

# LANGUAGE, LEARNING AND TEACHING

## Irish Research Perspectives

*Edited by*

Fiona Farr and Máiréad Moriarty

Peter Lang



This book showcases recent work carried out by members of the Irish Association for Applied Linguistics (IRAAL). By focusing on the relationship between language and its users within the micro context of Ireland, the contributors generate insights which promise to open up future avenues for Applied Linguistics research, both in Ireland and beyond.

The collection addresses two main themes within the field of Applied Linguistics: language learning and teaching, and the study of language and its discourses in context. In order to ensure that the volume is relevant to as wide an audience as is possible, it is not theoretically focused; rather, each chapter deals with a specific real world issue in context. The book provides an account of language problems that have arisen given the increasingly multilingual nature of Ireland, examines the current status of the Irish language and explores the potential for new technologies to enhance language learning and teaching.

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Fiona Farr and Máiréad Moriarty



PETER LANG

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## Introduction

### Aim of the book

The work presented in this book stems from a postgraduate conference held by IRAAL (The Irish Association for Applied Linguistics) at the University of Limerick in October 2010. IRAAL was founded in 1975 to support research in applied and general linguistics in Ireland. IRAAL is affiliated to the International Association for Applied Linguistics (AILA) and pursues its aim of supporting research by organizing seminars, lectures, conferences and workshops. The IRAAL Postgraduate Conference presented an opportunity for new and emerging scholars to present and discuss their research. While the majority of the papers presented focused on Ireland as the context in which they address specific language problems, we also feel that the research has implications for the study of language and teaching in society more generally. As such, this book is a result of the desire to highlight the advances being made in research in the field within the context of Ireland. It is our belief that by focusing on macro issues of the relationship between language and its users within the micro context of Ireland, insights into interesting and innovative discussions which have implications for future avenues for Applied Linguistic research are provided.

The book is situated within the broad field of Applied Linguistics (AL). AL is an academic field of inquiry which connects knowledge about languages and its relationship to the social world. The tradition of applied linguistics established itself in part as a response to the narrowing of focus in linguistics with the advent in the late 1950s of generative linguistics, and has always maintained a socially accountable role, demonstrated by its central interest in language problems. The most widely cited definition of

AL comes from Christopher Brumfit who describes it as ‘the theoretical and empirical investigation of real world problems in which language is a central issue’ (Brumfit 1995: 27). Applied linguistics starts from the assumption that the relationship between language and society is an imperfect one and as a field of study AL seeks to solve many of the related problems. As Grabe (2002: 9) points out:

(T)he focus of applied linguistics is on trying to resolve language based problems that people encounter in the real world, whether they are learners, teachers, supervisors, academics, lawyers, service providers, those who need services, test takers, policy developers, dictionary makers, translators or a whole range of business providers.

The aim of the present book is to provide examples of stimulating research which addresses two main themes within the field of AL. These include: language learning and teaching, and the study of language and some of its various discourses in context. In order to ensure the present volume has implications for as wide an audience as is possible, it is not theoretically focused, rather each chapter deals with a specific real world issue in context. The book endeavours to highlight real world language problems which are worth taking about. In this vein, the book aligns itself with Widdowson (2003: 14), who notes that applied linguistics ‘does not impose a way of thinking, but points things out that might be worth thinking about’.

The purpose of this introduction, as well as outlining the contents of this volume, is to highlight a few of the major issues that have occurred to us as editors, in drawing the chapters together. The book is about the relationship between language and society in Ireland, with a strong focus on language learning contexts. Like the majority of contexts, language issues in Ireland have been influenced by global flows of people, ideas and technology. The relationship between language and society is complex and multi-faceted. Discussing it in this book is timely in the Irish context for a number of reasons. Firstly, to provide an account of language problems that have arisen given the increasing multilingual nature of Ireland; secondly, to examine the aspects of the current situation in relation to the Irish language; thirdly, to illustrate the potential for new technologies to enhance language learning and teaching.

With respect to the first aim, it is important to point out that during the period referred to as the ‘Celtic Tiger’ the number of immigrants to Ireland grew rapidly. According to the Central Statistics Office (<<http://www.cso.ie>>), immigration to Ireland peaked in 2006 and 2007 with numbers as high as 107,800 and 109,500 respectively. Thus, one can surmise that the number of speakers of languages other than English and Irish grew at a similar rate. As ever, it is difficult to accurately account for the number of languages spoken in Ireland on a daily basis, but recent research would point to something in the region of 180+ languages (cf. Carson and Extra 2010). While an increasingly diverse multilingual society creates many opportunities, it also creates new challenges in which language learning and teaching play a major role. Undoubtedly, Ireland’s school-going population is likely to remain multilingual, multicultural and multinational, yet, there is little systematized provision and support for language learners, teachers and teacher educators. Some of the chapters in this book address these issues by focusing on the case of Polish migrants. By far the largest group of migrants to Ireland during the Celtic Tiger were Polish and while present economic conditions have forced some to return home, a significant number of Polish people have remained in Ireland. Machowska-Kosciak’s chapter highlights the significance of the existing linguistic repertoires in forming part of the language socialization process of Polish learners of English. In this way, Machowska-Kosciak addresses a gap in the literature on multilingualism identified by Ó Laoire and Singleton (2009), who argue that there is little research available in the context of Ireland which uncovers the conditions through which prior knowledge of an additional language might influence subsequent acquisition processes. Baumgart, in her chapter, points to the need for a more systematic approach to teacher education in the context of EAL (English as an Additional Language) provision in Ireland. She offers a very timely critique of how EAL has been managed in Irish primary and post-primary schools to date. She provides a suggested strategy which has the potential to alter and improve the EAL provision in Irish schools.

The second aim which related to the Irish language is a theme that runs through many chapters of the book. The Irish language is the first official language of the Republic of Ireland, with English recognized as the second

official language. The Irish language is an important marker of identity, yet after more than eighty years of status and acquisition planning, there are no monolingual Irish speakers, there are limited significant levels of inter-generational transmission both within and outside of officially designated Irish-speaking areas (the *Gaeltacht*), and the use of the language in contemporary Irish society remains low. All of these factors combine to make Irish a minority language and much of the research presented in this book will have implications for many other minority language situations, as well as for other so-called ‘bigger’ languages that find themselves in a minoritized position. The chapters by Flynn, Kavanagh and Hickey, and Ó Murchadha address three of the major debates in current thinking on minority languages. Flynn’s chapter taps into the growth in literature on adult learners of heritage languages, and more specifically addresses the role that culture plays for these learners. Kavanagh and Hickey’s chapter contributes to a growth in the research literature on immersion schooling. Their focus on parental involvement in children’s experiences of Irish language medium schools, *Gaelscoileanna*, is particularly novel. Ó Murchadha’s chapter also addresses a wider debate in current minority language scholarship on the notion of ‘standard’ and the ideological contestations that surround the very notion of standard language.

The third aim of the book seeks to address the seemingly ubiquitous elements of new technologies that are currently impacting on language learning and teaching. Two of the book’s chapters examine the potential for the use of such technologies in supporting language learning and continued professional development amongst language teachers and learners. In her chapter, Riordan highlights the potential for the use of blogs as a space where novice teachers can engage in reflective practice. She argues that if student teachers engage in such reflective activity from the beginning of their career, it may give them a better understanding of themselves and their students, which can only serve to benefit them in their future careers. Healy and Onderdonk Horan’s chapter offers an account of how corpora and concordancing software can be utilized to develop more authentic teaching materials for the teaching of *Hotelspeak* in Hotel Management ESP (English for Specific Purposes) pedagogy.



The three main aims of the book outlined here illustrate the robustness of the study of language, teaching and learning in Ireland. It is, of course, impossible to exhaustively address these aims herein and to this end we have organized the book under two main themes which we hope will allow it to serve the interests of linguists, educators and policy makers alike.

## Structure of the book

The book opens with commentary from Prof. Michael McCarthy, who offers perspectives on the research presented herein and contextualizes it within the international applied linguistics arena. As the table of contents shows, we have organized the remaining chapters into sections that revolve around two major themes. Section One contains four papers that open the book by examining issues related to language learning and teaching. The first chapter in this section focuses on novel ways to activate learning in today's linguistically diverse classroom. Through an analysis of data gathered from an action research project in Irish post primary schools; Collins makes a case for mime as a significant tool in facilitating successful language acquisition. In the second paper, by Flynn, there is a focus on learner motivation and the role of cultural awareness in language learning. Specifically, the chapter focuses on adult learners of Irish. The results of a series of qualitative interviews conducted by the author supports the claim that taking learners' linguistic and cultural needs into consideration when designing language courses and classroom materials may lead to greater learner motivation and success in acquiring the target language.

The next chapter in Section One focuses on current trends in the scholarship of the Irish language. In their chapter, Kavanagh and Hickey examine how the rise in popularity of the Irish medium schools, *Gaelscoileanna*, has brought about changes in the typical profile of the students attending such schools and, as a result, the typical profile of an Irish-immersion parent. In their chapter they explore the barriers to parents' involvement in

immersion schooling and how such barriers may impact on the linguistic outcomes of the children. The final paper in this section by Machowska-Kosciak takes a language socialization perspective on identity and knowledge construction in different educational settings in Irish post-primary education. The chapter is particularly concerned with the L1 (first language) and L2 (second language) language socialization processes among Polish immigrant students. The research examined how these students engage with issues of conflicting identities and competing language learning (English) and language maintenance (Polish) goals as they grow up and try to find their place in a new country and society. This chapter represents one of a relatively small number of studies to date which examine the experience of Polish learners of English in Ireland. This paper contributes to closing a gap that currently exists in the literature on the dual processes of language learning and heritage language maintenance experienced by immigrants and has benefits outside of the context of Ireland. In all, this section provides an account of a number of approaches to problems associated with language learning and teaching in contemporary societies categorized by globalized modernity and opens avenues for further research in the field relevant not only to Ireland.

The second section of the book also contains four chapters, which are organized around the theme of the study of language and discourse. The four chapters, many with a pedagogically-motivated research question, are focused around aspects of language study that have the potential to have significant impact in these globalizing times. The first chapter in this section by Baumgart looks at the discourse of multilingualism in the Irish education sector with a specific focus on teacher educators. Baumgart reports on research conducted amongst primary and secondary level teacher educators. The results of the research highlights how teacher education needs to address the issue of EAL more specifically and to provide structured workshops and sessions focussed around improving classroom practice through the use of policy tools and examples of best practice. She provides an up-to-date critique of the EAL provision in Irish schools and offers an avenue through which many of the issues outlined can be addressed. In their chapter, Healy and Onderdonk Horan focus on novel approaches to the creation of textbooks. In examining the discourse of the hospitality

industry, the paper focuses on novel approaches to attempting an effective tool for the acquisition of English in educating future hotel managers. They describe how the Shannon College of Hotel Management in partnership with Cambridge University Press and Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, participated in a year-long research project aimed at capturing the language of native and non-native English speakers in hotel management training. The resultant corpus, they argue, will provide an up-to-the-minute invaluable resource for both lecturers and students in terms of their English language use. The data is analysed for *Hotelspeak*, demonstrating the shared repertoire of this community of practice (Wegner 1998), and can inform the development of more specialized and pragmatic teaching materials within this context.

In Chapter 7, Ó Murchadha focuses on issues surrounding notions of a language standard in the context of the Irish language. Ó Murchadha highlights the contested nature of 'standard'. He argues that it is mostly an ideology against which varieties of language are evaluated. Reporting on fieldwork data collected from teenagers in the Gaeltacht, he argues that the creation of a written standard for Irish has been detrimental to the vitality of the traditional Gaeltacht vernaculars. The results indicate that participants consider Gaeltacht youth speech and non-Gaeltacht speech more standard than traditional Gaeltacht speech. The final chapter in Section Two, by Riordan, sheds light on a significant avenue for continued profession development amongst language teachers. Riordan begins by highlighting the role of new technologies in allowing teachers to interact in ways that previously were not possible. Such technologies provide teachers and those involved in teacher education with an invaluable resource when it comes to aspects of continued professional development. Riordan's chapter focuses on reflective practice. In particular, she investigated the use of blogs as reflective diaries with student teachers on an MA in English Language Teaching programme. Using a corpus-based discourse analysis of the reflections of student teachers, Riordan highlights blogs as a significant tool in the promotion of reflective practice as a tool for professional development.

We hope that the book sheds light on a number of issues that are currently prominent in understanding applied linguistics in a multilingual

and multimodal world. Inevitably, it also leaves many questions open, in need of further investigation and supporting data, which will allow us to continue the discussions around language problems not only within the context of Ireland.

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MICHAEL MCCARTHY

## Applied linguistics research: Connecting with the bigger picture

There is (fortunately) no one single agreed definition of Applied Linguistics (AL), though most scholars would agree that AL should always be concerned with practicalities in the real world in relation to which knowledge about language plays a pivotal role. Schmitt and Celce-Murcia (2010: 1) refer to AL's aim to 'achieve some purpose or solve some problem in the real world' by using what we know about language, how it is learned and how it is used. I might in addition, if the reader will permit such vanity, refer to a definition from one of my own works, which includes 'the belief that linguists can offer insights and ways forward in the resolution of problems related to language in a wide variety of contexts' (McCarthy 2001: 1). Meanwhile, the editors of the present volume have added further definitions to the mix (see p. 2). What emerges is a discipline that is very catholic in its scope, covering a spectrum that ranges from the application of theories and descriptions of language in general and particular languages on one side, to chalk-face and e-learning preoccupations on the other, which, while dominated by problems of language learning, by no means exclusively function within that domain. Aside from the issues of language and language learning in classrooms and more recently online, the discipline has, in the last few decades, expanded to include forensic applications and the broad domain of information technology. Being rooted in the real world, AL has also of necessity allied itself with sociolinguistic preoccupations and analyses and critiques of social and linguistic phenomena as reflected in educational linguistics, cultural studies, bilingualism, multilingualism, code-switching, literacy and (critical) discourse analysis, to name but a few.

How, then, does the present volume fit into this picture? Firstly, and most importantly, its roots are in Ireland, though its insights most certainly

will be of interest to practitioners in a vastly wider, global context. In the past, it often seemed to me, as a British outsider, that AL in Ireland struggled to assert itself in the shadow of its historically dominant neighbour. Small departments in a small constellation of universities funded by a small economy, located on the farthest-flung western fringe of Europe, were somewhat suffocated by the giant across the water with its many universities and the critical mass of scholarship in AL thus generated. However, in all probability the outsider will, like me, have been woefully ignorant of the long and fertile tradition of linguistic and applied linguistic work concerning the Irish language, as well as the excellent lexicographic and grammatical studies of the English language in Ireland represented by scholars such as Dolan (1998) and Filppula (1999). It is probably fair to say that relatively few AL scholars researching in the Irish context were known beyond Erin's green shores. However, all that was to change rapidly in the last years of the twentieth century and the opening decade of the twenty-first, such that anyone following even half-heartedly the AL literature in English in the last decade or so cannot fail to have noticed the emergence into international scholarship of a new generation of Irish AL researchers.

The new generation surfed the tide of several developments, not least the so-called Celtic Tiger economy with its increased funding opportunities for research and international collaboration and the expansion of university departments, along with the boom in MA and teacher education programmes in the field of AL and TESOL/ELT and the growing numbers of international students choosing to study in Ireland.

Two allied developments contributed to the growth of critical mass in international terms for Irish AL. The first was the transformation of Irish society from being a two-language culture to its current profile as a multi-lingual and multicultural nation. Such a development, as in other nations, brought with it both benefits and downsides, and both provided a new impetus for AL researchers. The present volume is replete with examples of such problems and prospects and good-sense responses to them, and Ireland-based AL has shown its ability to offer valuable insight into issues around intercultural communication (e.g. Chambers and O'Baoill 1999). The second development was the explosion of technology, which in turn had two aspects from which AL in Ireland has benefitted. On the one hand,

technology released the potential of corpus linguistics, with major corpora being built in Irish and Irish English, e.g. the Royal Irish Academy (2004) Irish language Corpus, the Irish and English Nua-Chorpas na hÉireann / New Corpus for Ireland (Foras na Gaeilge 2012), ICE Ireland, a member of the world-wide International Corpus of English project (Kallen and Kirk 2008), the L-CIE spoken Irish English corpus (Farr, Murphy and O'Keeffe (2004) and some smaller Irish English corpora serving specific projects (e.g. O'Keeffe 2006; Clancy 2011). On the other hand, the advent of e-learning in terms of CALL, ICT, Data-Driven Language Learning (DDL) and blended and online learning provided Irish AL scholars with home-based research opportunities that possess far-reaching and global consequences (Chambers 2010; Chambers et al. 2011). Meanwhile, the technology envelope has been pushed forward within innovative AL frameworks in collaborative enterprises between linguists and non-linguists in the Dublin Institute of Technology's projects in spoken language analysis in the context of language learning (Campbell et al. 2009).

As a result of this growth in Irish-based AL, outsiders like me now see a confident and self-assured body of researchers uninhibited by the long shadow cast by the scholarship of its neighbour across the Irish Sea, 'doing' AL against a national, European and global backdrop. It is a community of scholars receiving due recognition as a robust and energetic group of professionals, outward-looking in their research perspectives and methods, but firmly grounded in the home territory and serving the community that supports and invests in it. In particular, Irish English, as a variety of English, has earned itself the status of equal partner in studies of World Englishes and has shed its historical baggage as a minority dialect within the 'British' Isles. Alongside this, the Irish language has assumed a more confident place in the broader debate on multilingualism and language and heritage within the Irish nation.

The present volume is one of the fruits of the healthy flourishing of AL in Ireland. However, although home-grown in its practical preoccupations, a most powerful index of the health and calibre of Irish AL is the contextualizing of its research within established global methods and processes as well as cutting-edge approaches. The international profile of AL has changed in the last couple of decades in tandem with the way AL has grown and

changed in Ireland. In the context of language teaching and learning, several strands have come to the fore in the last two decades which are accurately and faithfully reflected in the chapters of the present volume. These embrace the fields of language acquisition, teacher education, technology and minority and heritage languages. Much has changed in the three decades that I have dared call myself an applied linguist. From positivist and generative theories of language acquisition to the emergence of sociocultural theory championed by scholars such as Lantolf, Appel and Thorne (Lantolf and Appel 1994; Lantolf 2006; Lantolf and Thorne 2006) and theories of language socialization (Duff and Hornberger 2008), the emphasis has been less on the language learner as rat-in-the-laboratory and more as a whole person building upon existing knowledge, thriving under guidance and scaffolding while acquiring a language as a social and cultural resource. Nowhere more marked is this urge to develop as a social being than in the challenging environment encountered by incoming populations, including school-age children. Papers in the present volume by Machowska-Kosciak and Collins testify to an awareness of these significant developments in AL.

Multilingualism and multiculturalism involve questions of identity, and language and identity has been another significant thread in the fabric of AL in recent years. The notion of a monolithic identity has been questioned by sociolinguists and sociocultural theorists, with identity now typically conceptualized as multiple, flexible, dynamic and reconstructed continuously in interaction. Identity has been seen both in terms of the social positioning that is often triggered by language use and in terms of broader ethnic and national identities (Spolsky 1999: 181). Furthermore, there is the question of whether individuals associate with particular community identities or distance themselves from them, an issue which applies in classrooms as well as in broader social contexts (Norton 2000; Toohey 2000; Maybin 2006; Block 2007). As Flynn puts it in the present volume: 'A person's sense of self is often connected to issues of culture and language' (p. 41), arguing that motivation is also affected by sense of self, a preoccupation addressed in the papers in Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009).

Irish, like the language of its near-neighbour and my own nation of birth, Welsh, depends for its health, survival and growth partly on the existence of immersion education (in Wales in the form of the *Ysgolion*



Cymraeg / Welsh Schools), as well as investment and commitment to reinforcement via the media and the 'linguistic landscape' (Howell 1982; Shohamy et al. 2010). An important trend in Educational AL has been the recognition of schools as a collaborative environment where success is enhanced not only by appropriate pedagogy but by parental and broader local and social involvement. Immersion education, in particular, is often viewed by immigrant parents as an investment in social capital, which can be achieved alongside the preservation of heritage languages, as Canadian evidence suggests (Dagenais 2003). Kavanagh and Hickey in the present volume ground their research in this perspective. However, no-one can gainsay the importance of teacher education in any paradigm shifts in pedagogical AL. Wright (2010), in an important survey article on Second Language Teacher Education, points to a shift away from what he calls the old 'demonstrate and delivery' pattern of teacher education with its roots in traditional AL towards an emphasis on reflective practice and school-based training, where the school is seen as a social context for teachers learning to teach. Additionally, action research and the role of the teacher as researcher-practitioner have come greatly to the fore, along with a recognition of the importance of teacher cognition and beliefs (Borg 2006). The classroom itself is seen as the arena for the development of a particular type of competence: classroom interactional competence (Walsh 2011: ch. 8), another kind of social capital often raising difficulties for immigrant pupils and a new challenge for teacher education in multicultural contexts. Baumgart in this volume tackles some of these questions head-on, aligning teacher-educators' perceptions with institutional and policy critiques. An awareness of the delicate strands that link, push and pull between teachers, classrooms, the home environment, the canons of teacher education and political and institutional policy inform all the papers in the present volume which confront the practical issues of language pedagogy.

It could be argued that it is in the area of technology that AL has seen the greatest upheavals in the last couple of decades, with the challenges of computer literacy for both teachers and pupils in language teaching and learning set alongside developments in Applied Corpus Linguistics and blended and online learning. Corpus linguistics has offered AL more than just the ability to search massive textual databases. Especially in the

development of spoken corpora, traditional perspectives on language use and teaching materials have been challenged (McCarthy 1998; McCarten 2010). Healy and Onderdonk Horan's paper in the present volume presents a classic case of the modelling and compilation of a vocationally-oriented spoken corpus, created collaboratively with British-based colleagues, research into which is not only grounded in the widely cited notion of Community of Practice (Wenger 1998), but is also aimed at extremely practical and useful ends in preparing hotel managers and allied professionals in the hospitality industry. One further comment about the impact of spoken corpora that must be made is the emergence, hopefully, of a greater respect for the spoken language, not only in pedagogy but in relation to major issues such as the promotion of standard varieties of languages. Recent years have seen a growth of understanding of the importance of varieties of English and of the role of English as *lingua franca*, along with the development of spoken learner corpora (Granger 2004). If smaller languages such as Welsh and Irish are to flourish, their spoken forms must be acknowledged and given proper priority, as Ó Murchadha adumbrates in this book. As mentioned towards the beginning of this exordium to the present volume, computational technology has penetrated a number of areas of language pedagogy, and of the many insights to come out of the advent of blended and online learning, perhaps the most striking is the new spaces in which teachers and learners can interact and thus develop more social kinds of learning, including online journals, fora and blogs. Building on the work of scholars such as Yang (2009), where blogs are seen as enhancing the development of communities of practice among novice teachers and the exchange of ideas and beliefs that blogs facilitate, Riordan brings corpus linguistic techniques to bear on her data in this volume, thus marrying two aspects of the technological revolution in AL.

When I was invited to write this introductory piece, in which I have attempted to place the papers in the present volume in a wider AL context, I read the contributions with a view to getting some sense of the state of health of AL in Ireland. My conclusion is that it is in excellent shape, that its practitioners as represented in these papers have forged a unique combination of research into important questions for Ireland while grounding their scholarship in current and cutting-edge approaches within international