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## ***Manx Language Revitalization and Immersion Education***

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### **Abstract**

The Manx language is currently enjoying a period of revitalization. The decline of the Manx language as the native vernacular language of the Isle of Man and the subsequent language shift to English are discussed in the first part of this paper. The paper then goes on to consider the revitalization of the language, with the emphasis on Manx-medium immersion education. The results of a questionnaire enquiring into parental motivations for choosing immersion education, and the linguistic backgrounds of the children are then examined in some detail.

### **Keywords**

Language shift, Language revitalization, Immersion education, Parental motivation, Linguistic background.

### **Overview of Historical Background**

Manx, along with its sister languages Irish and Scottish Gaelic, is a member of the Goidelic/Gaelic branch of the Celtic languages. Many scholars believe that the Manx language came to the Isle of Man with Irish raiders in about AD 500 (Stowell and Ó Bréasláin 1996: 1).

Assimilation to Gaelic culture was quick, possibly with Old Irish being the ultimate parent of the modern Manx language. Since the language at that stage must have been identical to that of Ireland and Scotland, it is impossible to identify any writings as being discernibly Manx (Stowell and Ó Bréasláin 1996: 1).

Manx was the majority native language of inhabitants of the Isle of Man from approximately AD 500 until the mid nineteenth century. Vikings who first raided, and then settled in the Island after AD 800 appear to have made little impact on the language:

It is very likely that in the Norse period the ruling class in Mann was bilingual in Norse and Irish and there was an underclass, which spoke, only Irish. It is possible that Norse survived in Mann into the fourteenth century. However, Gaelic obviously strongly reasserted itself in Mann to the extent that few words of Norse origin can be found in modern Manx. In the end, Manx shows less evidence of Norse influence than does Scottish Gaelic (Stowell and Ó Bréasláin 1996: 2).

The linguistic influence of Norse is largely confined to place names, notably with the *-by* suffix,<sup>1</sup> such as in Sulby, Crosby, Surby, and Laxey; the latter also incorporates the Norse for salmon, *lax* (the Manx for salmon is *braddan*). The Norse period left its mark on the Island's political and legal system, rather than on the Manx language. Tynwald, the Island's parliament, which celebrated its millennium in 1979, is the most prominent legacy of the Norse period.

Tynwald consists of two chambers, the House of Keys and the Legislative Council. The twenty-four members of the House of Keys are directly elected by the public to serve for a five-year term of office. The Legislative Council acts as a second revising chamber for Bills introduced in the House of Keys and the members of the House of Keys elect eight of its eleven members. The remaining *ex-officio* members are H. M. Attorney General, the Lord Bishop and the President of Tynwald, who is elected by Tynwald as a whole.

The Isle of Man is a self-governing, dependent territory of the British Crown and is not part of the United Kingdom. The British Crown does, however hold ultimate responsibility for the Island and appoints a Lieutenant Governor as its representative, with each Governor holding the office for a five-year tenure. The Island is a member of the British Commonwealth and is represented by the United Kingdom in international affairs, notably with regard to the European Union, where Protocol 3 determines the Island's relationship with Europe, negotiated on the Island's behalf by the UK.

An English-speaking administration has existed on the Island from at least 1334 when King Edward III of England granted possession of the Island to the first Earl of Salisbury. Manx has been isolated from both Irish, and its closer relative Scottish Gaelic, since the fourteenth century. Prior to this the Isle of Man had, together with the Southern Hebrides, constituted the Kingdom of Man and the Isles, with the kings of Man owing allegiance variously to Norway, Scotland, and subsequently to England. Possession of the Island was granted to the Stanley family, Earls of Derby, from 1405 to 1736, and from 1736 to 1765, the Island was owned by the 'anglicised' Dukes of Atholl (Broderick 1999:13). The English Crown purchased the sovereign rights to the Island from the third Duke of Atholl in the 1765 Revestment Act.

The first survey to give a detailed assessment of the number of Manx speakers was carried out by Henry Jenner in 1875.<sup>2</sup> Jenner sent a questionnaire to the clergy of each parish with the purpose of discovering whether Manx or English was the prevailing language of the parish and how many people spoke Manx as a 'mother tongue'. The results of Jenner's survey

(which excludes the Island's capital Douglas) give a total of 12,340 Manx speakers out of a population of 41,084 (30%). However, Jenner added a note of caution with regard to the number of speakers recorded:

Of course these statistics can hardly be taken to represent a perfect philological census of the Island, and it would be very difficult to obtain such a thing by answers from different people, as each man (as regards my second question at any rate) would have his own standards to judge by and I am very sure that the standards vary considerably. Still I think they may be said to give a fair approximate view of the philological state of the Isle of Man in the year 1875 (Jenner 1875:14).

The second question asked how many people spoke Manx as a 'mother tongue'; the tabulated answer listed the number of people who 'speak Manx habitually' (presumably as a mother tongue though not stated as such). The question was worded 'How many *persons* (my italics) speak Manx as their mother tongue?', therefore the number of Manx speakers must be presumed to refer to individuals not households. The figures given refer to those collected by the clergy and not the individuals to whom Jenner may or may not have spoken to when he visited the Island some months later—these are not included in his statistics. The figures are not given according to gender, but there is a question relating to 'language spoken by children'. However, no figures are given for the *number* of children in each parish, merely the information 'English only', 'English and Manx', and 'English and a little Manx'.

Jenner divided the Island into the 'North District', consisting of eight parishes, and the 'South District', consisting of nine parishes. In four out of the eight North District parishes the children were described as speaking 'English and a little Manx', and in one parish 'English and Manx'. In the South District English and Manx were spoken in one out of the nine parishes. Children in the remaining parishes of both North and South Districts were recorded as speaking English only.

Jenner's survey results included notes and comments by the local clergy. The following comment was made by the Vicar of St. George's, Douglas:

In the country parishes one finds three generations in one cottage. The old speaking Manx only, the middle Manx and English, and the children English only.

This statement presages the drop in speakers, which became apparent in the 1901 census<sup>3</sup> by which time the number of Manx speakers had fallen to 4,419. It is evident that Manx had lost its domain as the main language of the home and family by the turn of the century. The older

generation of Manx speakers was not being replaced by younger speakers. From 1901 onwards the decline in speakers continued, dropping to its lowest point in 1946 with a total of 20 Manx speakers.

Manx continued to be spoken as a second language by a small number of individuals throughout the twentieth century, and it is important to note that there has never been a time when there were no Manx speakers at all. The number of Manx speakers began slowly to rise again throughout the second half of the twentieth century. 1,527<sup>4</sup> people claimed to be Manx speakers in the 2001 census; the largest number of speakers recorded since 1911. Manx lessons have been available as an option in the Island's primary and secondary schools since 1992 following the appointment of a Manx Language Officer and peripatetic teaching team, and this is no doubt the reason for the large increase in speakers. It is clearly not possible to say what exactly is meant by Manx speakers in this context, as there is no indication as to the quantity and quality of the language spoken. The Manx language has no body of *native* speakers but it has, nonetheless, continued to be a spoken language. In that sense, the link from last native speakers to the present day remains unbroken.

### **Contributory Factors in the Decline**

The language shift from Manx to English, which occurred largely during the course of the nineteenth century, accelerating rapidly towards the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, was inevitable due to a combination of factors.<sup>5</sup>

The decline of Manx results not so much from rigorous action against it from within, but from a set circumstances emanating from without. Until the mid-eighteenth century Man had little contact with the outside world. Given its small population and resources external trade and contact can hardly have been all that great anyway, and English was therefore unnecessary to people outside the small towns, where it was spoken alongside Manx without displacing it. There was little incentive or reason for outsiders to come to Man, and so everyday contact between town and country areas was important and Manx would need to be used. The impetus in the direction of English came ca. early/mid-18th century, largely as a result of the 'running trade' from which many Manx people profited (Broderick 1999: 23).

The Dukes of Atholl were the owners and administrators of the Island from 1736-1765 and as such were in a position to set import duties at a lower rate than that of the rest of the British Isles. However, lower import duties into the Isle of Man resulted in a loss of revenue for the British government who regarded the Island's activities (the running trade) as 'smuggling'.

As a result of the Revestment Act of 1765, known on the Island as *Yn Chialg Vooar* (The Great Deception), sovereignty of the Island was transferred from the Duke of Atholl to the British Crown. This Act provided the British Government with the means to put an end to 'smuggling' thereby depriving many Manx people of their livelihood, which resulted in emigration and the consequent loss of Manx speakers. Indeed, Stowell and Ó Bréasláin claim that:

The suppression of 'the trade' (smuggling) led directly to poverty and emigration and hence the advance of the English language in Mann. This tendency was enhanced by immigration of people on fixed income from northwest England in the period from about 1790 to about 1814. The great depression in the Manx economy after 1765 was followed by a further depression in the period 1825 to 1837, leading to more emigration of Manx people, mainly to America (1996: 11).

The Island's coinage value of fourteen pence to the shilling (compared with twelve pence elsewhere) was an attractive immigration incentive to those living on pensions or fixed incomes. This anomaly lasted until 1840 when the value of the shilling in the Isle of Man was standardized at twelve pence.<sup>6</sup> Roads built between 1750 and 1800 also contributed to the spread of English from the town to the country.

Throughout the nineteenth century surges of emigration from the Island continued for a variety of reasons including depression in the fishing industry, potato famine and reorganization of common land. The Manx Education Act of 1872 established a system of compulsory education throughout the Island, and with the subsequent Education Act of 1892 the provision of education was both compulsory and free of charge.<sup>7</sup> English was the medium of instruction in all schools. Broderick observes that:

Though the medium of tuition was to be English this was not compulsorily laid down in the Act. The only subject made compulsory under the Act was religious education. However, though there was nothing in the Act providing against the teaching of Manx, in practical terms the Act facilitated the dissemination of English in Man. However, by the time the Act came into being Manx was in an advanced state of demise, and any hostile intent towards Manx abetted by the 1872 Act was in reality ineffectual (1999: 22).

Thus it can be seen that by the mid-nineteenth century the Manx language had lost many of its native speakers due to demographic change and migration from the Island and gained (partly as a result of immigration) an increase in English speakers. In addition all children received English medium education from 1872 onwards, irrespective of their own linguistic backgrounds. There are no recorded cases of children being punished for speaking Manx in

schools but anecdotal evidence suggests that they were discouraged from doing so.

Discouragement might take the form of being requested by the teacher to speak English or being subjected to a degree of mockery by English-speaking peers and/or the class teacher.

Another factor in the decline of the Manx language was the Island's attraction as a holiday destination. The Isle of Man Steam Packet Co. Ltd. was founded in 1830 and established a regular steam ship service between Douglas and Liverpool (Winterbottom 2000: 217).

Although most visitors stayed in or near Douglas, steam and electric railway systems built from 1873 to 1898 enabled them to travel all over the Island (Winterbottom 2000: 223-225). There can be no doubt that knowledge of English was advantageous to the many throughout the Island whose livelihood was dependent on the annual influx of visitors. *Cha jean oo cosney ping lesh y Ghailck*, 'you won't earn a penny with the Manx' is a frequently quoted aphorism from the 1880s. The 'Wakes week' holiday taken by the Lancashire mill towns provided the vast majority of visitors to the Isle of Man. This number reached a peak of 663,000<sup>8</sup> over the summer season of 1913—the Island's permanent population was at that time around 52,000.

It is therefore not surprising, given the factors of:

- demographic change
- emigration of Manx speakers coupled with immigration of English speakers
- compulsory English language education
- the rise of the tourist industry
- the improved communication both within the Island due to the building of new roads and the railway, and between the Island and the outside world,

that the Manx began to regard their own language as at best an irrelevance and a hindrance in the progressive modern age, and at worst a badge of ignorance and lack of education. The social and economic changes in the Island which began in the late eighteenth century and gathered momentum throughout the nineteenth century brought about a situation where bilingualism, facilitated by the education system and sheer economic necessity, rapidly became the norm. In 1821 it was claimed that between fifteen and twenty thousand people were 'incapable of receiving instruction in any other language but Manks' (out of a population of around 40,000); by 1871 the census gave a figure of 13,530 Manx speakers (population 54,042) of which 190 were reported as being monoglot Manx speakers (Broderick 1999:41).

In a bilingual situation where one of the languages carries much greater prestige and is in fact more useful in the day-to-day business of making a living, it is only a question of time

before it encroaches on all the linguistic domains, which formerly ensured the continuity of the vernacular language. Language shift from Manx to English for the majority of the Island's speech community had already been accomplished by 1871, according to the census figures.

As the numbers of speakers of any given language continue to fall, as in the case of Manx, the point where there are no longer any younger speakers gives credence to the feeling that the language has entered a fatal phase from which there can be no return. Figures and comments from Jenner's 1875 survey (see above) indicate that the number of Manx-speaking children was in serious decline by the 1870s. The 1901 census figures show a similar picture; in the age range 45-64 the figures are 21 monoglot Manx speakers and 2,167 bilingual Manx and English speakers, the 25-44 age range gives 28 monoglot Manx and 631 bilingual Manx and English speakers. In the 1911 census the figures dropped to 7 monoglots and 868 bilinguals for the 45-64 age group, and 4 monoglots and 179 bilinguals for the 25-44 age group.<sup>9</sup> The language is not only *considered* to be the preserve of the old, that is exactly what it is.

### **The Manx Language Revival Movement**

The Manx language revival to all intents and purposes began with the founding, in 1899, of *Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh*, 'The Manx Language Society', by which time the language had virtually disappeared as a spoken vernacular. The society initially adopted the aims of both preservation and promotion. *Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh* (YCG) sought to publish all existing literature in Manx, and facilitate the collection of whatever oral literature remained in the shape of songs or poems. The society wanted to promote the language by organizing Manx classes for adults and having Manx taught in the Island's schools. All aspects of Manx culture were (and are) encouraged by YCG including the performance of Manx music and dance (Stowell and Ó Bréasláin 1996:19).

However not all the society's members were in favour of the active promotion of the language particularly when it came to passing it on to children. YCG's first president, A.W. Moore, felt that teaching Manx to the young would be of no practical value to them:

Much as I regret to think of the day when the grand and sonorous language of Ellan Vannan will be no more heard, yet I feel that I must prefer the practical to the sentimental and acquiesce in its disappearance (Manx Language Society 1899-1931(b): 6).

In any event *Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh* (YCG) met with little success in its attempts to have Manx taught in the Island's schools. After the introduction of the 1872 English Elementary



Education Act, it was necessary to obtain permission from the British authorities to teach Manx:

After three years of correspondence between Whitehall and YCG it was decided to leave the matter to individual schools, with the result that evidently only one school was willing to teach Manx. The half-hour lesson per week was shortly after withdrawn, and efforts to have Manx brought into the schools on a more permanent and professional basis had to wait until 1992 (Broderick 1999:175).

Lessons for adult learners were greatly assisted by the publication in 1901 of Edmund Goodwin's *First Lessons in Manx*. The lessons were not originally intended for publication but were written for use in Manx classes held in Peel. They are not, and in Goodwin's own words in the introduction, 'do not claim to be a complete theoretical grammar' (*First Lessons in Manx*, 1901; reprinted in subsequent editions) but both the original, and a revised version of the book (Thomson 1965) were, for most of the twentieth century, (and remain) a valuable resource for Manx language learners and teachers.

A number of factors have contributed to the continuing rise in numbers of Manx learners and in the profile of the language generally. The population of the Island has increased by around 20,000 (largely due to immigration from mainland Britain) over the past thirty years. The 1971 census shows a population of 54,581 compared with an estimated 76,315 in 2001. The percentage of the population that is Manx-born fell from 67.2% in 1961 to 49.9% in 1996.<sup>10</sup> One might speculate that the fact that less than 50% of the population is Manx has affected both the indigenous population to the effect that the language is seen, by some, as part of a threatened identity to be protected; it is also seen by many newcomers as an aspect of Manx life to be embraced as part of their own and their children's new identity. In recent years the majority of new residents coming to live in the Isle of Man have been attracted by employment opportunities, particularly in the Island's Finance Sector, which accounts for 36% of income generated in the Island.<sup>11</sup> Holiday or second homes are not common in the Isle of Man. The cost of travel to and from the Isle of Man is expensive; it is not comparable to travelling within the UK to Wales or Cornwall, for example. New residents tend to settle in the Island for a number of years. There are no available statistics on the percentage of new arrivals with children.

The decline in the number of visitors from Britain throughout the 1960s and 70s was a serious blow to the Island's economy, and other ways of creating wealth had to be found to compensate. Government policies to attract and sustain high technology companies and financial institutions have been largely successful in economic terms. However, prosperity has not always

been seen as an unequivocal benefit to the Island, bringing as it does changes to the 'Manx way of life', many new housing estates offering property at prices difficult for locals to afford, and accentuating inequalities in society. Throughout the 1970s and 80s indigenous protest movements made themselves heard, to the discomfort of the government of the day (Belcher 2000:9-12).

As far as the language is concerned, it is the last of these protests that appears to have had a contributory effect on the more favourable official attitudes toward the Manx language. In the late 1980s a campaign of protests against the burgeoning finance industry and its economic impact on the indigenous population culminated in the conviction and imprisonment of three young men (one of whom is now a Member of the House of Keys and former chairman of Mooinjer Veggey) for arson. Partly built houses, destined to be sold for prices no local could afford, were burnt (Gawne 2002:179). Subsequent letters of support for the three young men and a general refusal on the part of the general public to condemn their action made it very clear to the Manx government of the day that their own policies were not universally popular. All three of the perpetrators were Manx speakers. It is not possible to state with certainty that the Manx government found it expedient to promote certain aspects of language and culture in response to these or any other protests. It is, however, true to say that the official stance on the Manx language and culture became one of promotion rather than denigration or indifference. Those who might have been alienated by a heavy-handed response have been disarmed by a reasonable one. A growing awareness of, and support for, the revitalization of minority languages in general and for Celtic languages in particular no doubt had some positive influence in this direction.

In April 2003 the United Kingdom Government ratified (on behalf of the Isle of Man Government) the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, thereby agreeing to extend the Charter at Part II protection level to the Isle of Man. Although Part III has much more specific requirements for regional or minority language provision, in practice many of these requirements are already satisfied by the Isle of Man Government, particularly with regard to education and heritage. The possibility of signing up to Part III and accepting these more specific requirements is being kept under review.<sup>12</sup> The Island's increased prosperity has also resulted in the fact that funds are available for bodies such as the Manx Heritage Foundation, which contribute to many aspects of Manx culture and language.

In fact, the Manx language has an unprecedentedly high profile at the beginning of the

twenty-first century. Bilingual street signs are seen in every town, government departments have bilingual names and letter heads, likewise with local authority vehicles and services—the language is on display as never before. Public transport timetables are bilingual and buses occasionally display their destination in Manx only, much to the bemusement and frequently derision of the bus travelling public (Figures 1 and 2). It is evident that the profile and status of Manx are completely out of proportion to the number of speakers (a total of 1,527 speakers of unspecified and widely varying competency out of a population of 76,315 based on the 2001 census). However, this public display of language consciousness is in itself a contributory factor in the revitalization of Manx.

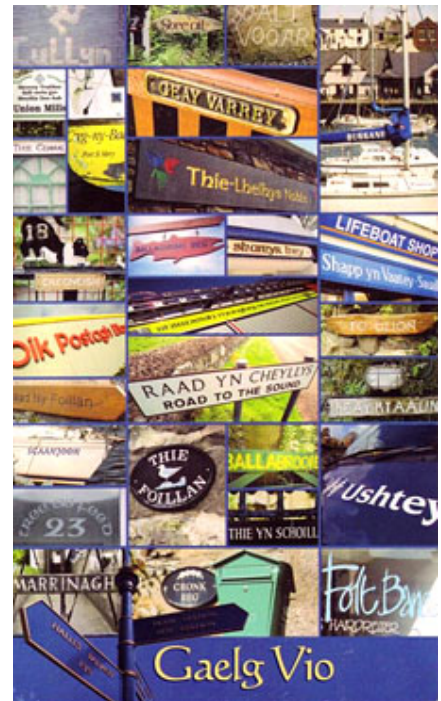


Figure 1. Bilingual signage.



Figure 2. Bilingual bus timetable.

The signal the Isle of Man Government sends to the outside world is that the Island population not only values and is aware of their heritage, but can also afford to indulge it. It makes economic sense in terms of what remains of the tourist industry to market the Island as having a unique culture within the British Isles, and the language is part of that culture. Thus increased prosperity has been good for the Manx language and the preservation of a certain

stereotypical version of culture and Island life. The fate of a language lies to some extent in timing, and just at the end of the twentieth century the time was right in terms of will and resources for language revival.

### **The Manx Language in Education**

In 1990 the Isle of Man Government commissioned a Gallup poll survey on the Quality of Life in the Isle of Man, which found that 36% of those who responded were in favour of Manx being taught in the Island's schools:

This significant finding came at the same time as the Department of Education was being approached by the Manx Language Working Party, among others, to have Manx introduced into the school system (Gawne 2002:178).

This led to the appointment of a Manx Language Officer in 1992 by the Isle of Man Department of Education. The position of Manx Language Officer is currently held by Rosemary Derbyshire. She is responsible for a peripatetic teaching team currently consisting of her and three other teachers. This team offers weekly, thirty-minute, optional Manx lessons in all schools run by the Isle of Man Department of Education. Take-up numbers were initially high and, despite difficulties, still average around 750-800 primary schoolchildren (out of a total of approximately 6,600). Teaching resources and materials were not available in Manx, and had to be produced by the team themselves, using desktop publishing. A three-year modular course is currently offered to the children beginning at Year 4 (aged 8-9) of primary school, and continuing into the first year of secondary education.<sup>13</sup>

The school timetable presents a problem for optional Manx lessons, as to opt *for* Manx lessons pupils have to opt out of another lesson, or even use their own free time—this is at the individual Head Teacher's discretion. Another problem is the lack of classrooms available for Manx lessons. Lessons are frequently conducted in reception areas or corridors where other children are coming and going, which is distracting and not at all conducive to language acquisition. Lessons are also apt to be cancelled without warning if, for example, there is an activity which all children in a particular year group are expected to attend. I spent an afternoon with one of the peripatetic team in which two lessons were cancelled, in one instance due to a cycling proficiency test, in another, a Maths test. In both of these instances the peripatetic Manx teacher was not informed until arriving at the school. Another factor worth noting is that, although the Manx lessons are intended to be of thirty minutes' duration, it is frequently the case

that by the time the children have assembled in the hall or reception area, or wherever the lesson is due to take place, and are settled with chairs, tables etc., between five and ten minutes of contact time have already elapsed, which would not be the case if a classroom were available for the lesson.

A more productive option for studying Manx is available to pupils in one of the Island's secondary schools, where the *Teisht Cadjin Ghaelgagh* (TCG), a level equivalent to GCSE, is offered. Studying a second language for GCSE is not obligatory, but is an optional extra subject, and a few pupils each year choose to study Manx as a foreign language, which ensures that it is timetabled as any other option would be. These pupils receive three fifty-minute lessons per week. The other four secondary schools offer Manx as an extra subject, but it is not timetabled and must be studied either at lunchtime or after school. Contact time is less, but is more than that designated for the peripatetic lessons available to younger children. The TCG is a modular two-year course that is designed, set, moderated and validated by the Isle of Man Department of Education, which also issues the certificates.

Figures for Manx speakers recorded in the 2001 census show an increase from 643 (1991) to 1,689. Questions relating to Manx Gaelic in the 2001 census<sup>14</sup> and their corresponding answers were as follows:

Do you speak, read or write Manx Gaelic?	1,689
Do you speak Manx Gaelic?	1,527
Do you write Manx Gaelic?	706
Do you read Manx Gaelic?	910

It is reasonable to suppose that this increase is due to the teaching of Manx Gaelic in schools, and indeed a breakdown according to the age groups of speakers confirms this.

As can be seen in Table 1 the most dramatic increase in the number of Manx speakers occurs in the wider age range of 5-19 years but most particularly in the 10-14 band, the number leaping from 64 to 340 in ten years. These figures do not however contain any information on either the fluency or competence of the speakers. On the basis of an informal assessment made in 2003, Tadhg Ó hIfearnáin, University of Limerick (29th January 2006, pers. comm.) considered the number of highly competent Manx speakers was likely to number around fifty. The evaluation was made on the basis of peer group assessment, that is, highly competent Manx speakers' assessments of their own and each other's levels of fluency. Fluency was considered on the basis of the speaker's ability to use Manx competently in a wide variety of situations. The

Table 1. Manx Speakers by Age: Comparison of Numbers 1991-2001

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Numbers in 1991</b>	<b>Numbers in 2001</b>
0-4 years	13	<b>41</b>
5-9 years	23	<b>217</b>
10-14 years	64	<b>340</b>
15-19 years	47	<b>146</b>
20-24 years	41	<b>64</b>
25-29 years	64	<b>79</b>
30-34 years	60	<b>64</b>
35-39 years	62	<b>80</b>
40-44 years	74	<b>90</b>
45-49 years	41	<b>70</b>
50-54 years	45	<b>71</b>
55-59 years	38	<b>61</b>
60-64 years	39	<b>50</b>
65-69 years	32	<b>45</b>
70-74 years	28	<b>31</b>
75-79 years	22	<b>33</b>
80-84 years	16	<b>36</b>
<b>85+ years</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>25</b>

Source: IOM Census Report 1991 Vol.1 Tab.3 in MacKinnon 2004 Appendix.

term 'fluency' is rather difficult to evaluate. Many, if not most, people tend to use it when referring to someone with a ready flow of language, or about someone who knows more Manx than they do themselves. It frequently implies little about the accuracy of the language used, and I therefore prefer to use terms such as proficient or competent apart from circumstances where 'fluent' would be better understood.

The reality facing the Manx language at the end of the twentieth century was that of any language when it reaches the point where intergenerational transmission has ceased. Few fluent (and it is debatable what is meant by fluency in this situation) speakers result from limited contact language lessons. If any language is to have a viable future, then children must be made the main focus of a sustained and determined effort in its transmission.

## **Immersion Education**

Immersion education programmes have become increasingly widespread throughout the world since the development of immersion programmes in Canada. St. Lambert, Quebec, was the first programme of this type to be implemented, in 1965. To quote Johnson and Swain:

By the mid-1960s, it was already becoming apparent to the English-speaking population of the Canadian province of Quebec that economic survival there would require high levels of proficiency in French. French was (and still is) Quebec's official language, and the language spoken by the majority of its population. However, large enclaves of English speakers knew little of the language. Many had studied French in school, but the small amounts provided and the focus on grammar, memorization, and drill had not provided them with sufficient skills to work in French, or to socialize with French speakers (1997:2).

A group of parents, who had investigated various types of bilingual education and consulted academics in the field of bilingualism at McGill University, proposed 'a radical departure from any existing FSL (French Second Language) program in Canada' (Johnson and Swain 1997: 2) to their local school board in St Lambert. They proposed that French would be used as the *medium* of instruction (and not simply taught as a subject) for their monolingual English-speaking children from school entry at kindergarten. The parents and the school board used the term 'immersion program' to refer to this type of education (Johnson and Swain 1997: 2-3).

All the Celtic languages with the exception of Cornish now have immersion education programmes in place, with the aim of halting/reversing language shift.

Wherever the number of native speakers declines in a community that is nevertheless determined to maintain its language, identity, and culture, immersion is likely to be an important means, perhaps the only one, for reversing or halting the process of extinction (Johnson and Swain 1997: 5).

## **Minority Language Immersion Programmes**

Minority language immersion programmes are, as Johnson and Swain indicate, the only realistic way of increasing or maintaining the number of speakers of a language when intergenerational transfer (for whatever reason) ceases to happen. Examples include the Maori immersion programme in New Zealand, immersion in the native language of Hawaii, and Native American language immersion programmes in Canada and the United States (Slaughter 1997; De Jong 1998; Reyhner 2003). Problems common to minority language immersion programmes are: the lack of teachers with sufficient training and proficiency in the Target Language (TL), lack of

TL resources, and the need for the creation of relevant vocabulary for using the TL as a teaching medium. These problems are acute in languages which are spoken by a minority but nonetheless do have a population of native speakers. They present an even greater challenge in the small number of instances where there are no surviving native speakers.

Revival immersion programmes, without the luxury of native-speaker comparisons, have as their goal an increase in *speakers* of the revived language. Adult L2 learners show a greater reluctance to use their emerging language skills and it is clearly preferable to target children if there is to be a realistic hope of avoiding language death and promoting language revival.

All the factual details in this section regarding the foundation of Yn Chied Chesmayd, Mooinjer Veggey and Bunscoil Ghaelgagh were supplied to me by Annie Kissack, Education Officer, Mooinjer Veggey (Clague 2007). Following the example of Gaelic medium playgroups in Scotland and Ireland, and in particular the Gaelic Pre-Schools Association, (CNSA), a small number of Manx speaking parents with young children established Yn Chied Chesmayd (*The First Step*) in 1990. Yn Chied Chesmayd was a playgroup intended for children whose parents were Manx speakers, and who wanted to give their children a bilingual upbringing. Yn Chied Chesmayd was run successfully for five years until the inception of Mooinjer Veggey.

*Mooinjer Veggey* (Little People) the Manx Gaelic Nursery and Playgroup Organisation is aimed at the wider population of the Isle of Man, seeking to make the provision of Manx Gaelic nursery education available to all pre-school children irrespective of language background. In April 2000 thirty-five children were registered with Mooinjer Veggey, the majority of who attended more than two sessions per week. At that time there were three playgroups up and running and a further one expected to open after Easter 2000, bringing the number of children attending Mooinjer Veggey playgroups to more than fifty.

In 1998 the chairman of Mooinjer Veggey, Phil Gawne, was appointed jointly by the Manx Heritage Foundation and Manx National Heritage to the newly created post of *Yn Greinneyder* (the encourager). Yn Greinneyder advises and assists organizations in the use of Manx, thus raising the profile of the language. This position is distinct from that of the Manx Language Officer (first appointed in 1992), who is employed by the Isle of Man Department of Education with the responsibility of organizing Manx courses for schools, with particular regard to the peripatetic team of Manx teachers for schools. Yn Greinneyder's draft development plan for the future of the Manx language—July 2000 stated:



While there is undoubtedly room for expansion in family language transmission, the Manx preschool movement will remain the most important vehicle for language transmission to preschool children. Already Mooinjer Veggey offers places to 60 children each week (approximately 2.5% of 2–5 year olds) and it plans to increase this level of provision over the next ten years to 10% of all preschool children (Gawne 2000).

The draft document also put forward two targets as follows:

TARGET 1 – to provide information, advice, guidance and support to new parents on the advantages of early bilingualism:

By December 2001:

Yn Greinneyder to ensure that materials supporting the use of Manx in the home and at preschool groups are produced and distributed to parents through the IOM hospital maternity wing, to all Manx speakers and learners and to all relevant health visitors and midwives.

TARGET 2 – to support the development and expansion of Manx preschool groups, ensuring the highest standards of language transmission are obtained:

By September 2001:

The Isle of Man Department of Education/Manx Heritage Foundation to establish a secure funding source for all groups which provide a Manx preschool educational service.

The above targets make no mention of the provision of primary level education for children attending Mooinjer Veggey pre-school groups although a weekly 'Gael-Scoil' Manx-medium half-day provision was available from the autumn term of 1996. The Gael-Scoil was held at one of the Island's primary schools and was introduced both as a compromise to parents and a means of assessing the level of support that might be expected for Gaelic-medium education. However, to quote the *Sheshaght ny Parentyn* (Parent's Association) submission to the Department of Education requesting the provision of Manx-medium primary education:

...it (the Gael-Scoil) can never provide the next step in language acquisition which a growing number of parents want for their children (i.e. from fluent understanders/ semi-speakers of Manx to elementary fluency in the language).

In response to parental demand the first Manx-medium class was established in September 2001 by the Isle of Man Department of Education in partnership with Mooinjer Veggey and *Sheshaght ny Parentyn*. The Manx-medium class operated within a mainstream primary school, Ballacottier School in Douglas. The Headteacher of Ballacottier held responsibility for the overall running of the class, and the children attending the Manx class integrated with the rest of the school during assemblies, playtimes and lunchtimes and participated in whole-school events. The class was

open to all children in either their Reception Year or the following Year 1. Nine children attended the first Manx-medium class and were taught by a teacher assisted by a nursery nurse.

The stated long-term aims of the Manx-medium class were as follows:

1. to provide children with the same opportunities for learning as their contemporaries in other Manx classrooms;
2. to have achieved comparable competency<sup>15</sup> in Manx and English by Y6;
3. to give children the opportunity to understand and use Manx with ease, through continual exposure to the language;
4. to enable children to learn through the native language of the Isle of Man.

There is some discrepancy between aim number 2, that the children should have achieved *comparable competency* in Manx and English by Y6 (Year 6), and the *Sheshaght ny Parentyn* submission to the Department of Education, which states that in seeking the provision of Manx-medium primary education, parents want their children to progress from 'fluent understanders/semispeakers to elementary fluency in the language'. It is not clear what is meant by 'elementary fluency'; the terms seem somewhat contradictory. The possession of 'elementary' language skills usually implies that the speaker is in the early stages of acquisition and has a limited range in the TL, and cannot therefore be regarded as having achieved fluency. It is difficult to know what is meant by 'fluency'; does it refer to the ability to use the L2 in an appropriate and target-like manner in all situations, or does it refer to a ready flow of the L2 even if it contains many non-target features? On the other hand, the aim of comparable L1 and L2 competency by Y6 (the final year of primary immersion) is not a realistic one. Six years of L2 immersion would not produce comparable L1 and L2 competence; exposure to the L1 in the home, the community, and the media ensures that the L1 remains the dominant language.

Two years later, in January 2003, following the opening of a new school building in the village of St Johns, the Manx-medium class, now known as *Bunscoill Ghaelgagh* (Manx Gaelic primary school) relocated to the vacated old school building with twenty-five children (Figures 3 and 4). The twenty-five children were divided into two classes, *Brastyl 1* (Reception and Year 1 children) with a teacher and nursery nurse and *Brastyl 2* (Years 2 and 3) with a second teacher (Figure 5). Although the classes were based in a different building, which effectively gave the feeling of a separate school they were ultimately the responsibility of the headteacher of St John's Primary School (mainstream English-medium). This situation lasted until 2006 when *Bunscoill Ghaelgagh* became a 'stand alone' separate primary school with its own headteacher.



Figure 3. Bunscoill Ghaelgagh from the air.



Figure 4. Bunscoill Ghaelgagh

The Department of Education's Manx Language Team of peripatetic teachers *Yn Unnid Ghaelgagh* (the Manx Language Unit) is also based at St John's old school building. In addition to the partnership with the Department of Education to run Bunscoill Ghaelgagh, Mooinjer Veggey also has a contract with the Department to run three preschool nurseries.



Figure 5. *Brastyl 2* (Years 2 and 3).

Ten nursery school units are financed by the Isle of Man Department of Education and are attached to primary schools. Children usually attend the nursery attached to the primary school, which they will attend at age five. The nurseries are intended for children from the age of three whose fourth birthday occurs during their nursery school year. A Foundation Stage Curriculum produced by the Department is followed in the nurseries.<sup>16</sup>

One significant difference between the playgroups and nurseries is the amount of Manx that the children are likely to hear. The playgroups are run directly by Mooinjer Veggey and every effort is made to employ staff with a good command of the language. However, the combination of proficiency in Manx and a recognized childcare qualification is not so common as to provide a uniform experience in all groups. Manx is used according to the ability of the

leader and helpers, but at the very least Manx is used in songs, rhymes and routine greetings. Employees of Mooinjer Veggey are encouraged and assisted with increasing their knowledge of Manx.

The nurseries, run in conjunction with the Department of Education, represent a different problem with regard to Manx speaking staff. A qualified nursery teacher must be employed, the wishes of the head teacher of the school to which the nursery is attached must be taken into account when employing staff, and the Foundation Stage Curriculum has to be followed. This entails a certain amount of compromise with regard to the quantity and quality of Manx used. In an ideal situation Mooinjer Veggey would employ only highly competent, fluent speakers but in the absence of such conditions compromise is seen as the best and only option (A. Kissack, Education Officer, Mooinjer Veggey, pers. comm. 26/10/03). The playgroups and nurseries are intended not only to give as many children as possible the experience of hearing and using the Manx language, whether they are from Manx speaking homes or not, but to be a starting point for children attending Bunscoil Ghaelgagh.

Before setting up Bunscoil Ghaelgagh, the Education Officer of Mooinjer Veggey and the prospective class teacher for the first Manx-medium class visited *Bunscoil Ghàidhlig Glaschu* (Glasgow Gaelic Primary School) to observe immersion education theory in practice, and the Immersion Phase Policy followed in the Isle of Man is modelled on that of *Bunscoil Ghàidhlig Glaschu*. The 'immersion phase' is identified as the period from YR (Reception age 4-5) until the end of Y2 (age 6-7) - a three-year period (nine school terms) for most children.

The aims of the Immersion Phase, reproduced from Brastyl Ghaelgagh Immersion Phase Policy, are:

- To provide children from non-Manx speaking backgrounds with a sound grasp of Manx oral language.
- To reinforce and develop the oral skills of children with some knowledge of the language.

### Objectives

- To ensure that the children hear and use the language in a variety of contexts and activities.
- To develop the children's confidence and comprehension when using and hearing the language.

### Methodology

- Teachers and support staff will speak Manx extensively, using visual cues, pictures and gestures to explain new words and concepts.
- Action and repetition will form the basis of the Immersion Phase. Standard rituals and routines will be developed to give children confidence to use the language in a secure setting.
- Use will be made of other children and adults as a useful resource in teaching new concepts.
- Songs and rhymes are an integral part of the Immersion Phase. The use of colourful books, posters and displays will create a stimulating environment. Manx must be on display around the classroom.
- Children will learn Manx simply by being in a class where this is the main medium for delivering the whole curriculum. At times they will need to learn certain concepts in a much more structured manner, however. Language games will be used to support the individual learner in this way.

Records of the children's achievements in oral Manx during the Immersion Phase will be maintained, to ensure progress and to enable easy reporting to parents and others. Such records take the form of an Immersion Grid for each child at this stage, which records progress in expressive and comprehensive skills. This will be regularly updated to reflect individual progress in relation to targets modelled on those set by *Bunscoil Ghàidhlig Glaschu*.

In addition to the Immersion Phase Policy outlined above, Bunscoil Ghaelgagh literature makes clear the intent to follow the National Curriculum in all areas except for the teaching of English, which will be gradually introduced at Key Stage 2 (Y3, age 7-8). Parents are warned of the possibility of a delay in reading skills as the child is coping with two languages, and due to the phonic differences between Manx and English initial reading skills will focus on sentence and whole word recognition.

## **Questionnaire**

It is clear that in supporting the establishment of a Manx-medium immersion programme the Isle of Man Department of Education was responding favourably to the lobbying of a small group of parents. Three years into Manx-medium immersion schooling the number of children had increased from nine to twenty-five. Are the parents of all these children Manx speakers, and if they are not, what is their motivation for choosing to commit their children to what is, for most people, an unknown and perhaps risky alternative to mainstream education?

This question, and others related to the linguistic background of the children attending Bunscoil Ghaelgagh, was addressed in the form of a questionnaire that I sent to parents in

January 2004. A letter was enclosed with the questionnaire requesting parental permission to include their children in my proposed study on immersion education in the Isle of Man. The parents were assured that their children would not be named or identified in any way in the study. All parents had, however, prior to my own study, been made aware by teachers that, owing to the unique nature of the school, they could expect a certain amount of media interest, and none took the opportunity to object or ensure their child's exclusion from either media attention or any study likely to be carried out.

Twenty-five questionnaires were sent out to parents, representing one per child,<sup>17</sup> rather than one per family. Space was provided on the questionnaire for parents to add comments of their own if they so wished. The questionnaire consisted of ten questions designed to elicit information regarding motivation for parental choice of this particular school; and the amount of Manx (the target language) the children could be expected to hear in the home, or at any rate outside the school domain. I did not feel that it was valid to include questions on the socio-economic background of the families for the following reasons. The twenty-five children involved in the study come from just twenty-one families. The Isle of Man is a small community, and many of the children's families and their circumstances are already known to me.

As numbers of children attending the school increase, questions relating to their socio-economic background will become more feasible and valid. A questionnaire carried out by Tina Hickey (1997: 48) in *Early Immersion Education in Ireland: Na Naíonraí* inquired into the socio-economic background of parents who sent their children to naíonraí, indicating that:

the naíonraí parents differ as a group from comparable groups in the general population in their educational achievements, labour force status and occupation. Whilst this indicates a greater take-up of naíonraí provision among the better educated and better off, it must be noted that there is a significant proportion of naíonraí parents (roughly a third) who have low educational levels, having left school before the Leaving Certificate and who work in manual jobs (Hickey 1997: 48).

Hickey's questionnaires were distributed to 2,487 children and yielded a return of 1,807 replies. This represented a response rate of almost 73%, which Hickey regarded as very good for a 'self-administered postal questionnaire' (1997: 33). Based on personal observation and knowledge, I would expect a survey carried out on the Buscoill Ghaelgagh parents to indicate that they were of a similar socio-economic mix as the naíonraí parents.

The majority of children come from Manx families (this was ascertained partly on the

basis of personal acquaintance, and partly by counting the number of distinctive Manx surnames) with a small minority of incomers. The children reflect the general population of the Isle of Man, in so far as they tend to have family members from other parts of the British Isles, and are not exclusively Manx in origin.

Twenty-one out of twenty-five questionnaires were returned completed. The questions, together with their replies and my comments, appear below.

### **1a. Did your child attend a Mooinjer Veggey playgroup or nursery school?**

Table 2. Number of children who attended Mooinjer Veggey Playgroup/Nursery

Yes	19
No	2

### **1b. If 'yes' which playgroup or nursery did the child attend?**

The majority of the children, 16, attended Braddan Mooinjer Veggey playgroup. Six children attended a Mooinjer Veggey playgroup other than, or in addition to, Braddan Mooinjer Veggey. In one instance the name of the Mooinjer Veggey playgroup was not given.

As can be seen above the majority of the children attending Bunscoill Ghaelgagh attended a Manx medium playgroup or nursery. There are differences in quantity and quality of Manx input between individual Mooinjer Veggey playgroups and pre-school nurseries. It is notable that the majority of children, sixteen out of twenty-one, attended one playgroup, Braddan Mooinjer Veggey, where the Manx language content is high. The parents of these children presumably have an existing commitment to, and interest in the Manx language. The majority of children attending Mooinjer Veggey playgroups and pre-school nurseries go on to attend mainstream English medium primary schools.

### **2. Which of the following factors influenced you to send your child to Bunscoill Ghaelgagh? Please circle on a scale of 1 for least important to 5 for most important.**

1. The general benefits of a bilingual education
2. Small class size
3. An interest in the long term revival of the Manx language
4. A wish to build on/continue the success of Mooinjer Veggey
5. Other

The first option, the general benefits of a bilingual education,<sup>18</sup> was offered on the basis that all

the parents had been given literature which outlined these benefits prior to making their choice of school and therefore were all aware of what was meant by this. For example the brochure *Oyryn Mie*,<sup>19</sup> '6 Good Reasons' sums up the case for bilingualism as follows:

- Children who learn two languages have a head start when reading and counting. They often do better in exams later on.
- Learning two languages is easier for young children.
- Knowledge of two languages provides increased skills to employers. There are a growing number of jobs for Manx speakers, particularly in education.
- It gives you a buzz to be able to switch from one language to another. Speaking both languages opens doors to make new friends.
- Most people throughout the world can speak more than one language. After learning two, it's much easier to learn more. Manx gives you a good start.
- Both English and Manx are like treasure troves, full of stories and songs, history and fun. Your child will have the best of both worlds.

Table 3 gives the results in terms of a cumulative score. This is calculated by allotting points according to the rating given by the parents (i.e. 5 points for the reason selected as the most important, and so on).

Table 3. Cumulative scores influencing choice of Bunscoill Ghaelgagh

		Cumulative score
a)	The general educational benefits of a bilingual education	87
b)	Small class size	60
c)	An interest in the long term revival of the Manx language	84
d)	A wish to build on/ continue the success of Moonjer Veggey	61
e)	Other (please give details)	9

In order of preference	
1.	General benefits of a bilingual education
2.	Long term interest in Manx language revival
3.	Success of Moonjer Veggey
4.	Small class size
5.	Other

Option number 5, 'other', was given in addition to, rather than in place of, other choices and reasons given under this option were as follows:

- Dissatisfaction with the catchment area system.<sup>20</sup>



- Dissatisfaction with mainstream educational system.
- Parental desire for child to have an opportunity to learn Manx that they themselves did not have.
- Child's personal happiness.
- The class teacher at Bunscoill Ghaelgagh had taught older siblings in mainstream school.
- Medical condition of child: parent felt this would be better coped with in the smaller class sizes of Bunscoill Ghaelgagh.
- Success and happiness of older siblings already attending Bunscoill Ghaelgagh gave parent the confidence to send younger child.
- Parents no longer together, but one was very much in favour of Manx medium nursery and primary education—the other parent, having researched immersion education was not opposed and is now very happy with the ongoing result and proud of the child's achievements.
- A chance for the child to learn about her own history/ culture rather than 'imported' British history only.

### 3. Do you or your partner or any other family members speak/understand Manx?

- fluently<sup>21</sup>
- with reasonable competence
- few words
- not at all

Table 4. Manx language competency in children's families

Child	a	b	c	d	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	Total
Fluently	3			2					1									2				8
Reasonable Competence	1						1	1			1	1	1					1		1	1	9
Few words	1	2	1	2	2	2			1		2			3	1	2	1	2	2			25

The children allocated the letters a-k are Brastyl Jeas children, while j-v are Brastyl 'Nane children. The numbers in the cells indicate the number of speakers in the family who fall into each category. A questionnaire was not returned for the child allocated letter 'e' in the other tables. The questionnaire indicates that four children have family members with fluent Manx. In the case of child 'a' both parents and one grandparent are fluent speakers, a sibling has 'reasonable competence' and a second grandparent has a 'few words'; 'd' has two Manx speaking grandparents, parents and siblings have a 'few words'; 'j' has one grandparent who speaks Manx and a parent with a 'few words'; for the fourth child 's' the fluent speakers referred to are an aunt and a cousin, 'with reasonable competence' refers to a family friend, and parents have a 'few words'. Seven of the children have one parent with 'reasonable competence', but those with

family members speaking only a 'few words' of Manx are clearly in the majority, which necessarily entails that few of the children have access to the language in the home—see question 4 below.

**4. If you and/or your partner are Manx speakers, do you use the language in the home with your child?**

Table 5. How often Manx is used in the home?

a)	Always	2
b)	Sometimes	12
c)	Never	3

The figures refer to the number of children whose parents speak Manx in the home (thus four children whose parents are not Manx speakers are excluded). The level of Manx speaking in terms of competency is not addressed by this question. It is clear that even if the parents are themselves Manx speakers, they generally do not habitually speak Manx in the home. I should point out that, although there are two children counted who always hear Manx in the home, these two children are, in fact, siblings, which means that it is only in one home that a parent claims to use the language with the children 'always'. Moreover, this parent does not regard himself to be a fluent speaker. Questions 3 and 4 establish which children have the most contact with the target language outside school.

**5. Has the level of Manx used in the home decreased/increased since your child's attendance at Bunscoil Ghaelgagh?**

Table 6. Level of of Manx used in the home since attending Bunscoil Ghaelgagh

a)	Increased	20
b)	Remained the same	1
c)	Decreased	0

This question may seem rather odd as it seems counter-intuitive to expect less Manx to be spoken in the home *after* the child has begun to attend a Manx language medium school, but it seeks to address the question of the child's perception of language domains. Maguire (1991: 124) claims:

a number of parents mentioned that their children had been happy to use bits of Irish as they were acquiring it in nursery school and in Primary 1 at the Bunscoil. A changed attitude emerged around the second year of primary schooling. At this stage, children rejected the use of Irish outside school, or more specifically in the home

None of the parents who responded to this questionnaire had observed this type of behaviour in

their children at that time. However, subsequently, the mother of a child in his second year of primary immersion experienced a similar reluctance on the part of her child to speak Manx with her in the home. The mother had decided to attend Manx language evening classes, hoping and expecting that the lessons would be of mutual benefit to herself and her son, only to find that he resolutely refused to speak to her in Manx, and seemed to feel resentful and annoyed with her for making the attempt.

Maguire (1991: 125) attributes the change in attitude on the part of immersion educated children in Belfast to the children's growing awareness of their parents' linguistic limitations, which occurs as the children's own language skills begin to draw ahead of those of their parents, typically around the end of the second year/beginning of the third year of immersion education. In a case where the parent(s) of immersion educated children have no pre-existing knowledge of the Target Language, their efforts to learn the TL, and evidence of normal L2 learner errors and mistakes, may embarrass the child as well as seeming inappropriate in terms of time and place, i.e. outside the immersion language's natural domain which, for the majority of children, is the school classroom. In the Manx immersion situation, it is extremely unlikely that the above-mentioned child has heard Manx spoken anywhere other than school. He was one of the only two children in his age group to attend Bunscoil Ghaelgagh from the town where he lives. His after school playmates and peer group all attend the local mainstream primary school.

**6. If you are not attending any Manx classes and are not Manx speakers could you tick the following reason(s) for this if applicable to you**

The answers of the 15 parents who responded to this question were distributed as follows:

Table 7. Reasons for not attending Manx classes

a)	lack of time, pressure of work/domestic arrangements	9
b)	do not feel that it is important	0
c)	other	6

Other reasons given were:

- No interest
- Lack of sufficient motivation
- Found the Manx language difficult to learn
- Found the syntax difficult

The first two of the above four reasons could, in reality, be construed as the option of 'not important', although they chose not to answer it in this way. The second two reasons reflect a feeling I have heard expressed by other people, namely that the Manx language is particularly difficult. I can only ascribe this to the fact that there is L1- L2 dissimilarity between English and Manx syntax and phonology, which some adult learners find more difficult than they expect, and the fact they may have attended classes which over-emphasise grammar and syntax in the early stages.

**7. If the child is the only Manx speaker in the home, do you consider this to be a disadvantage for him/her?**

Table 8. Number who consider the lack of Manx in the home a disadvantage

Yes	6
No	7
N/A	8

These answers contrast with those of parents interviewed at the Irish medium primary school, Shaw's Road, Belfast, Maguire (1991: 101) where the lack of Irish in the home was seen as the 'principal problem by the largest group of parents'.

**8. Does your child have opportunities to use Manx socially outside of school hours? (if 'yes' could you include an example?)**

Table 9. Opportunities to use Manx outside school

Yes	17
No	4

Examples of attendance at Manx dance and music groups were offered as evidence of 'opportunities to speak Manx'. However, whilst these are undoubtedly opportunities to engage in what is perceived of as 'Manx culture', they are not necessarily opportunities to speak Manx, as many of those involved in such activities are not Manx speakers. Nonetheless, these activities could be a rare opportunity for the children to socialise outside of school hours. Other opportunities arose when friends from school came to play or stayed overnight.

This question highlights an obvious problem with questionnaires dependent on the respondents' self-assessed knowledge: i.e. the assessment in question may be based more on perception than fact. I find it interesting to note that parents with fluent Manx, and both the

opportunity and ability to use Manx with their children, tended to underplay this (or are perhaps more linguistically aware and realistic), whereas, in at least one case (the family is known to me personally) where it was stated that the child ‘had the opportunity to speak Manx with family friends’, this meant simply that the child was able to exchange occasional greetings with a person whose knowledge of Manx consists solely of basic greetings.

**9. Does the child use Manx when playing in the home? For example if he/she plays school with toys or other children does he/she use Manx as the language of play?**

Table 10. Children who use Manx in play

Yes	21
No	0

Examples given of the children using Manx during play frequently involved role-play. Unsurprisingly, playing ‘school’ was the game where the child was most likely to be heard speaking Manx, and when friends from school came to play. Parents also noted that their children sang Manx songs and counted in Manx.

**10. Would you ideally like to see the provision of Manx-medium education?**

Table 11. Those in favour of Manx-medium secondary education

Yes	17
No	0
Unsure	2

This question was asked not in the expectation that there would be Manx medium secondary education available in the foreseeable future, but rather, to indicate the extent of future need and parental desire for such an option. The replies above show a high degree of satisfaction thus far with Manx immersion education. At the time the questionnaires were returned the provision of secondary level education for the present and future pupils of Bunscoil Ghaelgagh had yet to be resolved. However, as of September 2007 arrangements have been made for some continued Manx-medium teaching for the first children to leave Bunscoil Ghaelgagh to attend secondary school.

## **Conclusion**

From the answers above the primary motivation of the parents in choosing Bunscoill Ghaelgagh and Manx medium immersion education for their children would seem to be a combination of commitment to the future development of the Manx language, and awareness of the benefits of bilingualism. The benefits of bilingualism have been given a certain amount of positive media attention in recent years. The belief that the bilingual child may be adversely affected by speaking two languages to the detriment of both (semilingualism) has been discredited by the results of research carried out on immersion education models in which additive, rather than subtractive, bilingualism is the goal. The prospect of a child achieving fluency in a second language, at no cost to the first, is an attractive one, as is the idea that bilingualism is beneficial to the development of the intellect. The point made in the '6 Good Reasons' booklet, that: 'Children who learn two languages have a head start when reading and counting. They often do better in exams later on' is very appealing at a time when it is perceived that exam passing is the end goal of education.

The second most important choice cited for choosing Bunscoill Ghaelgagh, 'an interest in the long term revival of the Manx language', is rather more intriguing, given the answers to the subsequent language related questions. The number of children with parents or other family members who speak Manx is low. Only four out of the twenty-one children have parents or other family members who are fluent Manx speakers, and they do not claim to speak Manx as the main language of the home. This is a difficult question to self-assess unless one is constantly monitoring one's own and one's partner's speech and there may well be more Manx spoken in the home of the fluent speakers than is perceived by the speakers themselves.

The choice of the reply 'always' to the question of frequency of use in the home of a less fluent speaker may equally well imply 'I always use the language when possible and when I am able', but the end result may well be that there is less Manx spoken than in the homes of those more proficient who have chosen the option 'sometimes'.

The number of respondents who highly rated the importance of the Manx language revival is not reflected in the number of parents who are either Manx speakers or who are attending Manx lessons. Only one set of parents replied that they were currently attending language classes. The majority of the parents gave 'lack of time' as their reason for not doing so, and this is unsurprising, given the heavy demands on time that caring for a young family, and in

many cases combining this with full or part time work, involves. The amount of spare time that is involved in learning a second language is considerable, if any degree of fluency and proficiency is to be attained. The Bunscoill Ghaelgagh children and their families do not form part of a physical community, but rather live in different locations throughout the island. This makes it difficult to provide the type of Manx lessons which might be of the most benefit to parents, and which could be attended as a group. This situation may well change as numbers of children and parents increase.

Despite their own difficulties either with learning Manx or finding the time to attend classes, there is clearly a feeling of *owning* language and cultural associations among the parents, borne out by the following comments made on two of the questionnaire forms:

- the opportunity was not there for me to learn *my* language, even the dialect was corrected at school
- a chance to learn about *own* history and culture rather than 'imported' British history.

There was, in fact, only one respondent who claimed to have 'no interest' in the Manx language and who rated 'general benefits of a bilingual education' and 'small class size' as the most important of the given options.

It is evident that the future of the Manx language revival matters a great deal to the families whose children attend Bunscoill Ghaelgagh. However, Manx does not have the property of defining either identity or community loyalties, as for example Irish does in Northern Ireland (Maguire 1991: 27-33).

The Manx language is not a badge of identity for the majority of the Manx people. We are physically separate by virtue of being an island, and are, for the most part, under our own jurisdiction. Adult Manx L2 speakers often feel and say that the language is part of their 'heritage' and nationality, but they represent a minority of Manx people, most of who do not regard the ability to speak Manx as central to their Manx identity. The Manx language is not generally regarded by Manx speakers as a tool of exclusivity, and most tend to applaud the incomer who chooses to learn and speak Manx.

In choosing to send their children to the Manx immersion school, parents are expressing a greater than average interest in their children's education, as well as in the Manx language and culture. The inconvenience of getting their children to and from school, when they might attend a school nearer to their home, is also worth noting, as is the fact that it was parents who lobbied

the Department of Education for a Manx-medium primary school to follow on from Mooinjer Veggey playgroup. Small classes are important to many parents, but there is no guarantee, with a growing number of pupils and a limited number of qualified staff, that classes in the Bunscoill will remain small.

Parents in Ireland (Republic and Northern) and Scotland all gave similar replies regarding the link between language and culture (see Hickey 1997; Johnstone et al. 1999; Maguire 1991). They were, however, more likely to be either speakers or learners of the language themselves than is the case in the Isle of Man. It may be that if language classes could be made more accessible in terms of time, location and content, there would be greater parental involvement. Parents in all the studies of Celtic language immersion also praised the quality of teaching and were confident that their children were happy at school. Children are frequently in mixed age classes in immersion education and can remain with the same class teacher for several years, making a good relationship between children, parents and teacher all the more important. The Manx language revival is now entering a new phase with the founding of Manx medium playgroups, nurseries and Bunscoill Ghaelgagh.

Social and economic factors combined to make language shift inevitable after the number of Manx speakers had been reduced to the point where pragmatic considerations precipitated the almost fatal decline of the language. The real surprise must surely be that Manx survived at all. That it did is a tribute to all those who refused to let the language die, and gave their time to teaching Manx and campaigning to secure its future as a spoken language.



## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> *by* 'village, homestead' (Barber 2000: 128).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook/history/manks/jenner.htm> 3/10/05

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook/history/manks/census.htm> 21/02/06

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.gov.im/lib/docs/mnh/education/factfiles/manxlang> 15/03/06

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion of language shift in the Isle of Man see Broderick (1999: 23-25).

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.isle-of-man.com/interests/genealogy/wills> 15/03/06

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook/fulltext/ew1926/hist.htm> 15/03/06

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook/tourism/intro.htm> 15/03/06

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook/history/manks/census.htm> 21/02/06. All census figures need to be treated with caution as they are self-assessed and self-reported.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.gov.im/treasury/economic/census/1996/population/manxborn.xml> 30/03/06

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.gov.im/treasury/> 12/05/09

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.gaelg.iofm.net/INFO/gaelg.htm> 30/03/06

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.gaelg.iofm.net/INFO/gaelg.htm>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.gaelg.iofm.net/INFO/gaelg> 30/03/06

<sup>15</sup> Communicative competence.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.gov.im/education/provision/pre-school.xml> 10/06/06

<sup>17</sup> This was done to establish if there were any individual differences with regard to language use.

<sup>18</sup> Immersion education is not strictly speaking 'bilingual education'; bilingualism is, rather, the desired outcome but it was the term most familiar to the parents from the literature they had been given, and was therefore used.

<sup>19</sup> Produced by Undinys Eiraght Vannin, Manx Heritage Foundation.

<sup>20</sup> The school catchment area relates to the school in the area nearest to the child's home. In the Isle of Man children do not usually attend a school outside the catchment area of their home.

<sup>21</sup> The terms 'fluency' and 'competency' are used in the questionnaire to convey widely accepted generalisations regarding ability.

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