

**Mapping the Languages of Edinburgh**  
**Summary of Findings from SCOTLANG Seed Project 6**  
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### **The Study**

These findings derive from a study based on a language census of 11 to 12 year old students in Edinburgh schools. The aims of the research were:

- to map the languages known and used by Edinburgh school children;
- to investigate students' own views on levels of linguistic competence they have reached in the languages they know;
- to explore the contexts in which they use their languages;
- to examine students' attitudes to plurilingualism.

The study was conducted as a pilot to investigate the feasibility and value of a larger study, mapping the languages of Scotland.

The census took place in early autumn 2001, and information was collected from 3840 students, estimated to be approximately four fifths of the 11 to 12 year old population of Edinburgh. All were students in the first year of secondary education (or equivalent), in state secondary and special schools, and in independent schools.

The study was part of the SCOTLANG project, a research infrastructural initiative funded by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and co-ordinated by the Scottish Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (Scottish CILT), at the University of Stirling.

For further information about this study, please contact Joanna McPake

### **Main Findings**

#### **Languages studied at school**

Almost all (99%) the participants in the survey said that they were studying another language at secondary school, and, for the majority (81%), this language was French. Most of the students (94%) said that they had studied at least one modern language at primary school. French was also the main primary school language, studied by three-quarters of the respondents (75%). Students who had studied French at primary school were more likely than those who had studied other languages to be able to continue to study their primary school language after transferring to secondary school.

Generally speaking, students of French and German were more confident than students of Spanish and Italian about their competence in understanding, speaking, reading and writing these languages. These findings probably indicate that students have had greater opportunities

to study French and German, given that many had had to give up Spanish or Italian on transfer to secondary school, and that some Spanish-speakers were reflecting on competence acquired informally rather than at school - e.g. on holiday in Spain.

### **Languages in use outside school**

One in seven (14%) of the survey participants was plurilingual, having have acquired one or more languages apart from English outside school, as a result of family or other connections with places where these languages are widely spoken. Collectively they spoke 59 languages, the most common of which were Scots (19%), Urdu (11%), French (11%), Chinese (9%) and Panjabi (8%). Over two thirds (39%) of the participants spoke European languages.

Analysis of plurilinguals' confidence in their linguistic competence, and of the contexts in which they use their other languages outside school, focused on five languages: Scots, Gaelic, Urdu, Panjabi and Chinese. Among Scots, Chinese and Panjabi (U)\* speakers, around half of the respondents reported that they could understand and speak these languages well. This was the case for around a third of Gaelic and Panjabi (G)\* speakers. However, Scots and Gaelic speakers were more confident about their literacy skills than were those literate in Chinese, Urdu or Panjabi (G).

### **Opportunities for using other languages outside school**

All plurilinguals were most likely to use their other languages with their parents and least likely to use them with siblings, friends or teachers. Scots speakers are the most likely to use it with siblings and friends, possibly indicating that Scots is seen as having a greater role to play in establishing solidarity among young people than is the case for the other languages.

Home use of the other language was high among all language groups, with four fifths (80%) or more of the respondents indicating that they used their other languages at home (not necessarily all the time). Use of other languages in other contexts (for example on holiday, on the telephone, in a religious place) varied considerably from language to language. Generally speaking, Scots and Chinese speakers were the most likely to use their other languages in a range of contexts. Plurilingual respondents made relatively little use of their literacy skills in other languages, reflecting their lower level of confidence in these skills but also perhaps limited opportunities for reading and writing in languages other than English.

### **Motivation to learn and use languages**

Although there was only limited space on the questionnaire to investigate participants' motivation to learn and use other languages, the findings suggest that both monolingual and plurilingual students had relatively high levels of motivation at the time the survey was conducted: over four fifths (84%) of the participants agreed that knowing more than one language would be useful to them in the future, and almost two thirds (64%) thought that everyone should be able to speak more than one language. In the context of other recent studies of Scottish school students' motivation to learn other languages, these findings fit a general pattern of high motivation in the late primary which declines over the course of secondary schooling. There was little difference between monolingual and plurilingual respondents in this regard, suggesting that the experience of learning and using other

languages outside school does not necessarily promote higher levels of motivation to learn languages among plurilinguists.

### **Conclusions**

The Languages of Edinburgh was devised as a pilot study to investigate the feasibility and value of a national survey of the languages of Scotland. The aim of such a survey would be to identify the potential language resource which Scotland possesses, and the kind of investment required to help ensure this potential is realised. If the Edinburgh findings were to be replicated across Scotland, they would suggest that:

- " primary language learning is now almost universal in Scotland;
- " virtually all are studying a language at the start of their secondary careers;
- " motivation to learn and use languages at this stage appears to be high;
- " the plurilingual population is greater than generally believed.

These are all positive indicators, but greater investment in languages at secondary and subsequent stages of education would bring greater rewards. Such investment might include:

- " after-school provision to enable secondary students to study a second language;
- " investigation of the experiences and characteristics of 'keen' language learners and ways to capitalise on their enthusiasm;
- " more secondary, further and higher education provision for 'world' languages such as Chinese and Urdu;
- " investigation of good practice in existing out-of-school provision and ways in which it might be improved ;
- " further research into the circumstances and experiences of plurilingual speakers of European languages;
- " recognition of the long-term value of supporting the other languages of 'transient' plurilinguists (those who spend a few years in Scotland and then move to another country);
- " enhanced educational provision to develop cultural knowledge and understanding which draws on the multicultural traditions and possibilities of contemporary Scotland - with a particular focus on local languages such as Gaelic and Scots - rather than one which prizes only English;
- " further investigation of the opportunities for speakers of Gaelic, including GMU graduates from English-speaking families, to maintain and develop skills in Gaelic as adolescents;
- " further research into secondary school students' perceptions of what it means to speak Scots and into their experiences of learning and using Scots.

Such investment would enable Scotland to capitalise on an enhanced language resource with a range of benefits to the intellectual, cultural, economic, social activities of the nation, and also in terms of greater democratic participation and respect for human rights.