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Chapter 5

New speakers of Irish and identities

Introduction

The purpose of this and the subsequent chapter is to explore in more depth some of the themes that emerged in the analysis of historical and theoretical literature in previous chapters and in the discourses of new speakers themselves. While the themes are myriad and could fill several books, we have chosen to focus on two particularly salient fields: language and identity and language ownership. Similar to Chapter 4, in these two thematic chapters, we present the interview material and ethnographic observations in the first person, so as to draw on our own personal experiences and to reflect upon how research is inserted our personal, social and professional lives. The data in the current chapter on identities is examined by John while Bernie will look specifically at new speaker accounts through the lens of language ownership in Chapter 6.There are further distinctions between the two chapters: Chapter 5 is based largely on discrete interviews with individual speakers of Irish all of whom report high levels of competence and Chapter 6 is based both on interviews with and participant observation of a group of less fluent new speakers who meet for the purpose of practising their Irish. It is not our intention to give the impression that social groups of Irish speakers involve only those who are at lower levels of fluency; in fact many of the more fluent speakers featured in Chapter 5 are themselves involved in various social and political groups linked to language promotion.

Irish speakers and identities

While most Irish historians have not engaged critically in recent decades with the decline of Irish (see Walsh, 2012a: 4-13 and 69-112), there have been some exceptions, notably Lee (1989) and more recently Wolf (2014) and Morley (2017). Lee is particularly pertinent as analyses in depth the weakened position of Irish in the new state and its close relationship with national identity in the 20th Century (1989: 658-674). Lee argues that Irish is in fact so central to Irish identity that 'but for the loss of the language, there would be little discussion about identity in the Republic' (ibid: 662). Sociolinguistic surveys over the past 50 years confirm this association, with consistently large majorities of those surveyed between 1973 and 1993 in the Republic of Ireland (between 60 and 72 percent) supporting Irish as a symbol of ethnic identity (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994: 19). A further survey in 2000-2002 showed a significant drop in support although a large minority still supported that view, evidence of the resilience of nationalism despite sweeping socio-economic change in the previous decade (Ó Riagáin, 2012: 125-126). This decline was in fact reversed again in a survey conducted in 2013 with almost two-thirds of those surveyed in the Republic expressing support for Irish as a cornerstone of identity (Darmody and Daly, 2015: 79-80). The later surveys (from 2000 onwards) were conducted on an all-Ireland basis, and underlined stark differences in attitudes towards language and national identity on both sides of the border. For instance, only four per cent of Northern Protestants believed that Irish was a defining feature of Northern Irish identity in 2000-2001, compared to 21 per cent of Catholics (Ó Riagáin, 2007:379–382). In the 2013 survey, only one in three (33 per cent) of Northern respondents agreed that Irish was a fundamental part of the identity of Northern Ireland (Darmody and Daly, 2015: 79–80). These contrasting findings point to the distinct political contexts north and south of the border as described in Chapter 3.

Such quantitative findings are by their nature limited in scope and conceal the complexities of the relationship between language and national identity in the increasingly post-national contexts in which Irish speakers dwell. The aim of this chapter is to investigate how language and identity play out in the case of new speakers. Since beginning this research project in 2012, we have become more and more aware of the complexity of identity positions adopted by new speakers, far beyond the tired clichés of language and national identity. New speakers do not unquestioningly accept historical ethnolinguistic ideologies about the Irish language and have a range of relationships with it, some of which are conditioned by other ideologies around competing versions of Irishness. In this chapter, we analyse the range of personal identity positions held by new speakers in relation to their inherited or acquired linguistic profiles. New speakers adopt a range of positions in relation to Irish and/or English or to sub-strands within those general categories such as standard Irish, Gaeltacht dialects of Irish or the varieties of English spoken in Ireland.

New speakers of Irish align themselves with what are perceived to be pre-existing linguistic groups or forge new categories of self-identification based on their newspeakerness. Therefore, as a result of their changed linguistic practice, a person may adopt or construct a new identity as an Irish speaker and see themselves first and foremost as part of a like-minded group of individuals committed to speaking the language regularly. However, within that group of speakers whose identity is rooted firmly in Irish, many elaborate to explain that this is based on a specific type of Irish: this may be a standardised variety with a high premium on accuracy, a more hybridised variety with strong elements of mixing or a local and traditional Gaeltacht variety. Alternatively, speakers may express a mixed or ambiguous identity about their relationship to one or other of the languages. The profiles explored below also include people who were raised with Irish (or with Irish and English) outside the Gaeltacht and who defined their identity differently to Gaeltacht speakers with a similar

linguistic background. The discussion also contains an analysis of the discourses of people who, despite their frequent use of Irish, do not express an allegiance to Irish speakers as a group and see themselves primarily as English speakers. In the final section, the intersection of newspeakerness and sexuality is examined in an analysis of a sub-group of new speakers who identified as gay.

In general, new speakers who use Irish regularly and who invest emotionally or politically in the language tend to position themselves as a third group between what they see as 'learners' and 'native speakers', but also accord greater legitimacy to those raised with Irish in the Gaeltacht. For such speakers, consistent use of Irish is linked to the ongoing performance of their identity, and there is evidence that incorporating a new language into one's linguistic repertoire can have implications for self-identification if accompanied by ideological investment in the promotion of the language itself (Puigdevall et al., 2018). The new speakers who see themselves predominantly as English speakers are qualitatively different in terms of their ideological disposition while the gay new speakers discussed in the final section display highly complex and often tense relationships with Irish. The discussion in this chapter draws on the theoretical frame of Codó (2018) to analyse identity narratives and transnational mobility in Barcelona. Similar to the ways in which transnationals engage with or reject Catalan in the case of multilingual Barcelona, new speakers of Irish may draw on national identity rhetoric as part of their own struggles for personal coherence in eminently post-national contexts. Such identity construction and re-construction is a key concern of this chapter and in what follows John will present material in the first person in his examination of specific interviews and observations at fieldwork sites which relate to the construction of new speaker identities.

Primary Irish-speaking identity

Roibeárd is from Dublin and was 30 at the time of the interview. His language trajectory was discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4 but in this chapter I focus on his discourse around identity and language. Roibeárd distinguished between an Irish national identity and an Irish language identity, categorising himself as a 'Gael' rather than an Irishman (see Chapter 4). As a result, he disassociated himself from many of the stereotypical symbols of Irishness which do not depend on the Irish language. He referred back to his youth where he felt that he was choosing a different identity to his friends who spoke mostly or entirely English:

> B'fhéidir gur ag an aois sin *do you know* chuir cuid is mó de mo chairde b'fhéidir a chuid féiniúlacht in iúl trí foireann sacar na hÉireann *so* bhí i gcónaí 'Ó is Éireannach mé' ach anois ní bhreathnaím orm féin mar Éireannach breathnaím orm féin níos mó mar Ghael … baineann sé le teanga agus cultúr agus spórt agus mar sin *so* cé go bhfuil an-spéis agam i rudaí idirnáisiúnta *like* feicim gurb í Gaeilge mo chéad teanga anois *do you know?* Agus cinnte go n-úsáidim sílim go mbainim úsáid labhraím níos mó Gaeilge ná Béarla anois agus rinne mé mo chinneadh féin chun obair trí mheán na Gaeilge agus / *so* is dócha b'fhéidir gur go n-úsáidtear féiniúlacht mar b'fhéidir easpa féinmhisneach LF nó féinmheas ach is dócha an difríocht idir Ghael agus Éireannach ná go gcuirim ná ní bhreathnaím ar Lá Fhéile Pádraig agus foireann sacar na hÉireann le m'fhéiniúlacht a chur in iúl *like* breathnaím ar an gceol traidisiúnta na cluichí Gaelacha agus / an teanga agus mar sin chun an fhéiniúlacht sin a chur in iúl.
>
> *Perhaps at that age do you know most of my friends expressed their identity through the Irish soccer team so I was always 'Oh, I'm Irish' but now I don't look at myself as Irish I look at myself as a Gael… it's linked to language and culture and sport and so on so even though I am very interested in international things like I see that Irish is my first language do you know and it's certain that I think that I speak more Irish than English now and I made a decision to work through Irish and / so I suppose maybe identity is used due to a lack of self-confidence LF or self-respect but I suppose the difference between* Gael [Irish speaker] *and* Éireannach [Irish person] *is that I don't look to St. Patrick's Day and the Irish soccer team to express my identity like I look to traditional music to Gaelic games and / the language and so on to express my identity.*

By favouring 'Gael' over 'Éireannach', Roibeárd aligned himself with a specific form of Irish identity, one that is contingent upon speaking Irish and that he sees as associated with certain cultural practices ('traditional music, Gaelic games'). He favoured this as an identity option rather than one which he believed would relegate the Irish language to a marginal and

symbolic function in an English-speaking Irish identity based on 'soccer' or 'St. Patrick's Day'. Soccer, originally an English game, was in this case deemed less valid as a vehicle for Irish identity than games such as Gaelic football and hurling which have a longer historical pedigree in Ireland. Roibeárd may have been referring to the success of the Irish soccer team in the late 1980s and early 1990s which became a mark of cultural identity for many Irish people at the time. The reference to St. Patrick's Day referred to the Irish national holiday which is seen by many as a performance of contemporary Irishness but tends to be expressed overwhelmingly in English with nothing more than symbolic use of Irish. There is nothing inherent in traditional music or Gaelic games that requires either have to be expressed in Irish (they are in fact more often than not expressed in English) but Roibeárd appeared to argue that they are more authentically Irish and more closely linked to the Irish language than, as he put it, soccer and St. Patrick's Day.

The fact that, at the time of the interview, he saw himself as a 'Gael' and considered Irish his 'first language' suggests that he did not have these views in the past, perhaps reflecting his rejection of Irish as a teenager and his decision to reclaim it subsequently. At first glance, this appears to be in keeping with the constructivist approach to language and identity discussed in Chapter 2 which allows speakers to depart from pre-determined, seemingly static linguistic or cultural categories and construct more open-ended or fluid identities. However, Roibeárd may in fact see himself as having returned to or reclaimed his original identity as a 'Gael', reflecting the desire of one of his parents that Irish be transmitted to him in the home. At a later stage in the interview, Roibeárd aligned himself with 'na Gaeil' (Gaels) as an ethnic group, inferring that he saw such a group as holding a different identity to the majority of Irish people ('Éireannaigh'): 'Is dócha mar duine den oileán seo agus den ghrúpa eitneach seo / tá gaol nó tá ceangail níos láidre agam leis an nGaeilge ná mar atá ag an mBéarla' / 'I suppose as someone from this island and of this

ethnic group / I have a stronger relationship or connection with Irish than with English'. The reference to the 'island' of Ireland hints at a belief that Irish belongs not only to those in the Irish state but to all the people of Ireland, north and south. This comment is further evidence of Roibeárd's desire to decouple Irish from the Irish state and to position himself as a member of a national minority of active and committed Irish speakers scattered throughout Ireland, north and south. Whereas many Irish speakers in Northern Ireland have until relatively recently shared a cultural identity directly conflicting with the British state, Irish speakers in the Republic have since 1922 enjoyed the official support of the state (see Chapter 3). By distancing himself from the mainstream English-speaking identity associated with that state, Roibeárd was signalling his opposition to the marginalisation of Irish within that constructed national identity. Defining Irish speakers as a separate ethnic group based on distinct linguistic and cultural practice also suggests that his identity is based on resistance to the dominance of English. Although Irish waned in importance in his youth, there is no doubt about the primacy of speaking Irish to his current identity position and that he sees himself first and foremost as an Irish speaker.

When I met him, Odhrán was a 44-year old man who was brought up speaking Irish in a city and working in the community sector in the Gaeltacht. For him, being able to speak Irish was the most important part of his identity and similar to Roibeárd, he described himself as a 'Gael' rather than 'Éireannach':

> Tá sé tábhachtach do m'fhéiniúlacht go pearsanta ... is gné thábhachtach de mo shaol é agus cé mé féin agus eh is dóigh tá cuid mhaith de m'fhéiniúlacht déanta *you know* ag an nGaeilge...Caithfidh mé a rá gur Gael mé ní airím mar Éireannach eh agus is dóigh seo rud pearsanta em / cé go bhfuil [mé] is dóigh bródúil as an tír airím níos Gaelaí ná Éireannach agus tá gnéithe den saol in Éirinn nach dtaitníonn liom agus eh ceapaim go mbeadh níos mó bá agam don Ghaelachas agus don saol Gaeilge sin an saol comhaimseartha oscailte leathan *do you know*? Is dóigh le roinnt blianta anuas eh tá LF sórt m'fhéiniúlacht ó thaobh na em Éireannachas ag meath *you know*? Níl an méid sin dúil agam ann níos mó.

> *It's important for my identity personally ... it is an important aspect of my life and who I am and eh I suppose a lot of my identity is based on Irish ... I have to say that I am a Gael I don't feel like an Irishman eh and I suppose that's a personal thing em / although I'm proud of the country I feel like more of a Gael than an Irishman* [Éireannach] *and there are aspects of life in Ireland that I don't like and eh I think I like the Irish speaking identity and that Irish speaking world more that contemporary open broad world do you know? I suppose in the last few years eh LF kind of my identity in relation to Irishness* [Éireannachas][1] *is on the wane you know? I don't have much interest in it any more.*

For Odhrán, Irish played a central role in his life and therefore formed the cornerstone of his identity. He expressed a greater allegiance to that Irish-speaking identity than to a more widespread Irish identity expressed in English and representing aspects of Irish life that he does not like. Similar to Roibeárd, he distanced himself from that generic English-speaking identity and chose one based on Irish. His references to an Irish-speaking identity as 'open' and 'broad' appear to challenge historical perceptions of Irish as backward and insular and linked to the conservative Catholicism that characterised much Irish social life for the 20th Century (see below). When I questioned him about this, Odhrán acknowledged that such a view existed in the past but argued that younger generations had become more open to the label of 'Gael' as a positive identity marker. There is no doubting that he had embraced it as such: 'Feictear domsa go pearsanta gur rud liobrálach oscailte dearfach í an Ghaeilge sa saol atá inniu ann'/ 'I think personally that the Irish language is a liberal open and positive thing in contemporary life'.

Irish language identity linked to standard language or dialect

In addition to seeing themselves first and foremost as Irish speakers, many participants also told me of the importance of promoting a more standardised version of Irish that would reflect their own backgrounds and not align them too closely with any traditional dialect with which they felt little personal affinity. Such subjects may either favour a high level of accuracy in pronunciation and idiom while others are less concerned about language mixing.

A smaller number of new speakers chose to align themselves with traditional Gaeltacht dialects with which they have an affinity, often through family connections.

Many speakers advocated the widespread communicative use of Irish as what they saw as a national language without excessive emphasis on or recourse to traditional varieties. This encompasses issues of competence: although such speakers may express their linguistic insecurity by comparison with native speakers, this does not deter them from regularly using Irish and promoting it regularly in their own lives and in broader society. They may admit freely to speaking a mixture of accents or to using non-native pronunciation but for them the act of ongoing use is more important in terms of promoting Irish than 'sounding native'. This does not mean a linguistic free-for-all: most in this category, while recognising their own shortcomings, place a high value on accuracy in linguistic production but not necessarily on Gaeltacht accents.

Iarfhlaith was 33 at the time of the interview and worked in an Irish language organisation in Northern Ireland. Although he had learned a lot of Irish in the Gaeltacht and used certain regional forms, he did not align completely with any one traditional form. Iarfhlaith emphasised the importance of maintaining the unity of the Irish speaking community and warned against excessive adherence to localised Gaeltacht dialects which could, in his view, impede communication. However, although a particular Gaeltacht accent was not deemed necessary, accuracy and correct pronunciation were highly valorised:

> Ní dóigh liom go bhfuil sé tábhachtach go mbeadh blas na Gaeltachta ar an Ghaeilic / sílim go bhfuil sé tábhachtach go bhfuil Gaeilic cruinn … tá mé bródúil as an bhlas cainte atá agam ach ní bheinn ag brú cineál Gaeilic dhoiléir Dhún na nGall nó Uladh ar dhuine ar bith // bheadh sé tábhachtach domhsa a bheith cineál soiléir go leor fosta / an coincheap nó an fhealsúnacht atá agam // amharcaimse ar gach duine a bhfuil Gaeilge acu mar phobal teanga amháin agus má tá ceanndánachas róláidir ag daoine / briseann sin an teagmháil síos píosa beag.

> *I don't think it's important that Irish would have a Gaeltacht accent / I think it's important that Irish would be accurate ... I'm proud of my accent but I wouldn't push*

kind of unclear Donegal or Ulster Irish on anyone // it would be important for me to be clear enough also // the concept or philosophy I have / I look at every person who speaks Irish as one language community and if people are too stubborn / that breaks down the connection a little bit.

Drawing on Urla's concept of activism in the Basque case which speaks of '"pushing" the existing habitus of language use and attitudes out of the domain of the taken for granted and into the realm of the ideological' (2012: 13), Iarfhlaith's discourse can be seen as a contestation of the power of the native speaker ideology in relation to Irish which prioritised native over learner varieties. The emergence of new speakers and associated post-traditional varieties has unsettled the historical sociolinguistic authority which granted greater prestige to localised forms of traditional dialect (O'Rourke and Walsh, 2015; Ó Murchadha, 2019). By not distancing himself completely from traditional forms and preferring pan-regional accuracy in communication, Iarfhlaith can also be said to tread a middle ground between Woolard's twin ideological poles of authenticity and anonymity used to analyse ideologies of linguistic authority in Catalonia (2016). Woolard sees anonymity as attaching to dominant languages that are authoritative because they are anonymous and unmarked and seen as belonging to no-one in particular. Authenticity, on the other hand, attaches to minoritised languages seen as closely linked to a particular place or past (see Chapter 2). Iarfhlaith is somewhere in the middle as his linguistic production is marked as regional but yet his ideology veers towards the notion of Irish as the national language, in that he criticises excessive localism. His framing of the promotion of Irish reflects what Urla calls 'a complex and untidy admixture of accommodation and resistance to dominant-language ideology that can give rise to a rupturing of an existing linguistic economy as well as to new framings for language' (2012:12). Iarfhlaith resists the dominance of English through his activism for Irish and sees himself first and foremost as an Irish speaker. However, by prioritising accuracy and the standard language over localism he moves closer to a homogenising approach well-

established in dominant languages, thereby replacing the historical native speaker ideology with new forms of prescriptivism.

Similar themes of unity and accuracy were echoed by 29 year-old Sarah, who worked for a national Irish language organisation when I interviewed her. She had been worried about not adopting a traditional dialect but was now coming to terms with her new speaker status, based on the paramount importance of communicating with other speakers without the perceived authenticity of a Gaeltacht accent:

> Má théimid rómhion isteach sa scéal agus má bhrisimid suas mionlach atá ann cheana féin ó thaobh labhairt na Gaeilge de foghlaimeoirí agus cainteoirí dúchais ... measaim go bhfuil tá sé an-tábhachtach go ndéanaimid cumarsáid le chéile ... agus domsa bhí tráth ann go rabhas an-bhuartha nár roghnaigh mé canúint agus cé acu a bheadh agam agus anois an saghas dearcadh a bheadh agam air ná is cuma pé duine atá mé ag labhairt leo fad is atá mé in ann cumarsáid a dhéanamh … agus tá mé ag éirí níos compordaí de réir a chéile tá sé ag glacadh a dhóthain ama orm ach tá mé ag éirí níos compordaí go bhfuil canúint Laighean agam agus gurb ann dó sin ar uairibh tá canúint Bhaile Átha Cliath go sonrach agam agus freisin más rud é go bhfuil beagáinín den Bhéarlachas caite isteach ansin is í sin forás na teanga // tá éabhlóid ag teacht uirthi de réir a chéile.

> *If we go too deeply into things and break up a minority that already exists in terms of speaking Irish both learners and native speakers ... I think it's important that we communicate with each other ... and for me there was a time that I was very worried that I didn't choose a dialect and which one would I have and now my kind of attitude is that it doesn't matter who I am speaking to as long as I can communicate [...] and I am getting more comfortable gradually it is taking me a while but I am getting more comfortable with having a Leinster dialect and that that exists sometimes I specifically have the Dublin dialect and also if there are Anglicisms thrown in that is language development // it is evolving gradually.*

Sarah's discourse can be interpreted as a struggle over language ownership, the ways in which she attempts to control the production and distribution of linguistic resources (O'Rourke & Ramallo, 2011). When asked if she felt she 'owned' Irish, Sarah hesitated and said that she would like to own it more. Her identity as a new speaker activist is linked to her growing legitimacy as a speaker which derives from making peace with her 'Dublin dialect'

but that process is not unproblematic and is clearly ongoing. Bernie discusses issues of ownership in greater detail in Chapter 7.

The profile of Karen, aged 27 and who worked for another national Irish language organisation, was discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4 but here I focus on her discourse around identity. Karen recounted to me how she rejected attempts by a university lecturer to oblige her to adopt a traditional dialect:

> Ó thaobh na canúintí de chuir sé as domsa i gcónaí is cuimhin liom nuair a thosaigh mé leis an gcéim seo agus nuair a thosaigh mé leis an nGaeilge go hoifigiúil // dúradh linn go raibh orainn canúint a roghnú agus bhí orainn idir Cúige Uladh Connacht nó Mumhan a roghnú agus is cuimhin liomsa go ndúirt mise leis an léachtóir is as Baile Átha Cliath dom agus dúirt sé // bhuel caithfidh tú ceann dos na trí canúint seo a phiocadh agus dúirt mé Ach is as Baile Átha Cliath dom // conas gur féidir liom ceann a phiocadh? agus ansin chuir sé ceist orm // bhuel d'fhreastail tú ar choláiste samhraidh is dócha? Agus dúirt mise d'fhreastail agus bhí mé i gConamara *so* phioc mé canúint Chonamara mar sin agus sin a dhein mé ach níl níl canúint Chonamara agam […] cuireann sé as dom […] go mbeadh orm blas nó canúint éigin a chumadh agus a chur orm féin ar nós gur ligean orm gurb as Chonamara nó gurb as an Rinn nó gurb as áit éigin dom / cé gurb as Baile Átha Cliath dom […] arís nuair a chloisim fiú daoine de mo chairde as Baile Átha Cliath ag labhairt Gaeilge / gan iarracht a dhéanamh foghraíocht na Gaeilge a úsáid i gceart nó na fuaimeanna cearta a rá cuireann sé as dom mar tá a fhios agam go bhfuil agus go raibh agus go bhfuil fós tionchar Bhéarla Bhaile Átha Cliath ar mo chuid Gaeilge agus conas nach mbeadh?
>
> *In terms of the dialects it always disappointed me when I started this degree and when I started with Irish officially // we were told that we had to choose a dialect and we had to either choose Ulster, Connacht or Munster and I remember that I said to the lecturer I am from Dublin and he said // well you have to choose one of these three dialects and I said // but I'm from Dublin // how are I supposed to choose one? And then he asked me // well I suppose you went to a summer college? And I said I did and I was in Connemara[2] so I chose the Connemara dialect so but I don't have Connemara Irish [...] it bothers me [...] that I would have to make up and put on an accent or a dialect and pretend that I'm from Connemara or Ring[3] or somewhere / even though I'm from Dublin [...] again when I hear people from among my friends from Dublin speaking Irish / without attempting to use the correct pronunciation of Irish or the correct sounds that bothers me because I know that the English of Dublin has influenced and continues to influence my Irish and how wouldn't it?*

This extract can also be interpreted using Woolard's frame of authenticity and anonymity. For Karen, the imposition of a Gaeltacht variety through the education system was seen as inauthentic as an identity option. 'Putting on an accent' or 'pretending' to be from a certain

place did not reflect her identity as a Dubliner. Although she devalorised what she saw as poor pronunciation, she seemed to accept as inevitable the influence of English on her Irish. Later in the interview she told me that she still did not feel that she spoke 'fíor-Ghaeilge' ('real' or 'true' Irish, by which she seemed to mean an idealised traditional form of Gaeltacht Irish) and that her constant linguistic analysis of her own Irish was not a 'natural' way to speak a language. This strongly echoes Woolard's contention that both authenticity and anonymity are founded on the ideology of sociolinguistic naturalism, the notion that real or authentic linguistic behaviour is seen as natural (2016: 30-32). Although Karen rejected the authenticity of imposing traditional Gaeltacht varieties on new speakers, she did not see her own speech as authentic either. Her identity position and her activism remained under the shadow of the authority of the native speaker.

Karen's ongoing concern about her linguistic identity stood in stark contrast to Feargal, a 23-year-old running his own business when I met him in Dublin. Feargal positioned himself clearly as an Irish speaker and was involving in promoting Irish but outside formal language organisations. However his identity was based on speaking a markedly post-traditional variety of Irish which he embraced without reservation as legitimate and necessary for the future of the language. In fact, he argued that the promotion of accurate, 'academic' Irish was an impediment to growing the language community. Feargal was well aware of the heavy influence of English on his Irish but emphasised first and foremost the need for Irish to be a 'functional' language spoken imperfectly by the many rather than perfectly by the few:

> *Sure* muna bhfuil fhios agat focal caitheann tú an focal Béarla isteach //fiú in amantaí leis an comhréir a úsáidim bheinn ag úsáid comhréir an Bhéarla agus ag cur focla Gaeilge leis tuigim sin agus is dócha gur rud é a dhéanaim go comhfhiosach //an ndéanaim iarracht é a sheachaint ní hé go ndéanaim // *like* … ach ní rud a suím síos agus a deirim liom féin *like* … ag deireadh an lae ceapaim féin go bhfuil sé tábhachtach go bhfuil daoine feidhmeach sa teanga ach ceapaim go bhfuil sé an-tábhachtach go bhfanann saibhreas agus dá mbeadh bealach éigin *you know* leis an dá

rud a dhéanamh gur sin an suíomh idéalach ach is dócha gur b'fhearr i bhfad gur b'fhearr liom i bhfad go mbeadh an Ghaeilge beo mar teanga feidhmeach mar a bheadh *probably* agam agus ag roinnt de mo chairde ná mar teanga acadúil a bhfuil go ardchaighdeán ag líon bheag daoine agus a cheapann an-chuid daoine eile nach féidir leo riamh an caighdeán sin a shroichint agus dá barr ní bhacann siad leis agus ceapaim go bhfuil muid ábhairín i bhfáinne fí idir an dá rud i láthair na huaire *you know*?

Sure if you don't know a word you throw in the English word //even sometimes with the syntax I use I would be using English syntax and putting Irish words with it I know that and I suppose it's something I do consciously //do I try to avoid it I don't // like ... at the end of the day I think it's important that people are functional in the language but I think it's very important that richness remains and if there was some way you know to do both that's the ideal situation but I suppose it's much more important that I would prefer much more if Irish was alive as a functional language like I probably speak it and some of my friends rather than an academic language spoken to a high level by a small number of people and that many other people think they will never reach that standard and therefore they don't bother with it and I think we're kind of in a vicious circle between both things at the moment you know?

Feargal was less concerned about the authenticity of speech forms than about what he saw as the potentially alienating effect of them, reflecting Woolard's argument that a prior ideology of linguistic authenticity impeded the adoption of Catalan by new speakers (2016: 45). In aligning himself with a discourse of anonymity, he saw regular use of a strongly post-traditional form of Irish as more valuable than more limited use of historically correct forms. He struck me as an excellent example of a particular profile of new speaker who knowingly adopts a post-traditional variety and does not allow the quest for linguistic accuracy or traditional Gaeltacht norms to impede his activism. As the experience of Irish-medium education has taught us (see Chapter 3 and Ó Duibhir, 2018), swelling the ranks of new speakers will not rely exclusively on reproduction of regional Gaeltacht speech. Indeed, given the limited contact between many new speakers and the Gaeltacht, this is an unreasonable expectation (see McCloskey, 2008 for further discussion).

Linguistic identity based on a more standardised and grammatically correct form of language applied to 30 year-old Cárthach, who was involved in several informal language promotion initiatives around the country when I met him. Cárthach called for recognition for

non-Gaeltacht speakers of Irish and rejected the expectation that all learners should adopt a Gaeltacht dialect:

> Is dóigh liom go bhfuil cineál blas Gaeilge Bhaile Átha Cliath agam is dóigh go n-aithneofaí canúint Bhaile Átha Cliath nó cineál lárchanúint Laighean nó canúint uirbeach Gaeilge le ceart-fhoghraíocht ach mar sin féin nílim a rá gur chóir go mbeadh sé díreach cosúil le mo bhlas ach *em* is dóigh liom rinne mé scrúdú cainte / ar an ollscoil agus … is dóigh liom gur tugadh drochmharc dom toisc gur measadh nach raibh canúint cheart agam nó nach raibh blas ceart agam nó pé rud [J: Cad is brí le blas ceart?] is é sin blas na Gaeltachta / ach cuireann sin soir mé caithfidh mé a rá … tá go leor daoine i mBaile Átha Cliath nach bhfeadfá a rá 'Sin canúint na Gaillimhe' nó a leithéid ach déarfá go bhfuil na séimhithe i gceart acu mar sin is dóigh gur cheart go mbeadh aitheantas áirithe ann dóibh sin agus nach ndéarfaí go bhfuil sé sin mícheart … nach ndéarfaí go bhfuil mo bhlas mícheart is é sin a déarfainn agus blas mo chairde mar is daoine muide a úsáideann an teanga go príomha //bainimid úsáid shóisialta as an teanga níos mó ná an Béarla agus ní dóigh gur féidir sin a rá faoi mhuintir na Gaeltachta atá ar chomhaois linn in aon chor n'fheadar cén céatadán de mhuintir na Gaeltachta ar chomhaois linn a bhaineann úsáid as an nGaeilge abair sna réimsí teanga a mbaineann muide úsáid aisti.

> *I think I have a kind of Dublin accent I suppose that it would be identified as a Dublin dialect or central Leinster dialect or urban Irish dialect with correct pronunciation but even so I'm not saying that it should be the same as my accent but em I suppose I did an oral exam / in the university and … I think I got a bad mark because it was thought I didn't have a correct dialect or correct accent or whatever [J: What do you mean by correct accent?] that's the Gaeltacht accent / but that drives me crazy I have to say ... there are loads of people in Dublin that you couldn't say 'that's the Galway dialect' or whatever but you would say their initial lenition[4] is correct so I think that they should get certain recognition and that it wouldn't be said that that is wrong ... that it wouldn't be said that my accent is wrong that's what I'd say and my friends' accent because we are people who use the language primarily //we use Irish socially more than English and I don't think that can be said about Gaeltacht people who are the same age as us who knows what percentage of Gaeltacht people who are the same age as us use Irish for instance in the domains in which we use Irish.*

Cárthach's discourse also represents a challenge to the ideology of the native speaker which traditionally stipulated that all learners had to 'choose' one of the traditional dialects on which to base their speech (see Chapter 3). Similar to Karen above, he rejected this imposition as artificial but went further than her in calling for specific recognition for people like him and his friends. Once again, grammatical accuracy, fluency and correct pronunciation were valorised but a traditional Gaeltacht dialect was not. However only post-traditional varieties that strove for grammatical accuracy and that avoided Anglicisms should

be recognised. Similar to Karen and Sarah, therefore, Cárthach also reproduces dominant language ideologies of prescriptivism by insisting on a certain linguistic standard before any such recognition would be earned.

A smaller number of new speakers, often with a heritage connection to the Gaeltacht through their family, attempt to reclaim their ancestral dialect as a fundamental part of their linguistic identity. In Chapter 4, I presented the profile of Jason who had chosen to take up speaking Irish with his Gaeltacht mother during his teenage years in order to acquire her traditional dialect. Another example is 24-year-old Caoimhín who was raised mostly in English close to a Gaeltacht region but whose grandparents had been traditional speakers of the local dialect. After attaining a high competence in standard Irish from English-medium schooling, Caoimhín became more aware of his linguistic heritage and enthusiastically undertook a process of acquiring the traditional dialect which is still spoken in his region although not in his home town. This was achieved by spending long periods working in the Gaeltacht and self-study based on historical sources. In the following extract he tells me how he immersed himself entirely not only in the local dialect but also in the song and music tradition of the area:

> Chomh luath agus a thosnaíos ag obair [sa Ghaeltacht] bhí daoine ag rá rudaí nár thuig mé i gceart //bhí an-fhonn orm fáilt amach dén bhrí a bhí leo agus bheinn i gcónaí ag cur ceiste ar dhaoine mar gheall air / an úsáidtear é seo nó siúd //bhain mé ana-thaitneamh as na focail chanúnacha san a úsáid toisc gur Gaolainn [an cheantair sin] í //táim bródúil as an gceantar agus is [as an gceantar sin] mé //bhí sprioc agam go mbeadh an Ghaolainn chomh cruinn agam agus a gheobhainn / ní hamháin an chanúin ach nuair a thosnaigh mé a foghlaim na n-amhráintí / bhí sprioc agam go dtuigfeadh daoine gur [as an gceantar sin] mé //bhí mé ag cóisir tí ag duine [sa Ghaeltacht] agus dúirt [bean áitiúil] nár chreid sí go raibh an Ghaolainn chomh pras agam agus nár chreid sí nárbh as an [áit sin] dom //bhí ionadh an domhain ormsa agus uirthise agus mar is eol duit dhein sí anachuid taighde mar gheall ar an gcanúin //bhí mé ana-shásta go mbíodh daoine san ollscoil agus cainteoirí dúchais eile do mo mholadh //an tslat tomhais a bhí agam ná moladh daoine eile.
>
> *As soon as I started working [in the Gaeltacht] people were saying things that I didn't understand properly // I really wanted to find out what they meant and I would always*

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be asking people about it / is this or that used // I really enjoyed using those dialectal words but it is the Irish [of that area] // I am proud of that area and I am [from that area] // I had a goal to learn Irish as accurately as possible / not only the dialect but when I started learning the songs / I wanted people to think that I was [from that area] // I was at a house part of a person [in the Gaeltacht] and [a local woman] said to me that she couldn't believe that my Irish was so good and that she didn't believe that I wasn't from [that place] // I was really surprised and so was she and as you know she did a lot of research about the dialect herself // I was very happy that people at the university and other native speakers were praising me //my yardstick was other people's praise.

Caoimhín described how pride in his area and linguistic heritage were powerful motivational factors and prompted him not only to master his ancestral dialect but also the traditional music and song of the area in question. He expressed great satisfaction when he managed to 'pass' as a native speaker (Piller, 2002) both in the Gaeltacht itself and at the university where we went on to study Irish. His knowledge of the dialect in particular was exceptional and in the course of the interview it became clear that he was immensely proud of this. Therefore, while Caoimhín saw himself primarily as an Irish speaker his was firmly rooted in a local variety spoken by previous generations of his family rather than in the kind of standard Irish favoured by speakers such as Cárthach.

Ambiguous or mixed linguistic identity

Many of the new speakers interviewed expressed ambiguity about the importance of Irish to their identity or said that they felt distanced from it in some way. This was either due to their (greater) proficiency in English or sometimes because of a perception that Gaeltacht people 'owned' Irish more than they did. When I met him, Tomás was a 33-year old teacher who was raised speaking English in a Gaeltacht region but whose grandparents had been Irish speakers. Realising as a teenager that the break in intergenerational transmission had come in his parents' generation, Tomás endeavoured to learn and use the local variety of Irish but when I asked him about language ownership, he emphasised a bilingual identity:

Is í mo theanga féin í [Gaeilge] ach tá a fhios agam chomh maith gurb é an Béarla mo theanga chomh maith agus níl aon éiginnteacht fé sin ionam chomh maith is breá liom a bheith ag labhairt Béarla le daoine mar mhodh cumarsáide chomh maith cé go mbeadh meas áirithe breise agam ar an gcanúint agus ar an nGaelainn atá agam is dócha chomh maith.

It's my own language [Irish] *but I know also that English is my language as well and /I don't have any uncertainty about that either I love speaking English to people as a means of communication also even though I would have a certain extra respect for the dialect and for the Irish that I have as well I suppose.*

Tomás expressed no hesitation about his ownership of Irish, but he said more about English than Irish in this conversational turn. He considered English to be equally his language and he described how he loved speaking it. It is possible that residual influence of a cultural nationalist discourse prompted him to add, almost as an afterthought, that he had 'a certain extra respect' for Irish (see Chapter 3). An alternative explanation is that while both languages are equally important to him in an abstract sense, his specifically local dialect of Irish rather than an abstract standard language has an additional significance to his identity. This may be because he is from a small Gaeltacht district with its own distinct dialect, a linguistic resource arguably more salient to his identity than more standardised or supra-regional varieties of Irish or English, similar to Caoimhín above. However there is more ambiguity than in Caoimhín's discourse which is based strongly on a local dialect. While Tomás may have additional regard for his own variety of Irish, both Irish and English are important to him in identity terms and there is no obvious hierarchy of languages in his discourse.

Several speakers felt that while Irish was in some way their language, Gaeltacht people had greater ownership of it. This view is expressed by Eimear, a 34-year old from a city who was working in Irish language media when I met her:

E: *Yeah* tá mé an-bhrodúil as an nGaeilge em agus tá mé bródúil go mbaineann gur linne í mar thír ach níl a fhios agam an liomsa é-

J: An dtabharfá cainteoir Gaeilge ort féin?

E: Ó thabharfainn cinnte *yeah yeah*

J: Ach níl tú líofa dar leat?

E: Ní dóigh liom go bhfuil mé líofa i gcomparáid leis na daoine go bhfuil aithne agam orthu ní dóigh liom gur mhaith liom mé féin a chur sa gcomhluadar sin em tá // tá bealach fós le dul agam déarfainn.

E: *Yeah I am very proud of Irish em and I am proud that it is connected that as a country is it ours but I don't know if it is mine-*

J: *Would you call yourself an Irish speaker?*

E: *Oh yes of course yeah yeah.*

J: *But you don't think you're fluent?*

E: *I don't think I'm fluent compared to the people I know / I don't think I'd like to put myself in that company em I // I have some way to go I'd say.*

In an articulation of her support for an ideology of cultural nationalism (see Chapter 2), Eimear accepted that Irish was an important part of Irish identity ('I am proud that as a country it is ours') but positioned herself as less personally connected to Irish ('I don't know if it is mine'). She considered herself an Irish speaker but not unconditionally, comparing herself unfavourably with other people whom she knows. When I probed her about this, she said that she meant her Gaeltacht colleagues whom she felt spoke Irish far better than her ('I have some way to go'), inferring that they have a greater claim on Irish than her ('I don't … like to put myself in that company'). This view was articulated more overtly by Deirdre, a 29-year old postgraduate student whose family language was English but who acquired idiomatic Irish from spending periods in the Gaeltacht. In the course of our interview, Deirdre expressed frustration on a number of occasions about her relationship with Irish by comparison with that of people in the Gaeltacht:

Ní fheadar mé uaireanta braithimse gur le muintir Chonamara an Ghaelainn agus *you know* níl tú maith a dhóthain chun Gaelainn a labhairt agus uaireanta nuair a théim siar chun na Gaeltachta deireann daoine áirithe liom 'Ó conas go bhfuil Gaelainn chomh maith sin agat?' em agus ní maith liom é sin tá mé im chónaí sa tír seo canathaobh ná beadh?

I don't know sometimes I think that Connemara people own Irish and you know you're not good enough to speak Irish and sometimes when I go back to the Gaeltacht some people say to me 'Oh how do you speak Irish so well?' em and I don't like that I'm living in this country why wouldn't I?

In terms of identity, similar to Eimear, Deirdre did not express unambiguous support for the idea that Irish is 'her' language. Although she used many Gaeltacht idioms, she complained about a lack of acceptance by Gaeltacht speakers and felt delegitimised for her less traditional linguistic production ('you're not good enough'). She criticised Gaeltacht people for censuring her over her ability in Irish while simultaneously expressing surprise at her fluency. Her frustration with the view that, as someone living in Ireland she would be unable to speak Irish, could reflect aspects of a more essentialist 'one country, one language' paradigm or possibly the ideology of Irish as the 'national' language (see Chapter 3). However, Deirdre's discourse veered more towards a constructionist approach (see Chapter 2), particularly in her apparent rejection of the essentialism associated with labels such as 'Gall' and 'Galltacht'[5] which are sometimes used in discourses around Irish and identity:

Agus is fuath liom an focal sin Galltacht ní haon Ghall mé is Éireannach mé / tógadh sa tír seo mé cosúil le gach éinne eile em ba cheart deireadh a chur leis in bhfocal sin im thuairimse ní haon Ghall mé mar a deirim LF.

And I hate that word 'Galltacht' I'm no 'Gall' [foreigner] *I'm an Irishwoman* [Éireannach] */ I was raised in this country just like everyone else em that word shouldn't be used any more in my opinion LF.*

Deirdre condemned the use of 'Galltacht' to refer to the rest of Ireland and in particular the noun 'Gall', presumably because of the inference that by drawing on that paradigm everyone in the 'Galltacht' – including her – would be considered a 'foreigner'. Interestingly, and in contrast to other speakers such as Roibeárd and Odhrán, she used 'Éireannach' rather than 'Gael' when calling herself an Irishwoman, suggesting that she also finds 'Gael' excessively essentialist. At another stage in the interview, Deirdre positioned herself as part of a distinct

group of 'cainteoirí breátha' (fine speakers) outside the Gaeltacht who used Irish every day and argues that people like her will be crucial to the future of Irish. This discourse, also drawn upon by other participants, suggests that some new speakers see themselves as distinct from both Gaeltacht speakers and other learners of Irish whom they perceive to have lower levels of competence in or commitment to the language.

The new speakers in the study also included people who were raised in Irish-speaking or bilingual homes outside the Gaeltacht but who nonetheless consider themselves distinct from Gaeltacht speakers.[6] Despite the fact that Irish was their home language (either on its own or together with English), they perceive themselves as deficient in some way. They do not identify unproblematically as 'native' and often express ambiguous or hybrid identities. Laoise, a 29 year-old woman, was brought up speaking Irish in a city and was working as a teacher when I met her:

L: Is liomsa í mar theanga *yeah* ach arís em braithim gur / gur le lucht na Gaeltachta í ar bhealach níos / níos láidre ná gur liomsa í … toisc gur / toisc gur as pobal Gaeltachta iad nó pobal na Gaeilge iad ach tógadh mise i dteaghlach Gaeilge taobh istigh de phobal Béarla *so* sin é an fáth

J: Mar sin tá úinéireacht níos mó nó tá ceart níos mó ag lucht na Gaeltachta?

L: Ní dóigh liom go bhfuil ceart níos mó ach ach b'fhéidir go bhfuil úinéireacht níos mó agus tá taithí níos fairsinge acu freisin ar / ar shaol iomlán a chaitheamh trí Ghaeilge ná mar atá agamsa.

L: *It's my language yeah but again em I feel that / that the people in the Gaeltacht own it in a way that's bigger / that's stronger than I do ... because they are from a Gaeltacht community or they are part of an Irish-speaking community but I was brought up in an Irish-speaking family inside an English-speaking community so that's why.*

J: *So the Gaeltacht speakers have more ownership or a bigger right to the language?*

L: *I don't think they have a bigger right but maybe they have more ownership and they have a wider experience too of / of spending their whole life through Irish than I do.*

Although she considered Irish to be her first language, Laoise felt that she lacked legitimacy compared to the Gaeltacht speakers who 'own' Irish more than her. In her mind, legitimacy seemed to be contingent upon the geographical concentration of Irish speakers in the Gaeltacht and therefore their greater social use of the language. As outlined in Chapter 3, this points to the salience of community or territory in discourses around language: Laoise lacks legitimacy because her family is an isolated case unable to live entirely in Irish in an English-speaking community. Her views of ownership of Irish appear to be linked to how the sociolinguistic context has limited her sense of belonging to a wider group of Irish speakers.

Séamus, a 40-year old artist, was raised mostly in English in Dublin although his father was from the Gaeltacht. Although English was the dominant family language, limited home exposure and family trips to the Gaeltacht gave him a linguistic benefit and he excelled at Irish in school. Séamus did not question his linguistic background until his early twenties when he attended university and when identity and language were discussed in the course of his studies. When he was younger, he broadly accepted 'cultural nationalism' as the basis for his identity as he felt that it prioritised the place of Irish in Irish national identity. However when I met him, Séamus told me how he had read widely about language and identity in a European context and had come to question that historical hegemonic view about Irish:

> Tá sé an-tábhachtach ach ní hí an chloch is mó ar mo phaidrín í i ndeireadh na dála abair tá rudaí eile níos tábhachtaí abraimis cúrsaí clainne nó cúrsaí grá cúrsaí pearsanta ...ach ní maith liom b'fhéidir *top tens* a dhéanamh agus go mbeadh an Ghaeilge i gcónaí ar barra saghas as láimh a chéile a mhaireann na rudaí seo seachas a bheith ag iarraidh a rá 'Tá an Ghaeilge chomh tábhachtach nach bhfuil faic eile sa saol' dá mbeadh bheadh sé go hainnis mura mbeadh againn ach Gaeilge ach tá sé an-tábhachtach don léamh ar leith atá agamsa mar Éireannach agus mar Bhaile Átha Cliathach b'fhéidir níos tábhachtaí aríst mar táim ana-mhórtasach as an gcumas teanga agus an tuiscint atá agus an féiniúlacht sin atá préamhaithe i mBaile Átha Cliath seachas sa Ghaeltacht mar ní fear Gaeltachta mé is as an Ghaeltacht do m'athair ach is boc cathrach mé ach táim an-mhórtasach as sin.
>
> *It's very important but it isn't the most important thing in my life like there are more important things such as love and family ... but I don't like maybe doing top tens and*

that Irish would always be at the top [because] kind of these things are linked instead of trying to say 'Irish is so important that there's nothing else in life' if that was the case it would be dreadful if we only knew Irish but it is very important for the understanding I have [of myself] as an Irishman and as a Dubliner maybe even more importantly because I'm very proud of the language competence and the understanding and that identity that is rooted in Dublin instead of the Gaeltacht because I'm not a Gaeltacht man my father's from the Gaeltacht but I'm a city guy and I'm very proud of that.

While accepting Irish as important, Séamus does not identify Irish as the most important part of his identity focusing instead on more personal matters. At several times during the interview he referred to his 'European' identity and told me proudly about his fluency in French. In fact, Séamus's belief that it would be 'dreadful' if Irish was the only language spoken in Ireland suggests that he also takes pride in his identity as an English-speaker. Despite a family connection to the Gaeltacht, being an Irish-speaker from Dublin was very important and referenced frequently. In conclusion, therefore, while Irish was clearly important for Séamus's identity it was not the only aspect of that identity and his discourse contained much ambiguity.

Primary English-speaking identity

Some participants in our study seemed to self-identify primarily as English speakers despite their fluency in Irish and regular use of it. When I met Máirtín, a 27 year-old researcher, he was completing postgraduate studies in Irish. He was brought up with English only in an area with no recent Irish language heritage and learned Irish in an English-medium school before gaining fluency at university. Máirtín told me that he spoke Irish regularly and professionally but at several points in the interview he expressed frustration at making errors years after he first began to learn it. Because of this, he did not accept that Irish is his 'own language':

Ní bhraithimse [gurb í mo theanga féin í] go fóill ar aon nós eh ní bheinn céad faoin gcéad compordach leis an nGaeilge riamh b'fhéidir go mbeidh am éigin ach táim

compordach leis an nGaeilge i gcomhthéacsanna áirithe ach em is dócha tógadh le cúlra Béarla [mé] Béarla nahÉireann em sin an teanga má tá úinéireacht agam ar theanga ar bith sin é Béarla nahÉireann agus Béarla mo cheantair dúchais agus an teanga lenar tógadh mé tá úinéireacht agam ar an teanga sin.

I don't feel yet [that it is my language] eh I wouldn't be one hundred per cent comfortable with Irish ever even / maybe I will be some day but I'm comfortable with Irish in certain contexts but em I suppose I was brought up with the background of Irish English em that is the language if I have ownership of any language that's it Irish English and the English of my native area and the language that I was raised with I own that language.

Máirtín's discourse suggests that he identifies as an English speaker first and foremost, despite being comfortable with Irish in certain contexts, presumably his work. Specifically, he identified the variety of English spoken in his area as being more important in identity terms.[7]He was raised with 'Irish English' and expressed no ambivalence about his ownership of it whereas his relationship with Irish was restricted by his perception that he lacked sufficient competence in it. Máirtín told me that if he had children in the future, he would find it 'unnatural' to speak Irish to them:

Dá mbeadh páiste agam [iad] a thógáil i nGaeilge? Níl a fhios agam mar ní bheadh a fhios agam faoi na cúinsí pearsanta a bheadh ann tá sé an-deacair páistí a thógáil le Gaeilge caithfidh mé smaoineamh arís ar mo chúlra féin / bheadh sé cineáilín mínádúrtha sílim go mbeadh teanga dá labhairt agam leis na páistí nach mbeadh ag na seanthuistí eh bheadh sé sin aisteach agus deacair sílim thógfadh sé deacrachtaí agus an cheist a chuir tú maidir le úinéireacht eh ní maith liom cineál nach mbeadh tuiscint mhaith ag páistí ar an gcineál Béarla atá agam féin ...ní maith liom go mbeadh cineál Esperanto Gaeilge Fraincis agus Seapáinis á labhairt sa teach ... ach ba mhaith liom dá mbeadh siad eolasach ar chultúr na hÉireann agus tá Béarla na hÉireann mar chuid den chultúr sin anois chomh maith leis an nGaeilge.

I don't think if I had children would I raise them in Irish I don't know because I wouldn't know about the personal circumstances it's difficult to raise children with Irish I have to think again about my own background / eh it would be kind of unnatural I think if I was speaking a language to the children that their grandparents didn't know eh that would be strange and difficult I think it would cause problems and the question you asked about ownership eh I wouldn't like kind of that the children wouldn't have a good understanding of the type of English that I speak ...I wouldn't want there to be a kind of Esperanto Irish French and Japanese being spoken in the house ... but I would like them to be knowledgeable about the culture of Ireland and the English of Ireland is part of that culture now along with Irish.

Máirtín's discourse is noteworthy for its reliance on linguistic naturalism (see Chapter 2), an ideology which holds that authentic language use is understood as a natural behaviour without effort or artifice. Speaking a language other than his 'native' language to his children was an example of artifice and therefore unnatural and inauthentic. Such naturalism dictated that his children should have full access from earliest socialisation to the variety of English that Máirtín spoke and he disparaged the type of interlanguage that often emerges when parents attempt to speak minority languages to their children in majority language contexts. His reference to 'Esperanto' is significant as it is an 'artificial' language which represents the exact opposite of the ideology of naturalism. He expressed the desire that his children would be aware of Irish as part of their general cultural heritage, but in the absence of a personal commitment to speak Irish to them, presumably such knowledge would need to be acquired in the education system. Another example of sociolinguistic naturalism was evident in Máirtín's belief that only Gaeltacht speakers of Irish should promote the language:

> Sílim na daoine is tábhachtaí le cur chun cinn na Gaeilge ná na daoine atá ina gcónaí thiar ansin eh a bhfuil an cúlra nádúrtha acu *you know* na glúnta ar fad comharsaingach duine sa bpobal ar chainteoirí iad sin an áit is fearr na cainteoirí nua a thabhairt ar an saol is dócha ní chreidim / daoine // cainteoirí Gaeilge sna cathracha agus daoine ag caint in Eabhrais san Iosrael agus ní chreidim sa stuif sin in aon chaoi is í an Ghaeltacht an áit is tábhachtaí ó thaobh cur chun cinn na Gaeilge i mo thuairimse.
>
> *I think the most important people to promote Irish are the people who are living back west who have the natural background you know all the generations the neighbours the person in the community where they are speakers that's the best place to bring about new speakers I think I don't believe / [in] people // Irish speakers in the cities and people speaking Hebrew in Israel and I don't believe in that stuff at all the Gaeltacht is the most important place to promote Irish in my opinion.*

In Máirtín's view, as Gaeltacht speakers have always spoken Irish and because 'all the generations' and 'neighbours' speak Irish, this is an authentic linguistic environment and the

only appropriate one in which to speak Irish (the fact that more and more people in the Gaeltacht do not in fact speak Irish (Ó Giollagáin et al., 2007) was not commented upon). Because of this perceived sociolinguistic authenticity, new speakers can legitimately acquire Irish in the Gaeltacht but reviving Irish elsewhere is a pointless pursuit. In conclusion, it is obvious that English – or more specifically the local variety of Irish English that he speaks – had the greatest purchase in terms of Máirtín's identity, that he considered himself an English speaker first and foremost and that he wished his children to have the same linguistic background.

When I met her, Sharon was a 37-year-old from Dublin who was employed in recruitment but had worked in Irish language jobs in the past. She showed certain similarities to Máirtín in her relationship with Irish and English. Although one of Sharon's parents could speak Irish, she was raised in English but spent part of her education in a Gaelscoil. While a fluent speaker of Irish, she diverged from the Gaeltacht norm for the most part. I was struck by the complexity of Sharon's views about the importance of Irish:

> Is dócha go bhfuil saghas *paradigm* nua á chruthú ag mo leithéidse you know go bhfuil muid ag rá bhuel níl mé sásta an rud seo a chailliúint ach níl mé chun mo chroí a bhriseadh chun é a chosaint ach oiread *you know like* tá sé agam tá mé bródúil den rud go bhfuil Gaeilge agam leanfaidh mé ar aghaidh á chur ar mo CV féin LF *you know* ar eagla go gcruthódh sé ceangal idir mé féin agus b'fhéidir duine eicínt eile ach tá mé chun sciáil *you know* go bhfuil spéis agam sa sciáil a chur ar an CV céanna *you know* mar phointe comhrá *you know*?

> *I suppose that the likes of me are probably creating a new paradigm you know that we are saying well I'm not happy to lose this thing but I'm not going to break my heart to protect it either you know like I have it I am proud of the fact that I have Irish I will carry on putting it on my own CV LF you know in case it might create a link between me and maybe somebody else but I am going to put skiing you know that I am interested in skiing on the same CV you know as a topic of conversation you know?*

On the one hand, Sharon expressed pride at being able to speak Irish. However, she compared it to skiing, suggesting that it was not fundamentally important to her but more of a hobby which she dipped into from time to time. On the other hand, she argued that people like her

were creating a new 'paradigm' for the future of Irish, suggesting something more important than a hobby. Use of 'the likes of me' creates a clear divide between her peer group who learned Irish in the Gaelscoil and those raised in the Gaeltacht. Although she saw herself as part of a new approach and expressed a certain commitment to Irish, there were clear limits to her engagement. When I asked her about her decision not to speak Irish to her children although they are attending a Gaelscoil, she put this down partly to a lack of confidence, particularly in the intimate register of language used in a domestic setting, and partly because her partner did not speak Irish:

> Tá a fhios agam go bhfuil clanna ann agus go ndéanann siad é sin is go socraíonn siad agus bheadh seisean tar éis tacaíocht a thabhairt dom dá mbeinnse em ach ag an céanna *I think* go mbeadh rudaí caillte againn dá mbeadh muid tar éis é sin a dhéanamh ... *there's a certain intimacy* i gclann a bheadh caillte againn *you know*?
>
> *I know that there are families and they do that and they settle down and he would have supported me if I had em but at the same time I think we would have lost things if we had done that ... there's a certain intimacy in a family that we would have lost you know?*

I asked Sharon if she felt Irish was important to her identity. She hedged somewhat in her answer and referred to her use of Irish on social media and how the language created opportunities for her in employment. She concluded that it was important but only 'to a point' but that she didn't think about it very often, reflecting the fact that she uses it much less since moving into recruitment:

> Tá a fhios agam go dtugann sé deiseanna dom nach *like* dá mba rud é nach raibh Gaeilge agam ní bheinn [ar na meáin chumarsáide] dá mba rud é nach raibh Gaeilge agam *ya know* ní *I don't know* an mbeinn tar éis an chéad phost *you know* [san earnáil Ghaeilge] a fháil *so is dócha you know* tá sé tábhachtach go pointe ach go laethúil *you know like* ar pointe fealsúnachta *you know* ceapaim go bhfuil sé tábhachtach i mo phearsantacht ach go laethúil ní smaoiním air.
>
> *I know that it gives me opportunities like if I didn't have Irish you know I don't know would I have been [in the media] if I didn't have Irish you know I don't know would I*

> *have got my first job [in the Irish language sector] so I suppose you know it is important to a point but on a daily basis you know like on a point of philosophy you know I think it is important in my personality but on a daily basis I don't think about it.*

Rather than a cause to which she is politically committed or a fundamental part of her identity, Sharon seemed to see Irish primarily as a way of connecting with others who share an interest in it or as a means of giving her social or employment opportunities. In comparison with other speakers who are clearly invested in Irish and its promotion, it was not apparent that the language occupies a key role in her identity position and that she saw herself primarily as an English speaker.

Intersection of linguistic and sexual identities

In this final section, I draw briefly on a broader study on identity, language and sexuality conducted among 15 gay men who identified as gay or queer and also considered themselves new speakers of Irish.[8] I consider two main themes which emerged from this study: (a) tensions around historical ideologies of language and national identity and (b) the relationship between gay and Irish-speaking identities.

A feature of discourse surrounding minoritised languages such as Irish is their perceived suitability for diverse urban settings far removed from their 'heartland' rural communities. Since the beginning of the 20th Century and particularly following the foundation of what was essentially a Catholic state, Irish became associated with conservative identities based on nativism and a particular form of Irishness (Lee, 1989: 643-657). There are many examples in public and intellectual discourse in recent decades of such accusations being made against the Irish language movement or Irish speakers in general (Walsh, 2019a: 56-57). While many such stereotypes were unfair and did not reflect the diversity of opinion among Irish speakers, nonetheless they retained a powerful force in

popular imagination throughout the 20th Century and were a significant barrier to the promotion of the language. Such views also marginalised social groups such as gay/queer people who did not align with the hegemonic version of Irishness but who nonetheless wished to either remain or become Irish speakers (see further discussion of this topic in Chapter 2).

The gay new speakers whom I interviewed held a variety of views on the historical ideologies of national identity linking Irish and conservatism. Some challenged them openly and spoke how they had navigated and contested them in their lives while others seemed to have internalised them and were apparently on the brink of giving up Irish as a result. Seán, a 50-year-old working in media when I met him, was raised with both Irish and English and spends long periods in the Gaeltacht. He distinguished between Gaeltacht people, whom he experienced as open and accepting, and Irish language organisations which he found narrow-minded and where he had personally experienced homophobia in the past. Seán also mentioned what he called disparagingly 'the whole package', by which he meant the association between the Irish language and a narrow version of Irish national identity which excluded queer people like himself:

Ní dóigh liom ar bhealach go raibh sé sin [coimeádachas] mar chroílár saol na Gaeltachta //Tá mé ag ceapadh go raibh sé sin ar bhealach mar chuid des na heagraíochtaí Gaeilge ar bhealach go raibh daoine ag iarraidh a léiriú *you know* 'Ó is duine fíor-Éireannach *sort of* is fíor-Ghael mé is fíor-Chaitliceach mé is fíor-' *do you know what I mean*? Agus go raibh an pacáiste iomlán seo a raibh an dearg-ghráin agam air ar an bpacáiste ar fad / mar níor léirigh sé an rud a bhí ann go raibh sé an t-am ar fad ag iarraidh breathnú ar cúl go dtí saol ná raibh riamh ann agus gurb é seo an // dá mbeifeá Gaelach go mbeadh ort bheith i do Chaitliceach nó díreach.

I don't think in a way that [conservatism] was at the heart of Gaeltacht life //I think that in a way that was part of the Irish language organisations in a way that people were trying to show you know 'Oh I'm a true Irish person sort of I'm a true Irish speaker I'm a true Catholic I'm a true-'do you know what I mean? And that there was this whole package that I really hated every bit of the package / because it didn't show what existed that it was always trying to look back at a life that never existed

and that was // if you were an Irish speaker that you'd have to be a Catholic or straight.

Seán referred here to a dominant discourse of ethnolinguistic identity based on a fusion of language, nationality, religion and heterosexuality which he associated with Irish language organisations. This he believed was an inaccurate representation of Irish life. Seán was a regular and committed Irish speaker who described in warm terms his relationships with Gaeltacht people and the importance of Irish for him. He told me that change came about when he left the Irish language organisation where he had experienced homophobia. He realised then that although he had hated the 'whole package', it also included Irish which he loved but which had been obscured by negative associations. He told me of his relief at his success in extricating the language from the other negative elements and integrating it more centrally into his life as a gay man.

Another man, 47-year-old Nicholas who was also raised bilingually and whose grandfather was from the Gaeltacht, had also experienced homophobia but from Irish-speaking relatives instead of an organisation. His journey was much more difficult than Seán's and when I met him he appeared to be on the cusp of giving up Irish as a result. In an emotional interview for both him and for me, Nicholas drew a sharp contrast between Irish and German, referring to the relief he felt when he emigrated to Berlin as a young man in order to escape the stultifying atmosphere at home. He still spoke German fluently and when I told him that I had also studied German for several years, he seemed relieved and lapsed into it at various times during the interview:

> N: *Deutsch ist die Sprache der Freiheit* [Is í an Ghearmáinis teanga na saoirse] [J: Saoirse?] An saoirse.
> I: Ach ní cheanglaíonn tú an tsaoirse le Gaolainn?
> N: An mhalairt ar fad↑. [J: A mhalairt // Conas?] Bhuel *do you know* bhíos amuigh ann ins na hochtóidí bhíos i m'aerach agus ba dheacair an saol domsa anso in Éirinn agus chuas go dtí an nGearmáin agus an saoirse a mhothaigh mé thall ansan ní

féidir liom é fiú a léiriú *you know* //ba é sin an chéad uair i mo shaol agus go rabhas in ann bheith aerach agus ghlac gach uile duine liom gan ceist a chur orm …

J: An gceanglaíonn tú an Ghaolainn leis an gCaitliceachas agus leis an gcúng-aigeantacht san a luaigh tú níos luaithe?

N: Ceapaim go gceanglaíonn faraor //is dócha gur n'fheadar an rud an é sin an cás anois ach déarfainn sna hochtóidí bhí sé sin ann sa saol a bhí againn agus bhí sé ceangailte go trom leis an eaglais Chaitliceach agus is dócha freisin sin fáth báis na Gaolainne freisin bhuel fáth amháin tá mórán fáthanna ann.

N: Deutsch ist die Sprache der Freiheit [German is the language of freedom] [J: Freedom?] Freedom.

J: But you don't associate Irish with freedom?

N: The exact opposite↑ [J: The opposite // How?] Well do you know I was out then in the eighties I was a gay man and life was difficult for me here in Ireland and I went to Germany and the freedom I felt there I can't even describe it you know // That was the first time in my life that I was able to be gay and everyone accepted me without any questions ...

J: Do you link Irish with Catholicism and with that narrow-mindedness that you mentioned earlier?

N: I think I do unfortunately // I suppose I don't know if that is the case now but I would say in the eighties that was the way things were in the life we had and it was associated strongly with the Catholic Church and I suppose also that's a reason for the death of Irish well one reason there are many reasons.

For Nicholas, coming out as gay and being accepted by those around him was deeply rooted in language. Irish, spoken by some relatives who treated him with disdain, represented homophobia and rejection. On the other hand, German, the language of the city to which he moved, indexed freedom and liberation from repression. His powerful narrative of the links between language and conservatism when growing up as a gay teenager in 1980s Ireland resonated powerfully with me. They reminded me of my own experiences while becoming a new speaker of Irish, a minority of which were negative, and my suspicion of the hegemonic historical discourse about language and identity discussed above. Nicholas's discourse also echoed my own position as a multilingual person and the relationship between my sexuality and the various languages that I speak (Cashman, 2018).

A second theme that emerged from my work on gay new speakers relates to hierarchies of identities based on Irish and on sexuality. A large majority of the subjects described how it had been difficult for them to reconcile both parties of their identity in the

past, with only two stating that both were equally important to them. Pádraig was a 22-year-old student when I interviewed him and was involved in Irish language activism in a city. He felt that there is a link between gay and Irish-speaking identities as both are marginal positionalities. However, Pádraig felt more invested in Irish having opted to join that minority whereas being gay was something that he always felt was part of him and not an optional extra. When asked to prioritise the most important part of his identity, he chose language:

> Níl dúchas an-tábhachtach dom nó ní maith liom fiú nuair a chuireann daoine ceist orm 'Carb as duit?' mar ní bhraithim go bhfuil aon bhaint ag an áit sin arb as dom … ach braithim anois go bhfuil mé mar chuid den phobal Gaelach i [cathair] / ní dóigh liom go bhfuil mé mar chuid de phobal aerach mar ní dóigh liom go bhfuil a leithéid ann … is dócha nuair a fheicim daoine eile aeracha uaireanta atá cineál gáifeach nó a leithéid nach dtaitníonn sé liom agus nach bhfuil mé ag iarraidh a bheith // níl aon rud eadrainn seachas rud bitheolaíoch agus mar sin ní ionannaím leo ach i gcás na Gaeilge tá teanga eadrainn.

> *Heritage/native place isn't very important for me or I don't even like it when people ask me 'Where are you from?' because I don't feel I have any connection with where I'm from … but now I feel that I am part of the Irish speaking community in [city] / I don't think I am part of the gay community because I don't think such a community exists … I suppose when I see other gay men who are kind of camp and the likes that I don't like that and that I don't want to be // there's nothing between us apart from something biological and therefore I don't identify with them but in the case of Irish we have a language in common.*

Although Pádraig spoke Irish to a high level of competence, because of his reticence about 'heritage' or 'native place',[9] he did not model his speech closely on any given Gaeltacht dialect. Pádraig felt greater affinity with Irish speakers and identified more strongly with them through language than with gay people with whom he felt only a 'biological' link. He identified a community of Irish speakers but not of gay people, possibly due to discomfort with a queer/camp aesthetic. Pádraig may feel greater affinity with Irish because his mastery of it involved artifice and effort (see Chapter 3) however the performative aspect of adopting a new language could also be seen as camp. The emotional satisfaction at becoming a new

speaker of a minoritised language such as Irish is significant: precisely because the language is so weak socially can cause greater frustration in learning it compared to a hegemonic language or indeed an enhanced sense of achievement when overcoming such obstacles (Walsh, 2019b).

Noel, a 24-year-old student who identified as queer and was involved in radical politics when I met him, held a contrasting view. Although he corresponded in Irish with me by email before the interview, he was less sure of himself linguistically when we met. Although he began the interview in Irish, he switched to English soon afterwards because he felt unsure about the terminology related to queerness. He was one of two subjects (along with Nicholas above) who was moving away from Irish both in terms of practice and identity and again the interview became emotional at times both for me and him:

> Nuair bhí mé níos óige *I'd say* fiche haon fiche dó bhí mé i gcónaí ag smaoineamh bhí sin an t-am a bhí mé ag déanamh Gaeilge san ollscoil agus ... chuir sé isteach orm nach raibh an Ghaeilge *you know* nach raibh an Ghaeilge le fáil / *in everyday life* //ní feictear an Ghaeilge ní chloistear an Ghaeilge ... anois tuigim b'fhéidir is cineáilín *apostate Irishman* mé ach tuigim go bhfuil rudaí ann níos mó ná an teanga*I mean*agus is breá liomsa a bheith in ann í a labhairt ach ní bhreá liom an teanga a thuilleadh / ní páirt ollmhór tábhachtach ionam é a thuilleadh.
>
> *When I was younger I'd say twenty-one twenty-two I would always be thinking that was the time I was studying Irish at university and ... it bothered me that Irish was not you know not available / in everyday life // Irish is not seen and not heard ... now I understand maybe I'm a kind of apostate Irishman but I understand that there are bigger things than the language I mean and I love being able to speak it but I don't love the language anymore / it isn't an enormously important part of me anymore.*

Noel's reference to being an 'apostate Irishman' seems to reflect his guilt that he has stepped back from an earlier engagement with Irish although he did not give details about this. It could also be evidence of the hegemonic ideology that in order to be authentically Irish, a person would have to speak the Irish language. He did not explain the 'bigger things than the language' but given his political engagement I took this to mean his shift to queer activism. I

was struck throughout the interview how this created tensions for him: he spoke passionately about how he would defend the teaching and learning of Irish against critics and argued that it was a fundamentally important part of European heritage. On the other hand, he also seemed to find speaking Irish in an overwhelmingly English-speaking Ireland to be 'insular' and 'exclusionary' and referred to the association between the language and 'parochial identity'. When I pushed him a little on this, he accepted that he had internalised such views to a certain extent. While still professing to be proud at his ability to speak Irish, Noel then told me(in English) how it was now no longer his primary identity position:

> *I no longer love it / this is a personal thing / I think for a lot of us the reason we stop speaking Irish is because it's not longer as big a part of our identity ... being gay is very important to me now that you mention it it's interesting / my core group of friends back in [university] there's a good twenty of them all gay or some variant thereof and we do very much associate with that / it's a subconscious thing you don't think about being gay but these are your people and you share this thing with them / I think I don't have the same thing anymore with Irish ... I no longer have friends close friends who are fluent Irish speakers and as such I haven't / when I talked to you on the phone it was the first time I've spoken Irish in a good year or two.*

For Noel, the process of shifting from an Irish-speaking to a queer identity appeared to be linked with his acceptance at some level of the dominant historical ideology about Irish. At another stage in the interview, he framed speaking English as more 'modern' and 'inclusive'. Noel's comments resonate with ideologies of anonymity about hegemonic languages and echo the claims that they are somehow neutral and belong to everyone (see Chapter 3).

Conclusion

Throughout John's own trajectory of becoming and remaining a new speaker of Irish, he has continuously navigated ideologies of cultural nationalism or ethnolinguistic identity linking 'true' Irishness with speaking traditional forms of Irish and being Catholic and heterosexual.

Although he learned a traditional variety of Irish himself as a teenager, many of those who helped him along the way did not subscribe to such stereotypes themselves and led him to realise that speaking Irish – or adopting a Gaeltacht dialect – can carry very different identity messages for different people. The identities of new speakers discussed in this chapter reveal a broad and multifaceted panorama of constellations in relation to language and national or sexual identity, far broader than the tired clichés of 20th Century revivalism. New speakers adhere to Irish in different ways, sometimes adopting an Irish-speaking identity either with or without the label 'Gael', sometimes adopting ambiguous or mixed bilingual identities and sometimes retaining their primary English-speaking identity despite their regular use of Irish. Gay new speakers often suffer from the hangover of the dominant paradigm of 20th Century Irishness and it sometimes impedes their entry into the language or leads them to give it up altogether. There may be tensions between their gay and Irish-speaking identities but many persist because of personal commitment to Irish and succeed in resolving the tensions between both parts of themselves.

What these powerful narratives remind us is that there is no one way to be Irish, and no one way to configure it within a framework of identity and belonging, whether to a broader abstract Irish 'nation', a more localised linguistic community or a network shaped by sexuality. Dogmatic and static ideologies of ethnolinguistic identity such as those that we have seen in the past are stultifying and exclusionary and create barriers that work against the development of new speakers in the future. It is not practical, nor is it desirable, to bring about a situation where all new speakers have primary Irish-speaking identities and equal ideological commitment to the language. Growing the Irish speaking community – the stated aim of generations of language policy – should be the ultimate aim and that entails breaking down barriers that prevent or restrict access to Irish for (potential) new speakers. Creating a variety of pathways to Irish without insisting on shifts in identity at the same time may

ultimately be more fruitful in encouraging new speakers to see themselves as more and more invested in the Irish language. The new speakers featured in this and in previous chapters are living evidence of 'doing' identity in that most have themselves developed Irish-speaking identities through their increasing use of the language over time and active participation in existing networks. We will explore the policy implications of this study of identity in the conclusions but in Chapter 6, Bernie turns to a discussion around language ownership among a group which epitomises the complex and sometimes fractious relationship between traditional and new speakers of Irish.

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[1] The abstract noun based on 'Éireannach', meaning 'Irishness' but not necessarily linked to speaking Irish.

[2] In Co. Galway, where the largest Gaeltacht area is located.

[3] A small Gaeltacht area of Co. Waterford.

[4] A reference to a grammatical rule of Irish which involves changes to certain initial consonants according to number, gender and case. Not all new speakers acquire or apply this rule.

[5] 'Gall' is taken as the inverse of 'Gael' and means a 'foreigner' or an 'English person', referring to the time when English speakers in Ireland were incomers or colonisers. 'Galltacht', taken as the inverse of Gaeltacht, referred historically to English settlers in Ireland and, since the late 19th Century, to areas where English speakers lived (Ó Torna, 2005; McLeod, 1999). 'Galltacht' was used regularly by language revivalists as a binary opposite to Gaeltacht in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. It is still used occasionally to refer to the rest of Ireland outside the Gaeltacht where English is dominant but is a contested term. See also Chapter 3.

[6] Some such speakers considered themselves equally legitimate to Gaeltacht speakers and did not see themselves as new speakers. They declined to take part in the research

[7] 'Irish English' (sometimes 'Hiberno-English') refers to English as used in Ireland. English was introduced to Ireland in the 12th Century but its presence was consolidated by conquest and colonisation from the 16th Century onwards. For an overview of 'Irish English', see Hickey, 2007.

[8] Despite repeated efforts, no women or transgender people took part in the study. For a discussion of the methodology, see Walsh, 2019a: 60).

[9] The Irish word 'dúchas' means both and is strongly associated with place (see Ó Dónaill, 1977).