

“My Polish is dying, and I'm really upset about it”: First language experiences of the 1.5 generation of immigrants in Ireland

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Abstract

Children who immigrated to Ireland in the mid to late 2000s during the largest peak in net-inward migration that the country experienced are now young adults. This group represents what is known as the 1.5 generation (Rumbaut, 1994), a group of immigrants who were born into a language community but migrated to another community where they completed their education. This study explores the self-reported language experiences of such immigrants through semi-structured interviews with three participants aged between 22 and 24 who migrated to Ireland between the ages of four and seven. These participants were recruited using a short exploratory questionnaire. The descriptions of the participants' relationship to their first language indicates a combination of first language attrition relating to, for example, lexical retrieval, interference from the dominant L2, and incomplete language acquisition relating to specific domains of language use. The self-reported effects of this experience of their first language in the 1.5 generation migrant context impact their cultural and personal identity. Participants reported a range of emotions relating to their language loss, including fear, frustration and shame. The findings of this study can contribute to the emerging field of research in first language attrition and may have implications for the development and implementation of language maintenance policy such as those outlined in Ireland's *Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026: Languages Connect* (Department of Education and Skills, 2017).

Key Words

1.5 generation immigrants; first language attrition; incomplete first language acquisition; heritage language maintenance; personal and cultural identity

Introduction

This paper focusses on the language experiences of immigrants who migrated to Ireland in the mid to late 2000s during this time of increased immigration with the accession of 10 new members of the European Union. Since Ireland had predominantly experienced net-emigration <https://www.statista.com/statistics/537502/immigrant-population-of-ireland/>, the arrival of significant numbers of immigrants with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds was a new opportunity and challenge for the country. The linguistic diversity had not previously been present to such an extent. The *National Strategy for Language in Education: Languages Connect* responds to the increase in linguistic diversity by recognising the need to maintain and develop the first language proficiency of ‘the new Irish’ (Goal 2: Diversify and increase the number of languages learned and cultivate the languages of the new Irish) which had not previously been addressed within the country (p. 14).

Individuals who immigrated into Ireland previous to 2017 may not have received language maintenance support and, therefore, have difficulties with their first language including language attrition and incomplete acquisition. Recent initiatives such as *OWL: Our World of Languages* have highlighted the integral role of language in a child’s developing sense of identity and belonging, and aim to integrate the entire linguistic repertoire into the early educational experience (Kerrins & La Morgia, 2023). Since 2018, *Languages Connect* has developed various initiatives to support students’ heritage languages in the primary and post-primary sectors such as offering Summer Camps to support heritage language maintenance as well as a funding scheme for schools to acquire library books in their students’ home languages (<https://languagesconnect.ie/in-the-community/>).

This paper explores these experiences of adults who immigrated to Ireland before the age of 12. The participants in the study did not have access to the kind of supports for their first language outlined above during their educational experience and report on the negative

effects that their perceived resultant linguistic deficiencies have on their identity and emotional well-being. We find it imperative to give voice to the individuals who may have struggled or continue to struggle with their linguistic identity. We are particularly conscious that Ireland continues to experience high levels of immigration. The significant geo-political events of the past three years combined with a strong economic recovery in Ireland post-COVID 19 have contributed to a return to strong immigration figures with the upward trend approaching the peak numbers of 2007. Understanding the experiences of the 1.5 generation of immigrants who have now reached early adulthood reiterates the importance of language support for young migrants and may help us to support future generations of immigrants in developing and maintaining a positive relationship with their first language.

The 1.5 Generation of Immigrants and their Languages

We are conscious of the difficulties inherent in labelling and defining any group of people and are keenly aware particularly that defining a person's identity based on a deficit model of their language proficiency using terms such as 'non-native speaker' (Davies, 2003; O'Rourke, Pujolar & Ramallo, 2015). However, the researcher's personal experience suggests that an understanding of migrants who acquire one language in infancy and another potentially more dominant one in childhood may benefit this group and help serve their needs. We find that the term 1.5 generation of immigrants is useful to inform this discussion and this term as well as studies relating to the group's language experience are discussed in the following section.

Immigrants are often classified based on their immigrant "generation". The first generation, according to Rumbaut (2004, p.1165) are "persons born and socialized in another country who immigrate as adults, although the term technically includes the foreign born regardless of their age at arrival". Their children, who were born into the host country are

normally considered second generation and are often bilingual, speaking both their mother language(s) and the host country's language(s) and perhaps L2 dominant (Venturin, 2023).

An issue with these categories is that those children who were born in their country of origin but immigrated to a new country do not fit perfectly into either the first generation or the second generation. These immigrants are, as Rumbaut (2004) described; “pre-adolescent, primary-school-age children who have learned (or begun to learn) to read and write in the mother tongue at schools abroad, but whose education is largely completed in the host country” (p.1167). They do not align precisely with the first-generation category, as this term typically refers to individuals who emigrated during adulthood, having spent their formative years in their country of origin, which is not the case for these children. Conversely, since these children were not born in the host country, they also do not meet the criteria for being classified as second-generation immigrants. To overcome this challenge of labelling, Rumbaut (1994, 1997, 2004, Rumbaut & Ima, 1988) coined the term ‘1.5 generation migrants’, to represent those that were born outside the host country to immigrant parents but grew up in the host country. He found it is salient to distinguish the multiple generations and age groups when conducting research on immigration, since the variation between “nativity (of self and parents) and in age and life stage of arrival”, have been proven to affect greatly immigrant families’ and individuals’ levels of acculturation (Rumbaut, 2004, p.1164).

This paper is concerned with the experiences of 1.5 generation immigrants’ relating to their first language, that is the language spoken by their family and the community into which they were born prior to emigrating to Ireland. The effects of migration on the 1.5 and earlier generations’ first language is highlighted by (Gallo et al., 2021):

Individuals that abandon their native language environment before puberty seem likely to experience a more severe loss (e.g. Karayayla and Schmid, 2019) than those whose attrition onset occurred later in life. (p. 2)

The definition of first language attrition in the context of this paper is where “lack of contact leads to a reduced level of proficiency in the attriting language” (Schmid & de Bot, 2004). Language attrition, first language attrition especially, is a rather young and under researched aspect of linguistics (Gallo et al., 2021, p.2), especially compared to other domains such as second language acquisition (Prescher, 2007). This may result from the implicit understanding “that monolingualism is the norm” which governed linguistics (Ellis, 2008). As a result, little attention was paid to those that were different, here multilinguals (Ibid.). Moreover, Dewaele (2010) found that most multilinguals are L1 dominant, consequently, researchers paid the most attention to their experiences. However, a recent special issue of the *Language Learning Journal* focuses on the emerging research on language attrition within the field of bilingual studies (Schmitt & Sorokina, 2024) with articles relating to linguistic features of language loss (Lehtinen et al., 2024; Soto & Schmid, 2024) as well as extralinguistic features such as motivation and language attitudes. Previous studies of, for example, Russian-Australians (Venturin, 2023) and German migrants in the Netherlands (Prescher, 2007) highlight issues of identity and well-being related to language loss.

The age of migration may also shape the type of self-reported or perceived deficiency that a member of the 1.5 generation may experience. As Gallo et al (2021) as well as Schmid and de Bot (2004, p. 219) assert, it is important to distinguish between actual language attrition and a lack of linguistic acquisition within their language competence. In other words, individuals who emigrated before the age of 12 reporting struggles with advanced vocabulary or formal register, for example, may not necessarily be experiencing first language attrition. Since 1.5 generation immigrants may not have experienced explicit instruction in this type of

language in their first language, it may be a case that lacunae in their language competencies are related to an incomplete acquisition of their first language as opposed to the attrition of same. It is impossible to “lose” what you never learnt. As an exploratory study, this paper aims to explore the types of experiences that migrants in Ireland have with regard to their first languages and to understand how these experiences impact their well-being.

Method

This paper was inspired by personal experience growing up as an immigrant in Ireland. We recognise the importance of researcher reflexivity and the significance of the personal experiences of the researcher on their subjective relationship to the research topic (Consoli, 2024; Consoli & Ganassin, 2023). Therefore, we provide below a personal statement:

I moved to Ireland at the age of 8 and a few years ago, I realised that my proficiency in Hungarian started to decline. I would struggle to remember words, my mother would frequently correct my grammar and the most striking of all, other speakers began pointing out the fact that I developed an accent when speaking Hungarian. These experiences of struggle with my L1, mixed with comments from family saying I am not even Hungarian anymore caught my curiosity during my undergraduate degree. I wanted to find out if other people are experiencing this as well and how they are dealing with the situation. I knew I wanted to study cross linguistic transfer influencing the L1. Later, I learned that this is referred to as first language attrition (Patricia Toth).

This study explores difficulties that 1.5 generation immigrants in Ireland experience with their first language, like that of the co-author. We recognise the sensitive nature of the research being undertaken and the impact that it may have on participants. Research ethics

approval was sought from the relevant ethics committee and all suitable measures were taken to maintain anonymity and data protection.

Research design

To understand the perspective of this group, two methods were employed. Firstly, a short exploratory questionnaire was used to gain a broad understanding of the types of concerns individuals with relevant experiences might have. As is common in a mixed-methods approach, the questionnaire was used to inform the semi-structured interview and to recruit relevant participants (Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

Questionnaire

This mixed methods study began with a brief questionnaire serving two purposes:

1. Gather general data on 1.5 generation immigrants' first language experiences.
2. Identify suitable interview participants who fit the 1.5 generation criteria and reported first language attrition.

The questionnaire asked about current age, age at move to Ireland, first language(s), and extent of first language difficulties. Respondents could provide contact details for potential interview participation, leading to the recruitment of three suitable candidates.

As can be seen from the table below, 12 responses to the initial questionnaire were gathered. However, since Participants 5 and 11 report their first language to be English, their information was discarded. Those respondents who were between the ages of 20 and 25 and who migrated to Ireland between the ages of 4 and 12 were invited to interview and three suitable participants were identified.

Table 1

Questionnaire participant details and self-reported experiences of FLA

	Current age	Age of migration	First language(s)
Participant 1	22	4	Polish
Participant 2	23	7	Polish
Participant 3	24	7	Slovak
Participant 4	21	11	Hungarian
Participant 5	45	15	English
Participant 6	25	21	Hungarian
Participant 7	41	24	Hungarian
Participant 8	21	9	Hungarian
Participant 9	27	11	Hungarian
Participant 10	40	25	Hungarian
Participant 11	43	10	English
<i>Participant 12</i>	23	7	<i>English and Polish</i>

The data from the questionnaire were analysed for reference to experienced first language attrition and the perceived difficulties that the respondents encountered with their first language. Further analysis of some of these examples can be found in Section 4.

Interview

This study is an exploratory study, thus, choosing a structure that provides some guiding through a complex topic, yet allows for and encourages the elaboration of the interviewees (Dörnyei, 2007, p.136) was deemed as most appropriate. The choice of questions was based on the information from the questionnaire method and the groups outlined by Patton (2002):

- experiences and behaviours,
- opinions and values,
- and feelings.

During the interview process, participants were encouraged to elaborate on any detail which appeared to have relevance to them and their language experiences. The final closing question “is there anything else you would like to add?” was included to allow the interviewee to provide any last input they wish to share.

As outlined in Section 3.1.2, participants for the interview method were recruited through the questionnaire. As can be seen from Table 2, three participants were interviewed for up to an hour each. The participants were all in their early 20s and migrated to Ireland in 2005 or 2006. Two of the participants reported that their first languages are English and Polish, and one reported that their first language is Slovak. All of the participants grew up in Ireland: Participants 2 and 3 were still resident there at the time of the interview while Participant 1 had recently moved to the UK.

Table 2:

Interview participant details

	Interview duration	Transcription word count	Current age	Age of migration	Year of migration	Self-reported first language(s)
Participant 1	1 hour 58 seconds	13, 023	22	4	2005	Polish and English
Participant 2	47 minutes 18 seconds	8,755	24	7	2006	Slovak
Participant 3	58 minutes 46 seconds	8,833	23	7	2005	English and Polish

Once the interview recordings were completed, each interview was then transcribed for both anonymity and analysis purposes. The initial coding was conducted during the transcription

process on Microsoft Word. The edited transcription was then imported into NVivo, where the rest of the coding and analysis took place. The main themes which were identified during the analysis are outlined and discussed in the following section.

1.5 Generation Immigrants and their L1 Challenges

The data analysis revealed a number of areas in which people who migrated to Ireland before the age of 12 found their L1 use to be challenging. In the following section we outline issues with lexical retrieval and grammar usage as well as difficulties operating in certain spheres of the L1 domain.

Lexical Retrieval

The most frequently reported type of first language difficulty within the data was related to lexical retrieval. All 3 interview participants reported that they struggle to find a word or phrase they need.

*I would be on the phone to my nan and all of a sudden I forget the word for dog.
It's like and I can remember things like ridiculous long complicated vocabulary
and then I'll forget the word for dog. (Interview Participant 3)*

This mirrors the findings of a recent study of young speakers of Greek in London which found that monolingual speakers of Greek out-performed the bi-lingual Greek immigrants on a test of semantic fluency (Lazaridou-Chatzigoga & Karatsareas, 2022). A psycholinguistic study conducted with L1 Polish speakers in Ireland using the Child HALA Test found that language dominance shifted from Polish to English for between the ages of eight and eleven.

The participants became quicker and more accurate in accessing English (L2) lexical items than Polish (L1) lexical items at this age (Dubiel, 2019; Dubiel & Guilfoyle, 2021).

Grammatical and Orthographic Accuracy

The second most commonly self-reported area of first language difficulty related to the participants' ability grammatical and orthographical accuracy:

Because like again properly writing Polish, even when I'm writing those letters to my granny though, I catch myself again, misspelling stuff. ... It doesn't come naturally to me if I think about it, and if I remember correctly, sure, but sometimes it's just a real pain to write in Polish.

(Interview Participant 1)

The majority of the participants' education had taken place in the L2 environment, and this may account for the deficiencies in more formal and accuracy-related language competences. This reflects findings of a study of young bilingual speakers of Bulgarian and German which found that some aspects of the L1 grammar were more difficult for bilingual speakers to acquire and maintain (Genevska-Hanke & Hamann, 2024). However, in comparison to L2 learners of the language, L1 speakers were found to have a 'dormant advantage' (Montrul, 2005) regarding grammatical features which can be exploited when supporting their language development and maintenance.

Domains of L1 Use

When reporting on their use of the L1, the participants referred to various domains in which they were able to employ their language competences to a greater or lesser degree. The participants reported that they predominantly used their L1 when speaking with family

members. Although there were some issues with competences in that setting (relating to, for example, lexical retrieval as outlined above), the use of the L1 for more interactions outside of the home, with unfamiliar interlocutors and on more complex topics presented additional challenges to the participants. When asked if they felt fluent in their L1, one participant noted that they can understand everything in their L1 but struggles to explain more complex ideas:

Let's say when I go back home and people are asking me, what do you do for your job? Or what did you study in college? It's like, I don't really know what the word for like legal secretary is. I don't know how to say that or kind of words that adults would use or like workplace kind of conversation, those kind of things.
(Interview Participant 1)

Similarly, Interview Participant 3 reports that she would not know where to begin if she were to give a tutorial in her subject area in Polish, a task she could easily take on in English:

And I obviously know so much science at this point that I don't translate back to Polish either, and I don't like that cause I feel like if I wanted to give a tutorial on ... some classical mechanics in Polish, I would literally be like, "Sorry, like how do I even start?" (Interview Participant 3)

By living in an environment where their language use is severely limited, participants' range of linguistic knowledge may have been negatively impacted. In one case, the discussion of domains of use went beyond examples of unknown jargon in professional or academic contents to the challenges of communication during personal relations:

...[E]ven like sexual times, you're just like, I don't even know how to speak to you cause I only know this, I guess childhood version of my language say like how could I communicate to you from like an adult to an adult? (Interview Participant 3)

Experiencing language difficulties in these domains of adult life may result from an incomplete acquisition of the first language.

Causes of L1 challenges

L2 interference

When mentioned by participants, difficulties with grammar are frequently linked to translation from English. This implies an influence of the English language on the speakers' mind:

I use phrases with a word order that mirrors the English equivalent but is grammatically incorrect. (Questionnaire Participant 9)

Furthermore, two participants even reported that their internal language was English when asked about their experiences of first language attrition in the questionnaire:

Also, I used to think in Polish, I never do now, all of my internal dialogue is in English. (Questionnaire Participant 1)

Ungrammatical utterances in the first language which result from the interference of English as the dominant language reflects the language contact and language change framework

approach to understanding first language acquisition (Schmid & de Bot, 2004). In this understanding of language loss, the L1 is changed because of the L2 encroaching on it. One hypothesis relating to the processes involved in this language loss refers to the simplification of structures in the attriting language whereby a structure which exists in a more complex form in that language is superseded by a structure from the L2 which has a similar function but a less complex construction (ibid. p. 213). This would also imply that the nature of the languages themselves may influence the attrition which occurs.

Incomplete First Language Acquisition

All three interview participants acknowledged that some of their self-perceived deficiencies may not originate from their L1 attrition, but rather result from the incomplete language acquisition of their L1. Interview Participant 2 highlighted that they moved at the age of 7, therefore, their language acquisition of their L1 slowed down in the L2 environment:

I moved here when I was 7, so I kind of have the vocabulary of a 7-year-old.

Like obviously I picked up things afterwards. But ..., most of my Slovak speaking and learning was at a very young age. (Interview Participant 2)

This piece of information was emphasised by all three interview participants, conveying their awareness that not all of their struggles stem from forgetting their first language or English becoming the more dominant language in their mind, but also that their acquisition on their first language is not complete. Interview Participant 3 further commented that without Polish school, their language competency of their L1 may have remained the same since immigration.

[Polish school] gave me a good enough knowledge that I can communicate better and I'm not stuck with the Polish knowledge of a 7 year old rather than, you know, maybe hopefully at 12/13 year old. (Interview Participant 3)

This factor makes it more challenging to examine which aspects of their struggles stem from forgetting their first language and which from simply not learning it fully, having grown up in a different language speaking country.

The Effects of L1 Challenges

In this section, we look at the effects of participants' reported self-perceived language deficiencies. We present ideas around the impact that it can have on identity, and we differentiate between cultural and personal identity. In this way, we can highlight the effect that their linguistic relationships can have on the individual's relationship with their heritage culture and vice-versa. It can also affect their own self-perception. The participants referred to myriad emotions related to the loss and incomplete acquisition of their first language, and we explore these in the subsequent section. The negative emotions they associate with this experience are both a result of and a potential contributor to their language attrition.

Cultural Identity

The cultural capital of a language plays a significant role on the level of pride speakers feel towards their first language. Based on the interviews, Participants 2 and 3 reported feeling proud of being Slovakian and Polish, whereas one did not. The two Polish participants frequently cited politics as one of the main reasons for not being proud of their country and thus their language, as the political situation in Poland is quite divisive:

...your impression of your language always stems from how you feel about the country or about the... Political situation in it and everything that's kind of piled on top of that... (Interview Participant 3)

The current context in Poland may explain the stark contrast between Polish participants and the Slovakian participant who reported “I’m very – I love it like I’m very proud of it [Slovakian]” in contrast. Such negative feelings towards one’s country of origin could decrease the attention paid to first language attrition, similarly to the language having low cultural capital – in both instances, losing a language with “low value” may not be seen as a big problem by speakers. In saying that, one participant recognised the fluidity of identity and their own agency in their relationship with their cultural identity. When asked if they feel less Polish as a result of first language attrition:

I think I've never felt like that... But I kind of get that in a sense that one could feel that way and I could see that I definitely could. But I feel like I refused to.

(Interview Participant 3)

This comment is striking for two reasons. First, it offers some validation for the suspicion that speakers may feel like less-valid members of a community due to their first language attrition which prompted this paper. Secondly, this comment suggests a post-structuralist view of identity, where Interview Participant 3 believes they have a choice in allowing their attrition to affect their identity or not.

Personal Identity

Participants referred to ideas of dependency, childhood and the interrupted nature of their personal identity in their first language. One participant reported feeling like they depended on their mother for reassurance and support. She gave the example of navigating a formal setting in which she was to renew her identification card “*It was really like I was kind of depending on my mom to, like, not translate, but to reassure me*” (Interview Participant 2).

Interview Participant 2 reported a feeling of frustration of not be able to achieve the task without help: “*actually it was a bit like I almost wish I didn't have to have my mom there, like I wish I could just go out and like do this thing cause it's like it's an adult activity*”. Given that this participant was 24 years old at the time of interviewing, one may interpret their reported dependency on their mother as infantilising. Indeed, briefly after reporting on this experience, Interview Participant 2 expressed feeling like “*a child again*” when asked to reflect on their emotions during situations where they do not feel comfortable using their first language.

The maintenance of the L1 may also relate to the 1.5 generation migrant’s view of their own intelligence. Interview Participant 1 reported feeling angry for not receiving a H1 for their Leaving Certificate Polish exam result because she expected herself to receive the highest result being someone “*bright*” in her own eyes. Interview Participant 2 mentioned how not experiencing attrition would affect her on an emotional basis: “*Maybe it's more of like an emotional thing. Like I speak my language perfectly and it's my language and I'm so proud of it*”. Interview Participant 3 reported previously linking her English knowledge to her intelligence when she was younger, as well as hypothesising “*I don't know if I maybe would feel that more intelligent, if it didn't go away. like a little bit more sure of myself...*”. These findings suggest that experiences of the first language among members of the 1.5 generation of immigrants may influence members of the 1.5 generation of immigrants’ identity and feelings of self-competence.

Emotions and Perceived First Language Deficiencies

The analysis of the interview data revealed repeated references to emotional distress that can occur as a result. Three categories of negative emotion relating to the use of the first language were identified in the interview data: fear, frustration and shame.

Fear in the form of anxiety and nervousness was prominent in the data in relation to using the L1 with other L1 speakers. Interview Participant 1 notes that they have anxiety about their ability to perform in their L1 in a conversation with strangers to the extent that they need to practice their utterances in advance of the interaction:

I'm more nervous. More unsure of myself again, I think about everything beforehand. Before I say it, and honestly like process it 10 times beforehand before it actually comes out of my mouth. (Interview Participant 1)

Participant 2 describes anxiety related to negative feedback from member of their L1 community regarding their language use and outlines their fear of being embarrassed and standing out as a less competent speaker of their L1:

I think maybe like a relative or somebody, probably did say something negative and I remember, that's something I'm always like afraid of. So, I think it has happened where it's like Oh my God, I don't wanna be embarrassed or I want to just seem like everybody else. (Interview Participant 2)

We are aware that affective factors may have a strong inhibiting effect on language use and language acquisition so that these emotional responses may lead to further language attrition.

Frustration and annoyance were frequently expressed during reflections on instances of attrition, mirroring the findings of Koven (2007) and Venturin (2023). The participants directed this annoyance at themselves and were frustrated by the gaps in their language:

When I'm speaking to someone in Polish and I can't think of a word, I get, again, frustrated about myself and little anxious and partially annoyed because I'm like, I know what I'm thinking is at the end of my tongue. I just don't remember the word. I remember it in English. (Interview Participant 3)

Lastly, sadness and shame were referenced when participants were reflecting on their experienced attrition. One interview participant was asked why she didn't mention her language struggles to her mother:

It's not like I didn't get everything, but it wasn't natural. It didn't just click like that. I don't know. Maybe there was like a little bit of shame in it too. That little, tiny bit of hey, I should get this. And I don't or I don't feel confident 100% in speaking and communicating right now in a formal setting and that's not great because I meant to be Polish, right? (Interview Participant 1)

Participant 3 also referred to her relationship with the language and her mother. She was sad to be losing her competence and wanted her mother to speak more of the L1 with her:

I gave out to my mum, I was like, you're not speaking English to me anymore. You're speaking Polish to me because my Polish is dying and I'm really upset about it. (Interview Participant 3)

This range of negative emotion caused by the participants' self-perceived deficiencies in their L1 may have a negative impact on them as L1 speakers as well as on their own self-image. This section explores the effects that L1 attrition and incomplete L1 acquisition can have on the speaker in terms of their cultural and personal identities, as well as on their own emotional well-being in relation to their families and L1 community.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper attempts to shed light on the lived experience of 1.5 generation immigrants in Ireland regarding their relationship to their first language. We focus on representatives of this community who immigrated in the mid-2000s as children and are now adults living in and between their first and second languages. The qualitative, exploratory approach allowed us to discover aspects of the participants' complex relationship to their first language and culture and to consider the potentially wide-reaching effects of this relationship on them as individuals.

Participants reported difficulties with their L1 in terms of their ability to retrieve lexical items and to be accurate in the grammar and orthography of their L1. They also were concerned about their ability to perform tasks in complex, official and adult domains of language use. The perspective of the interview participants indicated that these difficulties were a consequence of incomplete first language acquisition since they predominantly used their L1 in family settings, and of language attrition caused by the interference from their dominant L2, English. The participants reported that their personal identity, as well as their

cultural identity can be affected by their negative perceptions of their own language proficiency. Furthermore, a number of emotions linked to both the loss and the incomplete acquisition of the participants' first languages were uncovered in the data. This indicates that the negative emotions may result from the difficult relationship with the first language on the one hand while also contributing to further attrition on the other.

One attempt at providing support is a strategic plan by the name “Languages Connect Ireland’s Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education”, which was published in 2017 by the Department of Education and Skills. Goal 2: “diversify and increase the uptake of languages learned and cultivate the languages of the new Irish” is particularly significant for the findings of this paper. First, by recognising immigrant languages to be a “national resource” (p.15), speakers may be more inclined to maintain their heritage languages because they can recognise its value in Irish society. Second, by cultivating the languages of the new Irish, it could help reduce their perceived language deficiency, as well as the negative emotions that have been found to accompany it. Immigrant children continue to arrive in the country and based on the findings of this study, adequate support could potentially make a difference to their lives growing up in Ireland. These findings suggest that first language attrition and perceived deficiencies in the first language can have a negative influence on those who experience it, highlighting a need for support.

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