

Evolution of bilingual education in Brittany

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Ikerlan honetan egileak bretoiera hizkuntzak historian zehar Bretainiako gizartean eta beraz, batez ere, irakaskuntzan bete duen zeregina aztertzen da. Frantziako Iraultzaren hasieran (1789) bretoieraz eta frantsesez idatziriko zenbait dekretu izan ezik. Frantziako boteredunak beti jokatu dute elebakartasunaren alde, bretoiera zeregin publikoetatik kanpo egon dadin. Hala ere, 1968. urtetik aurrera nabarmena da bretoiarekiko jarrera baikorra nagusitzen ari dela gizartean. Horrela, irakaskuntzan gero eta indar handiagoa dute bretoieraz irakasten duten eskola motak. Gaur egun guztira 5.000 ikasle ari dira ikasgaiak bretoieraz lantzen eta beste 12.000 ari dira bretoiera bigarren edo hirugarren hizkuntza legez ikasten.

Giltz-Hitzak: Bretoiera. Diwan ikastetxeak. Elebitasunaren bilakaera. Eskola katolikoak. Gobernuaren eskolak. Hezkuntza-elebiduna. Nortasun baikorra. Nortasun ezkorra.

En esta investigación, el autor analiza la función del idioma bretón a lo largo de la historia, en la sociedad, y más específicamente en la educación. A excepción de un periodo al comienzo de la Revolución Francesa (1789), durante el cual se escribieron varios decretos en francés y en bretón, las autoridades francesas siempre han promocionado el monolingüismo, excluyendo al bretón de las funciones públicas. Sin embargo, desde 1968 se percibe un cambio hacia una actitud predominantemente positiva. Así, en el campo de la educación, las escuelas que enseñan en bretón van adquiriendo cada vez más fuerza. Hoy, en total hay 5.000 estudiantes matriculados en estos modelos y otros 12.000 que aprenden el bretón como segundo o tercer idioma.

Palabras Clave: Educación bilingüe. El idioma bretón. Escuelas católicas. Escuelas Diwan. La evolución del bilingüismo. Identidad negativa. Identidad positiva. Escuelas del Estado.

Dans cette étude, l'auteur analyse la fonction de la langue bretonne tout au long de l'histoire, dans la société, et plus spécifiquement dans l'éducation. A l'exception d'une période au début de la Révolution Française (1789), durant laquelle plusieurs décrets ont été écrits en français et en breton, les autorités françaises ont toujours encouragé le monolingüisme, en excluant le breton des fonctions publiques. Pourtant, depuis 1968 on perçoit un changement vers une attitude plus positive. Ainsi, dans le domaine de l'éducation, les écoles qui enseignent en breton acquièrent de plus en plus de force. Aujourd'hui, il y a au total 5.000 étudiants inscrits dans ce modèle et 12.000 autres qui apprennent le breton comme seconde ou troisième langue.

Mots Clés: Education bilingue. La langue bretonne. Ecoles catholiques. Ecoles Diwan. L'évolution de bilinguisme. Identité négative. Identité positive. Ecoles de l'Etat.

INTRODUCTION

The end of the 20th century is marked for Breton by many interrogations on the future of the language, but also by the first results of long-term efforts to try and save it through bilingual teaching and using it in public life or community (family, associations, some official use).

This twofold movement, contradictory as it seems, both up and down, began by the turn of the century. It evolved over the last decades into some teaching, particularly bilingual education as it is organised in the *Académie de Rennes* (through different models) with some success and problems, which gives us a perspective to analyse it according to recent research.

1. THE CONTEXT OF BILINGUALISM IN THE 19TH CENTURY

1.1. The Breton linguistic situation of old

Brittany has always known more or less, since its origins, that is the 5th century, bilingual situations. In the Dark Ages, research (Fleuriot 1980) shows the presence of Breton-Latin bilingualism, as Latin was the written norm mostly used by clerics and monks in the peninsula, like elsewhere in Europe, but the bulk of the Breton newcomers to Armorica used as a vernacular only Old Breton or *lingua britannica*, a Celtic tongue. Brittany turned to French quite early, though, in the middle ages, mostly after 1000 in a quasi independent Duchy, but where power centres has moved east to the *mixed* zone (Britto-roman) which was already lost by Breton, as well as the cities of Nantes and Rennes. Concerning what will be called from now on Lower Brittany (western half in opposition to eastern Upper Brittany, where Breton had yielded to Romance, becoming *gallo* idiom), popular use is largely monolingual among the rural masses, as well as the sea-coast, with the exception of developing towns. There were probably different situations or unequal bilingualism, among the gentry and landlords, quite numerous, as well as among the new bourgeois population in market-towns and exchange centres. One can estimate, following historians (Fleuriot 1980), that Brittany which had then about one million inhabitants, was for the western part of the Duchy all Breton-speaking but little learned.

However, since the attachement of Brittany to France (1532), French had replaced Latin as the official language of the State (*état-civil*, justice - *édit de Villers-Cotterêts*), whereas Breton remained the official one of the Church, Lower Brittany following a *règle d'idiome* set by Pope Gregory IX, 1270). And the Catholic Church dominated then, and long after too, the whole education system, in *small schools* as well as in seminars; so, Breton was the main language used by this basic confessional teaching, besides Latin, and a bit of school French.

One fact proves how things stood: the publication in 1499 of a dictionary called *Catholicon*, a multilingual one (Breton, French, Latin - the first instance of such a book in France), to help *poor clerics from Brittany* learn French and Latin, according to the author.

1.2. Breton as the language of Catholic schools

Such a situation lasted until the French Revolution, when contradictory policies and sometimes short-lived principles were applied: translating texts like laws or decrees voted by the Convention, then under Terreur trying to exclude idioms like Breton, suspected by politicians to express *federalism* and *superstition*, as Basque was of *fanaticism*.

All that seems to have had little effect, until the French Republic (1870) and compulsory education in French (under Jules Ferry). According to recent historians (Lagrée 1992) archives show that three-quarters of schools used Breton for teaching, and even 6% Breton only, whereas another quarter used French only. Other sources give us details about the reality of such elementary teaching which was mainly learning the three Rs, reading more than writing, through catechism and saints' history, for example. It is clear, though, that in Brittany, under-alphabetised as it was at the beginning of this century, the Breton language, through its role as an official Church language (the *language of heaven* and of *fe y Bretaña*, as they said, like Welsh was *iaith y nefoedd* for Protestants), has been for centuries the main medium of learning reading and writing at all, if often devout lore. Such a usage can still be verified among aged people born at the start of the century, mostly women who were quite often monolingual (and still 100.000 in 1950), or alphabetised in Breton only.

Figures can be given: the early 20th century witnesses an increase of Breton speakers, first for demographic reasons, to over one million (1,2 m), before the first world war. This sociolinguistic pattern is well documented, owing to several enquiries about the 1902 episode (when the radical government wanted to oppose predication in Breton, which led to many reactions kept in archives, recently studied by Broudig 1995, 1997), proving that at the beginning of the century, Breton still was the vernacular all over Lower Brittany for an overwhelming majority of the population, as few adults then knew French (speaking or even understanding some of it), except in some recent cities like Brest or Lorient (*colonial* cities) or in a few other urban centers.

This means that globally, things stood as they did in the centuries before: the majority of the rural population, often *peasants* (some 80% in Finistère at the turn of the century) was Breton-speaking, elders and women being often monolinguals, whereas most males knew some French because of conscription, but younger generations knew or at least understood what was called the *langue nationale* after years of compulsory schooling.

1.3. L'école de Jules Ferry

Change came through what is called in French Jules Ferry's school system. All researchers and witnesses agree: according to article 14 (in primary school regulations), *le français sera le seul en usage*. That deliberate choice, which remained all through the Third Republic (1939), was first aimed at *nationalising* the language and the population of a *nation-State* that was not unified for the power that be, in the context of a *cold civil war* between Church (favorable to the monarchy) and State, all the more so as it was ardently colonialist. This is why the problem of Breton is linked with the question of German-speaking Alsace-Lorraine, as well as with the status of Arabic in Algeria, for instance.

The whole curriculum was then taught in French, in spite of principles that seem natural nowadays. It corresponds to a strategy that aims at making Frenchmen out of *Bas-Bretons*, using for half a century at least, with local exceptions, any object or *symbol*, which would show by the end of the school-day who must be punished for speaking Breton outside. Inspectors and rectors etc. insist on the necessity of such forced linguistic immersion in what is the only island of French in an ocean of Breton: State school. This is precisely the description that we find and can still hear of: out of the classroom, Breton was used in families, communities, vicinities, and even at work both in the countryside and at sea, French being the language of outsiders, State (administration - not always! -, justice, army, and schooling).

Turning Breton-speakers into Frenchmen becomes too the policy of the other school system, the Catholic one, built on the former *mall schools*, even if Breton remains the normal language of religious education (catechism until the late 40's, at least). Competition between the two systems can explain what was another *ralliement*, under the influence of a newly created diploma, *certificat d'études primaires*, which was compulsory to get a job in the State system (even as a postman, for instance).

This is what we call the *French model*, which since the start had been defined in the first *Ecole Normale primaire* in Rennes in the 19th century as bent to *Frenchify the language* and *grind out differences* (Nicolas 1993), and which then spread steadily to the whole population in Brittany, as in the northern part of the Basque Country in our century.

2. THE EVOLUTION OF BILINGUAL ENVIRONEMENT

2.1. Negative identity (1870-1970)

This is the context in which appeared what sociologists have analysed as a *negative identity* (Elegoët 1975), mostly between the end of the 19th century and the middle of the 20th, though we still find traces of it today.

It developed from what can be called a traditional or archaic identity, inherited from the past. All along the last century, observers (travellers or writers, etc.) oppose *Bretons* (in costumes of *paysans*), attached to their customs and speaking only their tongue to *bourgeois* or as often stated (as in 1902), to *Frenchmen*, people clad as townfolk and speaking French, which symbolizes *new ideas*.

But in the first half of this century, this so-called *Breton* tended to nurture an inferiority complex, due to his *altérité*, sometimes coupled with a wish to assimilate into the French melting-pot, which meant modernity and *progress*.

That feeling of shame or ethnolinguistic self-consciousness has been studied by *eth-nopsychiatrists*, and it was the cause of many problems like suicide or alcoholism.

Such a negative sociolinguistic identity was the price to pay for an assimilation that many wished and others suffered, but it was often felt as social promotion by a poor population, as it is still among emigrants.

It has disappeared nowadays, but it has marked generations in our century, and still has a lasting effect in the relations between the language and schooling in the State system.

2.2. More positive identity by the end of the 20th century

One can witness today a complete reverse in this matter, after a change of values after 1968 well into the eighties.

The former pattern (*l'école de Jules Ferry*) and the nationalisation of behaviours and language practices has come true, but it is also outdated. Everybody in Brittany speaks French, which is used in all families, at least through the media. At the same time, a new world culture incites many to seek roots or marks as to synthesise both what is *local and global*. So, the Breton language, the emblem of Breton identity, has achieved some legitimacy. At the same time, two new references have appeared, besides the central State: *regions* (1982 law) and the European Community with other policies and models (Great-Britain or Spain...).

2.3. Social demand for Breton

Social demand for a balanced bilingual education is quite old in Brittany, as it dates back to 1870. Today, it springs from society in the different networks that have developed. In the bilingual system called *DIWAN*, it is parents' associations that create new schools or classes, and its their federation that manage them in relation with the authorities (by contract). In bilingual State schools, it is also according to parents' initiatives (parents' association *APEEB*, *Association des Parents d'Élèves de l'Enseignement Bilingüe*, a member of *FLAREP*, *Fédération des Langues Regionales*) or from local politicians' pressure that schools have developed, as well as bilingual curriculums. It is also the case of Catholic schools, where an association of parents (*DIHUN*) keeps lobbying and negotiating with the local Catholic authorities in charge of that separate system.

3. BILINGUAL BRETON-FRENCH EDUCATION

The development of Breton teaching has followed the course of the history of our century, where the Breton movement was little successful until recently.

If we leave aside Catholic education, where the language was tolerated in the early century, and even programmed in the 1930's, apart from being the idiom of religious instruction, the Breton language was totally absent at all levels, and even forbidden at school, except at university level. Breton has been taught in our university (Rennes) since 1884 (paid by local councils), a chair of Celtic was created in 1903, and diplomas (*DEC*, *Diplôme d'Études Celtique*, 1906), after academics claimed that France could not leave the whole range of Celtic studies to Great-Britain and chiefly to the Germans! In spite of the claims for primary bilingual education to their friends (ministers...), these academics were never listened to.

In the second half of this century only did such a scheme appear: voluntary courses in *lycées* from 1953 (Deixonne law) development and extension to younger secondary classes in 1970 equal *dignity* for Breton through a Cultural Charter of Brittany proposed by Giscard d'Estaing to the Bretons, Breton becoming an option, like a foreign language (1979) then, creation of jobs, careers (*CAPES*, *Concours du professorat de l'enseignement secondaire*) with an academic cursus (1980's) as well as *bilingual* classes and curriculums last but not least, contract between *DIWAN* in 1992, development of bilingualism at school and teaching local *civilisation* (Breton patrimony).

The end of the 20th century shows some acceleration in this process of *normalisation*. Two reasons can explain this: in Brittany itself, the development of a *positive identity*, language included, at least at a symbolic level at the level of State education, moving from a very centralised system, with a single model, to some diversity, as was claimed by movements after 1968. Official French leaders have even begged some pardon, not so much through Mitterrand's *droit à la différence* as with Bayrou defending both *francophonie* and *les langues de France*.

4. BILINGUAL EDUCATION SYSTEMS

4.1. DIWAN school-system

The most important step was the creation in 1977 of the first *DIWAN* school, adapted from the Basque model of *ikastolak*. This project was intended to build up a number of elementary schools (maternal and primary classes), under the control of the parents' associa-

tions, in order to learn Breton according to immersive methods (bilingualism through immersion, model D, as in Quebec etc.). It corresponded to an expectation by language activists who despaired to find solutions to their claims in the French school system, as well as to utopias that had been popularised by the 1968 upheaval. The development of the *DIWAN* model has been steady, in spite of financial problems, which local authorities helped to solve, under some pressure and lobbying by the Breton movements, before they signed a contract with the ministry of education in 1992. *DIWAN* means now some thirty schools, five secondary ones (from first form to A level), for over 2.000 pupils (progressing by 20% per year), French being taught after Breton and less so, as the Breton language is the main means of teaching as well as of communication in these schools.

4.2. Bilingual teaching in State schools

A parallel must be observed in the development of *bilingual* classes about the same period (1975-1980), soon organised as bilingual *networks* or *filières*, for infants from the age of 2 up to university level at best. Breton and French are taught on an equal footing (parity bilingualism), according to several models (two school-masters, one in the morning, the other in the afternoon, or the same bilingual teacher all day teaching in Breton and/or French...). Here again, under the pressure of parents' associations, teachers, militants, politicians etc., there is a tendency to see more of these schools, which are said to have quit being experimental and are now growing pretty fast as well (10% per year). They concern over one thousand pupils in the whole Académie, mostly in Lower Brittany, and are included in new teachers' training courses.

4.3. Bilingualism in Catholic schools

Lastly and paradoxically, when one looks at the historical background, private Catholic schools (where almost one pupil out of two is schooled in Brittany) were late to develop bilingual classes. Regionalisation in 1982 having devolved some power to the *départements* in that field, this claim was taken up by opposition leaders (to the left-wing government) and some *départements* (Finistère, Morbihan) could subsidise Catholic schooling through these new bilingual classes, imitated from the State model (C), which often meant preserving rural schools that would have been closed because of demographic reasons, or because they were in competition with *DIWAN*. These schools where about one thousand pupils are being taught are pretty similar to the State ones, all the more as the initial training of teachers is no different in universities (Rennes and Brest) and in the *IUFM* (*Institut de Formation des Maîtres*). We can remark that those three systems (or models) have usually good relations, as their members know and feel that they belong to the same minority language.

In fact, if those three bilingual systems teach Breton to about 5.000 pupils, hoping to reach a targeted 10.000 (number or threshold, supposed to replace the ageing Breton-speaking population - ie. some 250.000 speaking, but 500.000 knowing it), they remain quite a minority in Brittany (half a million pupils in the *Académie*), and even in *Basse-Bretagne*, even if one must add other methods of teaching Breton, either as a second or a third language or as initiation (12.000 pupils), excluding some 22.000 in all who are concerned by the teaching of *Breton culture*, that is patrimony (Recteur Lhostis, 1997, who wished to develop it to all pupils...).

5. PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES

5.1. The discourse on Breton

As one could notice all along, such building-up of bilingual education is based on a new Breton discourse, far away from the arguments of both regionalist during the *Belle Époque*, or nationalists between the two world wars.

The legitimacy of bilingualism is reinforced by the impact of foreign models (Quebec, especially, in France), and chiefly by the example set to us by other minority languages in western Europe, like Celtic languages (Gaelic, more than Irish, and Welsh) or by the policies of autonomous communities like the Basque, or Catalonia...

Implementing such bilingualism means following universal schemes, those developed by international authorities as our territories have become integrated in a world-wide vision. Early bilingualism also means another approach, both more natural and easier to put in practice than studying English in primary school, for instance. Such experiments exist: *DIWAN* teach some subjects in English in secondary classes (history or geography, biology - whereas *instruction civique* will be left to French), and pupils are initiated on a voluntary basis to other rarer languages (Basque, Welsh), and even Arabic in primary schools in Brest (Ouest-France, 26/02/1998).

Such is the tenor of a new Breton discourse, drawing on the rights of minorities, including for immigrants, for instance, which is a stand quite opposite to any *nationalism* in the French bad acception of that word. We should remark that, even between the two world-wars, Breton nationalists if erred somewhat, always considered themselves as sympathetic to other minorities, both foreign (like the Basques during the civil war) or belonging to the French Empire (ex-colonies), which one can understand as being based on the same strategic interest.

So today, this new Breton discourse is markedly *progressist* and unanimist (right for children and families to learn the minority language etc.). It is, for example, Kofi Yamgnage, M. P. (*Member of Parliament*) and black mayor of Saint-Coulitz, who won over Cozan (Centre-right M. P., called *député DIWAN*), who presides the group of French M. P.s that was created recently to lobby for *regional languages*.

Parents' motivations, as one can try to sum them up, before a closer analysis be provided, are of several types: learning the language of family and/or environment (or of grand-parents) and neighbourhood, including newcomers, who can integrate more easily in this way taking part in a cultural revival that has developed over the last decades favouring an open-minded approach in early education, and making it easier to switch from one language to another, in a more coherent manner than through learning any foreign language at an early age, as this model is very little used in the French school system.

5.2. Language death perspective and new native speakers

This new development of bilingualism is also related to the fate of the Breton language. A consensus has appeared among the population at large (over three-quarters, and even 90% of youths, according to recent surveys), as well as among politicians or representatives so bilingualism is from now on mostly a question of implementing principles and policies that have been defined, what the French call *intendance*.

The problem is rather the urgency of it, in front of the linguistic situation. Two curves have to be borne in mind: the rapid decline of native speakers because of demographic reasons,

with the scattered remnants of a bulk of a million Breton-speakers as they were at the turn of the century, in front of a limited renewal.

It is clear that the situation of Breton in schools as well as its place in the community at large is no different from that of some other minority languages: Scottish Gaelic with some 5.000 bilingual pupils and less than 100.000 speakers, Welsh, a more positive example of renewal through early bilingualism over two generations and a modern use of mass media Basque (about 4.000 bilingual learners in France as well), with a difference over the Pyrenees, etc.

Schooling cannot, by itself as it were, replace the family support of yore, nor traditional society which has dwindled out by now. If schooling can produce bilinguals, it cannot ensure their reproduction, leaving it to society. Consequently, the main problem is how to articulate such linguistic immersion, albeit minorised, with the socialisation of children, then of adolescents. Which poses the inevitable question of what will be the place given to the language in public life and even in one's own life.

5.3. Some qualitative aspects of the bilingual renewal

This also raises the question, in Brittany as well as elsewhere, of the quality of such bilingual education and of the renewal of speakers that it is supposed to ensure.

In Breton, as in Basque, or in Irish, etc., traditional vernacular languages were characterized by a so-called dialectal variety, illustrated in Breton by the fact that diocese written standards existed for three centuries (17th-19th), favoured by the Church, before the unification of spellings in the 20th century, which left aside the question of an oral standard. Because of a dissensus between Breton and State school, already mentioned, the fate of the Breton language was for decades in the hands of scholars who were independent from public authorities so the so-called literary standard (like unified Basque or *euskara batua*) does not always correspond to the spontaneous Breton spoken in different areas of Lower Brittany. It is on these subjects that linguistic and sociolinguistic research have focused, and here is an example of it.

A common research project on Celtic countries (Brittany, Scotland, Wales and Ireland), subsidised by the European Community and local authorities or councils, has been carried out for over three years by our universities (Cardiff, Dublin, Skye, Rennes) in order to test the quality and the flaws of such new bilingualism, as it exists in our four countries, on a more or less common basis. After three years' research and work achieved in common, here are a few conclusions that one can draw from this experience.

From the general point of view of language learning, it appears indeed that the immersion model is quite preferable to other models that put the minority language on the same footing as a foreign language in its own environment. In the present case of Breton, the mastering of Breton as a language of communication seems rather satisfactory, at least in the long run which means learning well into adolescence in secondary schools. During the first years, on which this study was based (early bilingualism between 2 and 6), the morpho-syntactic system of Breton, pretty different from the French one, seems to have been well acquired on the whole, even if some interferences do exist (mostly following contact from French onto Breton, obviously enough), for example in word order, which globally remains faithful to the native model, but not always in detail or in percentages of utterances, for example. In the same way, the phonological system seems to be well mastered by most, which enables pupils to learn other languages more easily afterwards but, at the start, it suffers some interferences, which can also be found or heard in French itself (phonemes /r/ & /x/, cf. *beur* French or French from

the Midi) concerning vocabulary, it appears that the lexicon of these bilingual school-children obeys, quite logically, mostly to choices made by schools and institutions (schoolbooks, even for infants) as well as larger linguistic choices (purist versus popular usage) taken far afield, much more than to practice in their close environment, which has far less bearing than in the case of spontaneous acquisition. For it is crystal-clear that schooling in Breton, as much so as French institutionalised by school in opposition to regional or social varieties, represents for these kids a genuine norm that surpasses any other standard, at least while they are at school, and even outdoes the Breton that they may hear in their families or vicinities, all the more so as this norm in progress is also present in the media that use the language, according to a spoken standard quite close to the written norm.

This means, of course, that the development of such bilingualism, sometimes called *new bilingualism* in Brittany as in other Celtic lands (say, Belfast, for instance), or elsewhere in western Europe, raises as many questions as it may answer others, based as it is on a general dynamic in the new context of world culture and world-wide perspectives, as well as on social demand from people, which is by the way complex, changing, and at times contradictory. Which means to us that this minority bilingualism, brand-new as it is, has already got as much socio-historical depth as the movements from it sprang. And this, hopefully, is rather comforting for those who would have doubts about the future or such research in human sciences.

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