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'We have met the enemy, and he is us':[1] Reversing Language Shift in Brittany

Ronan Le Coadic

translation by Sharif Gemie

Abstract

The alarming statistics concerning the continuing collapse in the use of the Breton language contrast strangely with the consistent results of surveys revealing the attachment that Bretons feel for that language: these show a substantial and increasing commitment to conserve this language. The two contradictory examples suggest a scissors effect taking shape. However, these forms of evidence do not represent realities of a comparable nature: the data concerning the linguistic practice reflects deep, demographic, evolutions, while the data concerning the attachment to the Breton language concern expressions of feeling. To understand properly the relationship of the Bretons to their language, it is appropriate to present a detailed analysis which shows not only what this language represents to them, in general terms, but, furthermore, the correlations between attachment to the Breton language and social origins, geographic locations and types of identity. In this article, we construct such an analysis, referring to evidence gathered by both quantitative methods (surveys) and qualitative methods (interviews). The relation of the Bretons with their language has been shaped by their recent history and by the authority structures that have transformed their language into a marginalised, threatened form. To be effective, measures taken to reverse this language shift must take account of all these factors. Based on this analysis, we suggest three types of emergency measures in favour of the Breton language: to reinforce the 'points of support', to build bridges and to communicate.

Keywords : Brittany ; Bretons ; Breton language ; identity ; sociology.

In the sixty years between 1950 and 2010 the number of Breton speakers fell from about a million people to about 200,000. From 2010 to the end of this century, it is quite possible that this alarming fall will continue, reducing the number of speakers to only about 20,000. How should we understand this dramatic fall in the use of Breton? Above all, what measure should we consider to stop this decrease, or to lessen its speed? The argument presented here is that as the French state has played such a major role in the decline of Breton, it will only be through a major, collective awakening with Breton society that the future of Breton can be assured. First, we will consider the collapse of Breton and the role played by the State in this process; then we will analyse the 'scissors effect' that has developed over recent decades: the apparently paradoxical situation in which interest in and support for Breton has grown while use of Breton has declined. We will conclude by considering some methods to guarantee the future of Breton.

1. Language Shifts and the Role of the State

The use of Breton has declined dramatically since the 1950s. How has this been interpreted by scholars and by the general population?

1.1 A Dramatic Decline

1.1.1 Breton: A Great Wall of China?

When migrants left the British Isles for Armorica, at the end of the classical period and at the beginning of the Middle Ages, all of them, whatever their social status, spoke Breton. In this epoch, Brittany became a small, but vibrant, kingdom, capable of victories against other powers, and its language spread, even outside its borders (Fleuriot 1980, 92). But as Breton independence was challenged, and as its elites grew politically and socially closer to French elites, Breton then declined: a process which began at the top of society, and subsequently spread down the social hierarchy. The last Breton sovereign to speak Breton was Duke Alain IV (or Alain Fergant), who reigned from 1084 to 1112. But even when the Breton court and aristocracy began to stop communicating in Breton, the language retained some real social prestige for centuries (Fleuriot 1987) (Le Coadic 1998, 124). Above all, Breton continued to be the daily language of the great mass of the rural population of Lower Brittany until the beginning of the twentieth century.[2] In 1845, the historian Pitre-Chevalier described the linguistic frontier between Breton and French as resembling 'the Great Wall of China' (Le Gallo 1987, 145). His observations referred to the great extent to which Breton was used by that population, and the difficulties which confronted non-Breton speakers in those parts of Brittany. Even in 1946, Francis Gourvil estimated that there still about 1.1 million Breton speakers, and divided them into different categories: about a hundred thousand who never used French, about seven hundred thousand who

knew French but who preferred to use Breton, about three hundred thousand who could speak Breton but who tended to use French. There were also about four hundred thousand inhabitants of lower Brittany who only spoke French (Broudic 2009, 33).

1.1.2 Breton becomes a Minority Language

In the 1970s, it seems likely that Breton became a minority language even in Lower Brittany, although it is hard to find reliable statistical information on this point, as the various social surveys conducted in French never considered it. The first and only major official French enquiry concerning language use was a survey concerning family history in 1999 organised by the prestigious INSEE (Institut national de la statistique et des études économique – National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies), in cooperation with INED (Institut national des études démographiques – National Institute of Demographic Studies).[3] As a result of this research, it was estimated that there were 304,000 Breton speakers in the whole of France (Héran, Filhon, et Deprez 2002), of whom 257,000 lived within the official four-department region of Brittany (established in 1941) (Boëtté 2003), and 265,000 within the older borders of historic region of Brittany. The same survey also revealed some details concerning the social profile of Breton speakers, in particular their age: 'In 1999, three out of four Breton speakers were over 50, and half were over 65'. (Boëtté 2003, 20). Clearly, this was a language whose survival was seriously threatened.

1.1.3. A Threatened Language

UNESCO considered that Breton was a language that was in danger: an obvious conclusion from the data just presented (Moseley 2010). No further major survey concerning language use has been conducted in France since 1999. An opinion poll from 2007, however, suggests a continuing rapid decline in the use of Breton.[4] It suggested that the number of Breton speakers living within the old borders of the region had fallen in eight years from 265,000 to 194,500. Their loss is in part compensated for by the addition of 11,500 pupils, all less than 15 years old, enrolled in bilingual schools: if they are added to the number of Breton speakers, then one can claim that the number of Breton speakers is more than the symbolically important figure of two hundred thousand (Broudic 2009, 63-64). But even if one makes this qualification, there can be no doubt that the future looks grim for Breton. Let us now turn to consider how this situation came about.

1.2 The Factors which encouraged the Decline of Breton

1.2.1 The State and the Republican School

From the era of the Revolutionary 'Terror' of 1792-94, the French state has fought regional languages. Often this campaign took the form of simple assertions of the

primacy of the 'finest language in Europe' over 'dialects which perpetuate the reign of fanaticism and superstition' (Barère 1794) rather than any true public policy. The turning-point came with the Third Republic (1870-1940), which today is so praised for its progressive values, although it was also nationalist and imperialist. An active campaign against regional languages was initiated. The republican school and military service both imposed the use of French on young people: they were the basic instruments of this policy. In schools, when pupils were heard expressing themselves in a regional language, they were forced to wear a degrading object, known as 'the symbol'. They could only dispose of this object by identifying another pupil speaking in the regional language, who would then be forced to wear the object. At the end of the school day, the last pupil to be wearing the object would be punished. As the Breton writer Anatole Le Braz observed, 'through this system of spying, one quickly learnt to become an amateur policeman' (Piriou 1971, 30). Above all, pupils learnt a deep mistrust from their native language and cultures. This policy was firmly denounced by the Breton cultural movement, who argued that it was the cause of the collapse in the use of the Breton language. Were they right?

1.2.2 Some Qualifications concerning the republican school

Some recent works suggest some nuances in the analysis of the effects of the school on regional languages. They present three principal arguments. Firstly, the practices of teachers in their classes were often more subtle that what government ministers, prefects or school inspectors expected of them. One inspector claimed in 1897 that 'there was one principle which must always be observed: not a word of Breton in the classroom or playground'; however, the teachers themselves often acted in a more pragmatic manner (Monnier et Cassard 1997, 513). Jean-François Chanet's research on this theme is particularly notable (Chanet 1996). Secondly, whatever the teachers themselves really wanted, they simply did not have the power to impose a shift in language use on Breton society: to achieve this goal they needed the agreement of parents. Two points suggest the importance of this argument: the widespread survival of Breton until the 1950s (Broudic 1995, 371-74) and, more generally, the fact that regional languages have survived to this day (Chanet 1996, 203). The third argument concerns the importance of socio-economic factors in the decline of Breton: it was these, it is argued, rather than the school, which awoke the 'wish to speak French' and even 'the desire to change languages' (Broudic 1993, 1106-09).

1.2.3 Some Inconvenient Evidence

These qualifications suggest some nuances whose importance cannot be denied. However, the brutality of the schooling system and its social impact must never be forgotten. A study was published in 2000 which examined whether non-French-speaking

children in playgrounds really were forbidden to speak Breton. 130 people in the 56 communes in the department of the Côtes-d'Armor were interviewed: 123 of them (94.6%) remembered Breton being banned, and 48 of them had worn the infamous 'symbol' (An Du 2000). Such evidence leaves no place for any doubt. The words with which these interviewees recalled their childhood experiences is equally significant: 'we felt stupid', 'we were unable to talk about what we knew', 'we were constantly afraid', 'when we played, we used hand signals', 'inside, it half-killed us', 'we felt ashamed' and so on. As for 'the desire to change languages' in Brittany, such observations confuse cause and effect. If Bretons gave up their language in order to rise socially

> It was because social structures excluded (and still exclude, it must not be forgotten) regional languages from prestigious social spheres. Bilingual structures which associate the two languages are perfectly viable, as can be seen in many countries in Europe and elsewhere, and do not provoke this abandon of one language. They must be accepted as policies, and implemented institutionally. Instead, there has been a political choice, from above, which installed an official monolingualism and excluded regional languages: this was the cause of their abandon. (Blanchet 1995, 156).

What do the Bretons themselves think of such matters?

1.3 Breton Opinion

In the mid-1990s I conducted a series of semi-directed interviews on Breton identity: the interviewees themselves often spontaneously raised the issue of the change in languages (Le Coadic 1998, 196-202). They spoke both about the instruments of language change and the causes of the change.

1.3.1 The Main Instrument of Language Change

On average, the interviewees were in their forties: except for the oldest among them, none had personal experience of the 'symbol'. However, nearly all of them spoke of the role of the school in producing a brutal rupture in linguistic transmission.

> Gaël (retired sea-fisher, 63 years old): In our family, we only spoke Breton… It was very difficult, then, to go to a school where they hit you on the hand when you spoke Breton, as we didn't know how to express ourselves in French.

> Yann (manager, 58): It wasn't by chance! The Breton language was torpedoed. It was torpedoed – but I'm not telling you anything new – in the schools: we were

> not allowed to speak Breton. And if you spoke a word of Breton in the playground, you were made to wear the dunce's cap.

> Aline (farmer, 34): When I was little, at school, I was almost ashamed of my home. This was because my parents spoke to us in Breton… We felt as if this was a fault, and so we had to hide it. We lived as if it was something like an abscess that should not been seen… As if we were hunchbacks. It was a handicap.

The interviewees also spoke of other instruments of change: above all, of their parents.

> Jacques (manager, 48): They had been told so many times that they must not speak to their children in Breton, that they avoided speaking it in front of me.

But the only instrument of change to which all the interviewees referred was the school.

1.3.2 The Causes

Why forbid the use of Breton in schools? In my interviews, I did not raise this question, but some of my interviewees turned to it. Nearly all of them felt absolutely clear: the schools' actions were part of a larger policy which explicitly aimed to eliminate the Breton language. Only Hélène, the person who seemed most traumatised by her school years, suggested a different perspective.

> Hélène (fisher's wife, 42): They forbad from speaking Breton. So that we learnt French.

She seemed to think that one could only teach children French by fighting against the Breton language. The others thought differently.

> Aline (farmer, 34): Afterward we realised, but it would have been so much better if at school, in the environment in which we grew up, if people had been encouraged to speak [Breton] and to relate to it differently… It was stupid! It was so stupid! Because it could have been different.

Several interviewees were explicitly critical of the French state.

> Daniel (fisher, 41): The French state did everything to suppress [Breton]. Now they are starting to re-think, with some difficulty. That's it. It was also a

language! Of course!... But, then, that's the State for you! That's the State!... It was the French State that did it. Because, before, they only spoke Breton… It's true, it was the French State… But no! You had to speak French.

To conclude this point, it seems clear that the State played a major role in the sudden collapse of the use of Breton, both by its schooling policy and by its refusal to consider a bilingual policy in any form. The Bretons were faced by two forms of domination: the first social, as there was no possibility of social mobility upwards for Breton speakers, and the second ideological, as French was presented as the language that would 'transmit the most sublime thoughts of liberty', while Breton was 'a barbaric instrument of superstition' (Barère, 1794). The Bretons then decided that they had no option other than conforming to the monolinguistic demands of the Nation-State, the symbol of modernity. The collapse of Breton, however, was not total.

2. The Scissors Effect and Reversing Language Shift

2.1 The Challenge

2.1.1. The Critique of the State and Modernity

From the nineteenth to the start of the twentieth century, modernity meant hauling people off the land, which was reputed to be a zone controlled by the forces of *communautarisme* [ghettoization],[5] the clergy and the nobility, and marked by obscurantism and backwardness (Le Coadic 2001). By contrast, the State was the principal, sacred representative of modernity. In the 1960s, this concept of the modernity began to be challenged. In the struggles of May and June 1968, all aspects of 'bourgeois' modernity were vigorously criticized, including the State itself, the separation of the public and the private, the forms of representation, *laïcité*[6], liberal individualism, positivism and consumer society. All forms of constraint, of authority and all moral, religious and humanist values were questioned. The events of 1968 created a liberating rupture with tradition, and were followed by the development of new social movements (feminism, ecology and regionalism): these factors clearly affected the status of the Breton language.

2.1.2. The Emergence of the Scissors Effect

During the 1970s, the ethnic revival reached the Breton peninsula. It smashed into a population which, due to the oppressive factors that we have noted, had been trying its hardest for over twenty years to repress its language. The ethnic revival created a paradox: on the one hand, the Breton musical revival led by artists like Glenmor and Stivell stimulated a deep sense of pride, on the other hand, Breton was still seen by the immense majority of the population as useless and without any future, and so was not transmitted from the older generation to the young. The scissors began to open.

2.1.3 Reversing Language Shift Initiatives

The challenging politics of the 1970s encouraged the development and regeneration of the Breton cultural movement. This often took a 'national liberation' tone, allying the Breton cause with leftist political principles. More specifically, two new tendencies appeared. On the one hand, the militants discovered 'the people' and the richness of popular culture; young researchers criss-crossed the countryside, searching for the treasures of oral culture. On the other hand, for the first time, the state was outflanked: as the state schools did not teach Breton, militants created the Diwan [seed] schools, which combined teaching in Breton and progressive pedagogic practices. The first of these schools opened in 1977 in a village in North Finistère: it had five pupils and one teacher. Soon, pupils flocked to it. Diwan went from strength to strength: in its wake, bilingual classes were created in state schools and in the Catholic private schools. By 2011, 13,488 pupils were taught in the bilingual classes in these strands (Ofis ar brezhoneg s. d.). This clearly marks a revival in the Breton language.

2.2 The Revival

The significant political changes which affected the whole of society in the 1970s were often based on a re-thinking of the nature of modernity, re-orientating it towards the autonomy of the subject. This shift led Bretons to re-consider their relationship with their language.

2.2.1 Individual Autonomy

Today, people are extremely attached to the equality which citizenship provides for them. However, this quality is not sufficient in itself, for it reduces them to undifferentiated individuals. So, there is a consequent wish that differences should also be recognised, in a fraternal manner; such qualities should no longer be confined within the public sphere. Above all, people wish to be able to express their identities: to stress, to develop or to discount whichever elements seem worthy to them, without any particular model being imposed on them, without an authority telling them to accept or reject certain forms of behaviour. In sum, modernity is now expressed through a claim of autonomy in all spheres of life, whether sexuality, family, nationality or whatever.

2.2.2 Reconciliation with the Breton Language

It was in this context that Bretons came to re-think their language, which – for them – seemed to be less and less a symbol of backwardness. On the contrary, just as natural products from the land were seen as blessed with a specific 'authenticity', so Breton now seemed to possess its own unique characteristics. Of course, for some Bretons, it

was still seen as linked to the past. However, instead of rejecting this past, as their parents had done in the 1950s, the Bretons of today respect it. They now consider it to be a source of collective dignity, and a culture which provides them with the instruments to confront the great social shifts which mark today's society. Yet this reconciliation is belated and incomplete. The new passion for Breton is greatest among the young, the town-dwellers and those with university qualifications; it is least strong among the old peasant-farmers of Lower Brittany, who still have not broken free of the label 'backward' which was stuck on them. More generally, if the dominant tone in Breton public opinion is now sympathetic to the preservation of Breton, it is still seen as a part of heritage rather than as an instrument to use in contemporary society.

2.2.3 The Choice

The activists of the Breton language cause are now no longer a tiny band of militants, but they remain a minority, albeit a significant one. Their passions and concerns are clearly an element of renewed modernity, for they are a result of a free choice, not of traditional social constraints. The new Breton speakers inhabit de-territorialised networks: they are as likely to live in the regional cities of Upper Brittany (or anywhere in the world) as in the villages of Lower Brittany. Moreover, they have not been formed by any particular social base: they are not necessarily linked to traditional Breton-speaking milieus, to Breton-speaking families or even to Bretons. Their use of Breton is part of an important choice of specific lifestyle: they may be happy to speak Breton with some friends in an alternative bar or on the internet, or they may make Breton the normal language of communication in their family, in their workplace (Breton usage not only creates jobs for teachers, but also for translators, actors, publishers, etc.).

2.3 The Limits to the Revival

2.3.1 Quantitative Limits

Despite the astonishing expansion in the numbers of pupils in the bilingual networks, the overall number of Breton speakers is still in decline, as noted above. There were about 1,100,000 Breton speakers in 1946, and about 206,000 in 2007, many of whom are quite elderly. Furthermore, the familial transmission of Breton has almost ceased: in the 1920s, 60% of Breton-speaking children were taught by their parents; by the 1980s, only 6% (Boëtté 2003, 21). In 1999, only 3% of parents with children under 25 were Breton-speakers. There remain other problems: the manner in which Breton is represented remains problematic.

2.3.2 Ideological Problems

An opinion poll in 2001 asked Bretons what they thought about their language (Broudic s. d.).

Breton is…	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
An old language	94 %	6 %	
Our regional language	82 %	18 %	
A language just like any other	63 %	35 %	1 %
A traditional language	61 %	38 %	1 %
A dialect	38 %	59 %	3 %

The poll suggests that 61% of Bretons consider that Breton is a traditional [folklorique] language. This point is highly revealing, above all when one remembers just how pejorative the term 'traditional' [folklorique] has become in France. Yet, at the same time, some 63% argue that Breton is a language 'just like any other'. The two observations seem contradictory: is Breton 'just like any other' or specifically traditional? Considering more closely the evidence presented by this opinion poll, it seems that Bretons think in terms of a hierarchy of – at least - three levels when they consider languages. At the bottom is a mere 'dialect': Breton, thanks to the efforts of its defenders, has gained the status of a true 'language'. However, it has not reached the top stage of the hierarchy, as it enjoys no form of official recognition, it is not a state language and has not spread across nations: therefore, it remains limited to the middle stage, a 'traditional' language. The poll suggests the weight of the ideology of the French nation-state, so wedded to the French language (Dieckhoff 1997), but also the influence of ideas concerning globalisation. Among my interviewees, Jacques made some revealing comments on this topic.

> Jacques (manager, 47, discussing the shape of Brittany in 20 years). I think that there has to be an international language. And it will always the language of the one of the great economic powers. At the moment, it's English. I can't see why it shouldn't be English in 20 years, but perhaps in a 100 years it will be something else. So, for me, regional languages will always be traditional [folklorique]! (Le Coadic 2004, 101).

2.3.3 Qualitative Limits to Reversing Language Shift

Joshua Fishman correctly notes that 'Most modern RLS [Reversing Language Shift] movements have quickly and naturally, almost as a matter of course, moved to emphasize schools and schooling as the central thrust and process of the entire RLS endeavour (Fishman 1991, 368).' This is the case in Brittany: 56% of Breton speakers consider that Breton will be saved by bilingual schools (Broudic 2009, 159). It should be

remembered that the mother language of the pupils is French, as it is also for their teachers, usually sincerely devoted to the Breton language: the quality of the teaching in these schools has not been researched in depth. One can find one thesis (Le Ruyet 2009) and one publication (Madeg 2010): both these recent works are aimed at improving the teaching of pronunciation in bilingual schools. Some other relevant issues have been addressed in other works (Robin 2008). In 2010 Pierre-Yves Lambert, a specialist in Celtic languages, drew up a list of unique features of Celtic language which differentiate them from other Indo-European languages (CRBC Rennes 2 2010).[7] He notes nine unique aspects of Breton, which can be seen as forming the 'heart' of the language. I have been teaching in Breton for ten years, and I have to record that my students find nearly all these nine points difficult: yet the majority of them go on to become Breton teachers. This issue deserves further research.

The Breton language has reached a crossroads, as has been pointed out in a recent report (Ofis ar brezhoneg 2007). On the one hand, the number of Breton speakers continues to decline rapidly, on the other hand, there has been a revival, but with some very important limits to this revival. Its future will be decided in the decades to come.

3. The Medium-Term and the Role of Society

3.1 The State as Obstacle: Some Pessimistic Perspectives

3.1.1 The State as Obstacle

Since the mid-twentieth century, the French State has begun to relax its policy towards regional languages, just at the moment when they have fallen into a serious decline. In 1951, a law permitted, for the first time, four regional languages to be used as teaching languages: Breton was one of them.[8] In 1975, another law permitted the teaching of regional languages and cultures at all levels of education.[9] In 1977, the President of the Republic signed a Cultural Charter for Brittany,[10] in 1981 a BA degree in Breton was started, and in 1985 a CAPES qualification (Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle à l'Enseignement Secondaire) in Breton, which permitted those who held to qualification to teach in secondary schools. Yet the French state still clings to monolingualism. The French Constitution was even modified to this effect: in 1992 a new article declared that 'the language of the Republic is French'.[11] The measure was presented as means to block the spread of English within French society, but it has worked to stop any significant advance by regional languages. It was cited by the Constitutional Court as a reason for not signing the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 1999,[12] and for the cancelation of a protocol signed in 2002 which would have allowed the Diwan schools to have gained the status of state schools.[13] True, the French State no longer expresses the explicit hostility towards regional languages that it showed in the past, but given the serious demographic

situation of the Breton language, blocking all possibilities of serious progress will be sufficient to bring about the collapse of Breton (Le Coadic 2010, 353-356).

3.1.2 The Iron Laws of Demography

The age of the Breton-speaking population was referred to in the first part. Given the proportion who are over 65, one must expect a rapid collapse in the number of speakers in the next decade, simply due to their deaths. Fañch Broudic, analysing an opinion poll conducted in 1997, draws some sombre conclusion. 'In 1997, two-third of Breton speakers were 60 years old or older. One can estimate that 46% of these speakers… would have died by 2007: this amounts to 83,000 speakers. The arrival of 9,000 young Breton speakers is not sufficient to compensate for these deaths' (Broudic 2009, 73). Indeed, the proportion of Breton speakers who are more than 60 years old has continued to increase: today more than 70% of Breton speakers fall into this category; while only about 2% of 20 to 39 year-olds living in Lower Brittany speak Breton. The growth in bilingual classes is slowing, and so the serious decline in the number of Breton speakers is likely to accelerate in the years to come.

3.1.3 A Forecast

The Breton Language Office has attempted to calculate the possible number of Breton speakers at the end of twenty-first century. They have assumed that between 6,000 and 6,500 speakers will die each year, and they have considered three models of the formation of new speakers (Ofis ar brezhoneg 2007, 129). Their findings are summarized in the table below.

Scenarios	Numbers in Bilingual Classes	Proportion of pupils who continue to speak Breton after qualifying in a bilingual school	New Breton speakers	Possible total number of Breton speakers in 2100
Sustained development	Numbers increasing	75%	rising	250,000
Drifting	Numbers decreasing	33%	400 per year	70,000
Retreat	Numbers falling dramatically	20%	few	20,000

The authors of the report do not take into account the effects of the familial transmission of Breton, for they consider that this will not be statistically significant. They conclude that the most likely future is somewhere between the middle scenario and the lowest scenario, and so consider that there will be between 20,000 and 70,000 Breton speakers at the end of this century.

3.2 Representing the Future

3.2.1 Over-optimism

In order to reverse the decline in the use of Breton, first one must accept the reality of that decline. Activists concerned with reversing the language shift have been sounding alarm bells for years: towards the end of the 1990s they finally seemed to be heard by the region's elected representatives. This new attitude can be seen in the creation of an Office for the Breton Language in 1999 (which became an official, publicly funded body in 2011) and the unanimous vote in 2004 for a bilingual text concerning linguistic policy, which affirmed that 'The Regional Council of Brittany officially recognises Breton and Gallo, alongside French, as the languages of Brittany'. This text produced some concrete results. This new awareness, however, did not stop a certain lack of realism among the population. Some Bretons just refuse to accept that Breton could disappear one day.

> David (worker from Finistère, 37 years old, interviewed on the topic of Brittany in 20 years' time): As for Breton, it would be a shame if… But people are going to… No, no, it's impossible! I can't imagine that Breton could just disappear like that. It's impossible!

Further evidence of this type of thinking, which considers that Breton simply could not collapse, can be found in many opinion polls.

3.2.2 Opinion Polls and Other Evidence

An opinion poll carried out in 2003 found that 29.79% of Breton considered that they were 'confident' about the future of the Breton language (TMO-Régions 2003). They are only a minority within the population, but still quite a considerable body of opinion. Furthermore, it is striking that such feelings of confidence are structured quite systematically according to age: among those aged from 18 to 24, 25.7% feel such confidence, which among those aged more than 60, 33.42% express such feelings. It seems that older people, because they have heard Breton all their life, find it difficult to imagine that it could disappear, while the younger people, who are used to living in an environment where it is less present, feel less confident.

Fishman's comments concerning patterns of support for reviving a language are relevant here. 'It is hard for a thousand "old timers" who attend an absolutely first-rate "pageant for Xish" to believe that on the morning after Xish is still no better off than it was on the night before' (Fishman 1991, 398). Also, one frequently finds a reluctance to reflect on the future, in order to avoid considering unpleasant prospects. In my own experience, I have seen people who are passionate about Breton taking this type of 'ostrich position': they seem to wish to underestimate the risks faced in order not to feel intimidated. This is probably not the best way to confront problems, and it seems better to face the worst possible prospects, in order to think about how to avoid them.

3.3 What is to be Done?

3.3.1 Improve Quality

The quality of language teaching at bilingual schools has some serious weaknesses, particularly in syntax, grammar, pronunciation. This point has been recognised by specialists, but it rarely discussed more widely (Broudic 2011; Madeg 2010; Robin 2008; Le Ruyet 2009). The reasons for these weaknesses are obvious: the extremely common inability of families to use Breton; the near-total absence of Breton in children's daily environment (where French is omnipresent); and the limited abilities of Breton teachers. Those who teach, despite their obvious enthusiasm for their craft, have lived within the same constraints as their children: their mother tongue is French, they have always lived in a francophone environment and often they have not crossed the distance that separates Breton from French. One can envisage some procedures to remedy this problem. Action can be taken earlier: more hours per week should be devoted to languages in universities and other training centres. After qualification, there should be a specialist course to improve linguistic capacity for future teachers, and such training should continue throughout their careers. Such reinforcement of linguistic ability, based on a rigorous examination of the teachers' abilities, and including the widespread diffusion of relevant research, would produce significant improvements. But, finally, all the problems are not the fault of the teachers.

3.3.2 Bridge-building

On the topic of cultural interactions in minority languages involving elderly speakers, Fishman responds with a witty scepticism: such events can be 'remarkably gratifying' but also "remarkably misleading" (Fishman 1991, 397). They could well have little long-term effect: as we have seen, older people often have an unrealistic attitude to the future of the Breton language. On the other hand, there are some specific characteristics of Breton which suggests that more interaction with older speakers could be highly beneficial. A cultural chasm has split the two types of Breton speaker:

the native speakers, who have never studied Breton in a formal manner are elderly, with few academic qualifications, rural, and work as farmers, workers or fishers; the language they speak is rich, musical and full-bodied; on the other hand, often they are unable to write in Breton, to analyse its forms or vocabulary, or to adapt it to contemporary life. Those who have chosen to speak it, on the other hand, have learnt Breton in a formal manner (or their parents have learnt it): they are usually young, well-qualified, urban, executives or in middle management; their vocabulary is precise and wide-ranging; they can read and write Breton, but their sense of rhythm and syntax is weak. A meeting between these two cultures could be very useful, but would not be easy to arrange because, as they are the products of two different social contexts, they do not share the same social codes. Some individual initiatives have taken place, often through the schools, and six years ago the 'Collectors of Memories' scheme was launched in Finistère. Several inter-generational courses have been organised. Given the problems of the quality of Breton, and the obvious demographic challenges that the language faces, building more bridges between the two universes must be seen as urgent, and a key priority.

3.3.3 Family transmission

The first and most important priority, however, to ensure a future for Breton must be to reinforce the role of familial transmission. As Fishman has noted: 'Over and over again, pro-RLSers must remind themselves that it is intergenerational mother tongue transmission that they are after' (Fishman 1991, 12). We have shown how familial transmission has collapsed, and we have noted that only 2% of those living in lower Brittany and aged between 20 and 39 could speak Breton in 2007. To date, the campaign to promote the Breton language has concentrated all its efforts on developing Breton in schools, in the media and in public life. As we are facing a Nation-State that has relegated minority languages, religions and all cultural particularity to the private sphere where they will die off, the stress on the public has been useful. But now, the key challenge is to re-invigorate the familial transmission of Breton. This could be done through campaigns financed by elected authorities, or by the provision of grants for parents of children in bilingual schools who wish to learn Breton themselves. Finally, far greater discussion is needed about the 'home-family-neighborhood-community (which) constitutes the heart of the entire intergenerational transmission pursuit' (Fishman 1991, 398).

Conclusion

The Breton language has had many enemies over the centuries. Its most notable external enemy has been the French Nation-State, which has forged a culture based on the French language and monolingualism. But it has also faced an internal enemy: the

Bretons themselves who, when faced with the State's monolinguistical ideology, have accepted their status as a dominated minority and have abandoned their language in order to transcend their status. Today, the State no longer shows the same aggressive attitude towards regional languages; it merely blocks all forms of their institutional evolution. As for the Bretons, they too are in part enemies of the Breton language, in that they have shown themselves to be unrealistically optimistic, too easily despondent, and lacking in initiative. It is certain that the Breton language has suffered some dreadful losses, but all is not lost. ` The question of success must not be approached in absolute terms (…) but, rather, in functional, contextual or situational terms (…). *There is no language for which nothing at all can be done*' (Fishman 1991, 12).

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[1] Joshua A. Fishman notes: 'The case of threatened languages (…) is rendered even more difficult by the fact that not only is the "enemy" not recognised, but he/she is even *persona grata* within the very gates of the beleaguered defenders ("We have met the enemy, and he is us !", as the cartoon character Pogo pointed out more than a generation ago).' 'Can threatened languages be saved?', *Multilingual Matters,* 2001, p. 6.

[2] Lower Brittany [Basse-Bretagne] is the westerly half of Brittany, where the Breton language is most deeply rooted.

[3] Survey of 380,000 adults aged 18 or more, living in France. 40,000 of the sample lived in Brittany.

[4] Opinion poll by the TMO Régions Institute, carried out between 3 and 19 December 2007, with a sample of 3,109 people.

[5] Translator's note: *Communautarisme* is almost untranslatable. While nearly all the derivations of the term 'community' have positive resonances in English, *communautarisme* is clearly negative and pejorative. It refers to specific communities deliberately choosing not to integrate themselves into French republican culture.

[6] Translator's note: A second near-untranslatable term. *Laïcité* refers back to the great battles between religious and secular forces in the nineteenth century, which are seen as having won by the secular state with the law on the Separation of the Church and State in 1905. *Laïcité*, however, is not the synonymous with secularism or secularization, for there are forms of *laïcité* which allow for an active contribution by religious bodies to society and government.

[7] I wish to record my thanks to the author for allowing me to see a draft version of his text.

[8] Il s'agit de la loi 51-46 du 11 janvier 1951 relative à l'enseignement des langues et dialectes locaux, dite loi Deixonne. Elle fut la première loi française autorisant l'enseignement de langues régionales de France.

[9] Law n° 75-620, passed on 11 July 1975, known as the Haby Law after the then Minister of National Education, René Haby.

[10] In the 1970s, there was also a significant growth of Breton independentist and autonomist movements, and some incidents involving bombs.

[11] Law n° 92-554, passed on 25 June 1992.

[12] Decision n° 99-412 DC, dated 15 June 1999.

[13] Decision by the State Council, n° 248192-248204 — meeting of 28 October 2002, announced on 29 November 2002.