresses many of the changes discussed by King and Wang in relation to the Irish language. With particular attention paid to increased rates of women in the workforce and therewith the greater role of pre-school childcare, there is an increased need for the support of Irish in early-years settings. The editors close with *Changes in Family Structure and Lifestyles: Challenges for Regional or Minority Languages* which addresses the ways RMLs are uniquely affected by these changes in ways other languages might not be.

Part three, *Economy*, examines the impact of globalisation on RML communities. Beginning with *The Economics of 'Language[s] at Work': Theory, Hiring Model and Evidence* from François Grin and François Vaillancourt, the economic usefulness of languages is examined. This intersects with RMLs, which often have their utility more frequently questioned when their inclusion in education is suggested. The authors posit that while there are arguments used to frame the protection and promotion of RMLs, their economic benefit is situationally dependent, and defies a one size fits all solution. A curious element of this chapter is that the authors overwhelmingly discuss languages with existing high utility values. For example, while French may represent a RML in a broader English-speaking, North American context, the French language enjoys a great degree of prestige and privilege on a global scale. This is significantly different from other RMLs, such the Celtic languages focused upon in this volume, and certainly RMLs like Sorbian or varieties of Frisian, which do not have this same global utility. An Anglo-Canadian who learns French has greater economic opportunities than simply those in Québec or even a broader Canadian context, than a learner of, for example, Sorbian does. Through largely limiting the chapter to Québec with French and English, and Switzerland with German, French and Italian, an opportunity is missed. Most curious is the missing discussion of Switzerland's fourth national language, Romansh, which deals with these challenges in ways the aforementioned languages do not. In an endnote, the authors do briefly mention that examining Romansh would be too costly and that the Germanisation of Romansh-

speaking communities make identifying a true region in which Romansh is used in economic activity difficult, though precisely this sort of situation could have been used to examine the potential economic role of smaller, more geographically limited RMLs. Fortunately, the following chapter does offer insights into the potential economic benefits of RMLs which lack the global utility of languages like French. Using research gathered over more than 20 years, Mike Danson in *Gàidhlig, Gaeilge, Cymraeg and Føroyskt Mál: Minority Languages as Economic Assets* further expands into these topics by examining the periphery languages Irish, Scots Gaelic, Welsh, and Faroese. He suggests that their promotion and normalisation have brought economic gains to their respective countries, which in turn provides utility for these RMLs. In their closing chapter, *Regional and Minority Languages and the Economy: The Evolution of Structural and Analytical Challenges*, the editors address the difficulties which arise from the contextual differences of RMLs, even within a primarily European context.

Part four, *Governance*, analyses changes to policymaking which have impacted RMLs. Lewis' *The Governance of Language Revitalisation: The Case of Wales* details the effects of diffusion of political power on RMLs, which has resulted in greater protection for them from international organisations and greater promotion of them by sub-state governments in Western contexts. This occurs in tandem with greater involvement from non-government actors. Looking to Ireland, John Walsh examines the backing out of government from language planning in *The Governance of Irish in the Neoliberal Age: The Retreat of the State Under the Guise of Partnership*. Namely, Walsh concludes that Irish policy pays a marginal lip-service to the Irish language, symbolically promoting its usage whilst doing little to subvert the dominance of English. In closing, the editors expand the analysis of governmental and policy impact on language revitalisation. It is unclear how much involvement there was between chapter authors, either directly or via the editors, in preparation of this volume. The editors' closing for this section might have included some synthesis between chapters. Namely, Hickley's chapter from *Family* discussing a greater need for Irish promotion in early-years settings could have been (re)contextualised together with Walsh's critiques of the Irish government's tokenism from this section.

The anthology itself is closed with an afterword, *Forging Hope in the Company of Cynics*, from Colin Williams, which compiles a defense of RML revitalisation based in critical thought and academic discourse. It is a fitting summary which provides synthesis for the authors' and editors' wide breadth of ideas, and puts forward a challenge for those who advocate for language revitalisation to equip themselves with supported arguments. A lack of

a final word from the editors themselves, however, which might have sought to achieve the same synthesis of all four thematic parts, akin to their chapter summaries, is an unfortunate omission. Their perspectives both introduce the anthology and tie each chapter together, yet are absent from the volume's conclusion.

As a whole, the volume is useful for those involved with the promotion and revitalisation of RMLs, whether academically or politically. While the European-focused scope was outlined in the introduction, greater inclusion of examples beyond Ireland and the UK would have been welcomed as chapter foci. Nevertheless, the anthology represents a comprehensive contribution to the multi-faceted topic of language revitalisation in Europe.