DIGLOSSIC PATTERNING IN "ALL IRISH" SCHOOLS?: THE CASE OF *GAELSCOILEANNA* IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

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1. Introduction

Language policy in the Republic of Ireland has espoused the objective of Irish Gaelic (Gaeilge) and English bilingualism for the populace, since gaining independence from British rule in 1922. Schools were initially charged with the momentous task of educating students through the medium of Irish wherever possible, but government-induced all Irish schools (AIS) fell gravely out of public favor by the 1970s. Of interest, at approximately that time, a number of grassroots Irish medium, known as Gaelscoileanna, began to emerge due in large part to the effort of parents who sought this educational option in provision. Parents acknowledged the importance of Irish as part of their heritage and understood the effectiveness of using the language as a medium of instruction in schools (Coady, 2001; Cummins, 1978). Since the 1970s, there has been noteworthy and sustained growth in the number of Gaelscoileanna throughout the Republic (Table 1).

School Year	Number of *Gaelscoileanna*	Total number of national primary (ordinary) schools	*Gaelscoileanna* as percentage of total schools
1975/76	14	3497	.4
1980/81	20	3295	.6
1985/86	46	3270	1.4
1990/91	64	3235	2.0
1995/96	91	3201	2.8
1999/00	114	3172	3.6

Table 1. Number of primary level Irish medium schools in the English-speaking areas of Ireland (Republic only) 1975-2000 (sources: *Gaelscoileanna*, 2001; Irish Department of Education and Science, 2001).

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Elsewhere we have investigated the relationship between national language policy and its implications for the ongoing establishment and support in practice in Gaelscoileanna (Coady & Ó Laoire, 2002). Nonetheless, despite de Bhal's (1994) suggestion that there has been some amount of research conducted on various sociolinguistic dimensions of Irish language acquisition and use in Ireland, there remains a dearth of research on Gaelscoileanna and the ways in which language is used inside the schools. By way of comparison, Cummins has suggested that there have been more than a thousand graduate studies alone conducted on French medium education in Canada over the past three decades (Cummins, 1991). Given the paucity of research, it is useful to better understand language use inside the schools. This includes gaining a deeper understanding of the sociolinguistic environments of the schools, and the ways in which both Irish and English are played out it the schools' environments, interaction among students, and instructional strategies of the teachers.

In this paper we focus on the sociolinguistic environments of two case study schools. We show the ways in which Irish and English are emphasized in their oral and written uses. Data from the investigation suggest a diglossic pattern of oral-written language use. Finally, we discuss information gleaned from this investigation and its implications for the acquisition of Irish among students and for instructional strategies of teachers in the schools.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Diglossia

The term diglossia was introduced by Ferguson (1959), who defined diglossia as the use of two or more varieties of the same language to serve different functions in mutually exclusive domains by a given speech community. Fishman (1967) later extended Ferguson's definition to include not only varieties of the same language but also functional compartmentalization (i.e., distinct domains) of distinct languages. Fishman showed how distinct languages could serve different functions within a speech community and how this,

in turn, could contribute to stable bilingualism among the populace in which language shift would be less likely to occur.

Among applied linguists the notion that diglossia may induce stable bilingualism within a given speech community remains controversial. Chen (1997), citing research that suggests that diglossia is unstable because of the inherently asymmetrical relationship between language varieties, suggests that where language maintenance is desirable, protective language policy measures must be taken to ensure stable diglossia. She concludes "education can have a direct impact on the power balance in diglossic languages" (1997: 5).

One objective of language policy and planning efforts can be to foster bilingualism among the people of a particular speech community or within the broader societal context. In that case, two (or more) languages of a speech community may serve distinct functions in a diglossic arrangement. For example, one language variety may be used in the school domain for educational and administrative purposes in the school, and a second language variety used in government for the purpose of parliamentary debate. When more than one language variety is used in distinct domains, those speech functions used by a community's are considered diglossic.

2.2. Special diglossia

Spolsky & Irvine (1982) identified specific patterns of language use across language varieties. In their study of a Navajo speech community, the researchers investigated the ways in which both Navajo and English were used. The study revealed that Navajo was spoken in the homes of the community members and was appropriate for use with the government, local radio, and in legal proceedings. Alternatively, English was preferred in its literacy forms (namely in reading and in writing) in most instances. They concluded that "[e]ssentially, then, the situation can be characterized as a kind of diglossia: Navajo is the preferred and appropriate language for oral use and English the most frequently used language for writing" (1982: 74-75). They referred to this kind of diglossia as "special diglossia". Spolsky and Irvine's work revealed that there were exceptions to the language use patterns. In particular, school and church related functions were two contexts in which

Navajo was used in written form, albeit of limited and often lower-status language functions.

A subsequent investigation of Navajo speech community language use and diglossia was conducted by McLaughlin (1989). McLaughlin's study, conducted over a period of 15 months, included analysis of Navajo literacy functions, student and teacher perceptions of their writing practices in both English and in Navajo, as well as their beliefs about Navajo literacy practices. McLaughlin's study showed how the schools played an important role in the expansion of written forms of Navajo and also contributed to the elevation of the status of Navajo within the speech community. He suggested that the schools did this by "painstakingly incorporat[ing] Navajo language into the content and process of governance, daily activity, and literacy instruction" (1989: 282). In addition, community people were active in the functioning of the school and church and consciously incorporated literacy into the school and church domains. McLaughlin viewed this as a framework of "empowerment". Importantly, McLaughlin's study revealed how Navajo was used as a medium of instruction in school, and local community members thoughtfully incorporated Navajo culture into the school curriculum. Not surprisingly, this was an arduous task, and teachers and community members painstakingly created new literacy materials in Navajo. Initially viewed as a lower status language and culture, community members appeared to successfully elevate the status of Navajo language and culture through celebration of local cultural and linguistic resources of the children.

McLaughlin's investigation, as with that of Spolsky and Irvine, can be viewed within a framework of sociolinguistics and bilingual education. Schools have historically been used as an important means for implementing language acquisition policies (Cooper, 1992). Elsewhere (Coady & Ó Laoire, 2002), we have shown how national language policy impact Irish immersion education programs, Gaelscoileanna, in the Republic of Ireland.

2.3. Language use in immersion education

Immersion education programs are not uncommon throughout the world. Indeed, French immersion programs have a long history in Canada (Johnson & Swain, 1997). In French immersion programs, students are immersed into the target language (French) for

their educational schooling; French is used as the medium of instruction to teach academic content. Cummins (2002) has pointed out the Canadian experience with immersion education programs were among the first to conduct extensive research. The objective of immersion education is to facilitate students' acquisition of the target (L2) language by immersing students in it. This is achieved by using the target language as a medium of instruction to learn academic content. Beyond using the target language as a medium of instruction, Johnson & Swain (1997) maintain that there are other characteristics of immersion education programs. These include: the immersion curriculum parallels that of the local first language (L1), there is overt support for the L1, the program aims for additive bilingualism, exposure to the target language is limited to the classroom, students enter with limited and similar levels of L2 ability, teachers are bilingual, and the classroom culture reflects the local community (1997: 6-8).

Immersion education programs typically have a large portion, if not all, students from homes in which the target language is not spoken. This makes creating an L2 monolingual "target language" environment difficult: students bring with them to the school their linguistic repertoire, and the schools operate within a broader sociolinguistic environment that typically favors the majority language. Heller (1999) uses the metaphor of an island existing in an English speaking sea for a secondary level French immersion school, l'École Champlain, located in Toronto, Canada. She argues that the school created a French monolingual language environment in its attempt to foster a sense of linguistic unity among francophone students of Canadian origin and French speaking students relocating to Toronto from countries outside of Canada. In her sociolinguistic ethnography, Heller uses a framework of identity and linguistic capital, Heller writes, "[s]omehow it was assumed that once it was possible to create such schools, they would simply function in the way they were intended to function, that is monolingually" (1999: 91).

Contextual differences notwithstanding, the metaphor of an island in an English speaking sea may be extended to the case of *Gaelscoileanna*, which are geographically scattered throughout the Irish Republic. Each Gaelscoil represents an individual island anchored in a largely English speaking language environment or sea. The metaphor is appropriate here, as it highlights the complexity of attempting to establish and maintain

Irish in the schools while facing English dominance in the broader language environment. In the present paper we focus specifically on the ways in which Irish and English were used in two case study schools, which both followed a language policy of "all things through Irish". We show that there were oral-written language use patterns despite the schools' attempt to foster an all-Irish language environment in the midst of an English speaking sea.

3. Methodology

Data from this study were obtained from a study by Coady (2001). The study consisted of a collective case study (Stake, 1995) of two Gaelscoileanna, qualitative data collection methods, and survey data. The two case study schools were selected based on their outstanding reputations among educators, parents, and language policy experts familiar with Gaelscoileanna. The two schools differed along a variety of criterion, including geographic location (urban, semi-urban) and age (30 years, 6 years). As part of the case study, data were collected in the form of observation, interview, and document analysis. Student writing samples were collected in both Irish and in English in the upper primary levels of the two case study schools. Case study data were collected during May and June of 2000.

Data obtained from a national survey of teachers of Gaelscoileanna were collected in the form of a self-administered questionnaire. The survey data were adapted from and reproduced, in part, from a questionnaire administered by Cummins (1974). Data from the study were collected between 1998 and 2000. A total of 62 surveys were collected by Cummins in 1974; 47 surveys were collected in June, 2000.

4. Findings

4.1. Sociolingusitic environments of two case schools

4.1.1. School language policy

Entering the schools, it is clear that both Irish and English are used in a variety of ways. School names and placards are in Irish, though notices and official school documents

located in the schools' entranceways are written in both languages. With rare exception, official school documents were written in both Irish and English; typically Irish was located in elevated form and larger print size, followed by English translations, which were in smaller print. This illustration the schools' language policy, as reflected in official school documents, was partly explained by both schools' administrators. The principals and teachers at both case study schools stated that they followed a simple language 'policy' of "all things through Irish", the credo of the *Gaelscoileanna* movement since its inception in the early 1970s. Teachers, principal, staff, parents, and students readily acknowledged and subscribed to this policy. However, in practice English was also present throughout the language environments of the schools. Indeed, the "all things through Irish" credo espoused by both schools in this study suggested that even communication with the world outside of the school gate would also occur in Irish. In reality, this was an impossible goal, as parents and community members entering the school were often monolingual English speakers.

Principals and teachers worked toward fostering an image of "all things through Irish" or Irish monolingualism in the face of English dominance. The Junior Infants' teacher at one school stated that the task of maintaining an all Irish language environment was an especially daunting challenge because of "the English creeping in" (Coady, 2001: 117). The challenge for teachers and staff at both schools was daunting based on the increase in number of students coming from homes in which English was the language spoken. While neither school formally collected data regarding first language use in students' homes, at one case study school the Junior Infants teacher suggested that there were only "seven or eight families" including her own, in which Irish was spoken with some regularity in the home (Coady, 2001: 117).

Survey data revealed that the linguistic profile of students enrolled in Irish medium schools has shifted since 1974 to include more L1 speakers of English. In the 2000 year survey administered to teachers of *Gaelscoileanna*, data revealed that approximately 66% of the students enrolled in Irish medium schools were from homes in which English was 'always spoken'. This reflected an increase from the 1974 survey in which only 53% of the students were from English speaking homes (Table 2). These data reflect a shift in linguistic profile and composition of students attending the schools.

Students are from homes in which…	**1974**	**2000**
Irish is always spoken	8%	2%
Irish is often spoken	16%	7%
Irish is spoken now and again	23%	25%
English is always spoken	53%	66%

Table 2. Linguistic profile of students enrolled in Irish medium schools.

Further attempts to create an all Irish image and language environment were visible in one school's parent handbook. The handbook, dated September 1997, was written in both languages; three pages were written in Irish and three pages were written in English. An additional page was titled *Labhairt na Gaeilge* (Speaking Irish). Under that section the handbook stated the following:

> As it is compulsory that all children speak Gaeilge while at School, it is only fair that Parents also make every effort to speak the language while within the confines of the School and Yard. The following list may be of some help.
> (Scoil Collins, parent handbook, 1997, no page number, capitalization in original)

In the section *Labhairt na Gaeilge* was a list of 19 phrases translated from Irish into English. These were written for the benefit of English speaking parents. Conversely, an additional page in the handbook was titled in English "School Rules". The nine rules that followed were listed only in Irish, with the first rule *Is í Gaeilge teanga na scoile* (Irish is spoken at school) (parent handbook, September, 1997, no page number). This document revealed how the school emphasized that speaking Irish was not only compulsory for all students, but should be supported by parents as well. Absent from the handbook are references to written forms of the language and goals of Irish literacy development of students.

4.1.2. Oral language use in school

The emphasis on oral uses of Irish was evident inside school classrooms as well. During the data collection period, virtually all oral communication between students and teachers occurred in Irish. Students not knowing the Irish word were prompted and assisted

by teachers at both schools, especially at the lower primary levels. Expectations were that students would speak Irish and be fluent in Irish by the upper primary levels. In a focus group interview, teachers at one school stated that their expectation of students would be simply "to communicate in both languages" and this largely meant oral fluency. They stated that the goal was not for students to necessarily attain grammatical correctness of the Irish language all the time but to be able to communicate comfortably. In fact, the sixth class teacher, Christina, stated she wouldn't expect her class to be "perfect" in Irish after eight years of schooling, just "comfortable speaking both languages" (Coady, 2001: 160). The teachers' sentiments illustrate the school's emphasis on oral language fluency. They further highlight that communication in both Irish and English were expected, despite the attempt to foster an Irish monolingual language environment.

Students at both schools also acknowledged and followed the schools' monolingual language policy. When asked in a focus group interview, sixth class students at Scoil Nóra stated that the language policy of the school was "to speak Irish" (Coady, 2001: 161). When asked about the languages she used at school, Orla, a sixth class girl said that "we use Irish, we have to" (Coady, 2001: 161). At one school the upper primary students were given the opportunity to re-interpret the school's language policy. The sixth class student council was asked to write three rules that they believed would be the most useful for the school, as well as three school rules they should dispose of. The students took the first rule of the parent's handbook, *Is í Gaeilge teanga na scoile* (Irish is spoken at school) and re-wrote it as *Ní labhartar Béarla ar scoil* (English must not be spoken at school). The students' re-writing of the school rule illustrates how upper class primary students chose a narrower interpretation of the school's language policy that denounced the use of English in the school environment. Both rules also revealed the emphasis of the school's language policy on oral language use.

When students were found not adhering to an all Irish oral language policy, reprisals were given. At one school, both rewards and reprimands were used. For example, the school followed a language use policy that consisted of meting out 'orange cards' when students were found not to be using the language. The cards were to be sent home to parents, signed, and returned the following day. If a student were found not using Irish after

three cards had been sent home, the child would receive a note sent home from the school principal. Therefore each student was given three reprimands before the office became involved. The principal conceded that the school spent a lot of time and energy on "bold children" who were reprimanded for lack of effort in not using the language (Coady, 2001: 122).

Survey data revealed that students' oral use of Irish has remained relatively stable over a period of 26 years. However, students are now more likely to use less Irish outside of school than they were in 1974. These data are displayed in Table 3.

	1974	2000
Amongst themselves in class	1.9	2.0
Amongst themselves in the yard	2.2	2.3
Amongst themselves outside school	2.9	3.3
Speaking with the teacher	1.1	1.1

Codes: 1=always; 2=often; 3=now and again; 4=never.

Table 3. Teachers' perceptions of students' Irish oral language use in Gaelscoileanna.

Survey data supported interview and observational data. Observation data suggested that there was a strong emphasis on oral uses of Irish and that students used Irish almost exclusively with their teachers at both schools. In addition, they used Irish on the school playground but were less likely to hold conversations in unmonitored locations, such as just outside the school gate or in informal conversations among themselves when teachers or school officials were not present. In those relaxed locations, English was also used by students.

4.2. Written language use in school

Both schools monitored oral language use inside the school gate, but teachers acknowledged that considerably less emphasis was placed on written forms of Irish, in part due to the lack of available supplies and materials. English dominated the language environments of both schools. Examination of the material artifacts inside the school classrooms revealed that reading books, textbooks, standardized state examinations, computer software, and novels were almost exclusively found in English. This meant that

students had far less exposure to age-appropriate and engaging materials in Irish than would be necessary to foster an all Irish language environment.

Much of the material artifacts in Irish were produced by teachers themselves and lacked the high gloss appeal that was evident in the English material artifacts. These included official school documents intended for students such as academic achievement awards and certificates for Irish language use. Teachers also generated teaching aids and materials in Irish for students. Examples of these at the upper primary class levels included laminated charts and posters displaying mathematical concepts and grammatical constructions of the language. Teaching aids and materials at the lower primary levels included worksheets generated by teachers.
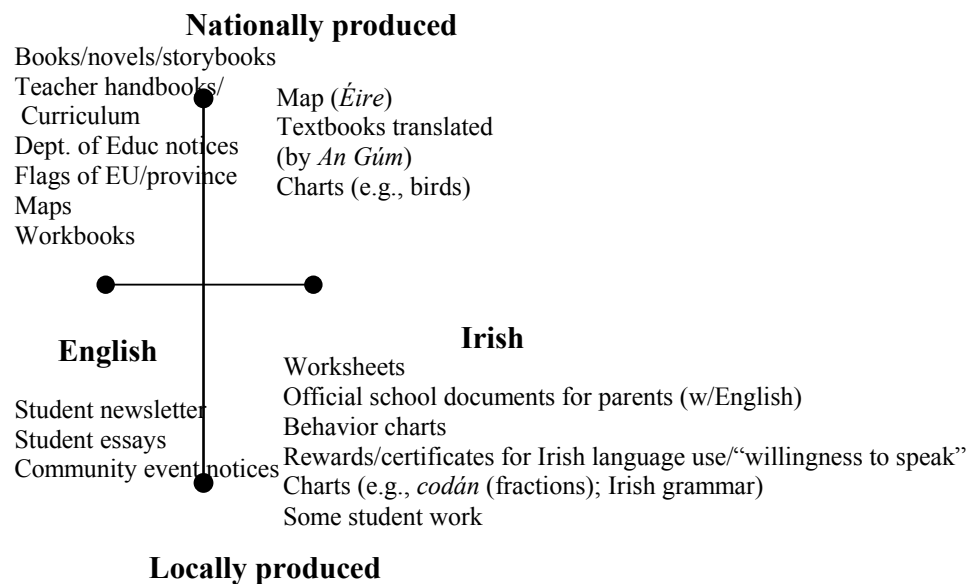
In some cases, charts and posters inside the classrooms were either locally-produced by teachers in Irish or were nationally-produced materials in which the English was covered over with Irish. Material artifacts produced locally in Irish consisted of charts of the seasons, weather, and colors. However, beyond teacher-generated materials and efforts to create Irish print, the dearth of reading materials and other literacy items for students in Irish was striking. English dominated most books, maps, and other nationally-produced items found in the classrooms. Exceptions to this included some reference materials and translated books by *An Gúm*, the state's official translation agent. *An Gúm* produces a variety of materials in Irish; their 2001 catalogue states "our current catalogue of children's books comprises a wide range of original titles and international co-editions" (2001: 45). This genre of literacy materials contrasted with available free reading materials and novels for students. Official national documents, such as the national curriculum, Department of Education circulars and announcements, educational surveys, and correspondence were found in English; educators stated that Irish versions took some time to arrive after the English versions were released. Standardized tests used in both schools were also exclusively in English.

Free reading materials in Irish were virtually non-existent in many of the classrooms in both schools. Free reading materials were found on students' desks, inside boxes aligning the rooms, and in bookshelves around the classrooms. In the Junior Infants

classroom at one school, for example, a small bookshelf aligning the wall contained 73 books. Seventy books were found in English, two were in French and one was in Irish (Coady, 2001: 142). Similar proportions of books were found in the fifth/sixth class at the same school. A slightly higher percentage of Irish books, approximately 15% of the total, was found on the bookshelves in the sixth class at the second case study school. In fact, the sixth class teacher there indicated that she found and used only one engaging novel in Irish during the 1999/2000 school year that she felt was age- and ability-appropriate for those students. In brief, students' access to engaging reading materials in Irish was limited at both schools.

Figure 1 summarizes the type of material artifact (locally-produced or nationally-produced) found in the case study schools. The data are also organized along language (Irish or English). The figure reveals that locally produced items such as school documents and rewards were written in Irish, while student books, novels, and essays that engaged students were largely written in English.

Figure 1. Overview of material artifacts in case study schools.

Nationally produced

Books/novels/storybooks
Teacher handbooks/
 Curriculum
Dept. of Educ notices
Flags of EU/province
Maps
Workbooks

Map (*Éire*)
Textbooks translated
(by *An Gúm*)
Charts (e.g., birds)

English

Irish

Worksheets
Official school documents for parents (w/English)
Behavior charts
Rewards/certificates for Irish language use/"willingness to speak"
Charts (e.g., *codán* (fractions); Irish grammar)
Some student work

Student newsletter
Student essays
Community event notices

Locally produced

Teachers in Irish medium schools stated that the primary obstacle they faced in the classroom was a lack of appropriate textbooks and teaching aids in Irish. In both schools

observed as part of this study, many of the materials observed in lessons were photocopied worksheets in Irish produced by the teacher. In the Junior Infants' class at one school, for example, students had access to beginning readers in Irish, which were the same readers that were used by first class students studying compulsory Irish in English medium schools. In an interview, the Junior Infants teacher stated that using materials created for English medium students posed less of a problem at the Junior Infant class level because the students were not yet proficient readers. She saw this as an increasing problem during the schooling of the students.

The paucity of age-appropriate and engaging written materials in Irish for students, coupled with a language policy that emphasized oral uses of Irish, appeared to have implications in students' writing at the upper primary grades. To investigate literacy development, writing samples were collected in both English and Irish from students in the upper primary grades of the two case study schools. Data from student writing samples were analyzed on a five point scale using a holistic writing rubric called Six Traits. The samples were scored along six measures: the development of ideas, organization of the text, voice, word choice (complexity and appropriateness), sentence fluency (variation in sentence and syntax), and conventions (grammar) (Six Traits, 2001).

Students were asked to write in both Irish and English, with both samples remaining within the same genre of writing. Before administering the writing samples, the fifth/sixth class teacher at one school commented that the students would have some difficulty writing in Irish and the samples would be "much shorter" in Irish than in English because "it's hard for them to plough through the Irish" (Coady, 2001: 150). In administering the Irish writing samples that appeared to be the case. While administering the writing samples in Irish, students sought aids such as soliciting the teacher for help, dictionaries, and using school textbooks in their Irish writing. In the second school the students searched for charts and other displays of information in the classroom to assist them. When asked how they felt about writing in Irish, students from responded that Irish had a lot of "grammar rules". One student stated that she knew all the adjectives she wanted to use in English, but had a difficult time finding the right word and spelling it in Irish.

	Idea Dvpt.	Organization	Voice	Word Choice	Sentence Fluency	Conventions
N	48	48	48	48	48	48
Mean	3.67	3.35	3.60	3.35	3.17	3.44
Std. Deviation	.97	.91	.87	.70	.88	.71

Table 4. English Writing sample data, both schools (Range 1-5).

	Idea Dvpt.	Organization	Voice	Word Choice	Sentence Fluency	Conventions
N	43	43	43	43	43	43
Mean	3.41	2.95	3.26	2.98	3.26	2.42
Std. Deviation	.98	.92	.75	1.03	.90	.76

Table 5. Irish writing sample data, both schools (Range 1-5).

The writing sample analysis revealed that students' written production in Irish was not as strong as their written production in English. However, students were able to write in both languages, indicating some development toward biliteracy in Irish and English and some cross linguistic transfer in writing. This was evident in students' scores in the area of idea development, which were highest in both English and in Irish. Sentence fluency was higher in Irish than in English; this might be partly explained by the fact that students who struggled with writing in Irish used nearby texts to complete the writing samples. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the English writing samples were collected first in English, followed by the Irish writing samples during the second week of data collection at each school; students were therefore somewhat familiar with the prompt and genre of writing asked in the prompt.

Subsequent to writing sample collections, focus group and individual interviews were held with students and teachers. Students strongly stated that they preferred to write in English. They found writing in Irish to be difficult and were frustrated when asked to do so. In fact, students were asked to create a newsletter and write a minimum of one article in Irish. None of the students wrote more then one article in Irish. Students preferred to write in English rather than Irish when given the opportunity to choose.

5. Implications and conclusion

The data from this study suggest a special diglossic patterning of language use inside two Irish immersion schools. Irish appeared to be used for most oral functions inside the school, while English dominated nationally produced written materials and books. This was especially notable among students' language choice of literacy acts such as free reading and student produced newspapers. These data are not surprising for several reasons. First, the emphasis on language use in the two case study Gaelscoileanna was on oral language fluency and ability, with corresponding reprisals and rewards put in place. This was consistent among interviews with teachers, students, parents, and in survey and observation data. Secondly, there was a dearth of text, especially age-appropriate and engaging literacy materials, in Irish. The lack of materials in Irish, especially on bookshelves for students' enjoyment and free reading was notable. Overall, Irish print in the classroom, as material artifacts, was largely teacher-produced and lacked the "high gloss" appeal of English. Students had difficulty writing in Irish during a writing exercise, and teachers' expectations were that this would occur.

We wish to emphasize the relationship between access to text (reading materials) in the target language and writing ability (output) in that language (see Cummins, 2001). While we acknowledge that students' writing scores also reflected cross linguistic transfer from English to Irish, it is important to highlight the difficulty students had when faced with completing literacy tasks in Irish. Teachers also acknowledged and anticipated the difficulty that students would have in Irish. Moreover, while standardized assessments were given only in English, emphasis on English literacy was of great importance to both students and teachers. These data have clear implications for the development of Irish literacy (or biliteracy) of students. Students require access to engaging and age –and ability– appropriate level written materials in multiple genres. Appropriate school language policies would provide guidelines that contribute to a more stable diglossic environment (Chen, 1997).

The data highlight the difficulty faced by immersion schools to create an Irish speaking island in the middle of an English speaking sea. Their task is made more difficult due to the shift in linguistic profile of students toward more monolingual English speakers

and therefore students' corresponding lower access to native speaking peers. Educators will need to clearly articulate goals and functions of both languages in the schools. Moreover, they will need to creatively locate avenues that foster Irish literacy if, in fact, the development of biliteracy is an intended goal for students.

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