SPEAKER DIVERSITY IN THE MAJORITY-MINORITY LINGUISTIC CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the mechanisms underpinning diversity in speaker types in a minority linguistic context. The comparison of speaker diversity in three Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking) areas, Ros Muc in Conamara, County Galway, Ceathrú Thaidhg in County Mayo and Ráth Chairn in County Meath, provides an evaluation of how this diversity has effected the various linguistic networks in these communities. The three communities display different patterns in relation to issues of contact linguistics, exhibiting varying aspects of sociocultural fragility and language endangerment. The findings of this research suggest that the more varied and complex the contact dynamics are, the less vital the sociolinguistic basis to the use of Irish in the community will be. This comparative approach highlights the correlation between high levels of family-based language transmission and the viability of a minority language in the community's various social networks.

Key words: language dynamics, linguistic networks, speech communities, diversity of speaker types, speaker interaction, minority-majority sociolinguistic interaction, language contact, linguistic anthropology

LA DIVERSITÀ DEI PARLANTI NEL CONTESTO DELLE LINGUE MAGGIORITARIE E MINORITARIE

SINTESI

L'articolo analizza i meccanismi alla base della diversità nei tipi di parlanti in un contesto di minoranza linguistica. Il confronto tra le diversità di parlanti in tre aree 'Gaeltacht' (dove si parla il gaelico irlandese) – Ros Muc nel Connemara, nella contea di Galway, Ceathrú Thaidhg nella contea di Mayo e Ráth Chairn nella contea di Meath – fornisce una valutazione di come questa varietà ha influenzato le diverse reti linguistiche nelle comunità menzionate. Ciascuna delle tre comunità manifesta un modello diverso relativo alla questione di linguistica di contatto, con aspetti differenti di fragilità socioculturale e livello di pericolo di estinzione per la lingua in questione. I risultati di questa ricerca suggeriscono che più varia e complessa è la dinamica di contatto, meno vitali saranno le basi sociolinguistiche per l'uso del gaelico irlandese nella comunità. Questo approccio comparativo mette in risalto la correlazione tra gli alti livelli di trasmissione della lingua all'interno della famiglia e la vitalità della lingua minoritaria nelle varie reti sociali.

Parole chiave: dinamica linguistica, reti linguistiche, comunità linguistiche, diversità nei tipi di parlanti, interazione tra parlanti, interazione sociolinguistica tra la maggioranza e la minoranza, contatto linguistico, antropologia linguistica

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents sociolinguistic data from three contrasting Irish-speaking districts (Gaeltachtaí): Ráth Chairn, County Meath; Ros Muc, County Galway and Ceathrú Thaidhg, County Mayo. It aims to highlight issues of speaker diversity in these communities in order to understand the social mechanisms which determine language use in these minority language contexts. All three communities face challenges posed by contact issues and are linguistically endangered by their general societal relationship with the majority language, English. They also contend with contact issues generated in the interpersonal context of English speakers marrying into or setting up residence in the three areas. The findings of this research indicate a strong correlation between the level of family-generated speakers in a community and the vitality of Irish as a communal language. A corollary of this finding suggests that minority language communities become more reliant on institutional support to provide the linguistic context for minority language use as the speaker categories become more diverse in a linguistic community. In other words, as language communities become more complex and mixed they tend towards an institutionalisation of speaking, while the majority language increasingly colonises the communal and familial linguistic networks which operate independently of institutional input or interference.[1]

While the communities under investigation in this study would primarily attach an ethno-linguistic meaning to the use of the term Gaeltacht, it also represents a statutory geographic entity in which certain administrative functions and responsibilities apply (Cf. Commins, 1988; Ó Riagáin, 1997, 49). Ráth Chairn is a small Gaeltacht community, situated in the eastern county of Meath consisting of seven townlands.[2] It was established as an Irish-speaking district between 1935 and 1937 when forty families from Conamara in Co. Galway settled in the area on farms acquired for them by the Land Commission, a state agency charged with land redistribution in the post-independence era. However, Ráth Chairn was not granted official recognition as an official Gaeltacht region until 1967, following political agitation by the inhabitants.[3] Ros Muc, on the other hand, is a coastal community of Conamara, County (Co.) Galway, in the west of Ireland, consisting of nine townlands. In contrast to Ráth Chairn, Ros Muc is a district of what could be termed the 'organic' Gaeltacht. Conamara in general withstood the language shift of the nineteenth century, to which Co. Meath had succumbed almost totally by the close of the 1800's. The native speakers of Irish from Conamara who established Ráth Chairn as an Irish-speaking district had to contend with the surrounding English-speaking community, while Ros Muc is part of the wider Irish-speaking community of Conamara. Similar to Ros Muc, the people of Ceathrú Thaidhg constitute an 'organic' Gaeltacht community dwelling in a coastal region of northwest Co. Mayo. However, unlike Ros Muc's relationship with the larger Irish-speaking community of the Conamara region, Ceathrú Thaidhg is part of the larger geographic area of Iorras which has succumbed to a large extent to the pressures of language shift during the course of the twentieth century. Even though the Iorras region is still officially recognised as a Gaeltacht region, the Ceathrú Thaidhg community perseveres in a similar linguistic context to that of the Ráth Chairn community in that they both represent islands of Irish-speaking in a predominantly English-speaking context of the broader geographic unit in which they exist.[4]

GATHERING THE DATA

The data presented here was gathered with the help of acquaintances in the three districts during various periods of field work between December 2001 and the summer of 2004. I chose Ráth Chairn (RC), Ros Muc (RM) and Ceathrú Thaidhg (CT)[5] for the purposes of this comparative study because they are comparable in terms of geographic size and population, but with contrasting historical and geographical circumstances pertaining. This research identifies the RC community consisting of 426 people; that of RM comprising 461 peo-

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1   Subsequent research, *Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht: Final Report* (Ó Giollagáin et al., 2007) has demonstrated that changes in the demographic make-up of the Gaeltacht population have contributed significantly to the sociolinguistic erosion of Irish in their traditional networks.

2   Townlands in Ireland refer to small historical subdivisions of land which make up electoral districts or baronies when combined with adjacent townlands.

3   Various aspects of the history of Ráth Chairn are discussed in Costigan/Ó Curraoin (1987, 28–32), Mac Donncha (1986, 120–134), Ó Ciosáin (1993, 154–167), Ó Conghaile (1986), Ó Giollagáin (1999, 203–204) and Stenson (1986, 107–118).

4   Hindley (1990, 134) dismisses the notion of the Ráth Chairn being an Irish-speaking community; Ó Giollagáin's (2002) discussion of the sociolinguistic make-up of the Ráth Chairn community arrives at a more circumspect judgement.

5   A more comprehensive discussion of my research in RC is presented in Ó Giollagáin (2002); in the case of RM in Ó Giollagáin (2005); a detailed presentation of the CT research is being currently prepared.

ple; and 360 people making up the CT community. This amounts to 128 households in the case of RC, 178 in RM and 119 in CT.[6]

The Ráth Chairn community is far more mixed, from a socioeconomic perspective, than that of Ros Muc or Ceathrú Thaidhg, and includes a significant middle-class element. While unemployment exists in all three communities, the numbers of unemployed in Ros Muc and Ceathrú Thaidhg represent a very significant portion of the local population, especially among middle-aged men. Ros Muc is an isolated, rural, disadvantaged community. Ceathrú Thaidhg is similarly an isolated rural district but the level of disadvantage is not as severe as is the case in Ros Muc because of the mix of economic activity in the area. While there is a relatively high level of dependency on social welfare assistance, household incomes in CT can be supplemented by seasonal fishing and earnings from agricultural activities on marginal holdings. In contrast to the two coastal communities, many of Ráth Chairn's population can aspire to a quasi-suburban lifestyle because of relative prosperity and proximity to the capital. Ráth Chairn, 55 kilometres from Dublin city, falls within the capital's commuter belt.

TERMINOLOGY AND ABBREVIATIONS

Native Speaker

The use of the term 'native speaker' (Nat. Sp.) here conforms to the generally accepted usage, that of a competent speaker of Irish who acquires the language within a familial/communal setting. The use of the term here also corresponds to the normal Gaeltacht understanding of a native speaker of Irish: a person of Gaeltacht origin who was raised through the medium of Irish in a Gaeltacht area.[7]

Neo-native Speaker

A neo-native speaker (Neo-nat.) also acquires the language in a familial/communal setting, but is the offspring of co-speakers of Irish who are not native speakers but speak Irish as their household language.

Semi-speaker

Semi-speakers (Semi-sp.) tend to emerge from a mixed linguistic environment where (i) one parent is a bilingual Nat. Sp. of Irish and the other is a monolingual speaker of English and when (ii) the Nat. Sp. speaks Irish productively to the children as a second household language. The use of the term 'semi-speaker' here differs to the manner in which Dorian (1981)[8] and Fishman (1991)[9] employ the term. Its use here is restricted to those who acquire a high level of linguistic competence primarily through familial/communal effort rather than solely relying on formal pedagogical or institutional support. The more competent speakers in this linguistic grouping acquire a competency akin to native speaker ability.

The term semi-speaker is another linguistic category which has undergone critical revision (Cf., for example, Baker, Prys Jones, 1998, 14; Edwards, 1994, 58; Martin-Jones, Romaine, 1986, 32; Romaine, 1995, 260; 2000, 234; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981, 249),[10] but is not employed here in a pejorative, semi-lingual sense. It indicates the complexity of the transmission process in a mixed sociolinguistic scenario where a minority language is partially transmitted in the familial/communal context against the backdrop of a general societal context where the major language is pervasive. Semi-speakers constitute a significant sociolinguistic category in that they have acquired a higher level of linguistic proficiency and experience greater familial back-up to

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6   The individual data presented here mirrors the resident population of RM's nine townlands. The statistics for RC, however, do not include data from the entire geographic population; I have excluded data from about one hundred households mainly dwelling on the periphery of the official Gaeltacht who would be considered as part of the surrounding English-speaking Meath community rather the participants in the RC community. The vast majority of these households would not have been part of the official Gaeltacht prior to the extension of the Gaeltacht boundaries in RC in 1982.

7   The notion of the native speaker has undergone some critical scrutiny recently (cf. for example Davies, 2003, 197), but it is employed primarily here to refer to the linguistic transmission of Irish in the familial context.

8   Cf. Dorian (1981, 106–107): »Unlike the older Gaelic dominant bilinguals, the semi-speakers are not fully proficient in Gaelic. They speak it with varying degrees of less than full fluency, and their grammar (and usually also their phonology) is markedly aberrant in terms of the fluent speaker norm.«

9   Fishman's (1991, 128) 'semi-speaker', a partially competent speaker, would be closer to the use of the term 'co-speaker' employed in this study.

10 This paper does not afford the scope to engage in adequate discussion of the concept of the semi-speaker, but much of the discussion has been characterised by an ideological distaste with the perceived pejorative nature of the term and with the notion of a socially biased concept of linguistic competence. However much of the discussion has failed to address adequately how semi-speakers operate in relation to the language dynamics which pertain to the minority/majority language contact issues, especially in the minority language community where the semi-speaker acquires his or her competence in the majority language more rapidly than competence in the minority language. I would suggest that such an analytical endeavour might yield a more fruitful line of enquiry for specialists in minority languages than focussing on perceived slights about a sociolinguistic pecking order.

act in accordance with the language dynamics of the native speakers of Irish, as opposed to the language use patterns of Gaeltacht co-speakers. The category of semi-speaker in general represents a half-way stage, both in terms of proficiency and language dynamics, between the native speaker and the co-speaker. Simply put, Gaeltacht semi-speakers do not participate in Irish-speaking linguistic networks in a similar fashion to that of either the native speakers or the co-speakers, and therefore they must be considered an independent sociolinguistic category. It is not unreasonable from an analytical perspective to identify them as a separate sociolinguistic category if, in general, they act and talk in a different manner to that of the other speaker categories.

Ambilingual Speaker

The term ambilingual is employed here to refer to speakers of Irish who, similar to the semi-speakers, emerge from a linguistically-mixed household, but where the use of English with the child by the English-speaking parent would be marginal in comparison with the manner in which Irish is used both in the household and in the extended family. In this scenario, the efforts of the Irish-speaking parent, mainly the mother, to rear the child through Irish are complimented by the assistance of other members of the extended family who have regular contact with the child. Ambilingual speakers can be distinguished from the semi-speakers in that they acquire a higher level of competency in Irish in a shorter period of time. In some cases of course, they can be indistinguishable from Gaeltacht native speakers because of the pervasive presence of English, especially in the social networks of the young in the Gaeltacht, partly due to the dominance of English in the media-assisted reproduction of various aspects Anglo-American culture directed at the young. When these pressures are combined with the more obvious social concerns of the native speakers who are attempting to establish their position vis-à-vis the other speaker categories in the social networks of the young, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the very concept of a (young) native speaker of Irish is, at best, a highly complex sociolinguistic category and, at worst, a gravely threatened sociocultural entity. It is now unusual in the present sociolinguistic environment to encounter a native speaker of Irish in the Gaeltacht who has not acquired a relatively competent fluency in English by the age of four/five. Additionally, many Gaeltacht parents of native speakers have asserted the claim, during the course of my research, that their children's ability in English surpasses their ability in Irish, their household language, by the time they are eleven/twelve years old. In other words, the conditions of recessive bilingualism prevail in the case of the native language; linguistic attrition in terms of a speaker's competence is mirroring the social marginalisation of the category of native speaker in the Gaeltacht.

Of the three areas studied here, this category of ambilingual speakers is only identified in Ceathrú Thaidhg.[11]

Co-speaker

Co-speakers (Co-sp.) acquire Irish through some method of formal instruction, mainly by means of the Irish-medium school system in the three areas. Co-speakers differ from the previous categories of speakers in that their competency in the language is achieved primarily outside the familial/communal context. It generally requires three or four years of formal schooling for the co-speaker to acquire a comfortable level of fluency to facilitate interaction in Irish with the other speaker categories.

English speaker

English speakers referred to in this study are native speakers of English with no (or a very limited) competency in Irish. A few non-nationals who are all competent speakers of English reside in all three areas and some have also achieved a fluency in Irish. I have also included a small category of learners of Irish in the case of RC who have acquired a partial fluency in the language. This category is almost entirely composed of adult learners attending language courses organised by Comharchumann Ráth Chairn.[12]

INDIVIDUAL DATA

Linguistic Competencies in RC, RM and CT

Fig. 1 below indicates the comparative linguistic competencies that exist in RC, RM and CT. Linguistically, RM is a far less complex community than the other two communities with 82.2% of the people surveyed being native speakers. The other categories in RM amount to: Neo-nat.: 0.7%; Semi-sp.: 1.3%; Co-sp.: 8.7%; Eng. Sp.: 7.2%. Ceathrú Thaidhg's native speaker population represents 46.9% of the total population. When this category of speaker is combined with the other categories in CT: Ambiling.: 3.6%; Semi-sp.: 21.4%; Co-sp.: 12.5%; Eng. Sp.:15.6%, we are presented with a more complex community from a socioinguistic perspective than the speaker configurations in RM.

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11 Cf. Halliday et al (1977, 142): 'Some bilingual speakers, including some who are ambilingual, can be said to have two (occasionally more) native languages'.
12 The community co-operative organisation in RC.

Comparable percentages for RC present an even more mixed and complex linguistic scenario, with the three categories of Nat. Sp. (28.9%), Co-sp. (24.6%) and Eng. Sp. (28.6%) being of similar proportions. Neo-nat. represent 4.9%; Semi-sp. 8.2% and Learners 4.7%.

Linguistic Profile by Age for Ráth Chairn, Co. Meath

A detailed discussion of the data of RC's linguistic profile is not feasible within the scope of this paper, but three readily recognisable sociolinguistic features of the RC community can be clearly identified in the data: (i) monolingual English speakers exist in every age cohort and are a significant section of the overall community, as we have seen above, at 29% of the speakers surveyed in RC; (ii) while native speakers of Irish are the largest categories of speakers overall, the community has an obvious difficulty in reproducing their numbers in the younger cohorts, as evinced in the first four data bars (the childhood/adolescent cohorts),[13] where native speakers only represent 13% of the total in these four cohorts; (iii) co-speakers, at 41%, are the most productive category in the four youngest cohorts and the data for this category, especially in the primary and secon-

dary cohorts, indicates a level of institutional success on the part of the Irish-medium school in the area in producing Irish-speakers.[14] English-speakers amount to 23% of the total in the four youngest cohorts.
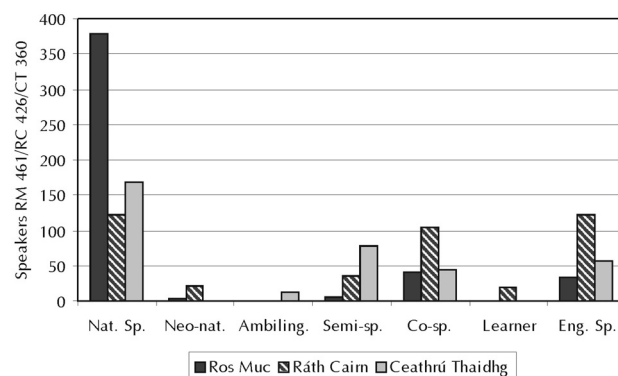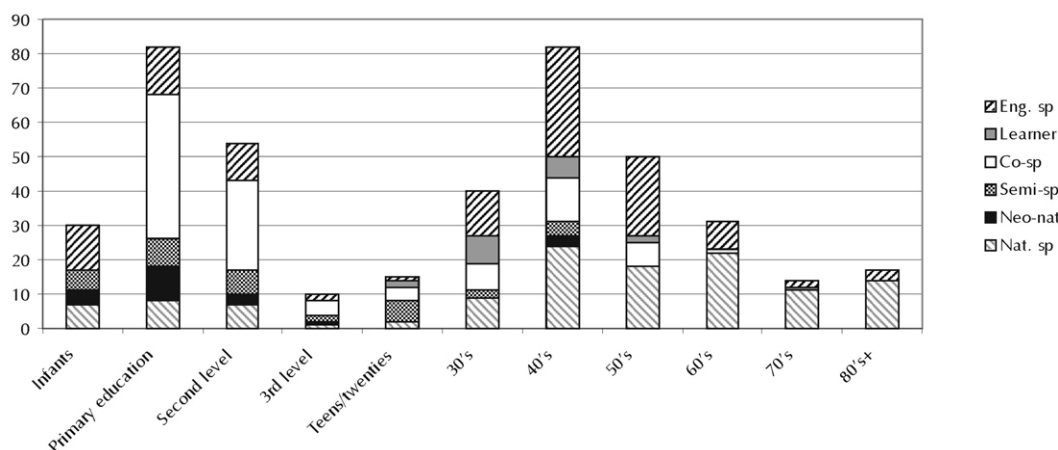

Fig. 1: Ros Muc/Ráth Chairn/Ceathrú Thaidhg: Linguistic competence.
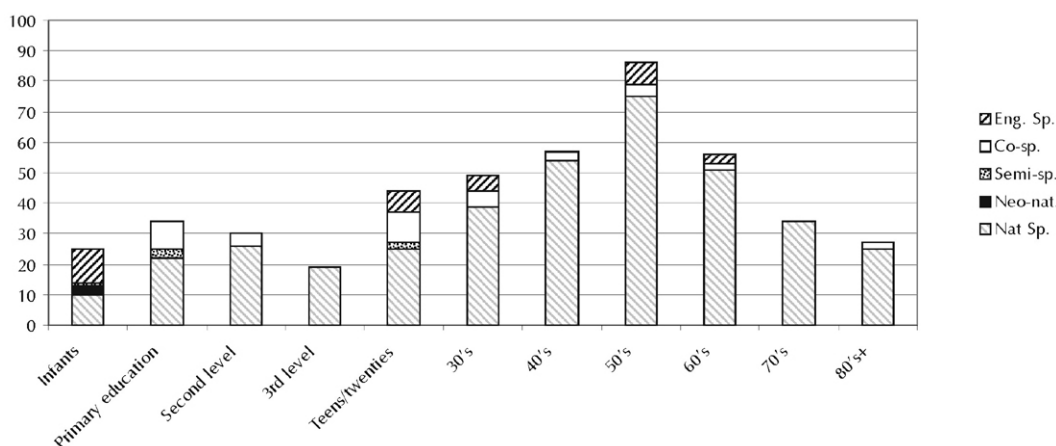**Sl. 1: Ros Muc/Ráth Chairn/Ceathrú Thaidhg: Jezikovne kompetence.**

	Infants	Primary education	Second level	3rd level	Teens/twenties	30's	40's	50's	60's	70's	80's+
Nat. sp	7	8	7	1	2	9	24	18	22	11	14
Neo-nat.	4	10	3	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
Semi-sp	6	8	7	2	6	2	4	0	0	0	0
Co-sp	0	42	26	4	4	8	13	7	1	0	0
Learner	0	0	0	0	2	8	6	2	0	1	0
Eng. sp	13	14	11	2	1	13	32	23	8	2	3

Fig. 2: Ráth Chairn: Linguistic Profile by Age.
Sl. 2: Ráth Chairn: Jezikovni profil glede na jezik.

13 The '3rd level' bar refers to teenagers and people in their twenties involved in third level education and the 'teens/twenties' bar represents the data of those in the same age group who are no longer engaged in formal education.
14 It is possible for children living within the official Gaeltacht boundaries to attend English-medium schools in the surrounding region.

	Infants	Primary education	Second level	3rd level	Teens/twenties	30's	40's	50's	60's	70's	80's+
Nat Sp.	10	22	26	19	25	39	54	75	51	34	25
Neo-nat.	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Semi-sp.	1	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Co-sp.	0	9	4	0	10	5	3	4	2	0	2
Eng. Sp.	11	0	0	0	7	5	0	7	3	0	0

Fig. 3: Ros Muc: Linguistic Profile by Age.
*Sl. 3: Ros Muc: Jezikovni profil glede na jezik.*

Linguistic Profile by Age for Ros Muc, Co. Galway

The data from RM's linguistic profile indicates clearly a major social difficulty and highlights an emerging sociolinguistic challenge to this predominantly Irish-speaking community. The RM data for the four youngest cohorts would suggest that the community has to contend with the social fall-out of significant demographic decline in the area. An obvious negative sociolinguistic consequence of this decline can be seen in the data for RM's infant cohort, where monolingual English-speakers out-number the native speakers of Irish in this cohort (Eng. Sp. – 44%; Nat. Sp. – 40%). However, unlike RC, the school-going categories indicate that RM succeeds in diminishing English monolingualism completely in the case of school children. In addition to the socioeconomic and demographic difficulties, the RM community now sees itself confronted with major sociolinguistic challenges despite not having concentrated to the same extent as the RC community on developing communal and co-operative structures and resources.

Linguistic Profile by Age for Ceathrú Thaidhg, Co. Mayo

The data by age profile for Ceathrú Thaidhg indicates that the community there is also experiencing demographic decline, though not as severely as is the case in

the Ros Muc context. The general pattern in CT emerging from this profile is that the sociolinguistic make-up of the community becomes more mixed as the focus descends through the various age groups. From the fifties age-group down, the native speaker proportion of each age cohort becomes less significant in relation to the community's speaker configurations. Worryingly for the sociolinguistic prospects of CT as an Irish-speaking community, the number of monolingual English speakers in the infant cohort is twice that of the Irish native speakers and they still outnumber the native speakers when the native speakers are combined with the ambilingual speakers of Irish. The category of semi-speaker is the most significant category of the four youngest age groups (infants – third level students) at 42% of this section of the community. This statistic indicates a strong adherence to the Gaeltacht heritage of Ceathrú Thaidhg in the linguistically mixed households, but productive use of Irish among the semi-speakers seems to be almost exclusively restricted to the familial context and the institutional setting of the Irish-medium primary school in the area. Even for the native speaker and the ambilingual speaker, Irish-speaking networks have not emerged among the young to facilitate productive use of Irish beyond the home and the school. Similar to RC and RM, the school provides the only Irish-speaking domain for the vast majority of CT's co-speakers. The evidence in CT suggests that, despite the familial transmission of Irish (however mixed or partial) in the case of the semi-speakers, they operate in
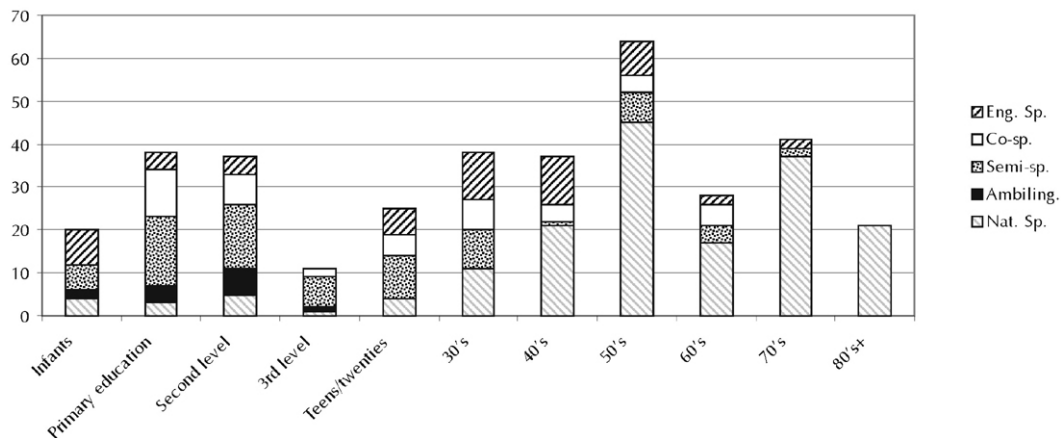
	Infants	Primary education	Second level	3rd level	Teens/ Twenties	30's	40's	50's	60's	70's	80's+
Nat. Sp.	4	3	5	1	4	11	21	45	17	37	21
Ambiling.	2	4	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Semi-sp.	6	16	15	7	10	9	1	7	4	2	0
Co-sp.	0	11	7	2	5	7	4	4	5	0	0
Eng. Sp.	8	4	4	0	6	11	11	8	2	2	0

Fig. 4: Ceathrú Thaidhg: Linguistic Profile by Age.
Sl. 4: Ceathrú Thaidhg: Jezikovni profil glede na jezik.

a similar fashion to the area's co-speaker in relation to the manner in which English is established as the language of the social networks of the young. The native and ambilingual speaker categories are too small as a proportion of the younger age groups to be able to influence the language of their social networks effectively.

The obvious challenge for the Gaeltacht community in CT is to devise social strategies to encourage the young to become productive users of Irish within their own age group. The school successfully provides a setting for the use of Irish in an institutional context and succeeds in assisting the pupils who did not acquire Irish at home to become competent co-speakers of the language. The growing proportion of semi-speakers in the community could, from an international perspective, be viewed as evidence of language shift pressures, but locally it displays adherence to the ethnolinguistic concept of a Gaeltacht community despite the mixed familial context and the cultural pressures from the majority language, English. However, the language use patterns based on the speaker configurations presented here require that the CT community will have to consciously address the issue of the lack of the productive use of Irish among the young. The mixed familial transmission processes, combined with strong institutional support from the primary school, are not adequate to the task of preserving the distinctive linguistic aspects of Ceathrú Thaidhg Gaeltacht heritage.

Regional Background of Speakers Surveyed in RC, RM and CT

The following figure indicates the regional background of all the speakers surveyed in the three areas irrespective of linguistic competence. The RM data in this regard indicates a highly homogeneous community with 91% of the RM community either being natives of Ros Muc or of the surrounding Conamara community. RC is much more varied in this regard. The data here for RC helps, to some extent, to unravel the linguistic complexity of the area. In the case of the RC community as identified here, 43% are RC natives of Conamara ancestry, 26% can trace their origins to the English-speaking Meath community; and residents in RC of neither Gaeltacht, RC nor Meath origin (non-local) amount to 21% of the community there. The data on the background of the CT community resembles the homogeneous nature of the RM community with 84% of the people surveyed in this study being natives of CT. When this percentage is combined with CT residents originally from the wider Iorras region, the percentage rises to 93% of the residents having origins in the local region. However, since RM is part of the larger Irish-speaking region of Conamara, CT would be more linguistically isolated in that Iorras is now largely an English-speaking region.
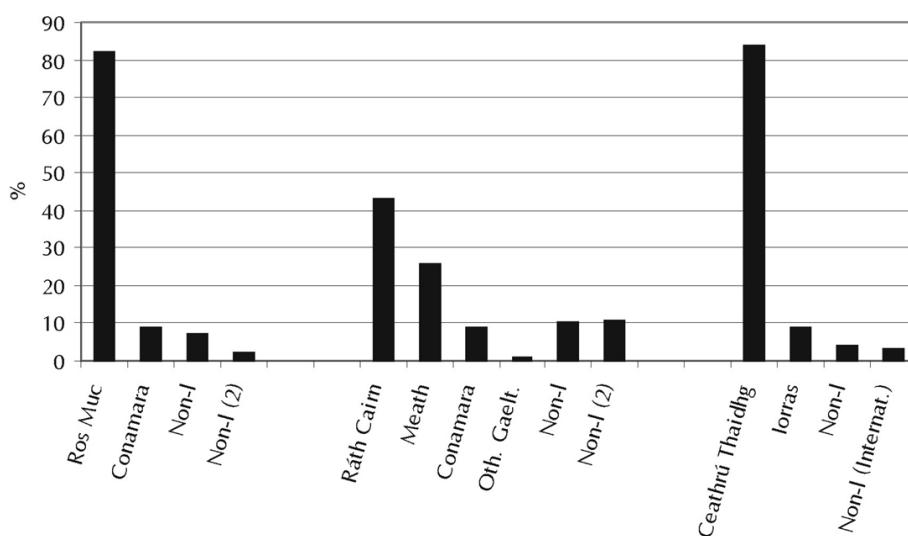
Fig. 5: Regional Background of Speakers.
Sl. 5: Regionalno ozadje govorcev.

HOUSEHOLD DATA

Profile of Household Language for Ráth Chairn

While in overall terms, Irish-speaking households amount to 47% of all the households, the percentage breakdown for the critical 'family'[15] category, from a sociolinguistic perspective, portrays a more problematic statistical comparison for RC as a designated Irish-speaking district or an official Gaeltacht. The English-speaking households (34% of the total households) in

Fig. 6: Ráth Chairn: Household language.
Sl. 6: Ráth Chairn: Jezik gospodinjstva.

this 'family' category are far more numerous than their Irish-speaking equivalents at 19% of the total households surveyed in RC. The significance of the 'sole occupancy' category to the configuration of Irish-speaking households skews the picture somewhat. These households are predominantly made up of elderly people living alone. The Irish-speaking percentage for this category represents 12% of the total, while 5% is the equivalent English-speaking figure. English is clearly the dominant household language in RC, especially in the critical 'family' category, from which RC's youngest generation is emerging. Approximately a third of the children the Irish-speaking 'family' category are being raised as semi-speakers.
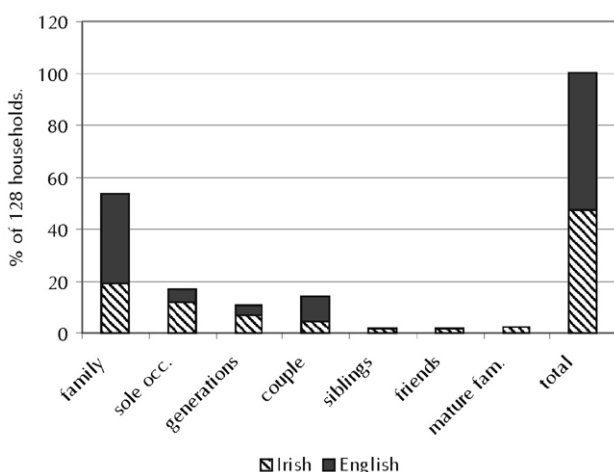
A perusal of the household data for RC in conjuction with the individual speaker data indicates that the school-reliant generation of co-speakers of Irish is much more prevalent than the home-based transmission of Irish. Despite the growing institutionalisation of Irish in RC, Irish-speaking networks can be found in RC in the various age cohorts. They are marginal, however, in the social networks of people younger than forty. It would be considered unusual in the Gaeltacht context for Irish-speaking networks to exist at all among the young in a community where the family-based transmission has become limited to a minority of the community. They exist in RC, however, because the community has, by necessity, become linguistically politicised by the requirements of preserving their linguistic heritage in a challenging minority setting. Conscious efforts are being

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15 The data category 'family' for the purposes of this study refers to a nuclear family with offspring engaged in any of the three levels of formal education. The category 'generations' is predominantly constituted of mature household units consisting of an elderly parent sharing a house with unmarried mature offspring, but households consisting of three generations and single parent families are also included in this category.

made in RC to foster the communal use of Irish. How-ever, it is difficult to envisage how the efforts will bear fruit in a sociolinguistic sense if the issue of the con-tinuing contraction of the family-based transmission is not adequately addressed.

Profile of Household Language for Ros Muc

The household language data for Ros Muc displays a more robust Irish-speaking configuration in comparison to RC, but ominously the predominantly middle-aged/elderly 'sole occupancy' category – 28% of the total households, although entirely Irish-speaking, corre-sponds almost exactly in percentage terms to the 'family' category (both Irish and English-speaking), at 29% of the total. English-speaking 'families' constitute 7% of the total for RM in comparison to the Irish-speaking 'fami-lies' who make up 22% of the total households.[16] De-spite the relatively low proportion of English-speaking households, 18% of the households surveyed in RM across all the categories, English-speaking networks are noticeably rooted in the pre-school and the primary level children's age group. The evidence here is indi-cating that the RM community is at a critical sociolin-guistic stage in that the conditions for language shift are being established by a relatively small proportion of households in which English predominates. The English-speaking households in the critical 'family' category, de-spite being significantly smaller in the communal con-text than their Irish-speaking counterparts, exert a dis-proportionate influence on the way the language net-works of the young are established because native speakers of Irish become functionally bi-lingual at a much more rapid rate than the native speakers of English in the Gaeltacht. In many cases, Gaeltacht native speak-ers of Irish have acquired a relatively competent fluency in English by the time they enter the primary school for a plethora of reasons, mainly due to the dominance of English in the wider society, especially in the media. Thus, in many ways, the formation of English-speaking networks among Gaeltacht children simply mirrors the general minority language condition of deferring to the sociolinguistic culture of the majority language where contact issues arise. The immediate challenge for the RM community is to creatively engage with these con-tact issues, especially in relation to the formation of the social networks of the young. A reliance on Irish-medium schooling in the area to address these complex sociolinguistic considerations would simply be a super-ficial response to a much more complex and deeper phenomenon.

Profile of Household Language for Ceathrú Thaidhg, Co. Mayo

On a superficial level of analysis the household lan-guage data portray a relatively positive sociolinguistic profile: the Irish-speaking and the semi-speaking/ambi-lingual households amount to 73% of the total across all household categories, but, similar to the household pro-file in RM, the predominantly elderly 'sole occupancy' (18%) Irish-speaking households represent the largest household type in CT. The semi-speaking[17] 'family'
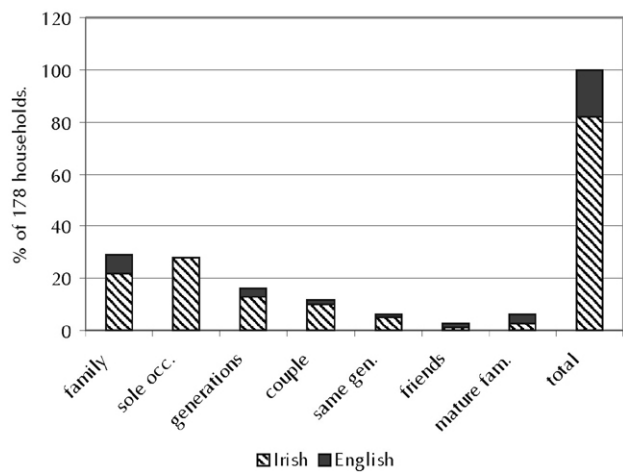

Fig. 7: Ros Muc: Household language.
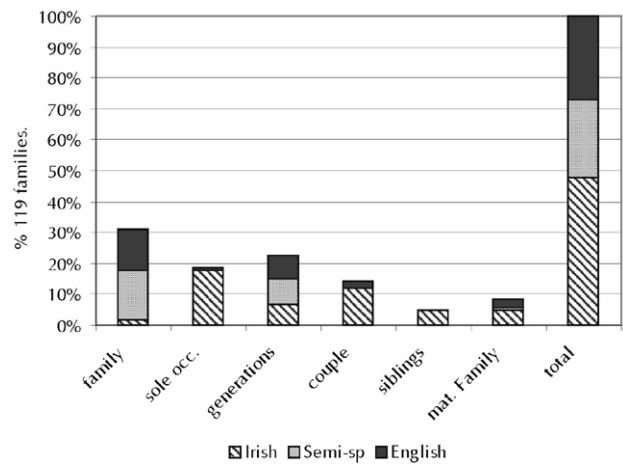*Sl. 7: Ros Muc: Jezik gospodinjstva.*

Fig. 8: Ceathrú Thaidhg: Household language.
Sl. 8: Ceathrú Thaidhg: Jezik gospodinjstva.

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16 Semi-speaking is confined to three households in the 'family' category in RM.
17 A semi-speaking category is displayed here for the CT household language data because of its significance to general sociolinguistic profile of the area. Semi-speaking constitutes a more marginal category in RC and especially in RM.

households (16%) constitute the next largest household category. English-speaking 'family' households constitute the third largest (12%) household category, with only 2% of the households belonging to the Irish-speaking 'family' category. The English-speaking 'family'

CONCLUSIONS

A detailed discussion of the implications of this research cannot be presented here due to considerations of space. However, an examination of the data in the three areas (RC, RM, and CT) indicates high levels of competence in Irish if the various capable speaker types are aggregated (Nat. Sp.; Neo-nat. Sp.; Semi-sp.; Ambi-ling. Sp. and Co-sp.). Competent speakers of Irish correspond to 93% of the community population in RM, 85% in CT and 67% in RC. From an international perspective on minority languages, such percentages referring to linguistic ability would be considered relatively high. The brief profiles of the linguistic make-up of the various social networks indicate that Irish-speaking networks exist in all three areas, but that only one of them, RM, could be categorised as a transgenerational Irish-speaking community. However, even in RM the formation of Irish-speaking networks in the young age cohorts is becoming increasingly problematic and marginal. CT's profile indicates a minority language community where Irish-speaking networks are almost exclusively restricted to the middle-aged and elderly age cohorts. The use of Irish among the younger age cohorts in CT is manifested in non-communal contexts, such as the institutional school setting, or limited to use in the home (mainly in a mixed semi-speaking context). RC's profile portrays a similar contrast between language use patterns in the younger and older age cohorts, but it also indicates an even more significant institutionalised aspect to the use of Irish among the young in that co-speakers are by far the most numerous speaker category among the younger age cohorts.

These language profiles and the comparatively high levels of linguistic ability in Irish in these three communities pose the question: why is the use of Irish in these communities becoming a marginal endeavour? The data here suggest that minority language communities require a very high level of family-based language transmission in a particular locality in order to withstand the sociolinguistic pressures the majority language speakers exert on the social networks. Extrapolating from the Gaeltacht context, minoritised languages clearly exhibit extreme fragility when in contact with the majority language. Even low levels of social integration of the majority language, especially in family-based transmission in a given area, can disproportionately support the for-

households correspond to 44% of the 'family' category. These percentage comparisons indicate that the non-institutional use of Irish in CT is in general limited to the middle-aged and elderly population cohorts and to the family-based semi-speaking contexts among the young. mation of majority language networks (English-speaking networks in the case of the Gaeltacht). In other words, for minority-language communities to maintain their sociolinguistic networks across the full spectrum of age cohorts, they require a concentrated level of family-based transmission. Efforts to integrate majority/minority languages at community level appear to be counter-productive towards the maintenance of the minority language networks. In such a mixed context, the majority language tends to dominate in the formation of linguistic networks. Put simply, the emergence of majority-language social networks in a minority-language district progresses in a fashion consistent with the colonising dynamic: a small foothold of majority-language family-based language transmission in an area can rapidly transform the language dynamics of the young.

As the social marginalisation of the minority language increases, the community rapidly arrives at a sociolinguistic watershed where the communal link between the use of the language in the home and in the community is broken. In this context, the circumstances for the socialisation of the minority language in the community becomes recessive for those who have been socialised in the minority language in the home, with the minority language no longer possessing the communal mechanism to socialise the area's population through the medium of their historical language.

The integration of the majority language in these Gaeltacht communities has resulted, not in the fostering of a bilingual community, but in the marginalisation of the use of the minority language, even though ability in the minority language remains relatively high. The increasing integration of the majority language in the communal socialisation processes results in the displacement of the minority language in these socialisation processes, and this effect increases as we descend through the age cohorts. It is evident from this study that minoritised speech communities tend towards an institutionalisation of speaking as they become more complex/mixed. The emergence of co-speakers in RC and semi-speakers in CT, however competent, as significant speaker categories has clearly not impeded the emergence of highly productive and dominant majority-language speaker networks. The challenge for the three Gaeltacht communities studied here is to create the sociolinguistic conditions in which the re-socialisation of Irish can occur.

RAZNOLIKOST GOVORCEV V MANJŠINJSKO-VEČINSKEM JEZIKOVNEM KONTEKSTU

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POVZETEK

V prispevku je predstavljen poskus razvoja analitičnega okvira, s pomočjo katerega bi lahko bolje razumeli mehanizme, ki podpirajo raznolikost tipov govorcev v kontekstu manjšinskega jezika. Načini, na katere ti različni tipi govorcev interagirajo z lastno skupnostjo in z večinsko jezikovno skupnostjo, nakazujejo potrebo po večplastnem pristopu k zadevam, ki se tičejo jezikovnega načrtovanja. Študija predstavlja analizo raznolikosti govorcev, ki se pojavljajo na treh (irsko govorečih) območjih ali Gaeltacht, Ros Muc v Conamari v grofiji Galway, Ceathrú Thaidhg v grofiji Mayo in Ráth Chairn v grofiji Meath, ter ponuja oceno o vplivu te raznolikosti na različna jezikovna omrežja v dotičnih skupnostih in preko njih na vitalnost irščine kot skupnega jezika.

Tri skupnosti izkazujejo različne vzorce v odnosu do problemov, ki zadevajo bilingualni sociolingvistični kontakt, in različne spremenljive vidike socialno-kulturne krhkosti in jezikovne ogroženosti. Izsledki pričujoče študije nakazujejo, da bolj kot je dinamika stikov raznolika in kompleksna, manj vitalna bo sociolingvistična podlaga za uporabo manjšinskega jezika v skupnosti (v primeru Gaeltacht torej uporaba irščine). Primerjalni pristop osvetljuje korelacijo med visoko ravnijo prenosa manjšinskega jezika znotraj družine in vitalnostjo manjšinskega jezika v različnih socialnih omrežjih v skupnosti. Dodatni izsledki študije nakazujejo, da z naraščanjem raznolikosti kategorij govorcev uporaba manjšinskega jezika v skupnosti nagiba k institucionalizaciji, na primer k uporabi v šolah.

Izsledki te študije osvetljujejo zanimiv pojav, ki bi mu lahko rekli sociolingvistični paradoks: skupnost Ráth Chairn, kjer v prizadevanja za ohranjanje jezika vlagajo največ naporov in kjer je ozaveščenost glede jezikovne politike in lingvistične ideologije med predstavniki skupnosti največja, je v sociolingvističnem oziru manj uspešna kot skupnost Ros Muc, kjer se prav nasprotno soočajo z večjimi socialno-ekonomskimi izzivi kot v skupnosti Ráth Chairn. Nadalje, skupnost Ceathrú Thaidhg z ozirom na vitalnost izkazuje drugačne probleme kot drugi dve območji. Za razmeroma ugodnim družbeno-gospodarskim profilom Gaeltacht Ráth Chairn ta skupnost skriva večje težave, povezane z družbeno krhkostjo in jezikovno ogroženostjo. V nasprotju s tem se zdi zastarelost jezika, s katero se soočajo v skupnostih Ros Muc in Cethrú Thaidgh, na prvi pogled sicer manj resna, a je prepletena in prikrita z nečim, kar bi lahko razumeli kot bolj pereči problemi socialno-ekonomskega zaostanka in obrobnosti. Pričujoči raziskovalni projekt nakazuje, da načrtovanje jezikovnih intervencij na institucionalni ravni ne zagotavlja mehanizma, ki bi odtehtal šibkost pri prenašanju manjšinskega jezika v domačem okolju, in ne vzpostavlja družbenih razmer za njegovo uporabo v skupnosti.

Ključne besede: jezikovna dinamika, lingvistična omrežja, govorne skupnosti, raznolikost tipov govorcev, interakcija govorcev, manjšinsko-večinska sociolingvistična interakcija, jezikovni kontakt, lingvistična antropologija

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ABBREVIATIONS

Nat. Sp.	Native Speaker
Neo-nat.	Neo-native Speaker
Ambiling.	Ambilingual Speaker
Semi-sp.	Semi-speaker
Co-sp.	Co-speaker
Eng. Sp.	English Speaker
Gaelt.	Gaeltacht/Irish-speaking Districts
Non-l.	Non-local
Non-l. (Internat.)	Non-local (International)
Non-l.(2)	Offspring of Non-local
CT	Ceathrú Thaidhg, Co. Mayo
RC	Ráth Chairn, Co. Meath
RM	Ros Muc, Co. Galway

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