The linguistic landscape functions as an informational and symbolic marker of the relative power and status of languages spoken in a territory. It is a term that was introduced by Landry and Bourhis (1997) and has rapidly become one of the important areas of research within the language-policy paradigm of sociolinguistics. TG4 is part of Ireland's linguistic landscape but also creates a linguistic landscape of its own, on screen, within the ambiguous diglossic context of the Irish speech community. It reflects the status-power relationship of English and Irish but not simply in a passive way. It is a participant, generator and legitimiser of linguistic norms. In sociolinguistic terms, all behaviour can be understood as a performance in which speakers embody or create a particular social situation, or indeed create a particular version of themselves through their use of language. Irish speakers create these social situations and persona both by the act of language choice and by the style and variety of Irish they choose to use, within the parameters of their linguistic repertoire. Setting up an Irish television service constituted the conscious creation of a new arena for such performances. Early campaigners wanted a station in which they would see programming based on their own language and values, but the medium has been an engine for remoulding the self-image of Irish speakers of all competences and the way that they portray themselves and are portrayed by others. Broadcasters have thus expanded the linguistic contexts in which Irish speakers create their collective public persona, challenging prescriptive expectations of linguistic correctness by legitimising the appropriateness of informal and mixed language in specific and, in some cases, unspecific contexts.

Communicative competence, an area developed first by Dell Hymes...
in contrast to Noam Chomsky’s idealised speaker-listener, refers not to linguistic knowledge alone but to what speakers need to know to be able to use language appropriately. It is suggested here that broadcasters as well as individuals have certain linguistic competences, but in the case of TG4 this needs to be planned in a more structural way, due to the nature of Irish and the kinds of language used within the bilingual speech community.

The chapter starts by placing the first ten years of TG4 within the context of the Irish speech community. It argues that the potential audience for TG4 programming in Irish is fragmented, ranging from very fluent speakers who are able to use and understand Irish in a wide range of dialects, registers and styles through to a very large number of people whose only knowledge of Irish is that obtained through schooling. This second group is by far the largest potential audience as nearly all those resident in the state during their school years came to acquire their Irish in that way. TG4, which aims according to its own mission statement to ‘serve the Irish language audience across all age groups and language ability’ (TG4, 2007), is thus faced with a particularly acute dilemma. The author believes that much of TG4’s programming has been compartmentalised with different target audience groups in mind, with few programmes that are likely to appeal to people from the two ends of the spectrum of linguistic ability. Those programmes that actually do so tend to be particularly visual ones such as sporting events. There are some exceptions where the language ability seems to have been set very much to the learner end of the scale, but where the quality of the production and the nature of the presenters have led to a wider viewership among those who would otherwise not be attracted to such programmes for linguistic reasons.

Ultimately, however, my central question is to what degree TG4 is a television station for Irish speakers, however we may define such a group, or a television station which uses Irish in the same way that much of the Irish population do. One can situate TG4 as a phenomenon within the context of the language policy paradigm as elucidated by Spolsky (2004), expanded by Shohamy (2006) and shown to be in keeping with the major schools of language policy study over the last century in continental Europe (Ó hIfearnán, 2006). This paradigm sees language policy, or language politics, rather than abstract language planning, as central to the question, particularly for a minorised language.
It is by means of the policy that beliefs about language in the population and the practice of languages by the population can be managed so that those beliefs and practices which enhance the policy objectives are strengthened, and those which do not are changed. TG4, like all Irish-language broadcast media in the state sector, reflects the actual conjuncture of Irish-language policy when it first came on air (Ó hIsearnáin, 2000). The existence of TG4 and its cost to state finances is not observed to be controversial among the majority of Irish people. However, it is also clear from its schedule that TG4, to a great extent, reflects the general attitudes towards Irish of the whole population, and a large amount of its programming tries to aim at the general audience whose Irish may not be very fluent. There are good reasons for the station to do this from a commercial point of view and its need to build its market share. It clearly also sees this as one of its roles. The language beliefs and practices of the majority of the population, and so of the government and institutions of state, undoubtedly also see this as central to its function. While accepting arguments that television stations do not have an obvious impact on the reversal of language shift (Cormack, 2007), the point is made that television can influence the way that people think about and use language. The broadcast media are one of the few fora where the majority of the population comes into contact with Irish after leaving school.

In conclusion, it is argued that TG4 should not simply reflect in its schedule the wide range of language abilities of its potential audience, but should take conscious decisions on language-development issues. In the long run, those whose knowledge of Irish is weak will probably welcome such maturity in the offer. To do this, TG4 needs to undertake research about the different language categories of its viewership in order to develop its own language plan.