

Teanga sa Chistin: A Qualitative Study of Bilingual Families, Baking Bread, and Reclaiming Irish in the home

Mel M. Engman, Queen's University Belfast

Órla McGurk, Glór na Móna

Alison MacKenzie, Queen's University Belfast

Abstract

Despite a political environment that alternates between ambivalence and hostility, Irish-medium education (IME) is an important educational and community resource for the revival and reclamation of Irish language, particularly in the North of Ireland (Ó Baoill, 2007). While enrolment numbers have surged in recent years, an over-reliance on schools to reclaim language can miss community desires for connection and self-determination that are at the core of reclamation efforts (Hornberger, 2008). Here, we re-centre these aims by taking a language reclamation (Leonard, 2019) approach to Irish bilingualism, to consider the possible (dis)connections between home and school for families with children enrolled in IME. First, we discuss the social and political factors that have shaped Irish language learning and use in Belfast. We then describe a study of intergenerational language learning and use that aims to bring the language of school into the home. Six participating families were given 'baking bundles' of ingredients to bake bread, an instructional baking video and text-based language supports. Wearing point-of-view cameras, they filmed themselves baking together, and participated in interviews from January 2022 to January 2023. An interaction analysis of the videos (Goodwin, 2018; Jordan & Henderson, 1995) and thematic analysis of recorded interviews (Terry et al., 2017) identified ways in which dominant practices and ideologies associated with school are transformed in bilingual family learning. This study illustrates the importance of connections between school and home learning for reclamation purposes and calls for further research on the learning and use of Irish for strengthening and sustaining relationships.

Keywords: language reclamation, Irish medium education, bilingualism, interaction analysis, family language policy

Introduction

The role of schools in language revitalisation and reclamation efforts is a contested one. For centuries, residential, religious, and government-run public schools have been effective tools of

linguistic and cultural erasure in colonial contexts around the world (Craven et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, there is a widespread reliance on schools to revitalise languages in indigenous and minoritised language communities, and the successes and challenges associated with these efforts have been well documented (e.g., Hornberger, 2008; McCarty & Nicholas, 2014). The dual role of schools as instruments for colonisation and/or resistance highlights the tensions that many communities experience when attempting to reclaim language, culture, and lifeways through institutions that have long histories as colonial tools of erasure (Hornberger, 2008; Spring, 2016).

This dual nature of schools holds true for the decline and subsequent resurgence of the Irish language in Ireland. A hostile place for the language under colonial rule, schools' punitive and assimilative practices not only contributed to the suppression and erasure of indigenous language, but also separated young pupils from familiar cultural practices and traditions. Pearse's (1924) characterisation of schools in Ireland as "the Murder Machine" highlights how educational institutions functioned as integral parts of a process that assimilated Irish youth into colonial subjects, or "Things".

A century later and the Irish language is now a compulsory school subject in the Republic of Ireland. As places where children most consistently spend the majority of their waking hours, schools are widely seen as important to the creation of Irish bilinguals (Mhic Mhathúna & Nic Fhionnlaoich, 2021), and numerous families now opt to send their children to schools where instruction is done entirely through the medium of Irish. Long waiting lists at these schools demonstrate the widespread desire for Irish language among families (Gaeloideachas, 2019) though this desire has not yet been fully realised. According to recent Census figures, 40% of the population in the Republic of Ireland can speak Irish (CSO, 2017), though it is rare to find a

speaker who uses the language in daily life outside of the Irish language classroom. Considering its ubiquity in Irish schools, current levels of Irish bilingualism in the Republic would indicate that the strategy of centralising revival efforts in schools has not been enough to ‘re-Gaelicise the country’ (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Dhonnabháin, 2015, p. 182).

Irish-medium education (IME) schools and the learning of the language also, however, serve a critically important function in supporting networks of Irish speakers, families and communities, particularly where the language has largely disappeared or where the language is spoken in fragmented pockets, as in some urban areas such as Galway and Dublin, and in the coastal Gaeltacht regions of Ireland. Language campaigns and projects have been fronted by public bodies and community organisations throughout the country to promote Gaeilge and its use among both speakers and learners. For instance, Seachtain na Gaeilge (Irish Language Week), facilitated by Conradh na Gaeilge (a cultural organisation which supports the Irish language worldwide) provides opportunities for teachers, students, and speakers of any level to come together and speak Irish across Ireland. The annual event is a reminder of how the language connects deeply to culture, heritage and traditions. Irish language learning is not, of course, only about learning the language in schools but about promoting the language so that it can flourish in social settings. This work is exemplified by, for example, Irish language Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) clubs such as Laochra Loch Lao and Na Gaeil Óga, and by regional organisations that facilitate and support informal Irish-medium youth work and education such as Fóram na nÓg and Cumann na bhFiann.

This is all in stark contrast to Irish in Northern Ireland, where the language is harshly stigmatised in many places due to perceived associations between the language and Irish identity—an ideological flashpoint during the Troubles. Despite this antagonistic relationship between the

language and official institutions, *Gaeilge* has had some critical success with school-based reclamation efforts with 12.4% of the population claiming some Irish ability (NISRA 2021). Irish medium education is the fastest growing sector in education in the North with more than 7000 IME students attending NI Gaelscoileanna in the 2021/22 academic year (Department of Education Northern Ireland, 2022). Nevertheless, as with the South, schooling is an imperfect instrument for reclaiming the Irish language. In addition to the numerous economic, social, and ideological challenges to IME in the North (detailed in the next section), the forced closure of schools during the pandemic dealt a blow to the movement, and families with English-dominant parents were particularly affected.

This study takes a relational approach to the reclamation of Irish by decentralising the school as a primary source for learning and development. We turn our attention to language practices of the home by examining intergenerational communication and learning among families whose children attend Irish-medium schools in Belfast.

Literature Review

Irish Language Education in Northern Ireland

From the establishment of the new Northern Irish state in 1921, political and religious tensions have culminated in civil unrest (Dixon, 2008), with the Irish language sparking fierce debate, cultural divide and, most recently, acting as a catalyst for the breakdown of power-sharing in the Northern Irish executive (Cochrane, 2018; MacKenzie et al., 2022). Despite the political polarity attached to *Gaeilge*, the language is a method of both formal and informal inculcation, communication, and as a cause to engage, unite and empower community and language activists

on a global stage through recent language rights and legislation campaigns (Conradh na Gaeilge, 2022).

Irish-medium education was first established in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s when a group of native Irish-speaking families joined together through purchasing a plot of land to set up an urban Gaeltacht (an Irish speaking area, often associated with the West coast of Ireland) on the Shaw's Road in West Belfast (Ó Baoill, 2007). These families established a school in 1971, still known today as 'Bunscoil Phobail Feirste', despite long government opposition. Although only nine children originally enrolled in the school, it now has the highest IME primary enrolment across Northern Ireland (DENI, 2021). It was also the first urban Bunscoil to be established outside of the Republic of Ireland. This school, as is common with the majority of IME schools, received no statutory support, recognition or funding until 1984, relying heavily on voluntary parental intervention and allyship to provide tuition, fundraising efforts and ensure the school was a safe space for the upcoming generation to be educated through the medium of Irish. These grassroots efforts mirror the activism and determination in today's campaigns to create infrastructure and generate enterprise for the generations of young Gaels to come.

In line with the statute of the Belfast Agreement and subsequently the Education Order of 1998, the Department of Education has a statutory duty to 'encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education' at all levels. However, scholarship (McGurk 2020, 2022; Ní Fhoighil & Travers, 2013; Nic Aindriú, 2019; Nic Aindriú et al., 2020, 2022) has pointed to a continual provision and resource deficit in relation to high-quality translated resources and materials, not to mention poor parity of resource provision for Irish-medium education and support for children with additional learning, social, emotional and behavioural needs. The dearth of adequate linguistic support materials has been a feature since the establishment of the Irish-medium sector, not only in

relation to formal education settings, but also in informal spaces where language is shared and practised (youth club settings, for example). Deficient and inadequate language provision signals the primary rationale for this study. Specifically, this study emerged in response to the Education Authority's failure to provide over 7000 pupils in Irish-medium schools with additional home learning support packs in Irish during the pandemic (Meredith, 2020), but which it provided in other languages, such as Polish, Slovak and Arabic. The Education Authority not only failed to uphold its statutory duty during the pandemic, but also created consternation with its funding cuts to informal indigenous language education in Irish-medium youth work – a crucial extension of a young person's immersive language experience (McArdle & Neil, 2016, 2022). It is in these youth spaces where practices that transcend the formal education curriculum are explored: and young people can experience 'Gaelsaolaíocht', living a life solely through the medium of Irish, helping to ensure the survival of intergenerational language use.

Language Reclamation

Language reclamation is a theoretical orientation that emphasises the potential for language to intervene in the inequities resulting from colonialism (Leonard, 2017, 2019). Similar to language revitalisation, which refers to "a global grassroots movement to maintain and grow the numbers of speakers/users of Indigenous languages" (McKenzie et al., 2022, p. 497), language reclamation acknowledges the intrinsic value of language as a social, spiritual, and relational phenomenon. It differs from revitalisation, however, in that the aims of reclamation are explicitly *decolonial*. Whereas revitalisation aims to increase speakers and fluency within existing societal structures, language reclamation "begins with specific community histories and needs" (Leonard, 2019, n.p.) to intervene in the social injustice resulting from longstanding colonial structures of

invasion (Wolfe, 2006). A reclamation approach to language learning and use necessitates an attention to relationships, and to ways of knowing and being that fall well outside of dominant conceptions of ‘language’ (Leonard, 2017). Chew (2015) finds resonance with language reclamation in her observations of *linguistic responsibility*. She notes how language activists and scholars (including Chew herself) seem to be “driven by a deeply personal sense of responsibility” (p. 161) to build relationships *in* and *with* their languages for future generations’ wellbeing, breaking cycles of trauma. For Chew, this linguistic responsibility is directly linked with intergenerational relationships and, specifically, with family. While linguistic responsibility can certainly be exercised in formal educational institutions, its origins are firmly planted in relations in the home and community.

Relational perspectives and the entangled nature of identity and family have long been relevant to Irish language and education. Pearse (1924) references the importance of family in his description of the school system as designed to produce “kinless beings” or Things, inferring that the connection to kin is what makes us human. This severance of relations at school is countered with the use of the word *clann* to refer back to more traditional educational practices Ireland, in which teachers played the role of a parent, and students were “collectively [the teacher’s] family, his household, his clann” (p. 8).

We rely on a reclamation lens in the present study because it enables a perspectival shift. Instead of examining fluency levels or numbers of speakers, we focus on the relational nature of language and its inseparability from context. Rogoff (2014) notes how separating language from context is a practice associated with assembly-line instruction (ALI) style of language teaching that is often found in schools. Reclamation sits in stark contrast to ALI (Henne-Ochoa et al., 2020), and returns language development and use to the domains of the everyday. Indigenous

language reclamation views language as an entry point for re-establishing relations among people, practices, and place (Leonard, 2011, 2019) –important decolonial framing for a study of language learning that bridges institutionalised practices and everyday interaction among families who are still engaged in struggle for greater self-determination (Walsh, 2020).

For families in Belfast, immersion re-centers Gaeilge as a force for community cohesion and identity (Armstrong, 2012; Ó Riagáin, 2007). Language ideologies are significant to informing linguistic practices and family decision-making in Belfast (Ó hIfearnáin, 2013) and elsewhere (Meek, 2007). However, little is known about how whole-family orientations to language, schooling, and identity shift when the minoritised language of schooling is relocated to the home. Further, in informal learning contexts outside of Ireland, recent studies show how the ‘pedagogical forms’ (Bang & Marin, 2015) that structure learning in families, are intertwined with social and cultural relations (Marin & Bang, 2018; Paradise & Rogoff, 2009). An examination of Irish reclamation in the home contributes novel documentation of culturally sustaining practices that occur outside of school.

The Study

Methodology

This study asks:

1. What practices emerge when Irish-medium education is de-institutionalised/re-institutionalised in the English-dominant home?
2. What identities and ideologies are salient to these emerging pedagogies of home?

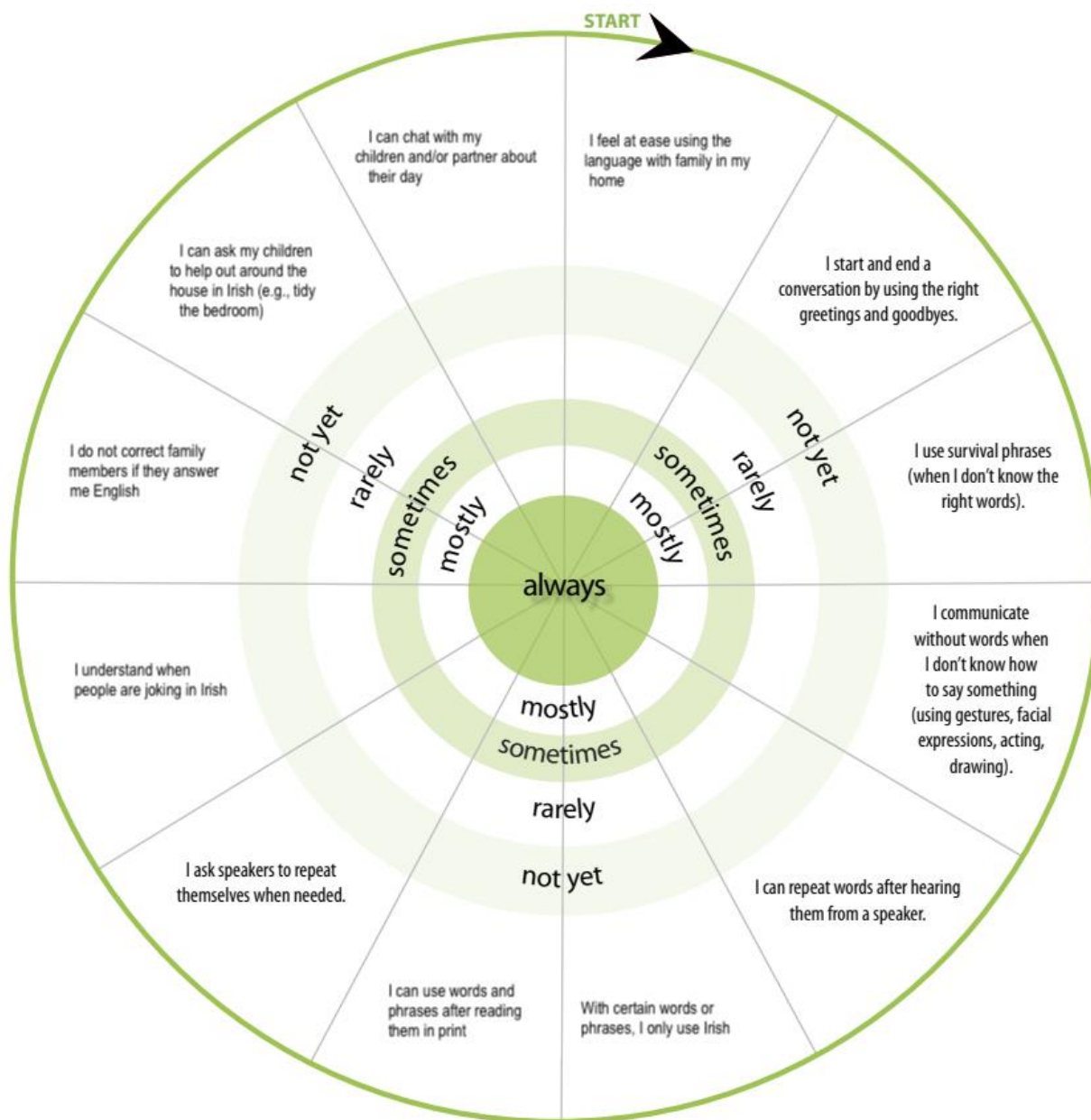
Participants and Data Sources

In partnership with the Belfast Irish language youth work organisation *Glór na Móna*, we invited families who have children in IME schools to participate in the study¹, eventually recruiting six families to take part. All six families reported varying levels of Irish in the home with English as the common family tongue due to at least one parent being a learner. As part of a decolonising methodology (Smith, 2016) during the informed consent process, participants were given the option to participate anonymously or to have their contributions attributed to them. The six participating families were given ‘baking bundles’ consisting of ingredients and material supplies needed for the bake. They were also provided with an instructional baking video and text-based language supports via a website created to host digital materials and information about the study. In addition, families were given point-of-view cameras to film their baking attempts. These head-mounted cameras were used to capture caregiver-child communication in the home as well as the embodied and material resources salient to engagement in the activity. The video-recordings of caregiver-child dyads and triads engaged in cooperative baking comprised the primary data for the study.

Secondary data came from interviews and informal discussions with participants conducted during the research period from January 2022 to January 2023. Questions centred on family practices, objectives, and expectations with regard to language and education. We also asked about specific moments in the bread-baking and general impressions of the event overall. Further, we invited participants to complete an individualised self-assessment map (see Figure 1) as part of the interview, generating discussion around intersections of practice, learning, and ideology.

¹ Pseudonyms are used to preserve anonymity of participants in the data below.

Figure 1. Self-assessment circle for family Irish reclamation; adapted from McIvor and Jacobs (2016)



Videos were uploaded to a secure server, and then the research team's *gaeilgeoir* transcribed and translated the videos. Next, the PI (Engman) checked transcripts for formatting, following Jefferson's (2004) transcription conventions, and then layered a description of non-verbal action onto the transcripts, including screenshots to better capture the multimodal nature of the interactions. The transcripts were then divided into episodes based on shared attention in preparation for interaction analysis, a method that comes from previous work with indigenous learning research (Bang & Marin, 2015; Engman & Hermes, 2021). Interviews were transcribed and translated.

Data Analysis

Transcription layers provided the first two phases of analysis. We then followed Jordan and Henderson's (1995) interaction analysis by collaboratively reviewing videos and transcripts in weekly research team meetings and eventually incorporated participant perspectives from interviews. General practices of co-operative action (Goodwin, 2018) within and across families' videos were noted with the aim of identifying specific patterns of home pedagogy and learning-in-interaction. The study's relational and generative view of language use is complemented with Goodwin's (2013, 2018) theory of co-operative action. In this view, linguistic, semiotic, material, environmental, and cultural resources are transformed in human relations to build social action in the world (Goodwin, 2013). Essentially, culture is not simply the 'big C' Culture of food, festivals, clothing, etc., but is an action that is made in the minutiae of the everyday. Embracing this orientation to culture and human development, we then applied a closer multimodal analysis (Engman & Hermes, 2021; Goodwin, 2013) to key 'episodes' that were emblematic of the general patterns of co-operative action that emerged in the previous stage,

examining the building of social action turn-by-turn. In addition, we analysed the interview transcripts and discussion around the self-assessment circles thematically (Terry et al., 2017).

Findings

This study of intergenerational language development and home pedagogy aims to understand:

(1) the kinds of practices that emerge when IME is brought into the bilingual home, and (2) the identities and ideologies that contribute to these practices. We explore these findings further in two parts below.

IME in the Bilingual Home

The interactional data of this study revealed a wide range of communicative practices across families. These differences speak to the ways in which communication is shaped by age, gender, neurodiversity, educational and linguistic background, and relationships to others in the interaction. Even across this wide variation, larger patterns of language use and learning emerged. First, we saw a blurring of the boundaries between learning and teaching, wondering, and knowing. The teacher-learner, expert-novice divisions that structure interaction in school were not found in the interactional data. Each person brought different knowledge to the table and this distribution of knowledge shaped the various constellations of language use and learning that emerged. Collaborative language was coordinated with collaborative action. Even when there seemed to be a designated leader to control the pacing and order of the baking task, collaboration was assumed rather than invited, and nonverbal communication was as important as the spoken word in accomplishing the task. Second, we found that the language of school and

home are different, but not incongruent. Language of school found its way into these Belfast kitchens, but often only after undergoing a sort of transformation.

Blurring the Teaching/Learning Boundary

In school, there are numerous linguistic, environmental, and practice-based cues to indicate who in the room is the teacher and who are the students. For instance, the placement of bodies, the structuring of turn-taking, and the control over classroom attention signal a teacher-student hierarchy in which teachers are the ‘knowers’ and ‘transmitters’ of knowledge, while usually students sit (literally) on the receiving end of this relationship. In the study’s baking configurations, the assigned role of ‘knower’ was more fluid and the practices associated with ‘teaching’ and ‘learning’ were not mutually exclusive. In many instances, knowledge was introduced to the group in a distributed way, shared across participants and uttered or embodied in collaboration.

A clear example of this blurring of teaching/learning boundaries is shown in Extract 1. In this interaction, Síle is working alongside her son Marcas (age 12) and her daughter Nóinín (age 9), both IME pupils, as they measure out the flour needed for the *builín aráin* (loaf of bread). Marcas has already poured some flour into the bowl on the scale while Síle watches the weight. Síle has some Irish, though not as much as her children. Yet, she makes a visible effort to stay in the language, often relying on materials and gestures to fill in gaps in the interaction. Aiming to read out the number on the scale, Síle realises she doesn’t know how to say “250” in Irish so she asks “cad é?” (what is?) in line 1 and then shifts the scale so bilingual Nóinín can read it better, then says “céad” in line 3, indicating that she knows it is in the hundreds, but needs some assistance with the exact numerical language. What follows is a multi-turn, collective attempt to

measure out 250 grams of flour in which the person who has the most experience using the baker's scale needs assistance with the language of numbers in Irish. In lines 4-12, Marcas and Nóinín work together with Irish to accomplish the task, though Síle rejoins the collaboration in line 13 with an English language question about the amount needed "how many has it to go?" Though she may not have been able to produce this question in Irish, she understands the answer well enough to further her participation in the flour-measuring, using a combination of gesture (lines 15-17) and Irish at the very end (line 18).

Extract 1: Finding 250

1 S: cad é- (points to number showing on scale: 210)

what is-

2 [turns scale so it's a bit more oriented to Nóinín]



3 [points to number on the scale and reads] céad 100

4 M: [leans in closer to read number Síle is pointing to]



5 dhá chéad seasca,

two hundred sixty,

6 tá dhá chéad caoga de dhíth,

- 7 *we need two hundred and fifty,*
 cá mhéad,
 how much,
- 8 S: how many?
- 9 M: cá mhéad-
 how much-
- 10 N: [comes over to look at the number on the scale]
 11 dhá chéad haon déag
 two hundred and eleven
- 12 M: dhá chéad haon déag gram? ok [starts to add more flour]
 two hundred eleven grams?
- 13 S: so how many - how many has it to go to? [points to number on scale]
- 14 M: dhá chéag caoga
 two-hundred and fifty
- 15 S: dhá chéad caoga [nods, signaling the need for more]
 two hundred fifty
 [watches the scale as M pours flour]
- 16 oh- [circular gesture with hand signaling more]



- 17 oh do-! [holds up palm, signalling stop]
- 18 stad!
 stop!

Over the course of this episode, we see a distribution of knowledge and leadership that has participants relying on one another to complete the task in a way that blurs boundaries between teacher-student, expert-novice. All are knowers, but they do not all know the same things. Síle first seeks Nóinín's help with producing the Irish for the number on the scale, both Síle and Nóinín need Marcas' help with knowing how much flour is ultimately needed, and

eventually, Síle's help is needed in measuring the flour as she is an experienced baker and is best-positioned to see the digital readout on the scale. Imperfect Irish utterances and knowledge gaps are filled with repetitions, gestures, and requests for help in fluid multi-turn sequences that bear no resemblance to the traditional classroom's Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) sequence (Mehan, 1979). Data from this study suggest that re-institutionalising Irish in the home necessitates attention to the relationships, environment, and context of use as these are important factors shaping what sort of language is required and what sort of language is produced.

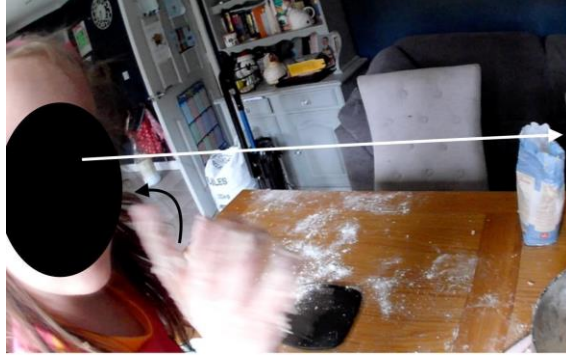
Transforming the Language of School at Home

We know that the language of school is not identical to the language of home. This is true of monolingual families in monolingual communities, and these differences are intensified for bilingual families whose children attend school in a language that is not shared among all family members. Yet this boundary between school and home practices appears to be quite porous in our interactional data. In every family baking video we noted academic language and practices seeping into talk around the weighing of ingredients, sensory aspects of baking, and practices around scaffolding language for others. In many of these instances, the academic language and practice was transformed by the home baking context, requiring creativity and negotiation across the two domains. One clear example of this comes from Gráinne, a bilingual mother of four who works in the Irish medium sector (i.e., has very high level of fluency) and her twins Éanna and Lochlann (age 6) in Extract 2. After mixing the dough, the two children started putting their dough into the baking tins. Gráinne asks the twins in line 19 what they call this thing that they are doing. Éanna appears to interpret the question as asking what they do at this final stage of baking preparation and answers "oh put the *ainm*!" in line 22.

This practice of putting one's name on work before submitting it is a common schooling practice and Éanna introduces it here in her home kitchen. Importantly, this practice is transformed in the family interaction when Éanna suggests writing only initial letters instead: “the start of your *ainm*” (line 25) and provides the first initials of the three bakers in line 28. Lochlann builds on this in line 31 by announcing that he wants to do his brothers' and father's first letters on his dough. Éanna then brings Granny Meemie into the picture, transforming this academic practice of attributing work to its creator into a relational practice of inscribing a product with intent for a recipient.

Extract 2: Put the *ainm*

- 19 G: cad é a chuireann sibh air seo nuair a dhéanann muid seo,
what do you call this when we're doing this,
- 20 níl mé cinnte,
I don't know,
- 21 oh sin go leor plúr=
oh that's a lot of flour-=
- 22 É: =oh put the *ainm*!
name
- 23 G: [turns toward Éanna] cad é?
what?
- [Éanna and Lochlann are working the dough, looking at their dough, not at G]
- 24 oh, d'ainm?
your name?
- 25 É: [pauses working the dough, turns to G] yeah just the start of your *ainm*
name
- 26 G: oh like céad litir s'agat?
oh like your first letter?
- 27 cad é ceann s'agat?
what's your first letter?
- 28 E: [turns and points to G, then L, then points thumb back to herself]



M, L, E.

- 29 G: [quietly to herself] °M, L-°
Mummy, Lochlann, Éanna?
30 maith thú Éanna!
well done
31 L: I want to do Conchúr, Fiachra, Daddy
32 G: Cochúr, Fiachra agus Daidí!
and
33 É: agus Granny Meemee!!

The transformation of academic language into home contexts demonstrates that the school/home boundary is not fixed. While IME contributes by laying the linguistic groundwork, the transformations themselves also highlight how experiential and relational knowledge shape the ways that young bilinguals connect the things they know across various institutional domains.

Reclamation Ideologies

Parents and children were asked about their home language practices, their feelings about language, and their relationships with the Irish language and community. Importantly, there appeared to be no illusions among these parents about the presence of English in their homes, families, and communities. Never did participants express a desire for Irish monolingualism. There was, however, a tacit acknowledgement of power inequities between the two, and families appeared to be well aware of the processes that may give certain words, structures, and language

functions greater prominence than others. For instance, Diarmuid, a father of two and a highly skilled *gaeilgeoir* who works as a translator, spoke about a desire to introduce vocabulary in Irish before his children encounter it in English.

(1) Like, for example, the word 'bicycle' - now the word bicycle doesn't annoy me because we had the object before we had the word for bicycle in the language (Irish), so I try my best to discuss and explore word vocabularies before putting these words into actions.

Diarmuid's acceptance of English words securing prominence in his children's Irish language repertoires points to a view of Irish that is modern and responsive to changes in the material and social world. The use of the word 'bicycle' does not make his bilingual Irish children any less Irish. This point-of-view resonates with the growing body of research on translanguaging – a theory that conceptualises language as “an integrated system” (Canagarajah, 2011, p. 1) of all the practices that comprise an individual's semiotic repertoire, including practices associated with multiple named languages (e.g., García & Lin, 2017; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Otheguy et al., 2015). Translanguaging also sits in contrast to the anxieties described among minoritised language users elsewhere that may stem from monolingual ideologies (Gal, 2006) in which the use of loanwords is seen as diminishing the purity of the language, and thus, the culture, national identity, and mind of the speaker. Language ideologies are reproduced in relationships, histories, and political formations (e.g., Blommaert, 1999; Kroskrity, 2004) and they are embedded in both discourse and practice. Ideologies associated with the reclamation community in West Belfast point to an awareness of the feedback loop between practices and one's relationship with the language.

Resembling Chew's (2015) *linguistic responsibility*, all parents interviewed spoke about the discipline required to stay in Irish. As gaeilgeoir and translator, Diarmuid has the linguistic skill to move fluidly back and forth between Irish and English, but he does not use it.

(2) I have a rule for myself with the kids. When they don't understand what I've said, I don't give them the direct English translation of the word. I explain the Irish word to them in Irish or I show them what I mean, or I take out my phone and show them a picture of what I mean. You know it's strange, I'm a translator, but I refuse to translate for the kids.

Síle demonstrated a learner's discipline in the interactional data shown in Extract 1, trying to stay in Irish despite lacking the necessary vocabulary in the moment. She mentions this practice as one of the family's strategies for promoting Irish bilingualism in her interview, and describes experiences decoding place names as a family and imperfect translations such as “*madadh té*” for “hot dog”. When asked how Gaeilge shapes family language in the home, Síle says:

(3) For me, sometimes it's learning new words, or else I just try, and that's how you learn too, you have to make mistakes.

Embracing imperfection is incredibly challenging when the stakes are so high, and it requires viewing the relationship between language and identity as robust and independent of practices that conform to a standard. The ideologies exhibited by the participants in this study run counter to commonly seen language ideologies of purity, standardisation, and perfection. Instead, there is a disciplined embrace of strategic flexibility, and playful, flawed communication that calls to mind Woolard's (2005) description of a campaign for Catalan meant to be “playful rather than painful” (p. 24), without worries of inaccuracy. In Síle's case, her disciplined and creative

communicative practices index joy instead of pain because they are entangled with the unconditional love she experiences with family.

Family was important to all participants who spoke of the pride that multiple generations take in younger people's language abilities. Importantly, the delight was not just with Irish, but with bilingualism as with Diarmuid's response to the question: "How does it feel to have young Irish speakers in the house?" Though the question asked about Irish, Diarmuid's answer points to *bilingualism* as a source of wonder.

(4) It's just amazing. I think the amazement just surprises you more than it would raising children monolingually.

This wonder is distributed across family members, generations, and community members in our interview data. The history of IME schools in Belfast is significant here because their affiliation and financial support from the State is a relatively recent development. For much longer, the schools have been run by and for the community. As Síle put it when asked about the school her children attend:

(5) It's not even a school, it's a community.

Language reclamation ideologies orient to language as an entry point for community relations in which Irish language and these relationships are mutually constitutive. With relationships at the core, it is no surprise that orientations to language in this setting tend to connect with wonder, self-discipline, and creative imperfection.

Conclusion

Language reclamation work re-envision research on language learning by shifting from a cognitive to a relational perspective. Binaries and boundaries become blurry and porous, and it transforms the knowing *about* of school-based learning to a knowing *with* (Engman & Hermes, 2021). This blurriness is due in part to the conditions under which various generations of the community are engaging with the language and with each other. IME in the North is not a predominantly middle-class endeavour, and while recent changes in policy and institutional attitudes have helped strengthen its profile, community concerns around future marginalisation are not unfounded. A long-delayed language rights bill, passed in Westminster in 2022, despite having been promised in 2006 (An Dream Dearg, 2023), hints at lingering inequities of power that motivate the community across generations. Many parents are learning alongside their children (Wright & McGrory, 2005), with the understanding that simply learning and using Gaeilge is activism –and an act of reclamation.

What this research reveals so clearly, we believe, is that communication between the generations in a minoritised language does not have to rely on perfection or a high degree of fluency to make meaning, and to do the relational work that language encourages. The fear of not speaking perfectly or fluently, of appearing inarticulate because the speaker stumbles through speech can linger as a hangover from colonising practices that designate the speaker of the minority language as lacking in intelligence, culture or education, and in the process, create hierarchies of prestige. That such fears were absent in our data speaks the empowering possibilities associated with translanguaging. In videos and interviews, parents and their children resorted to their full linguistic repertoire when needed, a strategy that connects with García's (2009) assertions that translanguaging pedagogies are effective because they are rooted in natural

plurilingual practice. The parent learned from their child; and the child learned from their parent, and all the while communication playfully flowed. Being able to access different linguistic features as and when required, regardless of the status of the speaker (parent/child; child/teacher, expert/novice), is essential to language reclamation. Translanguaging in reclamation practices encourages communication, can strengthen family and community bonds, and dissolve unequal power relations. It can also be a source of joy and fun.

Despite this, we note translanguaging in contexts where one language is severely minoritised may not be supported for fear of diluting the classroom learning with the hegemonic language and impeding reclamation progress (Hermes, 2007). Our research points to the value of immersion pedagogies that encourage a ‘dual approach’ to language learning such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Coyle et al., 2010; Mac Gearailt et al., 2023), and it highlights the possibilities of pedagogical innovations that integrate home literacies and family knowledges into the work of school as an extension of community.

Gaelige activism is a sentiment that echoes through language reclamation efforts around the world, and it is a sentiment we heard first-hand at the Irish Association of Applied Linguistics in Kerry in 2022 (Bhreatnach & Ó Laoire, 2022), reflecting some scholars’ experiences with the challenges of sustaining intergenerational language pathways. There is a need for applied linguistics scholarship to reflect the social, material, political, and historical complexity of language. A language reclamation lens is one such approach. By considering the role of language as a point of entry for developing and sustaining myriad relations –as a community relation in its own right– scholarship is better able to examine learning, identity, ideology, policy, etc. *in relation* with multilingual lives.

References

- An Dream Dearg. (2023). Accessed 31 January 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.dearg.ie/en/eolas>
- Armstrong, T. C. (2012). Establishing new norms of language use: The circulation of linguistic ideology in three new Irish-language communities. *Language Policy*, 11, 145-168.
- Bang, M., & Marin, A. (2015). Nature-culture constructs in science learning: Human/non-human agency and intentionality. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 52(4), 530-544.
- Bhreatnach, T., & Ó Laoire, M. (2022, 30 September - 1 October). *Seachadadh na máthairtheanga ó ghlúin go glúin sa Ghaeltacht? Scéalta ón ngort* [Paper presentation]. IRAAL 2022: Building Bridges through Applied Linguistics, Munster Technological University, Bishopstown, Cork and Tralee, Kerry, Ireland.
- Blommaert, J. (1999). The debate is open. In: J. Blommaert (Ed.) *Language ideological debates*, 1–38, Mouton de Gruyter.
- Canagarajah, S. (2011). Translanguaging in the classroom: Emerging issues for research and pedagogy. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 2, 1–28.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110239331.1>
- Chew, K. A. B. (2015). Family at the heart of Chickasaw language reclamation. *American Indian Quarterly*, 39(2), 154-179.
<https://doi.org/10.5250/amerindiquar.39.2.0154>
- Cochrane, F. & Loizides, N. & Bodson, T. (2018). *Devolution and power-sharing in Northern Ireland*.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351250566-2>

Conradh na Gaeilge. (2022). *Acht Anois: Irish Language Act*. Available at:

<https://cnag.ie/en/campaigns/ongoing-campaigns/achtanois-irish-language-act.html>

Coolahan, J. (1981). *Irish education: History and structure*. Institute of Public Administration.

Coyle, D., Hood, P. & Marsh, D. (2010). *Content and language integrated learning*.
Cambridge University Press.

Craven, R. G., Bodkin-Andrews, G., & Mooney, J. (Eds.). (2013). *Indigenous peoples: Education and equity*. IAP.

Central Statistics Office. (2017). *Census 2016 Results*. <https://www.cso.ie/en/census/>

Department of Education Northern Ireland (DENI). (2021). *Education data infographics 2021/22*.

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Irish%20Medium%20Education%20202122.pdf>

Department of Education. (2022). *Schools Plus*. Available at:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/services/schools-plus>

Dixon, P. (2008). *Northern Ireland: The politics of war and peace*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Engman, M. M., & Hermes, M. (2021). Land as interlocutor: A study of Ojibwe learner language in interaction on and with naturally occurring “materials”. *Modern Language Journal*.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12685>

Gaeloideachas. (2019). *Statistics*. Available at: <https://gaeloideachas.ie/i-am-a-researcher/statistics/>.

Gal, S. (2006). Contradictions of standard language in Europe: Implications for the study of practices and publics. *Social Anthropology*, 14(2), 163-181.

- García, O. (2009). *Bilingual education in the 21st century: A global perspective*. West Sussex, Wiley-Blackwell.
- García, O., & Lin, A. M. Y. (2017). Translanguaging in bilingual education. In: O. García, A. M. Y. Lin, and S. May (Eds.), *Bilingual and multilingual education*, 117-130. Springer.
- Goodwin, C. (2013). The co-operative, transformative organization of human action and knowledge. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 46(1), 8-34.
- Goodwin, C. (2018). *Co-operative action*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hall, R., & Stevens, R. (2016). Interaction analysis approaches to knowledge in use. In: A. di Sessa, M. Levin, & N. Brown (Eds.), *Knowledge and interaction*, 88-124. Routledge.
- Henne-Ochoa, R., Elliott-Groves, E., Meek, B., Rogoff, B. (2020). Pathways forward for Indigenous language reclamation: Engaging Indigenous epistemology and learning by observing and pitching in to family and community endeavors. *The Modern Language Journal*, 104(2), 481-493.
- Hermes, M. (2007). Moving toward the language: Reflections on teaching in an Indigenous-immersion school. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 46(3), 54-71.
- Hornberger, N. H. (Ed.). (2008). *Can schools save indigenous languages? Policy and practice on four continents* (pp. 1-12). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hornberger, N. H., & Link, H. (2012). Translanguaging and transnational literacies in multilingual classrooms: A bilingual lens. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 15(3), 261–278.

- Jefferson, G. (2004). Glossary of transcript symbols with an introduction. In: G. Lerner (Ed.), *Conversation analysis: Studies from the first generation*, 13-31. John Benjamins.
- Jordan, B. & Henderson, A. (1995). Interaction analysis: Foundations and practice. *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 4, 39-103.
- Kroskrity, P. V. (2004). Language ideologies. In: A. Duranti (Ed.), *A companion to linguistic anthropology*, 496-517. Blackwell.
- Leonard, W. Y. (2011). Challenging ‘Extinction’ through Modern Miami Language Practices, *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 35(2), 135-160.
- Leonard, W. Y. (2017). Producing language reclamation by decolonising ‘language’. *Language Documentation and Description* 14, 15-36.
- Leonard, W. Y. (2019). Indigenous languages through a reclamation lens [Blog post]. Available at: <https://www.anthropology-news.org/articles/indigenous-languages-through-a-reclamation-lens/>
- Mac Gearailt, B., Mac Ruairc, G., & Murray, C. (2023). Actualising content and language integrated learning (CLIL) in Irish-medium education; why, how and why now? *Irish Educational Studies*, 42(1), 39-57.
- Marin, A., & Bang, M. (2018). ‘Look it, this is how you know’: Family forest walks as a context for knowledge-building about the natural world. *Cognition and Instruction*, 36(2), 89-118.
- McArdle, E., Neil, G., (2016). *A model of Irish-medium youth work*. Ulster University. Available at: <https://www.glornamona.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/A-MODEL-IMY-2020-1UPDATED-MODEL-2020.pdf>

McArdle, E., & Neill, G. (2023). The Making and Shaping of the Young Gael: Irish-Medium Youth Work for Developing Indigenous Identities. *Social Inclusion*, 11(2), 223-231.

<https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v11i2.6474>

McCarty, T. L., & Nicholas, S. E. (2014). Reclaiming indigenous languages: A reconsideration of the roles and responsibilities of schools. *Review of Research in Education*, 38(1), 106-136.

McGurk, O. (2022). The reproduction of inequality in the Irish-medium education sector in Northern Ireland. [Dissertation: Queen's University Belfast].

McGurk, O. (2020). *Identifying, exploring and evaluating gaps in current provision for Irish-medium youth work in Belfast*. Glór na Móna.

Available at:

<https://www.glornamona.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/GapsinProvisionforIrishMediumYouthWork-OrlaMcGurk-2020-1.pdf>

MacKenzie, A., Engman, M., & McGurk, O. (2022). Overt and symbolic linguistic violence: Plantation ideology and language reclamation in Northern Ireland. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 27(4), 489-501.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2022.2028767>

McKenzie, J. (2022). Addressing historical trauma and healing in Indigenous language cultivation and revitalization. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 1-7.

McIvor, O., & Jacobs, P. (2016, February). NETOLNEW language learning assessment tool (v3.1).

<https://netolnew.ca/all-research-reporting/assessment-tool-report/>.

- Meek, B. A. (2007). Respecting the language of elders: Ideological shift and linguistic discontinuity in a northern Athapaskan community. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 17(1), 23-43.
- Mehan, H. (1979). *Learning lessons: Social organization in the classroom*. Harvard University Press.
- Meredith, R. (2020). Coronavirus: Education Authority material excludes Irish language. BBC. Available at:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-52391304>
- Mhic Mhathúna, M., & Nic Fhionnlaoich, F. (2021). Why parents chose to send their children to Irish-medium immersion preschools: learning from parental choice strategies in Celtic countries. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 29(3), 441-454.
- Nic Aindriú, S., (2019). The additional supports required by pupils with special educational needs in Irish-medium schools [Dissertation: Dublin City University].
- Nic Aindriú, S., Duibhir, P. Ó., Connaughton-Crean, L., & Travers, J. (2022). The CPD needs of Irish-medium primary and post-primary teachers in special education. *Education Sciences*, 12(12), 909.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12120909>
- Nic Aindriú, S., Ó Duibhir, P., & Travers, J. (2020). The prevalence and types of special educational needs in Irish immersion primary schools in the Republic of Ireland, *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 35(5), 603-619.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2020.1732109>

- Ní Fhoighil, N. & Travers, J. (2013). The inclusion of Irish-medium students with special educational needs. In: T. Day & J. Travers (Eds.), *Special and inclusive education: A research perspective*, (pp. 133-150). Bern: Peter Lang
- Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). (2021). 'Main Statistics for Northern Ireland', *Statistics Bulletin* [Census Publication]. Available at:
<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/system/files/statistics/census-2021-main-statistics-for-northern-ireland-phase-1-statistical-bulletin-language.pdf>
- Ó Baoill, D. P. (2007). Origins of Irish-medium education: The dynamic core of language revitalisation in Northern Ireland, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 10(4), 410-427.
<https://doi.org/10.2167/beb452.0>
- Ó Ceallaigh, T. J., & Ní Dhonnabháin, Á. (2015). Reawakening the Irish language through the Irish education system: Challenges and priorities. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education* 8(2), 179-198.
- Ó hIfearnáin, T. (2013). Family language policy, first language Irish speaker attitudes and community-based response to language shift. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 34(4), 348-365.
- Riagáin, P. Ó. (2007). Relationships between attitudes to Irish, social class, religion and national identity in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 10(4), 369-393.
- Otheguy, R., García, O., & Reid, W. (2015). Clarifying translanguaging and deconstructing named languages: A perspective from linguistics. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 6(3), 281-307.

- Paradise, R., & Rogoff, B. (2009). Side by side: Learning through observing and pitching in. *Ethos*, 37, 102-138.
- Pearse, P. (1924). The Murder Machine. Collected works, 24-25. *Corpus of Electronic Texts*.
Available at:
<http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E900007-001/index.html>
- Rogoff, B. (2014). Learning by observing and pitching in to family and community endeavors: An orientation. *Human Development*, 57(2-3), 69-81.
- Smith, L. T., (2016). *Decolonising methodologies* [2nd edition]. Zed Books.
- Spring, J. (2016). *Deculturalization and the struggle for equality: A brief history of the education of dominated cultures in the United States*. Routledge.
- Stevens, R. (2010). Learning as a members' phenomenon: Toward an ethnographically adequate science of learning. *National Society for the Study of Education*, 109(1), 82-97.
- Taff, A., Chee, M., Hall, J., Hall, M.Y.D., Martin, K.N., & Johnston, A. (2018). Indigenous language use impacts wellness. In K. L. Rehg and L. Campbell (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Endangered Languages*, (pp. 862-883). Oxford University Press.
- Terry, G., Hayfield, N., Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology*, 2, 17-37.
- Walsh, S. (2020). *What's the real deal with Stormont's Irish language proposals?* RTÉ.
Available at:
<https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2020/0115/1107583-whats-the-real-deal-with-stormonts-irish-language-proposals/>
- Wolfe, P. (2006). Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8(4), 387-409,

Woolard, K. (2005). Language and identity choice in Catalonia: The interplay of contrasting ideologies of linguistic authority. *UC San Diego: Institute for International, Comparative, and Area Studies*.

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/47n938cp>

Wright, M., & McGrory, O. (2005). Motivation and the adult Irish language learner. *Educational Research*, 47(2), 191-204.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131880500104317>