

LANGUAGE CONTACT IN THE MINORITY LANGUAGE IMMERSION PRESCHOOL

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1. Introduction

Contact phenomena in the language of young Irish speakers offer an insight into the process of change within a minority language and shift from that language. The contact situation between Irish and English is in many ways similar to that documented for other minority languages such as Welsh (Romaine, 1994). The need to promote the minority language as an L2 in order to increase the pool of speakers can conflict with the maintenance and promotion of the language among native speakers, as has been found in Canada (Mougeon & Beniak, 1994), Wales (M. Jones, 1998a, 1998b) and Ireland (Hickey, 2001). Grouping native speakers of a minority language in preschool or school with L2 learners of the language has been seen as beneficial for the language learners (Lindholm & Gavlek, 1994), but impacts negatively on young L1 speakers of the target language (Hickey, 2001).

Assessment of the effect of such grouping of majority and minority language children needs a broadening of perspective from the classroom to include the wider sociolinguistic context. Supporting the minority language by making it the target language in immersion does not overcome the differences in status of the two language in the world outside the classroom. As will be illustrated here, children as young as four years are all too aware of the different status of the languages of their community, and practised at switching to English with all but a handful of known minority language speakers. One outcome of this contact is the concern that has been expressed in recent years (e.g. Denvir, 1989; Ó hIfearnáin, 2002) regarding the level of contraction and mixing in the Irish of young native speakers, although there is also long-standing evidence of contact phenomena (Ó Catháin, 2001). Some of the issues relating to attenuation, code-switching and contact are discussed here in relation to data from

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young Irish speakers, but are of relevance to a number of other minority language situations also.

2. The position of Irish

Irish is the first official language of the Republic of Ireland, but it is spoken as the community language in a small number of areas only, mainly on the western seaboard. Ó Riagáin (1997) has shown that even within these communities (known as *Gaeltachtaí*) home use of the language varies, as a result of marriages where one partner is not a native speaker of Irish, or where both parents have migrated to the area from English-speaking parts of Ireland or from other countries. Ó Riagáin (2001) cites survey evidence showing that since the 1970s there has been an increase in the rate of language shift in the Gaeltacht, with a decline in the number of marriages between fluent speakers, and a reduction in the number of parents with high ability in Irish who have children with similarly high level of Irish in recent decades. Hickey (1997) showed that 42% of the parents of children attending *naíonraí* in the Gaeltacht had themselves had two native-speaker parents, but only 30% of them had grown up in Irish-only homes, the other 12% reporting that Irish was ‘frequently spoken in their childhood homes’. Now as parents themselves, only 22% stated that Irish was the language of the home. Census figures show that the percentage of 3-4 year olds returned as Irish speakers in Gaeltacht areas declined from 65% in 1961 to 40% in 1991. In Census 1996 a new question was put, asking for frequency of Irish use among those returned as able to speak Irish. Among 3-4 year olds in Gaeltacht areas, 51% were returned as ‘able to speak Irish’ but only 39% spoke Irish on a daily basis. Hickey (1998, 1999) reported survey data from Gaeltacht parents who indicated that only about a third of the children in Gaeltacht *naíonraí* had conversational Irish before they began attending.

As a result of this variability in home language use, children who begin to attend *naíonraí* or pre-schools in these areas are a mixed group, comprising children who are L1 speakers of Irish who may speak some or fluent English also, children from homes where both languages are used who may have quite diverse levels of Irish competence, and children who speak no Irish, whose parents expect that their children will acquire the minority language through the school system. A survey of Gaeltacht *naíonraí* (Hickey, 1999) found that L1 Irish speakers were in the majority in only 20% of

naíonraí in these areas, while L2 learners of Irish were in the majority in 40% of these groups. This points to a high level of language contact from a very young age between two languages of very unequal status.

Ó Riagáin (2001) stresses the need to examine policies that relate to economic and social, particularly education issues, because of their consequences for language maintenance objectives. Here it will be argued that grouping L1 and L2 minority language speakers together without specific language plans, syllabi and methodology in place for their different needs compromises the value of native speaker competence in the minority language and essentially accords it the status of supporting L2 learning. Such prioritising of the needs of L2 learners of the language without due regard for the use of the language among those already fluent will be shown to be counterproductive.

3. The sample and setting

Hickey (2001, 1999) details the study of *naíonraí* (Irish-medium pre-schools) from which the present data were drawn. Nationally, the *naíonraí* operate both in English-speaking communities and in Irish-speaking (*Gaeltacht*) communities. In the former they aim to promote the acquisition of Irish as L2, and in the latter its maintenance and enrichment as L1. Their other primary aim is to promote children's overall intellectual and social development. In fact, the *naíonraí* serve three different populations: L2 learners from homes where only English is spoken, children from homes where both Irish and English are spoken (in varying proportions) and Irish L1 pre-schoolers from Irish-only homes. As a result, *naíonraí* in Irish-speaking districts in particular bear more resemblance to the Welsh experience, where, as G. Jones (1991) noted, first- and second language speakers are not separated, or to the experience of francophone children in French-medium schools in Ontario (Mougeon & Beniak, 1994) than to the classical Canadian model of immersion, in which Swain (1981) noted that all children begin with the same levels of target language skills, i.e. none.

The subjects in this study were 60 children attending a *naíonra* in Irish-speaking communities in the west of Ireland. The children were aged between 3 and 5 years, and each of the 60 target children was taped and observed (using the Sylva *et al.*, 1980 observational system) for two 20 minute sessions as they were engaged in their normal routine in the *naíonra*. The language background of the target children and of all of the

other children in their naíonra was ascertained from parents' questionnaires and fell into three groups: 'Irish only', 'Irish and English', and 'English only', although all were living in officially designated Irish-speaking communities. The sample was drawn from the major Gaeltachtaí to include naíonraí where children from Irish-only homes were in the majority, naíonraí with a majority from Irish-English homes, and those where children from English-only homes formed the largest group. Naíonra *Stiúrthóirí* (Leaders) also provided data on the children's language ability at the time they began in the naíonra and completed a questionnaire on their training, methods and priorities. The transcribed data from the 60 target children were analysed using the CHILDES system.

The naíonra setting is very informal, with an emphasis on free play and exploration. Consequently, the children's time is divided between teacher-led small- and large-group work, and informal interaction with their peers, and they are usually free to engage in conversation with interlocutors of their choice.

4. Language networks in the Naíonra

In his discussion of Irish with regard to reversing language shift, Fishman (1991) concluded that the naíonraí not only achieve laudable results in terms of comprehension and expression, but also foster positive attitudes to the language, and in many cases have encouraged parents to go on to found Irish-medium primary schools (outside of the Gaeltacht areas). This is borne out by the national assessment of naíonraí (Hickey, 1997). However, the qualitative study of naíonraí in the Gaeltacht raises issues pertaining to his Stage 6 of reversing language shift regarding establishing the vital linkage with youth, family neighbourhood and community. A study of the children's language networks indicates the need to provide more than a formal agenda for Irish use between children and adults, in order to actively promote the future use of the language among native speaker peers.

Hamminck (2000) discussed the difference between adults and children regarding code switching, supporting Meisel's (1994: 415) conclusion that "the interlocutor is the most important single factor in the developing language decision system" of young bilinguals, with code-switching in young children even being triggered simply by a person's presence in the room. This has implications for groups containing both minority and majority language children. It is often assumed that children who are

proficient in a minority language can have a good influence on L2 learners of that language by promoting its use when working informally together. However, Baker & Jones (1998), Hickey (2001) and Mougeon & Beniak (1994) have noted that when the minority language is in contact with a majority language of high prestige, even when the minority language has official backing as the target language of the group, then speakers shift to the majority language to win peer approval. The influence of the group composition on language choice was also seen in Moffatt's (1991) study of Panjabi-speaking children in nursery classes in England. Moffatt (1991: 60) concluded that the difference in code choice for minority language speakers was not directly attributable to the number of other minority language speakers present, since some children switched to the majority language even when they had several native-speaker peers present.

The data from Irish-medium preschools support this finding. Hickey (2001) showed that children who were native speakers of Irish did not produce a higher proportion of utterances in Irish when in groups where children from Irish-only homes were in the majority. However, the group composition did affect children from bilingual (Irish-English) homes: they spoke Irish in about two-fifths of their total utterances when in groups with a majority from Irish-only or from Irish-English homes, but their Irish output dropped to as little as one-sixth of their utterances when in groups with a majority of children from English-only homes. Looking at the children's mean number of Irish utterances during observation, it was found that the mean number of Irish utterances by children from Irish-only and Irish-English homes also declined significantly when in groups with a majority from English-only homes.

As already noted, there are some parallels between this minority language immersion setting and Dual Language Immersion models in the U.S. (Lindholm & Gavlek, 1994). One part of the rationale for Dual Language Immersion is the argument that English speakers benefit from exposure to native Spanish-speaking peers in the classroom. Therefore, it is of interest to note that in the naíonra data the children from English-only homes who were in groups where Irish L1 children were in the majority did not show any greater use of the target language, Irish. Their mean level of Irish production was less influenced by the language mix in the naíonra than either of the other two home-language groups. Children from Irish-only homes and children from Irish-English homes had a higher mean number of Irish utterances in groups where

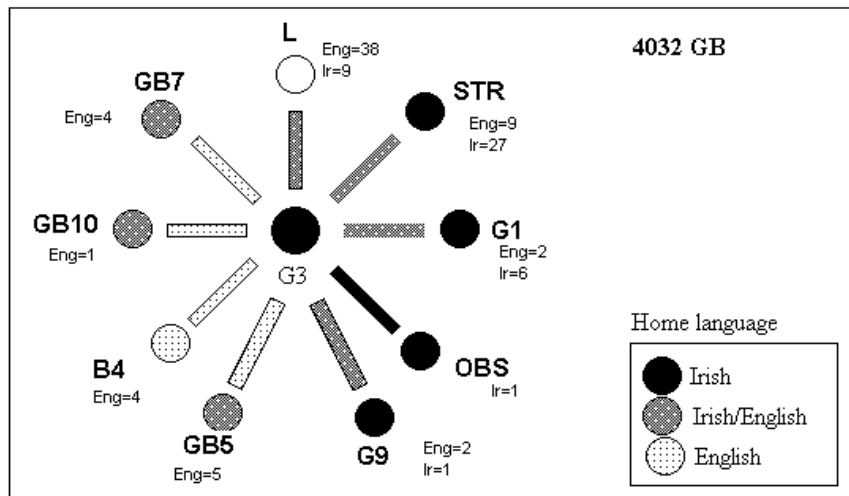
Irish-L1 children were in the majority than in English-dominant groups. Thus, it appears that the language ability mix in the group exerts a differential effect on minority language speakers and majority language children acquiring an L2.

Overall, children from Irish-only homes spoke Irish in only about half of their total utterances on average, regardless of the composition of the group. Such low levels of Irish usage by young L1 Irish speakers require serious consideration, firstly for their impact on an individual basis, since they point to a need for effective L1 enrichment for these children, and then on a societal basis, since they are establishing a pattern of shifting away from the language among these young speakers. Baker & Jones (1998: 494) noted that it is because pre-school children have incomplete competence in their mother-tongue that they are very vulnerable to the influence and social status of English, which reaches them through TV, cinema and community. As a result they argue that such children shift quickly from their minority languages. The pattern of language use in the naíonra setting is explored here. The children's intersentential code-switching is discussed, followed by a comparison of the intrasentential code-switching of the children from Irish-only homes and their Leaders (*Stiúrthóirí*). Finally, aspects of the input to the children is discussed in light of their needs for Irish enrichment. First the language networks of two children from Irish-only homes are presented as illustration.

4.1 Child from Irish-Only home in Naíonra with majority from Irish-English Homes

This child, coded G3 was attending a small naíonra that comprised three children from Irish-only homes, six from Irish-English homes and one child from an English-only home. The target child (G3) was a boy aged 4;7, who was talkative and restless during observation.

Fig. 1. Network of Fluent Irish Speaker in Group with Majority from Irish-English Speaking Homes.



STR= Stiúrthóir (Leader) OBS=Observer, G1, G9 Children from Irish-only homes; GB5, GB7 GB10 = children from Irish-English homes; B4=child from English-only home; L = unidentified child/ren. Black bar from target child means child spoke only Irish to that person; grey bar means child spoke Irish and English; white bar means child spoke only English.

Fig. 1 shows that while G3 interacted with a number of children during his observation periods, he almost always spoke to them in English, often telling them to shut up or attempting to exclude certain children from play. He spoke mainly Irish to the Stiúrthóir (27 utterances in total), but also addressed her in English on a number of occasions (9 English utterances). He used a small number of Irish utterances to G1 and G9, two children from an Irish-only home, but also addressed them in English. Example 1 shows that G3 was capable of switching back to Irish when he knew that the Stiúrthóir was dissatisfied with him, but also illustrating his own incomplete command of Irish:

1. **G3:** all girls go out (*sitting at table waiting to paint*)
I'm in the girls one (*referring to his painting overall*)
STR: hah? (*Attempting to elicit Irish, or showing dissatisfaction with statement?*)
G3: seo # cailíní ceann. **This is *girls (pl) one** (*claiming his overall is for a girl*)
STR: ní héa, mar a chéile iad ar fad *No, they are all the same*

Interestingly, the Stiúrthóir did not correct his Irish utterance, which shows the influence of English word order (*seo cailíní ceann* instead of *seo ceann do chailín* 'this-is one for-a girl'), possibly because she was more concerned at the time with his rejection of girls and focused on disputing his statement.

It appeared that G3 relied on the Stiúrthóir for Irish conversation, and did not seek out other Irish L1 children or sustain conversations with them in Irish. As a result

he could be very demanding of the Stiúrthóir, frequently shouting her name, and looking for her attention in a range of ways, as in the following conversation where he may a bid for her exclusive attention and then tried to keep her talking to him:

2. **G3: STR tá mo shúil tinn. STR my eye is sore**
 STR: cad atá ar do shúil? *What's wrong with your eye?*
G3: níl a fhios agam I don't know
 STR: b'fhéidir gaineamh a <shil> [?] isteach ann, an bhfuil?
Maybe sand went into it, did it?
G3: yeah.
 STR: yeah, nuair a bhíonn tú ag caitheamh gaineamh timpeall
 sin a <tharlaíonn> [>] nach é?
Yeah when you are throwing sand around that's what happens, isn't it?
 STR: an-bhuachaill Ainm, # buachaill maith.
Great boy Name, good boy (tending to his eye)
 L: STR! [another child calling her from other side of room]
 STR: cá bhfuil sé? *Where is it? (to other child, trying to find who called her)*
G3: xx.
 STR: now suigh síos <xx> [>] now sit down (dismissing G3)
G3: <xxx> Áine istigh sa xx. Áine (relative) in the xxx
 ...nóistíl [?] [= ospidéal]. *hopsital = Áine is in hospital
(initiates new topic regarding sick aunt)
 STR: an bhfuil? *Is that so? (turns back to him, intrigued)*
 cad atá mícheart léi? *What's wrong with her?*
G3: tá cos tinn aici she has a sore leg
 STR: nós Orla? *Like Orla? (naming someone else who has been in hospital)*
G3: no
 L: no, like Aoife (another child chimes in)
 STR: ar nós Aoife! *Like Aoife! (clearly surprised)*
 L5: and remember what happened to xxx
 STR: tá Áine san ospidéal *Áine is in hospital (turning to tell other children this news)*
 téann sé isteach chun í a fheiceáil *He goes in to see her*
(G3 turns to jigsaw and starts to sing to himself)

It was clear that the target child here was trying to engage the Stiúrthóir in conversation first by complaining about his eye hurting, and then trying to prolong that conversation by talking about people she knew. However, some other children then joined in this conversation, speaking in English, and the Stiúrthóir tried to include them and offer them glosses in Irish. At this point G3 lost interest, seeing that his conversation had been commandeered by the others, and he turned back to his jigsaw. Balancing the competing demands of a group of children is an extremely difficult task, but here it is made even more difficult because of their different levels of language competence, which can cause a fluent child to lose interest when the same information is repeated or adapted for language learners.

4.2. Child from Irish-only home in Naíonra with majority from Irish-Only homes

This naíonra had six children from Irish-only homes, three from Irish-English homes and just one from an English-only home. The target child was a girl aged 4;5, who during observation played with dolls, listened to a story and sang rhymes and songs. Despite the fact that this group had six fluent Irish speakers in it, Fig. 2 shows that this child spoke mainly English to other children, and a mixture of English and Irish to the Stiúrthóir, as is clear in example 3. Her Irish is seen to be restricted and inaccurate:

3. G1: cead agamsa uisce? *Permission by-me [to-have] water?*
 G1: máistreás cead agamsa uisce? *Mistress, [have] permission [to-have] water*
 STR: no níl, xx cailín maith. *No you don't, good girl*
 L: tá mise ag iarraidh péinteáil. *I want to paint (to STR)*
 L: cead agam dul ag péinteáil? *Can I go and paint? (to STR)*
 G1: but don't let any xx.
 L: Ainm! *(calling name)*
 L: Name 's going painting.
 G1: Name! Name 's going painting.
 L: Name 's going xx (loudly).
 G1: Name 's going painting!
 G1: tusa? *You?(to unidentified child)*
 L: you keep xx.
 G1: oh yeah I xx painting.
 G1: ## maistín@ ní raibh ag péinteáil **Mistress, [I] wasn't painting.*
 STR: ní raibh tusa ag péinteáil inné an raibh?
You weren't painting yesterday were you?
 G1: no.

Fig. 2 Network: Irish L1 Speaker in Group with Majority from Irish-Only Homes.

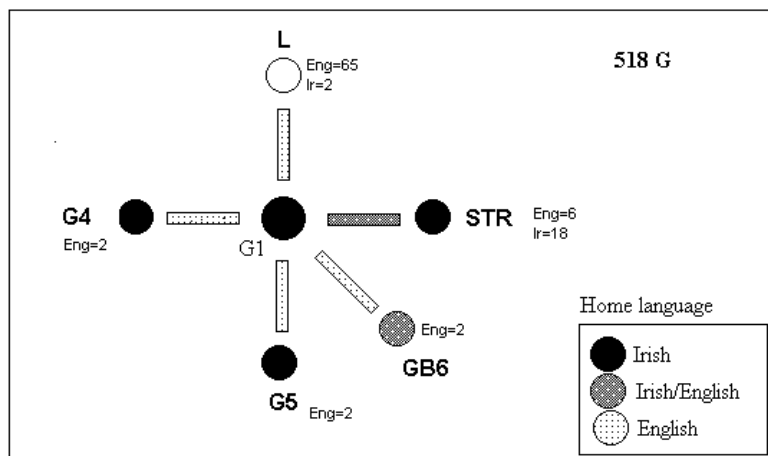


Fig. 2 shows that this child rarely spoke Irish to other children. In the exchange in example 3, the target-child spoke English directly to other children, even when they had just spoken Irish, but switched to Irish for the Stiúrthóir. The only clear example of her speaking Irish deliberately to other children was when she adopted the role of teacher and addressed the group as follows:

4. STR : now suígí síos i gcomhair lóin anois leanaí, xx suas,
 Now sit-pl down for lunch now children, xx up,
 faigh ceann eile, cailín maith
 get another one good girl (children arguing over chair)
 G1: socraigh síos! *Settle down (singular imperative)*
 STR : anois, cailín maith *now, good girl*

This indicates that the child was well aware of the official language of the naíonra, and saw Irish as the appropriate choice when trying to manage the other children, but there was no evidence that she perceived Irish as a normal mode of communication with her peers. Neither was there evidence during the 40 minutes when this child was being observed of her being offered any language specifically directed at her language needs, except perhaps instances of the gloss at the end of Example 3, when the Stiúrthóir provided a full sentence based on the child's subject-less utterance.

5. Intrasentential code-switching or mixing

Analysis of the sample children's networks showed that they are accomplished at switching language for different interlocutors, and that they operate a fairly general principle of Irish for the adults in their naíonra and English for other children, with some exceptions. Crystal (2000: 22) notes that an increase of code switching is one of the signs that a minority language is coming under pressure from a majority language:

There is usually a dramatic increase in the amount of codeswitching, with the threatened language incorporating features from the contact language(s). Grammatical features may be affected, such as an increase in the use of inflections and functions words from the dominant language. Knowledge of vocabulary declines, with younger people familiar with only a proportion of the traditional vocabulary known by older people, and older people being unfamiliar with or antipathetic to the borrowed vocabulary that is replacing it.

Concerns about the effect of contact with English have also been expressed regarding the use of Irish in the media. A recent example of this is the criticism by the State body *Foras na Gaeilge* of the quality of Irish in the soap drama "*Ros na Rún*" on

the Irish language channel TG4, which was claimed to contain too many unnatural anglicisms (Ó Gairbhí, 2001: 2).

Beyond the media, language attenuation has been noted by teachers and researchers. Denvir makes reference to “a thinning of language” as he describes it, in the younger generation in the Gaeltacht. He argues that this thinning of the Irish spoken by young L1 speakers, with reduced accuracy and vocabulary, is taking place at a societal level, and he lays the responsibility for this on the ubiquitous influence of English even in Irish-speaking communities. Another influence noted on minority language L1 speakers is the interlanguage of their L2 learner peers. G. Jones (1991) and M. Jones (1998a, 1998b) have observed similar influences from the interlanguage of L2 learners on the Welsh of L1 children, with the Welsh L1 children adopting the errors of the L2 learners rather than influencing them to use the correct forms.

Stenson (1991, 1993) looked at the English mixes in Irish utterances by native speakers and argued that even those that seemed to be adapted either morphologically or phonologically into Irish as borrowings remained incompletely assimilated into Irish. However, O'Malley Madec (2001) observed that while adult native speakers of Irish seem to use a great deal of English in their Irish utterances, their intrasentential code-switching is heavily context-dependent: speakers studied by her rarely used English mixes in formal radio interviews on the Irish-language station, but they used them very often in informal conversation with her. Studying these mixes by adults she found a great deal of regularity, mainly consisting of a limited number of discourse markers such as: *like, you know, you see, just, so, because, right, alright, whatever, really, I know*.

The output of the Stiúrtóirí in the observed naíonraí was examined for mixing, and was found to be quite variable between individuals, ranging from about 4% to as high as 13% of their utterances, with an average of 10% of their total utterances containing English mixes in Irish sentences. Among the Stiúrtóirí the most common English mixes included those noted by O'Malley Madec, with the addition of *now, and, c'mon, ok, sure*. These were often sentence-initial and used to gain children's attention, or sentence-final to elicit agreement. They also frequently used *yeah* and *no* in sentence-initial position. Irish does not have an equivalent of 'yes' or 'no', with the verb being repeated either affirmatively or negated instead. However, Ó Siadhail (1973) argued

that ‘no’ was already widespread in adult speech thirty years ago, and had undergone some phonological adaptation (*neó*). ‘Yeah’ is also now noted frequently in adult native speakers’ Irish. Overall more than 78% of the English mixes used by the Stiúrthóirí were drawn from O’ Malley Madec’s list of discourse markers plus *no* and *yeah*. Examples of English in the speech of Stiúrthóirí are given in example 5:

5. gheobhaidh mé duit é láithreach **alright?** (4032)
 I’ll get it for you immediately, alright
 fan soicind **now ok?** *wait a second now ok?* (605)
 now píosa ag gach duine *Now everyone has a piece* (4032)
 now suigh síos ag an mbord *now sit down at the table*
 right lads, suígí síos mar sin *right lads, sit down then* (4162)
 because níl an spás ann *because there is not room in-it* (5042)
 just fág mar sin é *just leave it like that* (604)
 no níl tú ag iarraidh sin *no you don’t want that* (604)
 yeah but cas timpeall é *yeah but turn it around* (4162)

Study of the intrasentential code-mixing by children from Irish-only homes in the naíonra showed that this occurred in only a small proportion of their total utterances (5.4%). It was noteworthy that some children never code-switched intrasententially: two children from Irish-only homes, nine from Irish-English homes and three from English-only homes produced no mixed utterances during their observations.

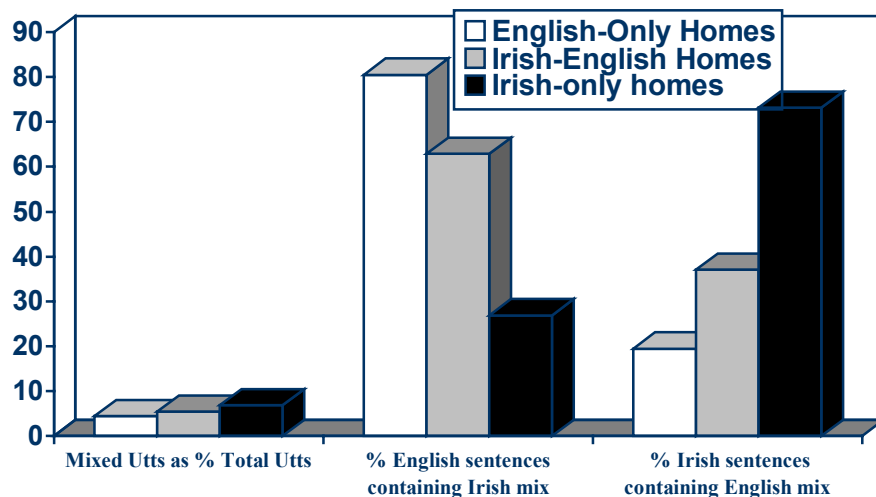


Fig. 3. Direction of Intrasentential Code-Switching x Home Language.

Fig 3 shows that most of the mixes (82%) by children from English-only homes were Irish words in English sentences, in agreement with Mac Fhlannachadha’s (1999) data from older L2 learners in Irish-immersion, and as is generally the case for language

learners. This differed from the mixes of the children from Irish-only homes: almost three-quarters of their mixes were in the form of Irish sentences with English words mixed in, in line with the type of mixes found among adult native speakers of Irish.

However, there was a notable difference between these children's mixes and those of the Stiúrthóirí. The limited list of discourse markers, plus *yes/yeah* and *no* made up the largest proportion of the English words in mixes produced by the Stiúrthóirí (78%), but they represented a lower proportion (46%) of the mixes by children from Irish-only homes. The children from Irish-only homes also mixed English nouns in their Irish utterances, and less frequently verbs and adjectives, and overall these made up more than half of their English mixes, a different pattern from that found in the mixes of their teachers.

The nouns mixed fell into two groups: borrowings that are common in normal adult Gaeltacht speech (though not necessarily adapted)², and apparent vocabulary gaps. In the examples below the English words do not disrupt the Irish sentences, and the English is neither morphologically nor phonologically adapted into the Irish system:

6. Nach*chaithfidh tú dul ag an **toilet**? *Don't you have to go to the toilet?* (50422CD)
7. Agus **sweets**. *And sweets* (40329CD)
8. Tá, tá **bicycle** agamsa. *I have a bicycle* (5184CD)
9. Tá an **dumper** seo lán xx. *This dumper is full* (50423CD)
10. xx siad féin ag **monsters**. *Themselves by monsters* (40323CD)
11. *Tá mise **boss** [?] inniu # tá. *I *am boss today, I am* (54014CD)
12. **Bye, bye, bye** anois. *Bye bye now* (5185CD)
13. Cuir **bandage** ar Aoife. *Put a bandage on Aoife* (40323CD)
14. a' déanamh **party**. *doing a party* (5183D)
15. Ní bhíonn siad xxx obair ar an **roof**. *They don't work on the roof* (5222CD)
16. xx thug Sarah **bite** dó sin. *Sarah gave him a bite* (40329CD)
17. Tá **moon** ansin. *There is a moon there* (51411CD)
18. Ní dhéanfaidh tú an **star**. *You won't do the star* (5222CD)
19. **Cheese** air Cheese on-it (50422CD)
20. Cén **bubbles**? *What bubbles?* (40321CD)

The words “sweets”, “bicycle” and “boss” are common in the Gaeltacht as borrowings (Ó Murchú, 1998: 19), and the words which relate to machinery such as *dumper*, *digger*, *JCB*, *thrasher* have also been common for some time in the Gaeltacht, rather like brand names. In recent years *bye, bye* is also often heard there, and the first author has seen it modelled with appropriate gesture to a baby acquiring Irish.

² Stenson (1991: 559) notes: “It is not possible to isolate a clearcut level of integration that can unambiguously distinguish borrowings from codeswitching in Irish”.

Regarding Example 10, an adult native speaker from Connamara reported hearing the word “monsters” used as an insult which is worse than the Irish word.

However, the other English words which the children from Irish-only homes used in examples 13-20 are not common in the Irish of the Gaeltacht. This appears to be the kind of codeswitching which occurs because the speaker lacks a certain term, and indicates that the Irish-dominant children need Irish enrichment. Some English words may become entrenched in the children’s Irish, and require more explicit teaching than merely supplying the Irish equivalent in order for take-up and use. In example (18) the child said “star” and the Stiúrthóir supplied the Irish word “réaltóg”, but there were not any other examples of “réaltóg” nor of “réalta” to be found in the children’s speech, whereas there were 15 other examples of *star* from them.

6. Language enrichment for young minority language speakers vs. simplification in input for language learners

As noted in discussion of some of the Irish utterances of the two children whose networks are described, young native speakers of a minority language are in need of the kind of language enrichment that is thought necessary for majority language children from disadvantaged homes.

In social situations where there is likely to be serious erosion of the first (minority) language, then that language needs development and maintenance if intellectual performance is not to suffer... Ancestral minority language-speaking children whose language and culture have been marginalized... may arrive in school with their first languages relatively underdeveloped in certain styles, contexts and functions of use. (Corson, 1993: 50, 87)

At a National Forum organised by the Dept. of Education and Science on Early Education, a submission was made regarding the mother-tongue needs of young Irish speakers in Gaeltacht naíonraí and schools:

The organisation is particularly concerned about the child who is raised as an Irish speaker who attends a naíonra or the reception classes of primary school [in the Gaeltacht] where he experiences the pressure of English. This is happening because children without Irish or with very little Irish are in the same class as him, without any system to deal with the linguistic situation. There is no syllabus or language plan laid out for these [native speaker] children. There is a need for support and language plans to serve the different needs of these language groups. (Authors’ translation) *Eagraíocht na Scoileanna Gaeltachta* (Organisation of Gaeltacht Schools) (1998: 2)

Hickey & Ó Cainín (2001) examined the response of Stiúrthóirí in the target-children’s naíonraí when asked if they offered any language enrichment activities to the

children from Irish-only homes. In summary, most said they did not. Some cited reasons such as impracticality due to insufficient personnel. Others believed that this would be unfair to the L2 learners whose needs they perceived to be greater, or stated that it would be contrary to their understanding of the principle of child-centeredness, apparently in the belief that being child-centred means offering the same treatment to every child, despite their having different needs.

Valdés (1997) cautioned that the modification of input to make it comprehensible for L2 learners in Dual Immersion could have a negative effect on the L1 of young minority language children. Ramirez & Merino (1989) and Mougeon & Beniak (1994) looked at classes containing L1 minority language speakers with L2 learners and found that teachers tended to adapt their language for the learners, ask fewer questions, gave less feedback and modelled for repetition more than when addressing only L1 speakers. Examination of the input from adults in the naíonra indicates a general tendency to simplify the language to make it accessible for L2 learners. There was a tendency to focus on helping learners to acquire basic phrases to ask permission and indicate preference, and basic body, colour and shape terms, as well as counting and the days of the week. In example 21 a conversation occurs about colours, with the Stiúrthóir and the ComhStiúrthóir (Co-Leader) trying to get the children to give the names of the basic colours. The target child (TC) from an Irish-only home uses an English word for a non-primary colour and this is accepted without offering the Irish term, even though it appeared not to be used appropriately by the child:

21. STR: cén dath atá ar *geansaí xx ag Name? *What colour is X's jumper?*
 STR: Ainm ná bí ag xxx, ná bí ag xx mar beidh muid ag iarraidh, [/]
beidh muid ag iarraidh a bheith ag éisteacht, tá sin magic xx.
Name don't be xx don't be xxx because we will be trying
we will be trying to be listening, that's magic
 STR: anois fan go bhfeicfidh tú anois. *Now wait till you see now*
 cén dath atá ar geansaí *Ainm? *what colour is Name's jumper?*
 STR: anois! (warning, trying to get the child's attention) *Now*
 L: bán. *white*
 CSR: anois! (*Looking at a child who is not listening*).*now*
 L: dearg. *red*
 CSR: bándearg! (white-red) *pink!*
 L: bándearg. *pink*
 STR: xx ar bríste atá ar *Seán? *xx on Seán's trousers? (no lenition on name)*
 L: bán *white*
 L: glas. *green*

- STR: glas, an dath atá ar do xx *green, the colour of your xxx.*
 L: glas *green*
 CSR: agus bróga *bán, bróga *bán
 *and *white(sg) shoes, * white (sg) shoes*
 agus tá ribín uirthi, tá
 and she has a ribbon on her, she has.
 TC: <agus tá **purple** air *and it is purple*
 CSR: **cinéal purple** sea *sort of purple, yes*
 L: I got xx socks.
 STR: ó tá xx deasa. *nice xxx* (5222CD)

This child would have benefited from hearing the Irish term in the context in which he needed it and from opportunities to go beyond naming primary colours. Another example showed a different response from this child from an Irish-only home when the Stiúrthóir was attempting to teach colour terms to some children in the group while looking at a book with them. Here, the target-child responds to a colour-term session by trying to engineer a book-reading experience focused on herself, rather than joining in to the group listing off colour words. It is also of interest that in an effort to be consistent with these terms which are new to the L2 learners, the Stiúrthóir models inaccurate use of the singular adjective with a plural noun to the Irish-dominant child in the group.

22. STR: Ainm, na dathanna, féach *Name, the colours, look*
 STR: seo? *here?*
 L: gorm *blue (unidentified child)*
 L: dearg *red*
 STR: Ainm, cén dath é seo? *Name, what colour is this?*
 L: dearg! *red*
 STR: sin buataisí dearg* *that's *red(sg) boots*
 G1: tá ceann agamsa! *I have one* (518G1)
 (getting the same book for herself, wanting Stiúrthóir to look at that with her)

Another example of simplified input to a child from an Irish-only home is given in Example 23, where a child appears to learn to overextend a counting term because the Comh-Stiúrthóir (CSR, Co-Leader) at first stresses the simpler method of counting which is introduced to L2 learners, and applies only to non-people:

23. CSR: cé mhéad as láthair? *How many are missing?(after calling roll)*
 L: em. *(doubtful)*
 STR: Ainm # Ainm agus Ainm. *(Naming 3 children)*
 CSR: tá # triúr as láthair. *There are three{people} absent*
 CSR: haon # dó # trí. *One two three (counting on fingers)*
 G3: trí *Three (non-people)*
 CSR: tá triúr as láthair. *There are three [people] absent*
 G3: trí. (Number) *Three (non-people)*

Interesting points can be seen in these examples about aspects of the input offered to these Irish L1 children. Generally, these can be understood as an attempt to keep the input simplified when the L2 learners are trying to construct a basic vocabulary. Nevertheless the result is that the children who are native speakers are receiving attenuated or inaccurate input:

- The Stiúrthóirí avoided the initial mutations required on the names of the children in the Vocative or Genitive cases, perhaps because it was thought that L2 learners would not then recognise their names.
- The Stiúrthóirí avoided initial mutations on nouns and marking the adjective for plural, possibly in an attempt to present stable forms to L2 learners.
- ‘Now’ and ‘Anois’ are used alone repeatedly to draw the attention of the children to the Stiúrthóir and as admonishments to keep them under control, instead of more complex imperatives which would offer more language to L2 children.
- There was a tendency to ask questions designed to elicit one-word replies, which restricted the scope of L1 children to formulate more extended responses and is likely to seem unstimulating to L1 children.

Stiúrthóirí undoubtedly wish to show their young charges that their statements are accepted and valued, something which helps to nurture self esteem, but they are not supporting the children’s L1 if they do not offer them normal levels of accuracy, present opportunities for more enriching linguistic interactions, or supply them with the Irish term for English mixes. This may, in fact, lead the children to understand that the inaccurate language they hear is superior to the normal use of the language at home.

7. Discussion

The results of this study raise some questions for immersion education in minority language situations and for minority language revitalisation, in terms of language restriction and shift. Fishman (2001: 464) emphasized the futility of prescribing ‘more institutions, positive attitudes or prestige and active speakers’ for a threatened language, likening it to urging a depressed patient to ‘get a grip on yourself’. What is needed first in the context of Irish is a greater awareness of the linguistic and sociolinguistic needs of young children who are bilingual in a minority and a majority

language. Identifying and serving their needs is not elitist, but as justifiable as identifying and serving the needs of monolingual children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Practical intervention is required to ensure that those needs are met, as well as those of L2 learners of the language. Accurate evaluations of broad revitalisation policies require an assessment of their impact in the more intimate setting of home and classroom. While it is of great importance to these children that the minority language is supported by the policy of the institution, the long-term aim of increasing *use* of Irish by these children in school and community is subordinated to the short-term aim of accommodating *ab initio* learners.

Managing this conflict between maintaining and developing the L1 of minority language children and promoting language revival among L2 learners of that language is of fundamental importance in all minority language situations. This issue has generated controversy in Ontario, Canada, where English-dominant children of French-mother-tongue parents are entitled to attend French-medium schools set up to cater for francophones. Mougeon & Beniak (1994) report that many such schools are separating English-dominant pupils from French-dominant pupils for at least the early years of elementary schooling. Other schools are providing intensive French for the English-dominant pupils. Such separation is not always an option in the Gaeltacht where the numbers of children are too low to support separate groups. However, it has been attempted in recent years in one large naíonra that now has a session only for Irish L1 children, and another for Irish L2 children, though this generated some local controversy initially. A compromise is also possible where Irish L1 children are grouped together for some activities during the normal day and come in early to each session for an activity such as book reading with the Leader and other L1 children. Much could be achieved in every immersion setting to help establish the normality of children speaking Irish to each other, even without complete separation.

Training is necessary to help Stiúrthóirí and teachers develop strategies to reinforce Irish use, and to form language plans for the different needs in their groups. An adequate response to these needs requires the development of appropriate teacher training, curricula and work organisation, as well as the resourcing of extra personnel to allow regular grouping by language ability. A first step has been taken in offering in-service training in language enrichment to Stiúrthóirí, but there is a need to continue to

raise awareness of the urgency of addressing these children's needs. It would be desirable to initiate among these Leaders an examination of the kind of communities represented by these naíonraí, and the ways that the social structures in the group are organised (see Toohey, 1996). Interviews with the Stiúirthóirí (Hickey & Ó Cainín, 2001) indicated a tendency to disperse the L1 Irish speakers among the learners as 'linguistic carriers', and this, in conjunction with a laudable commitment to free play and exploration by pre-school children, may result in sessions that inadvertently fail to provide L1 speakers with sufficient opportunities to interact with other L1 speakers of the minority language.

Finally, parents' support is critical in this endeavour. These are the parents who have already achieved intergenerational transfer and who use Irish as the language of the home and much could be gained by listening to their concerns and suggestions. The first step is to start in infancy by facilitating and promoting Irish-medium contact between children, in parent-and-toddler sessions in individuals' homes, and in informal sessions with more adult monitoring during the naíonra years, to try to establish patterns of using the language with other children. Parents also need practical advice and support, which the naíonraí could provide, to continue to promote their children's L1 acquisition through book-reading, rhymes, songs and language games.

The short-term aim of providing happy and effective experiences of Irish-medium pre-schooling needs to be linked more explicitly with the long-term goal of consolidating its use as a community language. There is a need for proactive intervention to ensure that attempts to enlarge the pool of L2 learners of Irish do not short-change the L1 speakers who need language maintenance. Just as educators of the gifted argue that it is not elitist but fair that children of exceptional ability be provided with differentiated learning opportunities rather than being left to 'get on with it themselves' or used as teaching assistants for their peers, so too L1 speakers of a minority language need differentiated language plans, grouping together, and support and enrichment for that language, as some protection from the overwhelming tide of the majority language which washes up even into their homes. Dispersing the speakers of a minority language among majority language speakers without due regard for their mother-tongue development achieves neither the short term goal of helping L2 learners

nor the long-term goal of creating a community of speakers of the language. Instead, it gives us only the sound of one hand clapping.

Appendix Networks in Figs 1 and 2 and Talk Fragments

STR: Stiúrthóir (Leader) speech; **CSR:** ComhStiúrthóir or Assistant Leader;
TC= Target child; **G=** Child from Irish-only Home; **GB=** Child from Irish-English Home; **B=** Child from English-only home; **L=** Unidentified child;

Black bar target-child spoke Irish only to this interlocutor;

Grey bar target-child spoke both Irish and English to this interlocutor;

White bar target-child spoke only English to this interlocutor.

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