

An exploration of linguistic neo-colonialism through educational language policy – an Irish perspective

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Abstract

In this paper, educational language policy is explored through the lens of linguistic neo-colonialism in Ireland in the case of learners of English as an Additional Language. The perspective of Ireland as a decolonized nation may have an impact on current language policy. Arguments for an additive approach to language and identity, language maintenance and the preservation of linguistic human rights make the case for avoiding subtractive bilingualism as a form of linguistic neo-colonialism. Social class and racism can lead to linguistic oppression that must be addressed critically by all stakeholders and policy makers at macro and micro levels. A transformation in linguistic oppression has potential to address these issues within communities. It is therefore essential that all children are afforded the opportunity to develop their language skills to the fullest extent possible, in order to gain maximum access to education and the structures and norms that constitute the society of their new community in addition to, not instead of, their home community.

Key words: *Language policy, identity, linguistic human rights, language maintenance, immigration, English as an Additional Language*

In this paper educational language policy is explored through the lens of linguistic neo-colonialism in Ireland. The perspective of Ireland as a decolonized nation may have an impact on current language policy. Arguments for an additive approach to language and identity, language maintenance and the preservation of linguistic human rights make the case for avoiding this type of linguistic neo-colonialism. According to Toolan “There has to be a positive argument for linguistic diversity and indeed there is a quite straightforward one. The positive arguments must be rooted in principles of self-determination, and the right to freedom of expression” (2003, p.60).

The plurilingual nature of education for children speaking languages other than English as L1 is a relatively recent Irish phenomenon (Dillon, 2011). The increased migration that took place in Ireland was at its height in the mid-2000’s as employment opportunities were opened up and increased mobility in the European Union became the norm. In 2002, the percentage of residents who were non-Irish nationals was 5.8%

while by 2011 this had grown to 12% (CSO, 2012). The Council of Europe acknowledges that while this increases the language resources on which Ireland can capitalise, it has transformed many mainstream schools to plurilingual micro-communities (2008, p.11-12) as well as putting pressure on an over-loaded education system in terms of demand for English as an Additional Language (NCCA, 2010).

Linguistic Diversity and Language Policy

Linguistic diversity in the educational arena can only be maintained and achieved in the context of appropriate educational language policy. Schlyter refers to the notion of language policy as language being viewed as an object to be acted upon “in terms of different aspects of language planning” (2003, p.163). According to Pennycook, language policy involves far more than choosing which language to use in, for example, education as it also involves the use of language “for purposes of cultural governance”, which reflect and produce “constructions of the Other” (2002, p.91). He refers to Foucault’s notion of governmentality which focuses on “how power operates at the micro level of diverse practices, rather than macro regulations of the state” (ibid.); in essence, he holds that while a language policy might be present at state level, the recommendations may or may not be implemented by those at ground level working in schools.

Saville-Troike notes that linguistic social control occurs where official or unofficial policies and practices regulate which language is to be used in particular situations (2006, p.123). Hamel points to the importance of counteracting the idea of monolingualism and de facto multilingualism (i.e. multilingualism which has simply developed but with a lack of awareness and/ or planning) through appropriate language planning. He says that de facto multilingualism “has proven extremely harmful for cultural diversity, massive bilingualism and minority languages” (2003, p.136). According to the Council of Europe “If languages are to be a real means of communication and openness to the Other, this must become one of the essential goals of education policies” (2007, p.30), leading to true plurilingualism. Restrictive language policies and passive language policies where the dominant language is promoted at the expense of minority languages lead to assimilation and cultural hegemony (Darder, 2014; Bartolomé, 2006). These issues will be discussed throughout the paper with a view to critiquing the policies in place for empowering bilingual and plurilingual learners in Irish schools.

Linguistic Neocolonialism

While not a simple theory to define or limit, postcolonial theory, which is most often applied to literary theory, may find a place in this context. Writers in the postcolonial tradition such as Fanon, Said and Ashcroft have opened up an interesting

consideration for reflection; as a postcolonial nation, which has had to fight for recognition and promotion of Gaeilge, the original mother tongue of Ireland, should the state be more empathetic to the cultural and linguistic needs and wants of newcomers? Perhaps newcomers are being colonised linguistically, at the expense of their own language in the neo-colonial sense. Furthermore, newcomers may be in the process of being colonised in a more additive sense of promoting Gaeilge among those communities.

The term neo-colonialism derives mainly from former masters acting in a colonizing manner towards formerly colonized nations (Glaes, n.d.). Economic connections and post-colonial influences point toward the emergence of neo-colonial relationships. According to Altbach (1971) neo-colonialism is difficult to describe and analyze but often is about how advanced nations maintain their influence in developing countries. In this study, neo-colonialism refers to the more dominant group imposing their practices and policies on the minority group. I propose that the term be used to explore linguistic neo-colonialism in terms of perspectives on and practices of language acquisition. It is through this lens that the paper is written.

As Viruru states “postcolonial theory is not limited to the study of how nations have recovered from colonisation but is more concerned with the adopting of an activist position, seeking social transformation” (2005, p. 9). She also says that new experiences of colonisation can be found in society today, for example ghettos, reservations in the USA and sometimes, schools. Bredella warns that we cannot understand others, and that when we try to understand others our motivation comes from a will to dominate them (2003, p.36). She makes the important point that we are prisoners of our own culture and we cannot help but serve the interests of our own culture (2003, p.37). Said’s evaluation of trying to understand the Other is summed up as follows: “In short, Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient” (1978, p.3). This has implications for researchers as the limitations of the researcher’s speaking lens that dominates the study must be taken into consideration, as highlighted by Garcia (2009, p.xiv). In this paper, there are limitations inherent to undertaking research about a diverse and multicultural population in my position as a product of European scholarship (Garcia, 2009) and as a ‘White teacher’ (Howard, 2006), in addition to all the cultural markers that go along with being an Irish citizen and English/ Irish bilingual speaker of western European additional L2s.

Of importance to the current study is therefore Viruru’s reference to the “connections between colonial ideologies of distinction and superiority to the debate over bilingual education in the United States and the world-wide clash between education based on

Western heritage and multicultural ideas” (Viruru, 2005, p.10). Mac Naughton refers to ways in which to address postcolonialism so that teachers may “consider how to engage with young children in order to challenge colonialism” (2006, p.51). One way in which teachers may challenge colonialism is through recognising the importance of the child’s first language and acting upon this. It is important to look at educational language policy at the macro and micro level. This has already been explored in detail by Dillon (2011). There is no languages-in-education policy in place in Ireland but her analysis of two important documents in the Irish context (NCCA, 2005; NCCA, 2006) corroborate with McGorman and Sugrue, who found that at the micro level “in practice, many practitioners did not attach adequate attention or priority to intercultural concerns in a very crowded, if not overloaded, professional renewal, school improvement agenda” (2007, p. 16). Furthermore, the findings of Smyth, Darmody, McGinnity and Byrne (2009, p. 172) show that the majority of Irish teachers find that the curriculum and textbooks do not take adequate account of diversity and that pre-service and in-service training do not adequately prepare teachers for facing the challenges of teaching in multilingually diverse classrooms.

Ireland was colonised by British rulers for over six centuries since 1366, starting with the Statutes of Kilkenny. According to Cahill (2007), for five centuries of this the use of the Irish language was considered disloyal to the crown and also, at times, was seen as an infection of the purity of Britishness. In many cases the language was considered something to be extinguished along with the religion of the majority of Irish people. Flores’s use of the phrase “docile colonial subjects” highlights the intentions of the colonisers very well (2013, p.268) and he refers to Spivak’s use of the term “epistemic violence” to explain what happened not only in Ireland but in many colonised nations (ibid.). Cahill (2007) and Crowley (2000) paint a clear picture of the politicisation of the Irish language over the years until it became the Free State and gained political independence in 1922.

The Irish were the first modern people to decolonise in the 1900s after centuries of British rule; but Kiberd makes the point that Irish minds were colonised by the British long after the territory was handed back politically (1997, p.6). Murray (2005, p.18) similarly believes that “much of what has resulted from centuries of domination lives on in our shared ideologies of progress and development today”. Kiberd asserts that within a colonised nation “the struggle for self-definition is conducted within language” (1997, p.11), which leads to an important message to be drawn from postcolonial theory for this study: colonisation in Ireland and in many other countries has gone much deeper than political rule. It has led not only to the loss of economic and political power, but also the decline of the native language and culture (ibid.) despite many attempts to revive the language since then, beginning with the Free State

government undertaking an expensive and expansive programme of training primary school teachers in Irish. Douglas Hyde delivered the following argument for de-anglicisation (the elimination of English influence, language, customs, etc.) following the inevitable English imposition of the English language during colonisation:

When we speak of 'The Necessity for De-Anglicising the Irish Nation', we mean it, not as a protest against imitating what is best in the English people, for that would be absurd, but rather to show the folly of neglecting what is Irish, and hastening to adopt, pell-mell, and indiscriminately, everything that is English, simply because it is English.
(Hyde's "Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland", n.d)

Gibbons (1996) maintains that despite differences between the types of oppression in Ireland and in other British colonies, the Irish national consciousness has long seen itself as oppressed. The sociohistorical backdrop must be taken into consideration (Bartolomé, 2006), in terms of the legacy of internal colonisation potentially leading to assimilationist ideologies. For Marx, thoughts tend to be shaped by a person's political and economic circumstances and therefore consciousness is social and based on socio-political experiences (Giddens, 1971). Of particular relevance to this paper is Murray's elucidation of one of Fanon's greatest insights – "that the damaged psyche of the colonized people mirrors the desires of the coloniser" (2005, p.20), which offers one perspective on the possibility of current language colonisation in practice in schools today. It must however be acknowledged that linguistic colonisation can also be seen as enriching the lives of newcomers through communication with multicultural communities afforded by the use of English (Canaragajah, 1999). Moane (2002, p.112) echoes and elucidates the point made by Murray (2005) above when he says that:

the pressure to re-enact dominator patterns of history come from both our own historical legacy and from contemporary global forces which combine to push us towards a path in which we recreate the patterns of domination reminiscent of colonial domination. However, such a path is not inevitable and indeed legacies of history may also provide the very resources needed to create a society characterised by greater equality, vision and social justice.

This means that the Irish consciousness could lean towards either oppressing newcomers or 'allowing' them freedom to be newcomers in Irish society and raises issues around a type of linguistic neo-colonialism which warrants further exploration. Freire's critical consciousness has as a major goal that of liberating people from their individual propagation of this type of political consciousness. For Watts, Diemer and Voight, critical consciousness is composed of critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action (2011). As action and reflection are reciprocal, justice-oriented citizens may take a critical stance on issues present in the collective consciousness which may

result in social change and transformation of consciousness. This has implications for Ireland as a formerly colonised nation. Underpinning this in the context of this paper is the issue of linguistic human rights.

Linguistic Human Rights

McGroarty (2002, p.19) writes that discussions of language policy often connect with issues of globalization and effects on language learning and the definition of language rights as expressions of human rights. This is a more recent phenomenon as Phillipson, Rannut and Skutnabb-Kangas (1995) wrote less than ten years before that language and human rights are topics which are seldom merged. It is clear that “human rights have become a major concern of the international community and governments worldwide” (Phillipson et al., 1995, p.1). Human rights are often linked to North-South aid and the worldwide promotion of democracy, according to Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1995, p.73). In order to promote the observance of human rights, one of the areas where one can start is in the promotion of language issues in the primary school. According to Phillipson et al. (1995, p. 1), linguistic rights should be considered basic human rights. Speakers of official languages within a country enjoy their Linguistic Human Rights (LHRs). Despite the drafting of many worthwhile international charters and documents, and the adoption of these by member states, many linguistic minorities do not enjoy these rights. Some of these documents will be outlined below. Since many of the linguistic minorities who do not enjoy LHRs are minority groups anyway, we can therefore observe an overlap between minority group rights and LHRs.

Observing LHRs can be done at an individual level and at a collective level. At the individual level, it implies that the mother tongue is respected by all and can be positively identified as such by speakers of that language. According to Phillipson et al. (2005), it means the right to learn the mother tongue, including at least basic education through the medium of the mother tongue. The same authors regard any restrictions on this as an infringement of fundamental LHRs. Phillipson et al. (1995, p.2) regard the observation of LHRs at a collective level as the right of minority groups to exist, to be different. Toolan (2003, p.60) notes that these arguments are positive and rights-based for minority-language or minority-culture maintenance and protection, and are unrelated to the more “intangible plea concerning preservation of diversity”, which he says is simply a preference, albeit a valid preference. Tollefson (2002, p.3) raises some questions around how language policies in schools marginalize some students and can create inequalities and says that these issues are “at the heart of fundamental debates about the role of schools in society, the links between education and employment, and conflicts between linguistic minorities and “mainstream” populations” (ibid.).

Wiley (2002, p.40) refers to the UNESCO resolution of 1953 that every child should have a right to attain literacy in his or her mother tongue when discussing the idea of language rights. He probes the assumptions about language rights by referring to Macias's distinction between two types of language rights (1979) – the right to protection and the right to expression (2002, p.39-40) and also refers to Skutnabb-Kangas, who has put forward her own proposal for a declaration of children's linguistic human rights based on the following three premises (1995, p.45):

- (1) Every child should have the right to identify positively with her original mother tongue(s) and have her identification accepted and respected by others.
- (2) Every child should have the right to learn the mother tongue(s) fully.
- (3) Every child should have the right to choose when she wants to use the mother tongue(s) in all official situations.

This proposal for LHRs links in with both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948 – hereafter referred to as UDHR)ⁱ and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989 – hereafter referred to as CRC)ⁱⁱ, which was ratified by Ireland in 1992. Article 26 of the UDHR is concerned with education while Article 15 is concerned with nationality.

Article 15 (1): Everyone has the right to a nationality.

Article 26 (2): Education shall [...] promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

These Articles are related to Articles 29 and 30 of the CRC, in terms of respect for cultural identity, language and values, and the use of ethnic minority languages.

Article 29 (1): [...] states Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to: (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own.

Article 30: In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.

The following articles from the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Council of Europe 1995 – hereafter referred to as FCPMN)ⁱⁱⁱ, which was ratified by Ireland in 1999, contain the following assertions which may be relevant to the protection of LHRs within any nation. However, upon detailed examination each article seems to have a ‘get-out’ clause, which makes the whole document seem as though it is simply paying lip-service to the notion of protecting minority rights.

Article 5 (1): The Parties undertake to promote the conditions necessary for persons belonging to national minorities to maintain and develop their culture, and to preserve the essential elements of their identity, namely their religion, language, traditions and cultural heritage.

Article 10 (2): In areas inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities traditionally or in substantial numbers, if those persons so request and where such a request corresponds to a real need, the Parties shall endeavour to ensure, as far as possible, the conditions which would make it possible to use the minority language in relations between those persons and the administrative authorities.

Article 12 (1): The Parties shall, where appropriate, take measures in the fields of education and research to foster knowledge of the culture, history, language and religion of their national minorities and of the majority.

Article 12 (2):2 In this context the Parties shall inter alia provide adequate opportunities for teacher training and access to textbooks, and facilitate contacts among students and teachers of different communities.

Article 14 (1): The Parties undertake to recognise that every person belonging to a national minority has the right to learn his or her minority language.

Article 14 (2): In areas inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities traditionally or in substantial numbers, if there is sufficient demand, the Parties shall endeavour to ensure, as far as possible and within the framework of their education systems, that persons belonging to those minorities have adequate opportunities for being taught the minority language or for receiving instruction in this language.

According to page 22 of the same document Article 14 (1) “does not imply positive action, notably of a financial nature, on the part of the State”. Furthermore, with regard to Article 14 (2), “this provision has been worded very flexibly, leaving Parties a wide measure of discretion”. It also states that it “imposes no obligation upon States to do both, its wording does not prevent the States Parties from implementing the teaching of the minority language as well as the instruction in the minority language”. It is clear that although recognition is being given to the need to protect minority group rights, this recognition does not appear to have a strong enough status which

may force nation states to act. The Council of Europe recognizes that while preservation of their L1 is an issue for immigrants planning to stay in Ireland and that its maintenance may be “perceived as a right or a duty by members of the population concerned and as an advantage for the country in its international contacts”, it can also be seen by both the immigrants and a part of the Irish population “as an obstacle to integration or as a sign of non integration” (2008: 26). The issue of preserving the L1 raises issues around Language Maintenance and Language Shift and will be discussed in detail later.

According to Phillipson et al. (1995, p.14) “there can be no beneficiary of a right unless there is a duty-holder”. The state and the individual both have duties in this matter regarding LHRs. The state has the duty to create conditions which lead to the enjoyment of human rights, and therefore to legislate accordingly. However, the individual also has a duty. People from ethnic linguistic minorities also have a duty to learn the official language to some extent e.g. that the rights “should not be to the detriment of the official languages and the need to learn them” (Phillipson et al., 1995, p.14, from the Preamble of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages). This is reiterated by the FCPMN, where it is stated that the right to learn the minority language “...shall be implemented without prejudice to the learning of the official language or the teaching in this language”. Saville-Troike (2006, p.122) acknowledges that when people cross linguistic boundaries in order to participate in another language community, learning that language is required, as well as being a necessary tool for communication.

Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson point out (1995, p.71) that

Ethnolinguistic minority children, indigenous and immigrant, often attend pre-schools and schools where no teachers understand their language and where it is not used, either as a subject or as a medium of instruction. The school has been and is still the key instrument, on all continents, for imposing assimilation (forced inclusion) into both the dominant language and the dominant culture [...] much of the recent focus on multiculturalism has in fact excluded multilingualism and thus excluded language from culture.

Language is one of the most important cultural markers. According to Bruner, language cannot be understood outside of its cultural setting (1983, p.134). Darder argues that language functions as the transmitter of culture (2012). While the *Intercultural Guidelines* (NCCA, 2005) do make reference to multilingualism in an additive sense on a number of occasions, this multilingualism is still counted only as a relatively small part of the 176-page document and therefore does not feature strongly enough here, notwithstanding the fact that the lack of in-service training for this and

the *EAL Guidelines* (NCCA, 2006) has made it extremely difficult for teachers to engage meaningfully with the guidelines at the micro level. The issue of pre-service and in-service training is certainly a cause for concern in facilitating the specific needs of newcomer children in mainstream classes, an issue also highlighted by Darder (2014).

Returning to the earlier point where neo-colonialism was raised, Donahue refers to the loss of Celtic language in America in the early part of the twentieth century, where two interviewees said that

Our ancestors came from Scotland and Ireland to escape the kind of repression that now seems the ‘right way to do things.’ ... They were forbidden to speak, read, or write in their native tongue and had to make English their ‘official language’ (2002, p.147).

This is echoed by Wiley who compares current LHRs with “early 20th century restrictionism” (2002, p. 61). While he says that support for children’s LHRs in the US are protected in principle, most of the efforts are outside the domain of federal education policy through community-based organizations and private efforts, for example. Pennycook refers to Phillipson’s argument that “colonialism should be seen as the first phase in linguistic imperialism” (2002, p.94) and also mentions that in the past, as in the present, while education has been seen as a means for effective governance of the people, language policy has acted as a mechanism for providing such governance (ibid.). According to Tollefson language can be central to social control and

An important issue in language policy research is the study of how policies are shaped by ideologies, and how discursive processes naturalize policies that are adopted in the interests of dominant ethnolinguistic groups (2002, p.6).

Burnaby says that the lack of use of Cree in schools in Canada is a good example of “resistance to well-ingrained beliefs underlying most instances of colonial language imposition on minority language groups” (2002, p.76). In an African context, Breton cites the high status of the former colonial languages, where they dominate in areas such as education, politics and science. He says that most states “have not gone beyond the level of political discourse” in safeguarding their African languages which have been celebrated regarding their richness, originality and essential “African-ness” (2003, p.209). In a similar vein, Pennycook looks to Orientalism which has been understood as a central aspect of colonialism since Said’s (1978) classic study when examining “Language-in-education policies in British colonies” which he says were “directed toward the preservation of Orientalist understandings of local cultures and the promotion of vernacular education as a means of social regulation” (2002, p.96).

These examples clearly have implications for schools as most of the burden of implementation of language policies and practices lies on schools themselves.

While there is no wish to on the part of the researcher to suggest that there has been, knowingly, any underhand treatment of new immigrants to Ireland over the last number of years, it is worthwhile to view the importance of language policy in terms of the implications of decisions made by government organisations on the languages spoken by ‘newcomer children’. Tollefson refers to critical linguistics as entailing social activism; that linguists are responsible for ways to alter social hierarchies based on how dominant and minority groups use language (2002, p.4). According to Macedo in his foreword to Darder’s 2012 volume, “hegemonic ideology is so successful that even its victims see it as natural and common sensical” (2012, p. x). The linguists that Tollefson mentions do not interact with children in a classroom. However, teachers must be the linguists here in a sense. Teachers and others who work closely with newcomer children can act as agents of change to transform the expectations of social hierarchies or they can maintain the status quo by perpetuating the myth that in order to assimilate, one’s native language and culture must be forgotten (Darder, 2012). The Council of Europe’s Language Education Policy Profile of Ireland recommends that in the case of developing a vision for the future of this evolving Ireland, the main challenge is to shift progressively from an

official but lame bilingualism (English/Irish) to the full recognition of differentiated plurilingual profiles (where Irish would have a special place and English a central role, and where other languages would be acknowledged as part of the country’s cultural and economic resources and assets as well as linked to individual identities and collective loyalties” (2008, p.34).

Skilton-Sylvester sees that language teaching can be seen as language policymaking acknowledges the importance of looking at the way in which teachers create policies of their own within classrooms “while accepting and challenging the policies that are handed down to them” (2003, p.10).

The Irish Language in the Education System

The Irish language holds a particular status within the education system and specifically at primary school level. Coolahan notes that “concern for the Irish language has dominated education debates in Ireland since independence” (1981, p.223) but that despite this concern, many stakeholders have been disappointed with the results. Prior to 1960, the emphasis was on the written language. With the introduction of the oral examination at Leaving Certificate level in that year, the emphasis shifted to the oral language. This and the introduction of a revised primary school curriculum in 1971 led to new teaching methods being used such as the audio-

lingual and audio-visual methods. The *Primary School Curriculum* (NCCA, 1999) continues in this vein to emphasise communicative competence as an aim for Irish language learning and promotes active learning and using a hands-on approach to teaching Irish which will help fluency to develop naturally.

Harris (2005) maintains that the promotion of the Irish language by the Free State government and governments thereafter referred to earlier reached its peak in the 1940's, when the Irish language started to decline, until a new revival in the 1960's and 1970's, some of which was instrumental in re-evaluating curricula. Since then the number of Gaelscoileanna (Irish language immersion schools) has risen rapidly and in 2015 there were 144 Gaelscoileanna in operation^{iv} constituting just under 4% of primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. Therefore, while the resurgence of immersion education is of note, the importance of ordinary primary schools in promoting the Irish language must not be under-estimated.

It is of significance to note that it is not possible to gain entry to any undergraduate or postgraduate programme of teacher education without having a minimum of C3 at Honours level in the Irish language to matriculate. This, along with the Irish Language Requirement to be eligible for registration with the Teaching Council, highlights the importance of the Irish language within primary education, not only traditionally but going into the future.

Natural intergenerational transmission of Irish is at a low level on most of the island of Ireland according to Harris (2005), and here the educational system plays an extremely important role in transmitting the language. A report from 1994 showed that Irish was never spoken in two thirds of homes in Ireland (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin) and census data from 2006 show that the proportion of people using Irish on a daily basis is much higher among the school-going population. Therefore, some results around motivation to learn Irish from Harris and Murtagh's *Twenty-Classes Study* (1999) are useful to note. It was found that pupils were reasonably well disposed towards the Irish language itself but often were not committed enough to learning Irish. It was also found that a substantial minority of pupils did not believe that they had the support and encouragement of their parents in the task of learning Irish (something which has an effect on achievement in Irish and attitudes and motivation to learn Irish). Pupils also tended to self-assess negatively in Irish in comparison with other subjects. Parents were found to be generally positive about Irish and supportive of the notion of their children being taught the language in school. Harris (2005, p.969) says that in practice many parents did not actively and directly promote positive attitudes towards learning Irish and often took a hands-off approach to the practice of their children learning Irish.

All of the above leads to the point made by John Harris (2005, p.964) that

primary schools have a particularly important role in reproducing competence in Irish, especially speaking proficiency, in each new generation and in maintaining the levels of bilingualism reported in the census in recent times.

This has implications for the discussion of Language Maintenance and Language Shift below and some references will be made to the Irish context once again at that point. It also has particular relevance to the area of Language and Identity explored below where the issue of newcomer children learning Irish is referred to.

Language Maintenance and Language Shift

Newcomer children speaking languages other than English (LOTE) at home in the Republic of Ireland are not denied the right to use their own languages. However, instead of simply not ‘denying’ children the right to use their home language, children should in fact be encouraged to actively use that language. Valenzuela’s theoretical conception of ‘care’ holds resonance as she holds that while most educators care about their students, this may take the form of caring in terms of divorcing the child from their home culture in order to help them assimilate into the dominant culture instead of affirming and embracing the home culture (1999). ‘Not denying’ cannot be seen as active caring. If children from minority groups are encouraged to value their L1 within a dominant culture, this may not only enhance self-esteem and cultural identity, but may also lead to positive cognitive consequences (Flynn, 2007; Thomas and Collier, 1997; Cummins, 1979; Bialystok, 2001; Rodriguez, Carrasquillo and Soon Lee, 2014). McCarty warns when quoting a Navajo elder from Arizona that “If a child learns only English, you have lost your child” (2002, p.285). Genesee (2008) affirms that additive bilingualism is critical for ELLs (Early Language Learners). This means that the acquisition of L2 or L3 should be at no cost to the home language or culture of the child.

Yagmur, de Bot and Korzilius (1999, p.55) state that education has been reported as a very important variable in studies on Language Maintenance (LM) and Language Shift (LS). Fishman (1985, p.158–66) proposed some measures for predicting the relative survival of community languages including the number of people speaking the community language according to age, the institutional resources for LM, religious and racial distance from the mainstream community, published periodicals, the number of ethnic mother-tongue schools and the period of major immigration. In a study of the language maintenance patterns of a Polish community in Australia, Janik states that the most frequently mentioned causes of LS are “migration, industrialisation, urbanisation, lack of prestige, and absence of the language at school” (1996, p. 4). These phenomena are linked to linguoracism and therefore a link can be

made between racism and linguistic oppression. Janik (1996, p.4) also identifies some of the factors which have been identified as clearly promoting LM and those that can promote either LM or LS, as shown in the following quotation:

His clear-cut factors are early point of immigration, linguistic enclaves, membership in parochial, local-church-based school, and pre-emigration experience with LS. His ambivalent factors are the educational level of the migrants, numerical strength, linguistic and cultural similarity to the dominant group, the attitude of the majority, and interethnic differences. Kloss (1966, cited in Clyne, 1991)

Tonkin (2003, p.324) says that “[...] language shift has been going on for as long as languages have competed, which is surely as long as the phenomenon of language has existed”. Darder and Torres remind us that “racialization of language can be traced to the political practices of the Ancient Greeks, who ranked a population’s capacity for civilization according to the language they spoke” (2004, p.61). Flores (2013, 2015) talks about the codification of national languages particularly during the Age of Discovery and later where speakers of different varieties of language or even different languages were encouraged to speak a more standard national language and how this could be seen as “raciolinguistic ideologies that produced an idealized hegemonic White subject in opposition to racialized Others, who were represented as engaging in language practices that were a threat to the integrity of the national polity” (2015, p.15). Tonkin (2003) also notes that minority languages have always suffered as a result of this LS. Holmes (2001, p.56) agrees with Tonkin as he says that “it is almost always shift towards the language of the dominant powerful group”. According to Holmes, this is because the dominant group has little incentive to adopt the language of a minority and “the dominant language is associated with status, prestige and social success” (ibid.). Richards and Yamada-Yamamoto (1998, p.143) state that issues of L1 loss and attrition are relatively recent concerns compared with the higher priority issue among policy makers of acquisition of the language of the host society.

According to Janik (1996, p.8), it was Fishman who developed the concept of domain, and suggested that “[...] stable bilingualism depends on the domain separation of two languages”. A domain is an area of life in which one particular language is used in order to communicate. Clyne (1991, p.91) points out that the L1 will only be maintained if it serves as a medium of communication with other speakers of that language. Holmes (2001, p.52) says that where LS occurs, “the order of domains in which language shift occurs may differ for different individuals and different groups”. Pauwels’s study of 1995 attributed cross-gender and cross-community variation in LS to the differing ranges of domains in which the community language was used.

Mikhailchenko & Trushkova (2003) point out that the basis for the estimate of the vitality of a language is its functional power. In order to test their hypotheses that there is language attrition among first-generation speakers of Turkish, and that the level of attrition depends on background factors such as language contact/ use, level of education and length of residence, Yagmur et al. (1999, p.55) constructed a Subject Ethnolinguistic Vitality Questionnaire (SEVQ), as developed by Bourhis (1981). The model of ethnolinguistic vitality was proposed by Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977) as a social-psychological approach developing a framework to investigate the relationship between language and identity. Factors such as status, education, institutional support combine to provide a classification of low, medium or high vitality. Low vitality groups go through LS rapidly, whereas high vitality groups maintain their linguistic and cultural identity in a variety of settings or domains.

Holmes (2001) also makes the point that domains of language use often depend on the socio-economic position of the immigrants; lower-SES, less affluent immigrants tend to have more opportunities for L1 usage, whereas high-SES immigrants employed in white-collar positions tend to make the LS more rapidly. There are factors that affect SLA outcomes negatively, including dominance of one group over another, high levels of segregation among groups, and desire of the learner group to preserve its own lifestyle. These group factors, outlined by Saville-Troike (2006: 122), were proposed by Schumann's Acculturation model of 1978.

Mallinson highlights that socio-economic positions invoke the question of social class and that confusion exists over what exactly is meant by class. She posits that "class is defined by people's relationships to various income generating resources or assets" (2007, p.153) and that the dominant culture or "competitive hierarchy" affects social processes in terms of access to resources, including linguistic resources. She also points to Acker's work which sees class as bound with race and gender and highlights the importance of viewing class through class relations rather than class structures. This idea of class relations is of central importance to LM and LS. In Kerswill's discussion of language variation, he comes to the conclusion that language use "has the power to tell us about social structures themselves" (2009, p. 368). This also has implications for this discussion of use of distinct languages as well as variations of language. Darder and Uriarte remind us that "educational language issues associated with English learners must be understood within historical and material conditions that inextricably link racism and class inequalities in powerful ways" (2013, p. 31). These issues affect different communities in a variety of ways depending on the value of a language within the community group and the value of a language within the dominant culture.

Driessen, van der Silk and de Bot (2002), in a study of the language proficiency of 7-10 year olds in The Netherlands, found that those with an immigrant background (Turkish/ Moroccan) were lagging behind in Dutch proficiency skills compared with Dutch pupils. Driessen et al. (2002, p.175) refer to Scheffer (2000), who concluded that despite all measures taken, “[...] unemployment, poverty, early-school-leaving and crime rates are increasing among ethnic minorities”. According to Driessen et al. (2002, p. 176), a number of factors seem to impact their disadvantage when it comes to learning Dutch. These include the home language, which is not that spoken at school, and the fact that they grow up in an environment where Dutch is not spoken by their peers. Language education is of course only one factor among many in this complex area and it is clear that factors such as poverty and unemployment can also have a great influence on LS.

McKinnie and Priestly (2004, p. 24) conducted a study of the linguistic minority community in Carinthia, Austria. They note that the Slovene/ German bilingual community is in a similar sociolinguistic situation to many other minority groups. For example, they have been socially and politically marginalised; they tend to use the community language in limited domains, and tend to have a low appreciation of the status of their language. These issues are linked with racism and in specific linguoracism experienced by that group, again perpetuated by the dominant culture within that society. The SEVQ was also used by Gogonas (2009, p. 107) who found that Albanian children living in Greece tend to shift to Greek as their linguistic competence in Albanian is declining; he found that they wish to distance themselves from this stigmatised language and that their parents, although holding LM as an ideal, did not take drastic measures to counteract this. Morris (2003, p. 148) notes that for Mexican-Americans, LS towards English has still occurred more slowly than for non-Hispanic migrant groups. Special factors favouring LM in this instance include a continuing influx of native Spanish-speakers from Mexico to the USA, geographical concentration of immigrants in tightly knit communities, and support received from the Mexican government in recent years. He states (2003, p. 152) that

Mexican-Americans, as the most numerous Hispanic group in the USA, are at the centre of a controversy over whether language shift to English will continue and even accelerate, whether measures should be taken to reinforce such language shift, or alternatively whether Spanish language maintenance measures are needed.

Yagmur, de Bot and Korzilius (1999, p. 53), in a study of language attrition rates among the Turkish community in Australia, point out that although Australian policies are in favour of language maintenance, “language attrition is a widespread phenomenon in many ethnolinguistic groups in Australia”. Holmes (1997: 19) says that in New Zealand, many initiatives have been endorsed (including Aotearoa,

support for the Samoan language) that indicate support for language maintenance for minority group children. Yagmur et al. (1999, p. 53) suggest that L1 attrition in an L2 environment is unavoidable and inevitable, based on a study of German immigrants to Sydney. On the other hand, De Bot and Clyne (1994, p. 17) report

that first-language attrition does not necessarily take place in an immigrant setting and that those immigrants who manage to maintain their language in the first years of their stay in the new environment are likely to remain fluent speakers of their first language.

It is suggested that there may be a threshold period for language attrition; unless L1 is maintained during the early years of immigration, LS will occur. This argument is closely related to the importance of age as a factor in language acquisition and also with the fact that the present study focuses on children whose families have recently immigrated. Yagmur et al. (1999, p. 54) show that although Italian is taught as a language in schools and as a community language in Australia, speakers of the language are undergoing LS. Kipp's study of 1995 shows that Dutch-born migrants are much more likely to undergo LS than, for example, Greek speakers, even over generations (Yagmur et al., 1999). Cummins (2008) cites the example of Toronto as a 'linguistic graveyard', due to the high proportion of immigrants who have lost their mother tongue since immigrating to Canada.

Clyne and Kipp (1997, p. 459) have discovered from analyses of census data in Australia that those first-generation immigrants from predominantly Eastern or Orthodox culture in Europe are more likely to maintain their home language than those from other parts of Europe, and that groups from northern Europe tend to shift to English the most. Those from Asian countries also tend to display fairly low LS. Those from South America, especially Chile, have undergone a much lower LS than those from other Spanish-speaking countries. With regard to second-generation immigrants, Clyne and Kipp (1997, p. 462) have shown a high inter-generational shift towards English among Italian-, Polish-, Hungarian- and Macedonian-Australians, A relatively low LS was detected among Spanish-, Turkish- and French-Australians, and those of Hong Kong, Korean, Taiwanese, and Japanese parentage. The second-generation shift was shown to be lower among the children of endogamous marriages (both parents speaking the same home/ community language).

Clyne and Kipp (1997, p. 464) note that the best maintained community language in Australia is Greek, and that in the case of Greek, the language is a core value in that culture, along with religion and historical consciousness. Clyne and Kipp (*ibid.*) also make reference to the fact that Greeks are renowned for their ethnolinguistic vitality, a term used by Giles (1977) "[...] to describe the role of language in ethnic group relations". Clyne and Kipp (*ibid.*) also note that there has been an increasing pattern of

LS among the Greek communities, which suggests the inevitability of LS in the Australian context, regardless of efforts made to slow the LS by reinforcing cultural values and successfully implementing LM programmes. Macedonian is another language which stands out ethnolinguistically in Australia, according to Clyne and Kipp (1997, p. 465), as it is the language which has seen the most home users and the language which has had the lowest rate of LS among first- and second-generation immigrants. Holmes (2001, p. 63) states that “Polish people have regarded language as very important for preserving their identity in the many countries they have migrated to, and they have consequently maintained Polish for three to four generations”. He also says that the same is true for Greek migrants in places like Australia, New Zealand and America.

Jeon (2008, p. 54) refers to the three-generational model of LS which has been observed in the United States; in general the first generation speaks the L1, the second generation speaks the L1 and L2, while the third generation usually shifts to the majority-language L2. However, the last phase sometimes happens during the second generation, which can cause problems for “... intergenerational communication as parents, grandparents and children do not understand each other” (ibid.). He refers to the Korean community in the US as having experienced this phenomenon, and seeks to explain it in terms of language ideologies. He refers to a continuum of language ideologies ranging from assimilationist to pluralist, and that his research in a variety of settings showed that the Korean people he worked with were somewhere in the middle of the continuum. As access to education may be limited for minority language speakers, this can lead to differences in multilingual competence among family members; “children who are learning the dominant language at school become translators and brokers for their parents in service encounters, inverting the power structure and undermining parental authority” (Saville-Troike, 2006, p. 123). Hawkins says that “the language and literacy practices and funds of knowledge from students’ homes need to be represented and validated in the school curriculum and pedagogical practices” (2005, p. 37).

In Ireland, with the recent wave of immigration, most newcomers are first generation while the children attending primary school are second generation. Holmes states that where studies have been conducted in New Zealand, they show that “[...] community language proficiency is highest where immigration is most recent”. Fishman (1995) has stated that in general LS from the mother tongue to the majority group language is generally all but complete within three generations. Holmes (2001, p. 52) notes that LS to English has been expected of migrants in predominantly monolingual countries such as England, the United States, Australia and New Zealand and has been traditionally viewed as a sign of successful assimilation. This successful assimilation

was assumed to mean abandoning the minority language. His research shows that most migrant families gradually shift from using Gujarati, or Italian, or Vietnamese to each other most of the time, to using English and that “this may take three or four generations but sometimes language shift is completed in just two generations” (ibid.). In fact, he states that “gradually over time the language of the wider society displaces the minority language mother tongue” (ibid.). It is worth mentioning that, as Holmes said, a community may shift to English voluntarily over a number of generations, and while this involves the loss of the language for those individuals and even for the community in that country, if the language is spoken by a large group in its homeland it will not be under threat of disappearing because of this LS (2001, p. 57). The Polish community in Ireland or the Turkish community in England are good examples of this case.

Holmes (2001) informs us that censuses in Canada, Australia and Wales have included at least one language question for a considerable period of time. Censuses in Scotland and Ireland have also included a language question for the last number of years, while New Zealand added a language question for the first time in 1996. Clyne’s research in Australia (1991) and Crowley’s work in Vanuatu (1995) have teased out language usage information from census data in those countries. However, census questions may not offer enough insight into the nuances of spoken language and according to Holmes (1997, p. 29), ethnographic work analysing conversational interaction between bilinguals needs a

theoretical model which can satisfactorily accommodate code-switching behaviour. It is patterns of code-switching at the micro-level in face-to-face interaction which will undoubtedly throw light on the macro-level process of language shift.

The issue of global and national status of L1 and L2 have particular relevance to the area of L1 maintenance. One of the important symbolic functions of language is political identification and cohesion. Saville-Troike (2006, p. 20) states that, in the context of the USA “Maintenance of indigenous and immigrant languages other than English is not widely encouraged and is often actively discouraged”. In the USA, it is noted, while the teaching of English as L2 to immigrants is encouraged, promoted and supported, state and federal support for learning other languages is generally rare and ineffectual (2006, p. 121). Furthermore, Saville-Troike says that “Where knowledge of a particular language confers few visible economic or social benefits, there will be little motivation for acquiring it as L2” (2006, p. 121). Regarding institutional forces and constraints, Saville-Troike (2006, p. 124) outlines some of the problems associated with the dominance of L1. Among these is the issue that acquisition of a dominant L2 may lead to loss or attrition of the minority L1, leading to potential alienation from the minority language community.

Clyne and Kipp (1997, p. 468) have noted that among pre-school and school age children, those speaking Dutch, Macedonian, German and Turkish undergo the weakest LS. In the second generation, children speaking Austrian, French, German, Hungarian and Dutch tend to shift to English either on entering school or soon after. Holmes (2001, p. 52) notes that in traditionally English-speaking monolingual countries one of the first domains in which children of migrant families meet English is the school. While they may have watched English TV programmes and heard English used in shops before starting school, they are expected to interact in English at school from the very beginning because it is the only means of communicating with the teacher and their peers. Lesemann and van Tuijl (2001, p. 310) point to the interest among practitioners and researchers in educational approaches which provide balanced bilingual contexts to young minority children.

According to Hornberger “multiple languages and cultures are inherently valuable for society, [...] all groups in society have a right to participate equally in that society and [...] education must be available to all” (xv). Bearing in mind Fishman’s argument (1985) that schools cannot bring about LM on their own, that there must be support from the home and community, we must also consider LM approaches that may be relatively easily achievable within the primary school in the context where balanced bilingual instruction simply is not currently an option. It is interesting to note that LM and LS are occurring in different ways in Ireland. Firstly, the issue of LS of the Irish language over centuries has already been raised. Interestingly, however, this has not resulted in language death but the language has survived due to revitalization efforts alluded to earlier and the high status afforded to it in schools. Secondly, the new languages in Ireland are now in danger of undergoing LS unless real efforts are made to ensure their maintenance as outlined above.

Language and Identity

According to the FCPMN “The use of the minority language represents one of the principal means by which such persons can assert and preserve their identity. It also enables them to exercise their freedom of expression” (Council of Europe, 1995, p. 19). Language is for most ethnic groups one of the most important cultural core values, according to Smolicz, in Phillipson et al. (1995, p. 7). Language is by no means simply a means of communication. According to Fishman (1995, p. 51), languages stand for or symbolize peoples. Alred is of the opinion that the process of identity formation takes place principally through language (2003, p. 22).

Mazrui (2002, p. 267) quotes Westermann as follows in a strong statement about the relationship between language and identity in the African context “By taking away a people’s language, we cripple or destroy its soul and kill its mental individuality” and

also quotes Mwaura (1980, p.27) on p. 268 when stating that “Speakers of different languages and cultures see the universe differently, evaluate it differently, and behave towards its reality differently” because language controls thought and action. These statements reinforce how strongly individuals feel about their language as an intrinsic part of culture. Where major power differentials exist between language communities, this is particularly significant for society. De Souza Santos (2014), for example, feels strongly that there is a need to depart from eurocentrism in all its facets in order to counter cultural hegemony and therefore the assimilationist will for hegemonic identities. Language as a transmitter of culture (Darder, 2012) is a central part of identity. Bialystok notes that the language we speak can be instrumental in forming identity, and that “being required to speak a language that is not completely natural may interfere with the child’s construction of self” (2001, p. 5). This has more far-reaching implications when languages are distantly related to each other than those closely related to each other as languages belonging to distant families may be more likely to bring with them a larger cultural gap (Widdowson, 1989; Ogiermann, 2009).

Language has a more central role among certain ethnic groups in defining culture. Weiyun He refers to Lemke (2002) and Ochs (2003) when stating that the identity of the HL learner is to a large measure formed through her/ his speech (2006, p. 7). Smolicz and Secombe (1985) modified their core value theory in order to differentiate between negative evaluation of the community language, indifference, general positive evaluation and personal positive evaluation. The term core value refers to “those values that are regarded as forming the most fundamental components or heartland of a group’s culture, and act as identifying values which are symbolic of the group and its membership” (Smolicz & Secombe, 1985, p. 11).

Poles were found (Clyne, 1991, p. 92-3) to have a general positive evaluation of their native language. This means that they regarded the language as a vital element of ethnicity (Janik, 1996, p. 5). Their language is one of the core values of their Polishness. Polish settlers in Australia have pursued the goal of language and culture maintenance by creating organisations to maintain their linguistic and cultural heritage. It should be noted that Australian policies are in favour of language maintenance (Yagmur et al., 1999, p. 53). Holmes (1997, p. 33) refers to Grin (1993), who suggests that the long-term survival of minority languages depends partly on whether or not the group makes the positive choice to use the language wherever possible for community language activities. The availability of choice in this matter however is also subject to the number of speakers of that language in a given area, as well as the overarching policies and political ‘care’, in Valenzuela’s sense (1999). The experience of Poles in Ireland seems to be in this regard similar to that of their experiences in Australia in the 1990’s. Janik (1996, p. 5) informs us that for example,

Greeks, Poles and Latvians are portrayed in the literature as belonging to ‘language-centred cultures’. In Ireland, we can see many and varied examples of where this happens e.g. Polish schools in Dublin and Limerick, radio broadcast time in Polish, a Polish bank, the newspaper the Polish Herald, the TV station City Channel etc. (Debaene, 2008, p. 6-7). Furthermore, Polish culture maintenance is perceived as important and very important by respectively 58.6% and 36.8% of the 87 respondents to an online questionnaire administered to Polish nationals in Ireland, which Debaene says is “indicative of strong commitment on the part of Polish migrants to their mother country and culture” (2008, p. 8). Holmes (2001, p. 61) notes that “Language shift tends to be slower among communities where the minority language is highly valued. When the language is seen as an important symbol of ethnic identity, it is generally maintained longer”. In addition to this is the issue of community support being facilitated and valued by the socio-political environment as a whole.

Jeon’s references to language ideologies can be summarised as follows according to assimilationist language ideologies and pluralist ideologies (2008, p. 59). The former may include various strains of xenophobia, and may stem from a desire for newcomers to be ‘Americanised’, or may in fact come from the newcomers themselves, resulting from a personal desire to succeed socially and academically. Wong-Fillmore (2003) says that immigrants may choose to stop speaking their HL as they would prefer not to be seen as other or different. Shin’s study (2005) found that although parents may generally have favourable attitudes towards bilingual development, they tend not to act on those attitudes because of their wishes for their children to acquire English quickly. Furthermore, educational policies tend not to promote the use of the HL as explored earlier. Pluralist ideologies are best expressed by Schmid, and have already been explored in the section on educational language policy:

recognize and affirm the multilingual nature of the society, declare that multiple languages (and ethnolinguistic groups) are national resources to be nurtured as a collective asset, grant equal language rights to individuals and/or groups to retain their “mother’s tongue,” and stipulate a policy goal of facilitating native language retention and maintenance, most commonly through the educational system (2000, p. 62).

Ethnicity is also of concern to the present study. Ethnic category, according to Saville-Troike, influences learner SLA due to the “socially constructed categories from within native and target communities” (2006, p. 126). These attitudes are attributable to the nature of their interaction with other learners and native speakers of the TL. Saville-Troike states that “Members of ethnic groups who perceive themselves to have much in common are more likely to interact, and thus are more likely to learn the other’s language” (2006, p. 126). Reference is made to Miller’s study of 2000, where fair-haired Europeans who physically resembled their Australian peers assimilated more

readily than did those from Asia, who appeared different to their peers. This case highlights a more traditional form of racism where how one looks has an effect on how populations are treated and restrictive policies and practices come to the fore within schools. Another case mentioned by Saville-Troike is that of Finnish children attending school in Sweden and Finnish children attending school in Australia; the former, who were viewed negatively as a minority group, did less well than the latter, who were viewed positively as Scandinavians (2006, p. 125). Holmes (2001, p. 52) notes a similar phenomenon when he says that “Immigrants who look and sound ‘different’ are often regarded as threatening by majority group members. There is pressure to conform in all kinds of ways”. Saville-Troike’s own research of 1984 (cited in 2006, p. 127) found that children from South America, the Middle East and Europe appeared to establish friendships more easily with American children than children from China, Japan and Korea.

Other factors which may contribute to perceptions of social distance are religious background and cultural background including patterns of social behaviour (Saville-Troike, 2006, p.127). Jeon found that many Koreans were motivated to raise their children bilingually so that they could develop “...healthy ethnic identities”, as well as the recognition that as Korea grows into a more dominant global economic nation the knowledge of Korean would bring more practical benefits (2008, p. 62). According to Villarruel, Imig and Kostelnik (1995, p. 103), the term diversity has been used “to describe the racial and ethnic variation among children and the families in which they live”. They also go on to state that when it comes to ethnicity

the maintenance of ethnic identification and solidarity ultimately rests on the ability of the family to socialize its member into the ethnic culture and thus to channel and develop future behavioural and interpersonal norms as well as family lifestyles (1995, p. 106).

They acknowledge the difficulties for practitioners to move from an appreciation of the significance and validity of the child’s and family’s language, culture and communication practices, to actions affirming these important considerations. It is noted that the transition to formal schooling is a critical period in the child’s life, perhaps even more so for the culturally/ linguistically diverse children. This may be due to the fact that “the behavioural characteristics of one culture group can be markedly different from those of another” (1995, p. 107).

Watson-Gegeo and Nielsen (2003, p. 157) see that schooling is in most societies a “normal and pervasive feature of socialization”. As such, school becomes one of the cultural meaning systems within which children’s activities are embedded and socially organized. Of importance to the current study is the proposal that second language classrooms, or classrooms in which the child is being taught through the L2/ L3,

exhibit and teach, either implicitly or explicitly “... a set of cultural and epistemological assumptions that may well differ from that of the L2 learner’s native culture” (Watson-Gegeo et al., 2003, p. 158). Furthermore, school ‘culture’ “... typically reflects the socio-politically dominant culture in a society, although much about school is not ‘native’ to any cultural group...” (ibid., p. 159). McCarty (2002, p. 289) refers to a conversation with a Navajo teacher where it was remarked that their language was second best in boarding school, which has resulted in “internalized ambivalence about the language, and often, the conscious socialization of children in English”.

Cummins (2008) comments on the phenomenon of newcomers staking a claim to belonging to Irish society by learning Irish. He states that anecdotal evidence points to the fact that newcomer children may be achieving at a higher level in Irish than ethnically Irish children. He also asks what image of the child is being constructed through policies to promote Irish as a legitimate expectation. As Cummins point out, fluency in Irish may provide newcomers with a strong claim to belonging. He mentions the anecdotal phenomenon of pupils being withdrawn during Irish class for Language Support, thereby denying newcomer children of the possibility of participating in Irish classes. He draws a parallel between this and a similar phenomenon in Canada, whereby bilingual newcomers are doing better at French than children who had started four years earlier. Kopeckova also reported on her small-scale study in 2011 that 12-year-old children from Eastern Europe were doing better in Irish than native Irish children^v. There is still a dearth of research in this area. However, the Council of Europe (2008: 25) points to some emerging evidence that newcomers are learning Irish very well. An issue that arises here is – who has more claim to Irish identity? It is not just about teaching the language, but enabling children to do powerful things with language, such as exploring multiple identities. Furthermore, almost all Irish children learn Irish and as it is an integral part of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999), it is wise that newcomer children are afforded the opportunity to study Irish at this early stage so that they are not discriminated against at a later stage in being able to understand the societal use of Irish for official purposes, e.g. naming of state or voluntary bodies such as *Iarnród Éireann* (state-owned train service) and *An Bord Pleanála* (state agency with responsibility for planning infrastructure). A lack of knowledge of the Irish language could prevent people from becoming a primary school teacher, for example, because of the current matriculation requirement.

Interestingly, the NCCA also recognises the importance of multilingualism in the *Intercultural Guidelines* from the perspective of speakers of English as L1 rather than children with EAL. It is stated that learning Irish provides opportunities for the child

to engage in being multilingual and to gain an understanding of multilingualism, thereby offering opportunities for them in “developing empathy with, and an appreciation for, those children who are required to learn through a language that is not their first language” (NCCA, 2005, p. 163).

Conclusion

Language is the principal means of human communication (Chomsky, 2006). Language has a central role to play in the *Primary School Curriculum*, and is noted as one of the key principles thereof (1999, p. 8-9). Language helps the child to clarify and interpret his other experiences, to acquire new concepts, and to add depth to and consolidate concepts already known. Morrison reminds us that

Language is a social instrument for the induction of the child into society. Socialization of children would be difficult without language; thus, parents and schools have a great responsibility to provide optimum opportunities for language acquisition (1984, p. 320).

According to Lazenby Simpson (2002, p. 4), “an inadequate linguistic repertoire in the language of the host society is the greatest barrier to the full development of the individual’s potential within that society.” Social class and racism can lead to linguistic oppression and must be addressed critically by all stakeholders and policy makers at macro and micro levels. However, a transformation in linguistic oppression has potential to address these issues within communities. It is therefore essential that all children are afforded the opportunity to develop their language skills to the fullest extent possible, in order to gain maximum access to education and the structures and norms that constitute the society of their new community in addition to, not instead of, their home community. The Council of Europe considers the primary school to be the keystone of language learning in the education system (2008, p. 52). However, language learning outside of the education system must be valued and recognized as crucial to cultural identity. Furthermore, language learning in schools must continue to take all children’s home languages into consideration in order to minimize the potential for linguistic neo-colonialism. We live in an era where “conservative solutions that assert the practicality and superiority of restrictive language policies in schools” (Darder and Uriarte, 2013, p. 8) and there has been a rise in neoliberalism and neoconservatism (Hill, Lewis, Maisuria, Yarker & Carr, 2015) given the changing political face of global economies towards the end of 2016. Therefore we must encourage action at the micro level within classrooms to engage with critical consciousness and act on a pedagogy of possibility (Darder, 2012) in order to continue challenging linguistic colonialism.

Notes

ⁱ<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml> Accessed 25.02.13.

ⁱⁱⁱ<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm> Accessed 25.02.13.

ⁱⁱⁱhttp://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/1_AtGlance/PDF_H%281995%29010_FCNM_ExplanReport_en.pdf Accessed 25.02.13.

^{iv}www.gaelscoileanna.ie Accessed 05.11.15.

^v<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/2.663/%C3%B3-bh%C3%A9al-leana%C3%AD-imirceach-1.572601>. Accessed 25.05.16.

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