

TV Breizh, two years on

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Background

On September 1st, 2000, a new television channel went on air from its Lorient base on the southwest coast of Brittany. Its name, *TV Breizh*, was advertised at the time of launching as the "first private regional bilingual channel in Europe". Following a project carried out by the Cultural Council of Brittany, an umbrella organization for all language and culture groups, and following the commentary on the 1998 Soccer World Cup in Breton on Eurosport, the Breton-born president of TF1 (the biggest private channel in Europe) announced in October 1998 that he would launch a bilingual satellite/cable digital television channel broadcasting across Europe. This information was confirmed in April 1999 in the Isle of Skye during the Interceltic Film and Television Festival.

The TV Breizh project enjoyed, and still does, in the main - an overall favourable reception from the press and the general public across various sections of the Breton population, from politicians to audio-visual professionals, from local entrepreneurs to music stars and language activists, etc. As TV Breizh is only accessible through pay-in satellite multiplexes (TPS and Canalsatellite) or through cable multichannel operators in the cities, its share is still under 1% two years after launching. It would seem that the channel and even more so its programmes are more likely to be talked about than actually watched. This could imply (Delalande, 2002) that the positive opinion surrounding the channel resorts somewhat to myth, symbol, emblem rather than reality. Two years on, the time is ripe to look at that reality, particularly from the angle of the channel's Breton language output.

Challenges: Audience

Market research had allegedly showed that Brittany was the only area on the French territory, which had a strong identity, enough population (4 million) and also an important diaspora throughout France and Europe with strong attachment to the old country.

Even if broadcasting costs are getting cheaper all the time thanks to digital technology, these were the conditions that made the project viable. The potential audience was the 75000 households with access to cable television in Brittany and the 100000 equipped with satellite dishes (plus millions of other potential viewers across France, Europe and even as far as North Africa and Turkey...). The channel's share is allegedly between 0,6% and 0,7% and TV Breizh has applied for frequencies to be allotted to them both on digital terrestrial (due to start in France in 2004) and on the analogic terrestrial band, as some space is still available locally. The CSA (Superior Audio-Visual Council) gave a negative answer to the digital application in October 2002 and is to answer the analogic application some time in 2003. No doubt, the audience would be multiplied if TV Breizh were to be granted those frequencies, especially the analogic one, since everybody would then be able to access its programmes without any extra cost or installation.

Funding

TV-Breizh is a private channel with private funding. The initial budget was to be over 15 million euro a year. It is, in fact, closer to 12 million - 1/10th of Welsh S4C's annual budget. Industrialists of Breton origin - and Le Lay himself - are the main investors, but also such international TV tycoons as Australian Rupert Murdoch and Italian President Silvio Berlusconi. This capitalistic presence, financially modest as it was (that is to say, for such a costly industry as television), brought about controversy during the pre-launch period over the cultural standards and even the ideological tinge the channel may have. In actual fact, one can't say that TV Breizh has showed any political or economical allegiance on screen to anybody so far, and it hasn't received any criticism in that domain since launching. The channel has poured 1,2 million euro into dubbing youth programmes into Breton during the first year and a half but it isn't prepared to continue, so the regional authorities have been asked to provide funding through a non-profit organization called Dizale. However, that funding has been too little and it has come very irregularly, often causing the two brand new dubbing studios in Kemper and Lorient to stop their activity for weeks and months. As a result, the Kemper studio had to close down and sell out in September 2002.

Programming

TV-Breizh broadcasts daily from 9 am to 1.30 a.m. A typical weekday would alternate between magazine-type programmes (maritime, agricultural, musical, portraits, current affairs, etc) with old American or European series, all in French. From 5.30 to 7.00 pm the children's programmes (animation films and cartoons) are on offer in either French or Breton (optional selection with the remote control). After two years without a proper news programme - first dismissed as too costly for the channel - there is now a regional news programme which is broadcast at the same time (7.00 to 7.30 pm) as the blockbusting France 3 news. One of the subjects in the TV Breizh news is "in Breton": interviews in Breton with subtitles and commentary an option in French or Breton. From 20.30 p.m., movies in French, from the wide "Celtic" catalogue: Irish, Scottish, Welsh films, or else US films on Celtic themes or with just an actor of Celtic origin. Sports programmes - except for sailing - have all but disappeared, especially soccer games that used to be commentated in Breton or French. A series of documentaries on Breton history was to be scheduled, but there has been no sign of it so far. A full language learning programme had been announced too, in the shape of a daily sitcom, but the channel's communication doesn't ever mention it any more. Neither do press conferences give a date for the first movie to be dubbed in Breton any more (one of the promises made in an interview with French TV magazine *Télérama* at the beginning was to show one film a month in Breton during the first year, then one a week).

What place for Breton then?

So how much Breton is there altogether on TV Breizh? When one adds up children's programmes (the bulk of Breton language output by far, albeit with numerous repeats), the daily news item, the humorous "Petra lazez?" 1 mn clips that introduce a new word in Breton for learners, and the 1 mn weather forecast (those last two broadcast very often during the day), TV Breizh offers about 17 hours a week in Breton. Much more, obviously, than public television ever proposed - then again, that wasn't too hard an achievement, as Welsman George Jones put it: "One thing is clear, the Breton language output of TV Breizh will not have to be

overwhelmingly impressive to outstrip that of French television." [Jones 1997] But probably not enough to really make an impact : the announced homemade sitcom and dubbed fiction movies would undoubtedly have made that impact, beside providing jobs and experience for Breton speaking actors. TV Breizh had trained 30 people for dubbing in July 1999 ; some of them do get a bit of work with children's programmes, and the result - both artistically and linguistically - is quite impressive.

Reversing language shift in Brittany?

After the dramatic drop in the number of speakers throughout the XXth century (from 1,5 million after World War I to 1 million after World War II to an estimated 300 000 in 1999), the main challenge facing the Breton language for its survival into the XXIst century and beyond is most certainly the near extinction of family transmission within the homes.

In a survey published in 1998 by the INED (National Institute of Demographic Studies) about various language communities in France, native or migrant alike, Breton shows the lowest rate of intergenerational transmission, close in fact to 0%. In the *Euromosaic* report [Nelde, Strubell & Williams, 1996] published by the European Commission, Breton ranked thirty-second out of 48 communities, with a rating of 8 for "reproduction" on a scale graded from 1 to 28.

The authors of the *Euromosaic* report, Belgian P.Nelde, Catalan M.Strubell and Welshman G.Williams considered that situation to be a consequence of the extreme position of the French state by reference to the modernist goal of cultural and linguistic homogenisation, and the associated denigration and neglect of minority language groups within its territory. This has certainly been responsible for generating a profound negative identity among members of the respective language groups. Furthermore, while the current situation begins to approximate a situation of benign neglect, there is little indication of any policy development that seeks to redress the situation.

A merely mechanistic analysis of the demographic situation of the language could lead to the conclusion that Breton is doomed. However some of the sociolinguistic trends of the past 20 years should allow us to think quite differently. Seemingly, the very socio-economic factors that contributed to the decline of the

language during the transition from a traditional society to the industrial era are now the basis of its present revival. [Kergoat, 1999]

Far from being the nostalgic attitude of a few, the promotion of the social and educational use of Breton is widespread in the general public. The age of "negative identity" is over and done with, for a growing number of Bretons. A poll carried out in 1997 in Lower Brittany (the westernmost part) showed that 88% of the people surveyed thought that the language should be retained (12% up from the 76% of 1991). Even the French population as a whole think that "regional" languages should be recognized and protected: 82% declared in April 2000 that they thought France should sign the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (77% in 1994).

The role of the schools

For two decades after World War II, nobody but a few really cared about the decline of the language: Bretons were busy studying through the medium of French to become civil servants; or else, when they stayed on the farm, their concern was to fight off long-time degrading stereotypes about Breton farmers by becoming more and more competitive.

Its presence in the environment was felt to be so "natural" that no one could imagine it possible for Breton to disappear. The new generations, deprived of the language and therefore, unable to pass it down to their own children by themselves, have developed a deep sense of loss. Feeling that they had been dispossessed of part of what they were, they are the ones who have strongly demanded Breton-medium schools, and even created them from scratch (Diwan) when they weren't granted by the central authorities.

Since the first Diwan school was set up in 1977, and despite the fact that the overall number of school age children in Brittany has been going down steadily since then, Breton medium education hasn't ceased to increase in numbers (between 10 and 20 % every year), also in State and Catholic schools' bilingual streams. In September 2002, it has reached the global figure of 8100 students. The regional educational authorities also claim that another 22,000 study Breton as a subject; unfortunately, even though not at all negligible, that figure includes everything and

anything from proper initiation to a couple of rhymes and songs and this therefore not reliable.

It has to be kept in mind however that the figure of 8100 bilingual children represents but 2% of the total school population in Brittany. This age pyramid is healthy though, because half of these children are still attending pre-school. Although family transmission is unbeatable when it comes to language maintenance, the growing social demand for Breton medium education as a substitute can be considered vital criteria that mark off a language of the future from a purely residual phenomenon, especially since it has also been accompanied by the ongoing development of languages classes and courses for adults.

The demand would originally come from educated lower middle class families, but now, the recruitment is increasingly diverse, becoming closer all the time to the community's socio-cultural structure: even though social careers (and teachers in particular) are still over-represented among parents, more and more workers, employees and farmers are sending their children to Breton-medium schools. Since bilingual children's school results have been found, like elsewhere, to be very good, educational authorities have avoided conducting a general assessment of their standards in Breton as of yet, but national evaluations in French and mathematics at primary and secondary level have confirmed an excellent standard and the first three generations of Diwan teenagers have all passed their Baccalaureat successfully, (leaving certificate or high-school diploma).

Breton is now generally seen as a dynamic element in a society that has to find new solutions within itself to transcend such crises as agricultural overproduction and its environmental consequences, or the end of State-assisted industries such as shipbuilding for the French navy (ironically, TV Breizh premises were reclaimed from the Lorient navy arsenal). Cultural activities and production, often language-linked, provide more and more qualified jobs - also avoiding the situation where some of the youth having to emigrate. They also generate profits in other sectors of the economy, increasingly eager for "authenticity" (tourism, food industry, etc), through the positive image conveyed internationally by Breton musicians and singers.

Not surprisingly, the newest developments in this permanent search for non-standardized products have taken place

in the communication and media sector. Prior to TV-Breizh in 2000, Ofis ar Brezhoneg (the Breton Language Office) was set up in June 1999, funded by the Regional and State institutions and two new Breton language radio stations, Radio Kerne and Arvorig FM were launched in 1998.

What can the media do?

Joshua Fishman writes in *Reversing Language Shift*: "Even the much touted mass media are insufficiently interpersonal, child-orientated, affect-suffused, societally binding to attain cumulative intergenerational mother-tongue transmission, particularly so since the proportion of Yish [i.e.French] utilized by the media will long (and perhaps always) be greater than the proportion of Xish [i.e.Breton]. [...] The favorable outcomes of the Hebrew, Catalan and Quebec French cases *did not begin with* work, media or government Xization ; they began with the acquisition of a firm family-neighborhood-community base." Having said that, he also adds further in his book that "the importance of Xishization of these services and influences is beyond question". As head of TV-Breizh Rozenn Milin when interviewed by a French TV magazine : "I don't know if we'll manage to reverse the decline of the Breton language, but it's important to try".

For the past two decades, those few families (a few thousand people across Brittany at most) who did transmit the language in their homes and/or send their children to Breton-medium schools expressed their frustration over the lack of adequate Breton TV programmes for young people; but they did not constitute a strong enough a lobby to have any influence on the issue. Thus, the amount of time allotted to broadcasting in Breton on France 3 Ouest, the state run public television service [Guyot & Michon R 1997] is small. France 3, which had brought its programmes from 65 h to 85 h (a year, of course) has withdrawn, after only one year of running TV Breizh a new programme they had launched to that effect, thus going back not only to 65 h but also to a smaller broadcasting area (the southern *département* of Loire-Atlantique is now cut off from any Breton language programming).

All programmes on France 3 Ouest are broadcast during the most inconvenient time slots (12.15 pm during the week, 11.30 am on Sunday) ; after a short-lived attempt at providing

programmes for all ages and tastes in the 1980s, nearly all programmes now belong to the "news-current affairs" category, to suit the mainly ageing target audience. A 1994 survey by the INSEE - National Institute of Statistics - found that 300,000 people listened to TV or radio programmes, at least sometimes, out of 689,000 who said they understood Breton. But listeners and viewers were rather old : 159,000 above 60 and only 21,500 under 30. Most of them didn't get an extensive education: 171,000 had been to school until the age of 14/15. 31,000 out of 39,000 regular listeners/viewers were retired. All programmes are now subtitled in French (without any opt out) except for the daily 3:30 news, which is discontinued during the summer. Finally, one does not have access to the same amount of Breton programmes if one lives in the west (both programmes, the daily news being the most successful with *circa* 20,000 viewers daily), the east (no daily news, unless one goes on the Internet!) or the south (nothing as of summer 2002).

Television programmes in Breton (and radio programmes to a lesser extent) are at the same time *the* popular media, so to speak, with a population that is generally a lot more familiar with the oral message than with the written word (contrary to the Welsh public for example, who can also read in their vast majority). Quite naturally for a language that has presently no widespread accepted standard form, people often complain; although, sometimes with an obvious lack of goodwill, that the dialectal variety of people interviewed, or indeed the attempted "central", "medial" expression of the announcers is an obstacle to comprehension.

Implications of Breton television for bilingual education

Television is for watching, television is for fun, not for teaching" would still be quite a common view among the public, and probably even more so among teachers, who often see it as nothing short of an influential rival. And so it is, in a way. But it has become such a big part of children's and teenagers' lives, conversations and concerns, that schools simply can't ignore it anymore. Parents of Breton-speaking children had until now a narrow range of moving pictures to choose from, just a few cartoons released on videos, but these were also usually shown at school.

The very fact that a daily peak-time children's programme exists, be it on a paying channel that not everyone gets, be it dubbed mostly from British, American or Australian programmes has brought some change in the schoolyard. These programmes, however, won't have the impact they deserve until TV Breizh is made available for all through terrestrial broadcasting. Some of the TV Breizh material is being used in schools, since the quality of a dubbing is mostly good, and the channel is now considering video sales. For the past decade, France 3 had produced only documentaries and news and current affairs programmes, but they don't have the same effect as fiction on a child's imagination and expression.

TES (Ti Embann ar Skolioù - the multimedia resource centre for Breton medium schools) for example have released, in cooperation with France 3 Ouest, a compilation of agricultural news items, and they have also acquired copyright of a collection of interviews made by an independent producer from Central Brittany. But the imagination has to be triggered too, and only fiction (written or audiovisual) can manage that.

What is the main objective of using TV news programmes (or radio or audio-tapes, for that matter, although they 're not as successful with the pupils)? In the Breton context of a declining social use, it is, most certainly, to enrich the sometimes overstandardized language used in schools by bringing the richness and authentic prosody of all varieties of Breton (accents, dialects, registers, men and women, young and old, etc) right into the classroom, while keeping in mind that the Breton population has of course become very mobile.

TV-Breizh translators have to deal with the same old dilemmas (dialectal vs "standard"; loanwords vs neologisms; code-switching and mixing, etc) as the other language revitalization sectors, except with a much greater responsibility, that of addressing the new generation of speakers. Some challenges actually sounded very exciting. Before the channel went on air, and because Rozenn Milin used to mention time and time again the ins and outs of dubbing *Braveheart* into Breton for launching night, everybody would be half-jokingly discussing which of our dialects would be chosen to dub the Scots, their Irish allies... and their English enemies. Two years after, however, the prospect of dubbing long footage fiction [Baudu, 2000] is not even

mentioned by TV Breizh leaders any more; in actual fact, it is the mere existence of any dubbing policy at all that is being questioned, and a petition has been circulating since the summer of 2002 to ask the Regional authorities to help financially.

The overall political climate doesn't seem too favourable, however. Even though the new conservative government's motto is "decentralization", the integration of independent Diwan schools into the public system was ruled out by the *Conseil d'Etat* (High Court) in July 2002. An amendment to include "respect for regional languages" into article 2 of the Constitution was again rejected in November 2002 by the new conservative majority at Parliament, following the shocking presidential election of April-May 2002 in which the left and the right had no choice but to unite behind President Chirac to keep out of power the neo-fascist candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen (whose Front National party gets its lowest vote in Brittany, by the way).

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www.tv-breizh.com

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www.aber.ac.uk/mercator

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The Celtic Languages in North America: Notes from the Field

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Studying Breton in North America: Challenges and Opportunities¹

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Introduction

Breton is one of the four Celtic languages which still have a significant pool of native speakers, the others being Welsh, Irish and Scottish Gaelic. Of these four, Breton, a Brythonic language closely related to Welsh and Cornish, is generally the least accessible to the potential learner in North America. This is for several readily identifiable reasons. First of all, Breton immigration to North America was never of the same magnitude as immigration from Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Therefore, there are fewer people of Breton ethnic background who might wish to reclaim Breton as a heritage language, and there are fewer native Breton speakers in North America who could serve as potential teachers. Additionally, most materials for studying Breton language and culture are written in French. Few of these works are available in English translation, and even those are almost never found in bookstores and have to be special ordered. As a corollary, the fact that Breton is a minority language not of the British Isles but of France means that Anglophone North Americans are much less likely even to be aware of its existence.

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