

**Examine the strategies that have been or could be implemented to aid the survival of minority languages.**

**(80 Marks)**

**Marking Scheme:**

Number of aspects discussed:	3 @ 20 marks each	4 @ 15 marks each
<u>For each aspect:</u>		
Identifying aspect	4 marks	3 marks
Discussion	8 x SRPs	6 x SRPs

Overall Coherence 20 marks graded\* 20 marks graded\*

*In this answer, I choose 3 aspects to discuss (1. Welsh, 2. Irish and, 3. Basque). Overall coherence means how well your answer is structured (Introduction, main section, conclusion – well-structured and coherent) and do you keep to the point/ answer the question directly.*

Throughout history minority languages have fought for their survival, whether it be because of oppressive policies implemented by colonial power or national governments who seek to unify their empires/ countries. Today community groups, governments and the media can support minority languages through campaigns and policies so that these minority languages can survive. For this essay I will discuss how the Welsh, Irish and Basques languages hope to survive and/or thrive through the implementation of policies and strategies.

Welsh is from the Celtic language family and it has existed for over 2500 years. It faces many of the same threats faced by Irish, whereby the larger majority language of English is threatening to take over and wipe it out. England was obviously the ruling coloniser and as such put her dominance on the Language. Today the use of Welsh is diverse within the country, with the north west being a strong hold where 80% of the population speak the language. There is far less in the south east of the country close to the urban areas and capital of Cardiff, with less than 20% of the population speaking it here. Today 611,000 of a Welsh population of 3million have the ability to speak Welsh with over 340,000 using it as there first language. The reasons behind this include a variety of policies enacted by the Welsh government to support this minority language such as the Welsh Education Act (1993). This gave Welsh equal status to English in everyday life. This means that all public service departments have a duty to treat Welsh and English on an equal basis, even in the court system. Also, the Welsh Language Measure (2011) means all official documents must be published in Welsh and English. Along with these strategies, the Welsh Language board encourages Welsh in all facets of life and are actively trying to promote bilingualism in homes, through encouraging adult language classes and promoting the Welsh language in the arts; theatre, literature and media. In education, the language is compulsory for pupils between the ages of 5 and 16 and today over a quarter of the schools are run through Welsh, and it is taught in all secondary schools as a first or second language. Not all methods in support of the language were government acts as Eisteddfods, a Welsh cultural festival, is run through the Welsh language yearly, celebrating Welsh culture, drama, literature, art and music. With the ever increasing impact of media on children's lives, Welsh is widely used in local newspapers and TV stations (S4C). Finally all of these strategies could

not continue without the political support of Plaid Cymru which is the Welsh nationalist party whom actively support Welsh as a national expression of National Identity.

In relation to Irish as a minority language the 2016 census stated that 1.7million respondents were able to speak Irish (39% of respondents) but almost 1 in 3, (30%) 10 to 19 year olds answered “no” to the question “Can you speak Irish?”. It seems from this that Irish is indeed a minority language on the island of Ireland, and needs the support of government lead strategies if it is to survive with the next generation of the country. Historically the Gaelic league was established in 1893 to de-anglicise the Irish population and encourage the Irish Language. After 1922 the state rested the revival of the Irish language on the primary education system and primary teachers where it was mandatory that Irish was to be taught. The Fianna Fail party, established in 1926, strongly supported the restoration of the language and in 1937 Eamon de Valera established Irish as the official language of the state. Responsibility was later placed on the secondary school system to put strategies in place to keep the language alive. Between 1934-73 those students who failed Irish in their Inter and Leaving certificate failed the whole examination. This use of the stick rather than the carrot, put huge pressure on both the students and their teachers. In spite of their efforts, Irish outside the classroom declined and even in the Gaeltacht full time Irish speakers dropped below 100,000 in the 1960’s. Today Radió na Gaeltachta and TG4 provide everyday modern media outlets for the language. The greater emphasis in spoken Irish in the state exams, which changed in 2012 means that the Oral section is worth 40% and the Aural worth 10%. Many schools have employed initiatives such as seachtain na gaeilge every year that promotes the use of the Irish language in the weeks leading up to St Patrick’s Day. Gaelscoileanna now teach over 50,000 students, which is over 7% of the student population and its aim is to establish and sustain a high standard of Irish-medium education throughout the country as well as to develop and strengthen the Irish speaking community and culture. While the Irish language has and is being supported by the state, its future lies in the hands of the Irish people and whether they want to save it.

Finally the Basques are a unique cultural group who have their own language and traditions and live in the Pyrenees Mountains that border between France and Spain. Their language is known as Euskara. Linguistically, Basque is unrelated to the other languages of Europe and indeed, as a language, isolated from any other known living language. Strategies have been needed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century to ensure the survival of this unique language. While the majority of Basques live in Spain, the official languages of this region are both Basque and Spanish. Knowledge of Spanish is compulsory under the Spanish constitution (article no. 3), but knowledge and usage of Basque is also a right and policy under the Statute of Autonomy (article no. 6). Knowledge of Basque, after declining for many years during Franco's dictatorship owing to official persecution, is again on the rise due to favourable official language policies and popular support. Currently about 33 percent of the population in the Basque Autonomous Community speaks Basque in everyday life. Under General Franco however, the Basque flag, Basque regional holidays, and of course the teaching and speaking of the Basque language was banned. Under Francoist Spain, public use of Basque was frowned upon, often regarded as a sign of separatism which applied especially to those regions that did not support Franco's uprisings. However, in those Basque-speaking regions that supported the uprising the Basque language was more than merely tolerated. Overall, in the 1960s and later, policies were put in place to reverse the trend and education and publishing in Basque began to flourish. As a part of this process, a standardised form of the Basque language, called Euskara Batua, was

developed in the late 1960s. In 1975 after Franco's Death king Juan Carlos released all Basque political prisoners. The region was granted some political Autonomy but it was far from close to independence. Following the formal declaration by ETA of ceasefire, who had pursued a policy of terrorism throughout Spain, the Basque language is thriving in Spain but unfortunately due to the French constitution is not receiving formal support through policies in France.

thegeographypage.com