UNIVERZA V LJUBLJANI

FILOZOFSKA FAKULTETA

ODDELEK ZA ETNOLOGIJO IN KULTURNO ANTROPOLOGIJO

NASTJA SLAVEC

‘To have’ Irish in Corca Dhuibhne:

Language ideologies and practices in a minority language community

‘Imeti’ irščino v Corca Dhuibhnu:

Jezikovne ideologije in prakse v manjšinski jezikovni skupnosti

Magistrsko delo

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Izvleček

‘Imeti’ irščino v Corca Dhuibhnu: Jezikovne ideologije in prakse v manjšinski jezikovni skupnosti

Irščina je narodni in prvi uradni jezik Republike Irske, vendar jo govori le še manjšina prebivalstva. Po stoletjih jezikovne asimilacije v angleščino ima irščina danes le še simbolni pomen za irsko narodno identiteto. Pričujoča magistrska naloga temelji na etnografski raziskavi v *Gaeltachtu* (tradicionalno irsko govoreči skupnosti) na polotoku Corca Dhuibhne na jugozahodu Irske. V nalogi se osredotočam na jezikovne ideologije in prakse maternih oz. naravnih govorcev irščine ter analiziram njihov odnos do države, (enojezičnih) govorcev angleščine in novih govorcev irščine kot drugega jezika. Na to, kaj »*imeti*« (kot pravijo Irci – to je govoriti) irščino v Corca Dhuibhnu pomeni, vpliva kompleksen preplet različnih in celo nasprotujočih si jezikovnih ideologij. To sta ideologija irščine kot narodnega jezika, ki jo irska država uveljavlja vse od svoje ustanovitve v 20. letih prejšnjega stoletja, ter starejša ideologija, ki irščino pojmuje kot manjvredno in podrejeno angleščini in je, kljub državni jezikovni politiki, še vedno prisotna. Čeprav govorci irščine v Corca Dhuibhnu pogosto uporabljajo diskurz o irščini kot narodnem jeziku, v nalogi prikažem, kako se preko njihovih občutkov in izkušenj razkriva dejstvo, da so pravzaprav jezikovna manjšina.

Ključne besede: lingvistična antropologija, manjšinski jeziki, jezikovna manjšina, jezikovna ideologija, jezikovne prakse; Irska, irščina, Gaeltacht, West Kerry, Corca Dhuibhne.

Abstract

'To have' Irish in Corca Dhuibhne: Language ideologies and practices in a minority language community

The Irish language is the national and first official language of the Republic of Ireland, yet only a dwindling minority of the population speaks it. After centuries of language shift to English, today Irish has solely a symbolic value as an element of Irish national identity. This master's thesis is based on ethnographic research in the *Gaeltacht* (a traditionally Irish-speaking community) on the Corca Dhuibhne peninsula in south-west Ireland. In the thesis I focus on the linguistic attitudes and practices of local native or first language Irish speakers, and analyse their relationship with (monolingual) English speakers, with new speakers of Irish as a second language, and with the Irish state. I show how speaking or *having* (as Irish people say) Irish in Corca Dhuibhne is shaped by a complex interplay of diverse and opposite linguistic ideologies. These are firstly, the ideology of Irish as the national language, which the state has promoted since its establishment in the 1920s, and, secondly, an older linguistic ideology that sees the Irish language as inferior and in subordination to English and has persisted despite state linguistic policies. I conclude that while Irish speakers in the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht frequently adopt a discourse about Irish as the national language, the fact that they are a linguistic minority is revealed through their feelings and experiences.

Keywords: linguistic anthropology, minority language, linguistic minority, language ideology, language practice; Ireland, Irish, Gaeltacht, West Kerry, Corca Dhuibhne.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 "*Fáilte go hAerfort Bhaile Átha Cliath…*" ("Welcome to Dublin Airport")[1]

A few days before I went to Ireland, my mother told me about a conversation she had had with an acquaintance. She had told him I was planning to do research about the "Irish language minority" and he looked puzzled. He had just been on a trip to Ireland a few months before and had seen Irish language signs everywhere. In the airport after landing, on street signs in Dublin and on country roads… there was Irish alongside English. The implication, he seemed to insinuate, my mother related to me, was that there was no need to study the Irish language minority. They had everything settled. No problems at all. Not like us, the Slovenian minority in Italy, who seemed to live in constant struggle. Why would someone go to Ireland when one had a fine example of a minority at home? Was there even something as an Irish language minority if the Irish language was one of the first things tourists notice upon landing at Dublin airport?

Of course, not only a Slovenian from Italy or someone from a linguistic minority would have thought that the Irish language was on par with English in Ireland. The short film *Yu Ming is ainm dom* (O'Hara 2003) perfectly presents this misunderstanding: a Chinese guy decides to go to Ireland, reads that Irish is the national language there and learns it. When he comes to Ireland, he is able to orient himself perfectly looking at the bilingual signs, but has difficulties speaking with people: no one can understand him. It turns out that almost no one speaks Irish; one must go looking for Irish speakers in certain places...

The bilingual signs in Dublin airport, however, are not a trap for foreigners (although Irish language signs certainly contribute to creating a feeling of authenticity, of true "Irishness" that tourists like); they aim at reproducing the image of Irish as the national language. In the airports of Ljubljana or Venice, a traveller can read signs in, respectively, Slovenian or Italian, the local official language spoken as the first language by most of the population, as well as in English, the international language of communication. In Dublin airport and all over Ireland, the Irish language is used on signs because it is the national and first official language of the Republic of Ireland, but it is not the first language of the population. English presents itself not only as the "language of globalisation", but also as the second official language of the Irish state, the language spoken by all the population (there

[1] "Fáilte go hAerfort Bhaile Átha Cliath/ Welcome to Dublin Airport" is one of the bilingual (Irish-English) signs a traveller can see at the Dublin airport.

are hardly any monolingual Irish speakers left) and, indeed, the majority of the population's first and main language. The role of Irish as the national language seems to be in large part reduced to appearances on road signs, in the names of some state institutions and enterprises – the Irish prime minister is called *An Taoiseach*, for example, and the police are known as the *Gardaí* – and as a compulsory subject in school curriculums. The Irish language, once the main language of the "Emerald Island", then minoritised and marginalised during the centuries of English colonisation, had been rescued and given new prestige at the beginning of the 20th century as the mark of Irish identity, the language of the then newly independent Irish nation state. The linguistic policy and ideology of the Irish state saw the Irish language as the language "of all Irish people", a language all Irish people can claim to *have*, even if they don't use it, never hear it and their knowledge of it is limited to a *cúpla focal* (a couple of words) they had to learn in school.

Although Irish has become the "imagined" national language of an "imagined community" (to use Benedict Anderson's (1983) term) – the Irish nation, it is still also the language spoken in some very real, although small and scattered communities. In these communities, located in the western peripheries of Ireland, the Irish language survived the language shift to English, which occurred in the rest of the country during the centuries of English domination, and continues to be the first and main language of a significant number of the local population. The areas where these Irish language speakers live are known as the *Gaeltacht* and have been the object of a specific language policy since the formation of the independent Irish state in the 1920s. Although the state's efforts have contributed to the maintenance of Irish in the Gaeltacht areas, the local Irish-speaking communities are very fragile and the future of the language there is uncertain. Moreover, because of the ideology of Irish as the national language, the Irish language speakers from the Gaeltacht have been subjected to very particular views, beliefs, practices and experiences.

That a language is at the same time a national language and a minority language spoken by small communities is a quite unique situation in Europe. While a minority language speaker would usually have to confront herself with only one category of "Other" – the majority language speaker, native Irish speakers from the Gaeltacht are involved in different and sometimes contradictory relations: with (monolingual) English speakers from the Gaeltacht and from outside it; and with Irish speakers with different levels of proficiency and commitment to the language from outside the Gaeltacht. The Gaeltacht people also strive to negotiate a balance between Irish as the intimate language of family, friends and the local community, and Irish as the language of the nation, of state symbolism and, alas, state

hypocrisy (with regards to its provisions for the Irish language and the Gaeltacht). They must find a way to live their lives through Irish, while most of the people see it merely as a (hated) school subject, a "dead language" with "no use".

The Irish language speakers I encountered told me about their *grá* (love) for the language, its beauty, and the richness of cultural heritage and historical bonds it expresses and transmits. Yet not so different sounding discourses about heritage have been used to lock the Gaeltacht in time, to reify it as the repository of old national treasures, to make of it (as some of my interlocutors said) a "reservation" – a treatment the Gaeltacht people are dissatisfied with. But the minority and the national discourses on the language are sometimes intertwined, with the first being influenced by and echoing the second. In other instances, the national linguistic ideology, coupled with the reminisce of an older ideology from previous, (post)colonial times, which saw the Irish language as a benchmark of poverty and English as the language of socio-economic mobility (often in the form of physical mobility, with emigration), forms strange double-binds. If you speak Irish you can seem like a backward rural person, yet you can also be considered an obnoxious "elitist". An English language speaker might be happy to hear the national language spoken around them, yet feel threatened if they are addressed in it. Irish language speakers often feel uncomfortable speaking Irish in public or demanding a state service to be provided to them in the Irish language. They don't want to "impose" their language on anyone, and they are afraid of being impolite. A group of Gaeltacht locals in the pub would switch to English when non-Irish speakers join the conversation; then they might have to respond to complaints by *Gaeilgeoirs* (Irish language enthusiasts from outside the Gaeltacht) that they don't care about the language. These are some examples of how the experiences of Gaeltacht Irish language speakers are shaped by and caught into diverse and at times opposite linguistic ideologies.

The fact that the Irish Constitution declares the Irish language to be the national language of Ireland does not mean that Irish is not at the same time also a minority language. It only adds an additional level of complexity to the feelings, attitudes, discourses, practices and experiences of Irish language speakers in the Gaeltacht. It also conceals, to some extent, the fact that Irish is a minority language, weak and under pressure, and therefore needs special efforts to be spoken and preserved, both from the individuals and the institutions. A minority language is a language whose speakers often find themselves in a subordinate position in relation to majority language speakers and institutions (as in the example mentioned above, where Irish language speakers shift to English in the pub or feel uncomfortable demanding Irish language to be used where they have the right to), as its use is

not normalised. To speak Irish is not the norm, even in the Gaeltachts, and indeed many native speakers told me that it requires a "conscious decision" to consistently use Irish in their everyday life and in all aspects of life. They face problems commonly faced by minority language speakers across Europe: having to act as an "advocate" for the language and explaining to people why one would speak it; struggling to have one's name written correctly on documents; micromanaging conversations in both languages and the tensions that arise about language use; having to make an effort to learn everyday words (like those for technology or social media) in one's own language, as one usually only hears them in the majority language; arguing with those people who see one's language as useless or unworthy...

For Gaeltacht Irish speakers – like for many other minority language speakers – their language is a particularly important element of who they are. I am not referring here only to group identities as national or ethnic identity (though it might be claimed that these forms of identity are also particularly relevant for minority communities), but to the very personal identity of the individual, the way her "self" has been formed and influenced by all the particular experiences mentioned above. Minority language speakers seem to have a greater awareness of linguistic issues than monolingual majority language speakers: they not only reflect on them more often than the latter, they also experience and feel them personally. They are also very attached to their community.

Not all Irish speakers from the Gaeltacht would say that Irish is a minority language – indeed, some told me they don't like to use this expression precisely because it evokes a negative image of being "less" and being "different" – but they nevertheless experience it, although they might not name it that way. They might say that Irish is the national language and belongs to "all Irish people who care for it", but then reveal that they indeed do feel different and, more often than not, not understood by the state and monolingual English speakers.

In this thesis, I study the experiences of native or first language Irish speakers from the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht,[2] a small peninsula in county Kerry, south-west Ireland. I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Corca Dhuibhne for a total of seven weeks in 2018, during a one-year study exchange at the National University of Ireland in Maynooth, and recorded semi-structured interviews with 25 Irish speakers, men and women of different

[2] The name would be approximately pronounced as "Korka Rine Gaeltaht" in Slovenian.

ages, from the area. I investigated their beliefs about the Irish and English language, their views on the current situation of the Irish language and their Gaeltacht community, their relationships with the Irish state, with monolingual English speakers and with Irish speakers from outside the Gaeltacht, and their use of the Irish language in different contexts. Moreover, in the thesis I describe the particular spatial configuration of the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht, where there is a division between the predominantly English-speaking town of Dingle/Daingean Uí Chúis and the traditionally Irish-speaking villages located "*back west*" (in the westernmost part of the peninsula), as well as other developments that have affected the Irish language community in the area. I have also dedicated some attention to how different generations of speakers – in particular, the younger ones – see the Irish language. As I have indicated above, the practices and attitudes of Gaeltacht Irish language speakers – and the development of the Gaeltacht areas as such – have been influenced, shaped and regimented by different "ideological layers", and **my aim in this thesis is to illustrate and analyse the complex dimensions of values, feelings and experiences attached to speaking or "*having*" (as Irish people say) the Irish language in Corca Dhuibhne.**

Besides that, I ultimately wish to stress that, when we talk about (minority) languages, language maintenance and language shift, we actually talk about people and their experiences, feelings, and identities. I also hope to transmit to the reader an impression of my fieldwork in the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht and of my personal encounters with local Irish speakers and to do justice to their commitment and love for their language and community. I went to Corca Dhuibhne for the language, but I will remember it for the people who have welcomed me and helped me during my research there.

1.2 "Cárb as tú?" (Where are you from?)

I have started this chapter with my mother telling me how researching the Irish language minority was, according to an acquaintance of ours, not needed. In the previous paragraphs, I've tried to show why such research can be interesting and relevant. A minority language isn't a minor topic and researching it can unfold complex relations between individuals, institutions, ideologies, practices, identities and policies operating in the larger society, as well as make us reflect on the role of economy, politics, geography and history on language and people's beliefs about it. Research on minority language communities can also help to foreground the issues they face, bring attention to their voices and encourage a reflection on their condition.

However, I haven't explained why studying a minority language community in a remote part of Europe was important for me. It's not that we usually get to know much about a researcher's personal motives for her research. Indeed, in most cases, it is not (and should not be) a relevant piece of information for assessing the research. Nevertheless, there are instances when the researcher's background influences her own research. Such is the case of anthropology, where it is widely acknowledged that, in studies using the ethnographic fieldwork method, the researcher is the main instrument of her own research. Therefore, understanding the position (the personal-experiential, cultural and ideological background) of the anthropologist is important. Nevertheless, ethnographies usually provide a description of the fieldwork site, but only rarely we get to know what place the anthropologist comes from, although since the 1980s there has been an increasing reflection, among anthropologists, of the impact of the researcher's own personality and history on her experience in the field and thus on her own research (see, for example, Okely and Callaway 1992).[3]

To me personally, a simple question as "Where are you from?" or "*Cárb as tú?*", as I learned to ask in Irish, already poses some difficulties. "*Is as an Iodáil mé, ach is Slóivéanach mé*" ("I'm from Italy, but I'm Slovenian"), I would say to my classmates at the Irish language course at the University of Maynooth when we were studying the names of countries and nationalities. Or shorter and more accurate, the one I like the most: "*Is Slóivéanach as Trieste, an Iodáil, mé*" ("I'm a Slovenian from Trieste, Italy"). Maybe adding, as an attempt to explain: "*Is é Trieste cathair in aice leis an tSlóivéin*" ("Trieste is a city close to the border with Slovenia").

I come from a minority community, the Slovenian minority in the north-easternmost part of Italy, along its border with the Republic of Slovenia.[4] The uneasiness I (and also other Slovenians from Italy) feel when asked when I come from and the great lengths I usually have to go to explain my background to puzzled strangers index that this isn't the norm. A "*Slóivéanach as an Iodáil*" doesn't conform to the normalcy of "one state – one nation – one language – one identity", a powerful construct through which we link certain groups of people (nations) to certain bounded spaces (nation states), and which permeates our lives and

[3] Anthony P. Cohen (1992) observes that anthropologists are often motivated by a personal problematic as well as by simple intellectual interests. This does not mean that anthropology "should be 'about the anthropologist's self': rather, it must be informed by it", Cohen (1992: 228) writes.

[4] The Slovenians in Italy are an autochthonous minority in the provinces of Trieste/Trst, Gorizia/Gorica and Udine/Videm. There are no official data on the number of Slovenians living there, but some common estimates are that there are around 80,000, maybe up to 100,000, although the numbers are decreasing because of assimilation.

organises our societies.[5] The fact that I'm not content to just say, "*Is as an Iodáil mé*" ("I'm from Italy") shows that my particular background and identity are things I feel strongly about and certainly an important part of who I am. Stating only that I'm from Italy would, for my Irish classmates or any other foreigner, mean that I am Italian. On the other hand, I do sometimes try to limit my answer to "I'm Slovenian," but the conversation might get very complicated later on if the person I'm chatting with asks me "where exactly" I am from. Besides that, saying "I'm Slovenian" can have very a different value and evoke different meanings for a person from Slovenia in comparison to someone belonging to one of the Slovenian minorities present in the neighbouring regions of all the four countries bordering with Slovenia (Italy, Austria, Croatia and Hungary).

Being a Slovenian from Italy entails participating in diverse networks. A Slovenian from Italy, of course, shares a common language, culture and history (up to the 20th century)[6] with people in Slovenia, to which she is tightly connected. She also speaks Italian, can participate in Italian culture and lives among Italians in the Italian state, where she must deal with Italian institutions, policy, bureaucracy etc. Moreover, she is part of the "*manjšina*" (the minority) – as its members call it – and has very likely attended Slovenian language schools, follows local Slovenian-language media, and is perhaps active in her local community and in one of the numerous Slovenian-language cultural or sports organisations.

Most importantly, however, being a Slovenian from Italy entails very particular experiences, feelings, views, attachments and encounters. It's what I would call – for lack of a better term – "*being a minority*", as I'm referring here to a sense of self and a set of

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[5] In the 1990s, the anthropology of place and space has challenged this view of the world as formed by separate, closed cultural "bubbles", each occupying a bounded geographic area (see, for example, Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Studies of nationalism (such as Anderson (1983)) have also shown how the modern notion of nationality is in large part a 19th-century construct.

[6] The Slovenian minority of the provinces of Trst and Gorica is a relatively new one. Until the end of the First World War, these provinces were part of the Austrian empire, like the rest of present-day Slovenia, and they shared a common history with the rest of the Slovenian population until then. Trieste/Trst was an important cultural and economic centre for the Slovenians. Nevertheless, Italians formed the majority of the population of the city, while its hinterland was predominantly Slovenian. After World War I and the dissolution of the Austrian empire, Italy annexed Trst and Gorica (as well as the western part of present-day Slovenia). During the Fascist regime, in the decades between WWI and WWII, it enacted a strict anti-Slovenian policy, aimed at totally assimilating the Slovenian population in these regions. After the Second World War, Slovenian-language schools, media and other organisations have been gradually (re)established.

The situation of the Slovenian minority in the province of Udine/Videm significantly differs from that in the other two provinces. For most of their history, the Slovenians in Videm were under the rule of the Republic of Venice instead of the Austrian Empire. Their region became part of Italy in 1866 and was thus in large part cut out from the process of national identity formation, which the rest of the Slovenians in the Austrian empire underwent in the 19th century. The Italian state didn't legally recognise the Slovenian minority in Videm until 2001, and the first bilingual (Slovenian-Italian) elementary school has opened only in the 1990s.

A comprehensive presentation of the Slovenian minority in Italy can be found in the book *Mi, Slovenci v Italiji = Noi, sloveni in Italia = We, the Slovenes in Italy* (Čavdek et al. 2018).

experiences deriving from speaking a minority language and being part of a minority community, this is speaking a language and identifying with a group of people and a culture which are not the norm in the wider society in which one lives. Being a minority means having to negotiate one's relation to the majority language, people, ideology and institutions, as well as one's own identity and commitment to the minority language and community, on an almost daily basis. It entails being the "Other" of the majority, being different. The minority often wishes to maintain its difference – to protect its distinctive language and culture, to assert its presence in its region and claim its rights. But the difference is also painful: it can mean being misunderstood, misrepresented, discriminated, disparaged or not being acknowledged by the majority. You can feel as if your culture and your outlook, and your link to your place and to your (family, community) past – central aspects of your sense of self – are under constant threat of being extinguished.

It is my experience of coming from a minority community that has sparked in me a wish to meet people from other minorities and an interest in studying them and in reflecting on their condition.

1.3 Minorities in the ethnographic mirror

The bulk of this thesis is based on the ethnographic fieldwork research I conducted in the Gaeltacht community of Corca Dhuibhne in south-west Ireland. Ethnography is a benchmark of anthropological research, which requires living with the community one studies for an extended period of time in order to get to know it at first-hand, develop personal relationships with the people and collect ethnographic data in the form of interviews and fieldwork notes based on personal observation and participation in the groups' activities. It also represents a kind of disciplinary myth: students read and hear a lot about ethnography, yet are not given much practical advice, nor get to really try ethnographic methods before embarking on their first solo experience "in the field".

I have been asked more than once what I thought the biggest challenge I faced during my fieldwork research was. All the practicalities of organising my fieldwork research had run smoothly. I answered that the biggest challenge I faced was my own background: I was afraid of projecting my own experiences on the Irish language speakers I met in Corca Dhuibhne. Yet, on the other hand, if someone were to ask me what the biggest asset I brought to the field was, I would give them the same answer: my background as a member of a minority.

My experience as a member of a minority language community has, I believe, given me sensitivity for the complex interrelationships of languages and identities. I also have a first-hand understanding of concepts such as bilingualism or language shift and of issues that minority language communities usually face. I could relate to many of the things Irish-language speakers told me, from having to manage two different languages in our daily lives, to deep feelings of "being different" (sometimes in a negative way, other times with pride), because I have lived very similar experiences myself.

Ethnographic knowledge is intersubjective in nature; it is formed through encounters and exchanges between the ethnographer and the people she meets and interacts with during fieldwork. It is also deeply experiential: participant observation (one of the main ethnographic techniques) involves careful observation and requires the participation of the researcher as a wholesome person, not only as a detached scholar gathering some "objective data". In fact, during my fieldwork experience, I found I had no "data" – at least not in the form of objective pieces of information or even rational thoughts. It would be more appropriate to talk about insights: sudden grasps elicited by a phrase one of my interlocutors said or understandings crystallising from scattered feelings and sensations after days of observation and reflection. This is a very intimate way of knowing.

I noticed that my understanding of the Irish language situation was often built through comparisons with my personal experience and with the situation of the Slovenian minority in Italy. It came very naturally to me to draw parallels between what I was observing and hearing in the field and my own background. At times, some words or an event would evoke deep feelings within me, which would then generate an inner reflection about the way I see the world and approach fieldwork as a member of a minority community. Many of the insights I had in this way were difficult to put into clear (scholarly) words and to properly explain or relate to the anthropological literature I have studied.

I had the impression that telling the Irish speakers I met that I had also been brought up speaking a minority language made it easier to connect with them (though, of course, it varied from person to person). It contributed to a sense of recognition between me and my interlocutors; reassuring them, for example, that I also often have to spell my name to people who are not familiar with my (minority) language or to juggle two languages (the minority and the majority one) simultaneously in a group conversation, usually encouraged them to go past the first, superficial step of the interaction – that of acting as "advocates for the Irish language" – to a more open or specific discussion of their experiences. Listening to the interview recordings one can find a few instances when the interlocutor had tried to explain

to me how he or she felt about the Irish language – maybe apologising for not finding the right words for that – and I said, "Oh yeah, I know what you mean…" I felt I knew what they meant then because their words were evoking emotions or situations that were familiar to me – there was an underlying match of feelings and experiences. However, analysing these clusters of feelings is a challenge: how can I know for sure what my interlocutors *really* meant? And besides that, how can I pin it down on paper in such a way that the reader will be able to get a sense of what they meant (or at least of what *I* thought they meant)?

I've tried to be cautious. I can never be certain to what degree are my experiences comparable to those of Irish native speakers: what if instead of understanding my interlocutors, I was projecting my views on them? Indeed, the subsequent transcriptions and the analysis of the recorded material, after I finished my fieldwork in Corca Dhuibhne, have been very informative in this respect: I have been able to reflect on the similarities and the differences that had emerged during the conversations, but which I couldn't really make sense of at the time. The questions about the Slovenian minority in Italy (and subsequent comments to my answers) that some of my research participants made in casual conversations were also helpful, as they indirectly revealed their point of view and what *they* as Gaeltacht Irish speakers considered important minority language issues. In a way, they held me a mirror that prompted me to re-evaluate the questions I was posing them during the fieldwork interviews.

Ethnography is a joint construction of meanings by the researcher and the people she studies. My outlook on the Irish language and the Gaeltacht as a bilingual minority language speaker and, moreover, as an outsider to Irish culture and language may well be different from that of, for example, a monolingual English speaker from Ireland or another researcher who didn't have the same experiences and motives for conducting the research I had. It might have been easier for me to empathise with my interlocutors and understand their struggles, but, at the same time, I have probably overlooked or taken for granted some other aspects. For example, a monolingual (majority language) speaker might have marvelled at the fact that Gaeltacht people regularly speak two languages and thus devote more time to analysing their everyday language choices. My position – like that of every other hypothetical researcher – is neither privileged nor flawed, but it is important to acknowledge it, especially as it is a minority one.

A clear difference between the Irish language community in the Republic of Ireland and the Slovenian minority in Italy is the relationship with the nation state. The first one is a

minority in “its own” state, as indeed, as some of my interlocutors in Corca Dhuibhne have noted almost with exasperation, “Irish, our national language is a minority language”. On the other hand, Slovenians in Italy feel connected to another nation (Slovenia) than that of the state in which we live (Italy). Moreover, there is a society (in Slovenia) where Slovenian is the habitual main language of communication of all social groups and across all domains (from grocery shopping to academia), to which Slovenians from Italy can look at as a model for developing their Slovenian language. Irish, on the other hand, always remains secondary to the more prominent English language. The Irish society functions through English; there is no linguistic domain exclusively occupied by Irish and no social group, not even the most committed Irish speakers in the bilingual Gaeltacht areas, could carry on in their lives without English interference or without having to use English in some instance or another. There is now no society where Irish would be the majority language.

Neither of the two minority language communities is overly happy with their condition. Some of my research participants thought the situation of the Slovenians in Italy must be better because we can get help and support from our kin-state. However, while the Slovenian *language* is certainly doing better than the Irish language, the Slovenians from Italy (as the acquaintance from the beginning of this chapter) would most likely think that the Irish language *speakers* are doing better than them. Aren’t the Irish speakers living in a state that fully recognises them and which apparently accords several rights and high prestige to their language? Aren’t they living, so to speak, among “their own people”, their own compatriots?

As a result of particular historical processes of national identity formation, the Slovenians from Italy have come to see themselves as a distinct group, different from (and marginalised by) the Italian community among which they live. Here, categorisation based on identity is conterminous with categorisation along linguistic lines. This is clearly not the case in Ireland. There, the Irish language has been brought to the front of national identity formation projects, while its traditional speakers have remained at their margins and with little space to develop their own sense of who they are. As I try to show in this thesis, Gaeltacht Irish language speakers have been constituted and have been seeing themselves and their language through the eyes, aims and expectations of others – the Irish state, the non-Irish speakers and the new speakers of Irish – as much as through their own. The lines between them and the Other are blurred – this is the main difference between the Irish language community and the Slovenians in Italy.

1.4 A short review of relevant concepts and literature

The topic of this thesis can be characterised as falling under the label of linguistic anthropology, the "study of language as a cultural resource and speaking as a cultural practice" (Duranti 1997: 2). Linguistic anthropology is connected to linguistics (in particular, to sociolinguistics), but it is distinguished by an approach that is grounded in anthropological theory and ethnographic tradition. The focus of linguistic anthropology is not language as an abstracted object per se, but rather the way that society and culture shape language and are in turn shaped by it. There is more to language than it solely being a medium for communication amongst humans. In particular, a central element of the linguistic anthropological study of language is the awareness that language is a "non-neutral medium" (Duranti 2011). It is a tool for social organisation and differentiation, and, at the same time, it is itself embedded in social practices. Moreover, as Alessandro Duranti (2001: 44) writes, "any perspective on language is positioned, that is, it is imbued with sociopolitical as well as personal investments".

People have different beliefs about different languages and their speakers. The beliefs that Irish people, particularly the Irish language speakers from the Gaeltacht, have about the Irish language and those who speak it represent a focus of this research. In other words, I am interested in language (or linguistic) ideologies, which can be defined as:

> (…) dynamic sets of beliefs about language that are enacted and reproduced in everyday linguistic practice and interaction. Language ideologies are "the cultural conceptions of the nature, form, and purpose of language, and of communicative behavior as an enactment of a collective order" (Gal and Woolard 1995:130) and include large-scale sociohistorical processes that shape and are shaped by language. (Cavanaugh 2009: 6)

The study of linguistic ideologies has emerged as a salient topic of linguistic anthropological analysis in the 1980s (Duranti 2011: 43).[7] In a review of the large and diverse body of work on this theme, Paul Kroskrity (2004) notes that there is no single definition of linguistic ideologies; rather, researchers have developed different conceptualisations, which follow the distinct possible lines of inquiry into the beliefs that people have about language.

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[7] Researchers in the fields of social psychology of language and of sociolinguistics have developed a similar concept, that of linguistic attitude. While the two terms are almost synonymous, the concept of linguistic attitude is usually understood as referring to individual beliefs and feelings about a language, whereas the term linguistic ideology "highlights the importance of the group as opposed to the individual", in line with the respective research traditions (O'Rourke 2011: 10). Accordingly, I generally use the latter term to emphasise the wider social processes shaping people's perceptions of language, and I prefer to talk about attitudes when having in mind specific personal perceptions.

Consequently, Kroskrity (2004: 501) identifies five different dimensions or "partially overlapping but analytically distinguishable layers of significance" of linguistic ideologies. Firstly, linguistic ideologies are often tied to individual or group interests, this is, they can be constructed to promote and legitimate their political and economic interests. Secondly, language ideologies should be conceived as multiple, as there are different groups or social divisions within a society; and, therefore, dominant linguistic ideologies are open to contestation by other divergent ideologies. Thirdly, people have a different degree of awareness of their local linguistic ideologies, so that while some ideologies are explicitly articulated, other can be only inferred from practice. Fourthly, through linguistic ideologies, language users indexically link particular linguistic forms and practices with other "features of their sociocultural experience" (Kroskrity 2004: 507). Lastly, Kroskrity explains that linguistic ideologies are used in different ways to create and represent various social and cultural identities, like, for example, national identity.

Linguistic ideologies are thus not just about language; instead, they are "a mediating link between social forms and forms of talk" (Woolard 1998: 3). This concept also allows us to relate the microsocial level of individual beliefs – as well as linguistic practices – with larger macrosocial processes and power relations (Woolard 1998: 27). Here, linguistic (or language) practice refers to the ways in which people use language(s) in the different situations and interactions of everyday life. In general, the term practice indicates "habitual social activity, the series of actions that make up our daily lives" (Bucholtz and Hall 2004: 377). Linguistic practice – as other forms of practice – is rooted in behaviours acquired through socialisation processes, but it can also be a deliberate expression of individuals' social agency (Bucholtz and Hall 2004: 378).

Among the scholars in the field of linguistic anthropology who have researched linguistic ideologies and whose work I have found particularly relevant to my research are Michael Silverstein (1998, 1999), Jillian C. Cavanaugh (2009), Susan Gal (2012) and Kathryn Woolard (1998, 2004). The last two are also amongst the most influential anthropologists who have researched European minority languages. In particular, Woolard, who has done extensive research in Catalonia, has stressed how there has been a "monolingual bias" in Western intellectual tradition, which has cast multilingualism as anomalous and marginal and has failed to acknowledge the richness of language contact and bilingual phenomena (Woolard 1999: 3). The study of bilingual or multilingual communities

has the potential to challenge these longstanding assumptions and to develop a new theoretical understanding of language.

In general, however, although linguistic anthropologists have engaged in the study of endangered languages in indigenous and other communities around the world, while searching for literature I had the impression that not many had done research about minority languages in Europe. However, work on this topic has been conducted in the field of sociolinguistics, often preoccupied with the development and implementation of language policies, which is another term relevant to the Irish case.

Bernard Spolsky (2018: 4) defines language policy as being comprised of three components: the interrelation of language practices (the actual use of the language varieties in a community), beliefs about language (or language ideologies), and their management by individuals, groups and institutions within a community. The state is one of the main actors in the development and implementation of language policies and it is indeed a very influential one in the Irish case. However, the concept of language policy does not refer exclusively to statuatory provisions that are applied at the state or regional level. It can be used, for example, also to indicate how languages are managed in a (bilingual) household or family.

Another useful concept is that of regimes of language or linguistic regimes, developed by linguistic anthropologist Paul Kroskrity (2000) to connect language and politics. Language ideologies are one of the components of a linguistic regime, which refers to "the ways in which the political economy of language functions and is reproduced on the ground through the discourses and actions of social actors" (O'Rourke and Brennan 2018: 2). This concept highlights how individuals, not just beliefs, can also be *regimented*:

"(…) language regimes not only organise language ideologies and linguistic practices, but also orient individuals' daily lives and everyday actions" (O'Rourke and Brennan 2018: 1).

Looking more specifically at the Irish language, I found a general review of its present situation in the collection *A new view of the Irish language* (Caoilfhionn Nic Pháidín and Seán Ó Cearnaigh 2008), while Pádraig Ó Riagáin (1997) has written extensively on Irish language policy. Conchúr Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007) have prepared a widely quoted and discussed report on the use of the Irish language in the Gaeltacht. Among the scholars who have researched Irish language ideologies and policies, and whose work has helped me to organise in a meaningful way what I observed in the field, are Steve Coleman (2003, 2004), Tadgh Ó hIfearnáin (2013, 2014), and Bernadette Ó Rourke and Sara Brennan (2018). While

the first two have focused on Gaeltacht communities, the latter two have studied "new speakers" of Irish, those people outside the traditional Irish-speaking communities who start speaking Irish as adults, thus offering me a complementary view. Unfortunately, literature written in the Irish language has been inaccessible to me.

Although I have found useful information in the prolific literature that has a sociolinguistic, and mostly quantitative, approach to minority languages, language use and language management, I strived to find work that would have a similar approach to the topic that I aspired to have – this is, an approach centred on people and attending to their experiences. *Living memory*, Jillian Cavanaugh's (2009) book on linguistic ideologies and the "social aesthetics" of Bergamasco, a dialect in northern Italy, has served me as an inspiring example on how to write linguistic ethnography.

1.5 On minority languages

The concept of minority language might seem intuitively easy to understand, but it can be difficult to define. Firstly, it is important to note that a language is not a minority language solely based on its (small) number of speakers. Certainly, most minority languages have a lower number of speakers in a given geographical area than the local majority language, but this is often the *result* of particular social, political and economic processes that lead the language to become a minority language in the first place, rather than the other way around.

The condition of minority language is not a natural one. A language is a minority language precisely because there was or is an asymmetry of power between it and another (majority) language and between the people that speak them. Minority languages have lost some of their functions and domains of use and usually have a lower prestige than the majority language. They and their speakers have been stigmatised. Language shift[8] from the minority to the majority language should be viewed as a consequence of the socioeconomic and political processes that lead a language to become a minority language, rather than as depending on some inherent characteristics of the two languages. In fact, some authors and activists prefer using the term "minoritised language" to highlight the processual dimension of linguistic subordination.

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[8] Language shift can be defined as "a situation in which a community of speakers effectively abandons one language by ''shifting'' to another (not necessarily by conscious choice)" (Garrett 2004: 63).

While processes of linguistic subordination and minoritisation have very likely been occurring throughout all human history, the concept of minority language and the attention given to the study and protection of minority languages are quite recent. In 19th- and 20th-century Europe, nation-state politics, aimed at creating a unified nation with one national language, coupled with modernisation, urbanisation and changes in the traditional ways of life (as well as, in some cases, changes in state borders), have led to the gradual abandonment of many languages. However, especially in the second half of the 20th century, movements upholding the preservation of these languages and demanding rights for its speakers developed. Regional and state authorities adopted different approaches for dealing with minority languages, from total neglect or indifference to full protection and promotion. In any case, minority languages became the direct objects of policies. The very idea of minority language formed and has been changing in relation to these political developments. It is also linked to discourses and ideologies about multilingualism, linguistic diversity, endangered languages, etc.

Various authors have described common characteristics of minority languages (see, for example, Simpson 2001; Edwards 2010: 73–103). One of these is the fragility of the minority language in relation to the dominant language. First of all, its speakers (especially younger members of the population) are bilingual in the majority language and might not have a complete proficiency in the minority language; the minority language might be excluded from certain domains (for example, administration and media) while being connected to others (often the home) and its speakers might be used to speaking about certain topics only in the majority language, therefore not developing the relevant vocabulary in the minority language. Language shift to the majority language is a common problem. In fact, as Penelope Eckart (1980) has shown, diglossia – this is, the coexistence of two languages in a community, each associated with separated domains and assigned different meanings[9] – is usually only a phase, rather than a static situation, and can be a driving force in the shift to monolingualism in the majority language. Minority languages need to be actively sustained to thrive: education, media, and provision of services in the minority language are usually among the main measures implemented. In his influential work on the different steps in reversing language shift, Joshua Fishman (1991) highlighted the importance of

[9] Diglossia is "a type of societal bilingualism that (…) involves two codes that are historically related but hierarchically differentiated by domain and function" (Garrett 2004: 53). The roles of the two codes in the society are usually described as being those of "high" language and "low" language, where the former is accorded more prestige and authority, is highly standardised and used in public and formal domains, while the latter is limited to informal or intimate contexts (Garrett 2004: 54).

intergenerational transmission – this is, the transmission of the language from parents to children through primary socialisation at home – for the maintenance of minority languages.

Linguistic ideologies play a significant, though often overlooked role in language maintenance and shift, as they mediate between the micro- and the macro-social levels. Kathryn Woolard observes that:

> (…) studies of language maintenance and shift initially implicated macrosocial events as direct causes. Later research has insisted that it is only through the interpretive filter of beliefs about language, cognition, and social relations that political and economic events have an effect on language maintenance or shift (Mertz 1989: 109). (Woolard 1998: 16)

Finally, it is important to note that when we talk about minority languages, we should be really talking about the people who speak them. Besides the concept of minority language, there is also that of a minority community – one which I have already tried to illustrate in this chapter by writing about my background as a member of such a community. The definition of a linguistic, ethnic or national minority community[10] is perhaps even trickier to clarify than that of a minority language. One of the difficulties of the concept of "minority community" is how to identify and number its members. It is both a category of self-ascription and of external categorisation, and questions about what are the criteria for that might arise (for example, is it enough to speak a minority language to be part of a minority language community?). Moreover, talking about a minority group can be politically sensitive. The existence of a minority group with a different language and identity can be the basis for claims for political autonomy and separatism, and thus be seen as a threat by the existing authorities.

Scholars and practitioners in the field of International Law have been particularly concerned with the definition of 'minority', as there are several international and EU-level declarations and conventions that seek to protect linguistic and other minorities. However, there is no unique definition and, furthermore, these documents also present different approaches to minority languages and communities. For example, in an analysis of the ideologies regarding linguistic diversity in the European Union, Susan Gal (2012: 31–33) notes how EU-level reports have progressively shifted from writing about "linguistic

[10] Here, I use the term "linguistic, ethnic and national minorities" as this is the expression I found to be commonly used by European minorities' organisations and activists. The term "ethnic and national minorities" is used to refer to those communities who claim to have a distinct ethnic or national identity than the rest of the population (the Slovenians in Italy are one of these), while for a linguistic minority a sense of separate identity isn't relevant or openly claimed (this is the case of the Irish language speakers in Ireland). The term "autochthonous minority" is also sometimes used to highlight the difference from immigrant minorities.

minorities" (in the 1980s) to "minority languages" and even "multilingualism". This can be conceived as a part of a wider shift towards neoliberal discourses, which make "fewer assumptions about speakers" (Gal 2012: 32) and talk instead about cultural heritage and its economic advantages. In other words, there is an objectification of language as a commodity.

However, a minority language would not have much hope to survive as a spoken language without the existence of a community of people who see it as an important part of their identity and who use it in their daily lives and advocate for it. One might even question if a minority language would have much reason to survive without a community for which it has at least a symbolic value. It should also be noted that communities can keep their distinctive sense of ethnic identity and their cultural traditions even after having lost their language in favour of the majority language. Besides that, in some other cases, a language which is not the main language of a group of people (anymore), can be reclaimed and refashioned to serve their identity-building projects. This is precisely what happened with the Irish language, as we will see in the next chapter.

1.6 Short note

All the names of the research participants mentioned in this thesis are pseudonyms. Some other personal details have been changed as well to protect the anonymity of the people who participated in the research.

2. THE IRISH LANGUAGE

While I have been referring to the Irish language as a minority language, which it is in Ireland both in terms of the number of its speakers and of its status vis-à-vis the English language, the statement that Irish is a minority language would be met by many Irish people – including some Irish language speakers – with surprise, if not even with indignation. Most people are accustomed to think of the Irish language as the national language, the language of Irish people. Even if less than 2% of the Irish population speak it on a daily basis (CSO 2017),[11] the language is one of the symbols of Irish identity.[12]

In this chapter, I use literature on the social and political history of the Irish language (Crowley 2005, Mac Giolla Chríost 2005, Doyle 2015) and on Irish language sociolinguistics (Ó Riagáin 1997, Nic Pháidín and Ó Cearnaigh 2008) to present the historical processes that led the Irish language to become a minoritised and marginalised language in the first place, and those that led to its current symbolic role as a national language. I give attention to the linguistic policies of the Irish state in the 20th century, as they have had an essential impact on the lives of the Gaeltacht communities, such as that of Corca Dhuibhne, as well as on the general perception of the Irish language, its speakers and the Gaeltacht areas by the state's population. It is crucial to understand how the Gaeltacht areas have been defined from above, by the state, rather than from below by social actors from its communities, and that they have been subjected to a series of policies, which have effectively regimented the Gaeltacht.

2.1 A history of language shift and revival

The Irish language "revival", or its mobilisation as a cultural resource and a means for claiming a distinctive Irish heritage and identity, started in the second half of the 19th century, during a national formation process which culminated with the Irish independence from

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[11] According to the Census of Population carried out in 2016 (CSO 2017), there are 73,803 people who speak Irish daily, which is about 1.7 % of the Irish population. In comparison, 39.8% of the population was reported as being able to speak Irish (CSO 2017). However, this latter statistic only points to the symbolic value the Irish people attribute to the language, as it has been noted that people claim to be able to speak Irish even if they have only a very basic and limited ability in the language (Punch 2008).

[12] Perhaps it is not incidental that the language is commonly referred to as *Irish*, rather than (Irish) *Gaelic*, which would be a direct translation of its official endonym, *Gaeilge*. Instead, Gaelic or Scottish Gaelic is a term usually used for a language spoken in Scotland that is closely related to the Irish or Irish Gaelic language.
Today, the Irish language has three different spoken regional variants or dialects, corresponding to the three historical regions of Munster (in the south), Connacht (in the west) and Ulster (in the north of the Irish island), and one common written standard. In the Munster variant spoken in Corca Dhuibhne, the language is commonly called *Gaelainn*.

English rule and the establishment of a new Irish state in 1922. At the time, the Irish language, whose speakers can nowadays pride themselves on having a long and rich written tradition dating as far back as the 4th century AD,[13] was already a minoritised language, spoken by a decreasing number of the rural population dispersed in small pockets in the marginalised western part of Ireland.

Starting in the 12th century with the Anglo-Norman invasion in 1169, and gradually expanding and fortifying from the 16th century onwards,[14] English rulers colonised the Irish island, bringing with them a new social order and a different culture and language, which gradually displaced the Gaelic culture that was until then dominant on the island. Through the centuries of English rule, the language of the colonizers, English, replaced the Irish language, which had been the main language of the native population. However, it would be wrong to interpret the colonisation of Ireland in simple black-and-white terms as an eight-hundred-year-long struggle between two cultures and languages, and contemporary historians (such as Crowley 2005) advise that it was a far more complex and nuanced process. In any case, we have to acknowledge that:

> (…) the politics of language in Ireland have been underpinned by the experience of the processes of colonialism, anti-colonialism, and post-colonialism, with all of the attendant difficulty, violence, and bitterness that has entailed. (Crowley 2005: 7)

In the 19th century, the Irish language was reduced to a lower register status, fragmented into many different dialects and with a very limited written production. Its domains of use had gradually shrunken and given way to the English language. The direction

[13] The Irish language is considered to be one of the European languages with the longest written and literary tradition. The first inscriptions in the Irish language are on Ogham stones, dating from the 4th till the 7th century (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005: 65). These inscriptions are made in the Ogham scripts, and many are found in the south-west of Ireland, with several also on the Corca Dhuibhne peninsula. The conversion to Christianity, starting in the 5th century, brought about the introduction of the Latin alphabet. The Latin language and the Christian faith had an important influence on the Irish language and society (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005: 67).

[14] Two major factors of change in this period were the "plantations" of the regions of Munster and Ulster (settlement of newcomers from England and, in a lesser extent, from Scotland, and confiscation of land from the original Gaelic landowners) and the religious tension brought about by the English Reformation (Doyle 2015: 63–65). The Penal laws, a series of provisions introduced during the 17th century with which the English rulers tried to force conversion to the Anglican church, limited the rights of Catholics and prevented them from attaining positions of power (Doyle 2015: 81–82). The Penal laws effectively established the Anglican minority, which was mostly concentrated in Dublin, as the dominating class on the island. The old Gaelic higher classes, which were also the patrons of Gaelic culture, particularly through their sponsorship of the *filí* or Irish language poets and intellectuals, were displaced (Doyle 2015: 49). Needless to say, the new ruling classes spoke English and promoted English customs. In any case, since the 16th century, the conflict between the English and the Irish has been articulated mostly in terms of religion (rather than around the language or culture), and the Catholic faith has been seen as a distinctive trait of Irish identity, in opposition to the English Protestants, up until well into the 20th century (Crowley 2005).

of language shift from Irish to English followed the spread of the English colonial rule. As the English power had been expanding from its first stronghold in Dublin in the east of the island towards the west and out from the urban centres toward the surrounding rural areas, so the English language spread from east to west and among the urban population first, with the rural and lower classes following. From the 16th century onwards, Irish speakers were increasingly becoming bilingual in English, as English was necessary for commerce in towns, to deal with the administration and the courts, or to achieve education (Doyle 2015: 66–67), as the "(…) prestigious ruling caste of landlords, judges, barristers and attorneys, officers, officials and agents came to constitute (…) the apex of the English language and cultural system in Ireland" (Smyth 2006: 403–404 quoted in Doyle 2015: 67). Although some contemporary poets and commentators were aware of the progressing diglossic regime and warned about the dangers faced by the Irish language (see, for example, Crowley 2005: 74–78) the language shift only accelerated in the subsequent centuries.

English was the language of administration, legislation, commerce and education, as well as the language of progress and modernity (new inventions, like print, were introduced through English), while Irish was the language of the past, of a disappearing and lower-class culture, which had been displaced by the English colonial society. English was the language to speak to achieve socio-economic advancement, and so gradually, as more and more people adopted English over Irish, the latter became the vernacular of a social subclass associated with poverty and backwardness.[15] Between the 1600s and the 1900s, three quarters of the Irish population changed their language, with the shift being particularly significant in the second half of the 19th century (Ó Laoire 2005: 285–286).

The Great Famine (1845–1849), during which Ireland lost more than a quarter of the 8 million inhabitants it had at the time (1 million died and another million and a half emigrated), had great consequences also on the Irish language, as it impacted especially heavily on the Irish-speaking communities in the west of the island (Romaine 2008: 14; Mac Giolla Chríost 2005: 100–101). It also strengthened the perception of English as the language that was most needed and useful, especially considering that it was the language spoken in America, to which Irish people massively emigrated during the Famine and subsequently

[15] In this context, it is interesting to note the origins of the Irish word for English – *Béarla*. Its first meaning was "speech" and it seems that it had to be preceded by *gall*, meaning "foreign", to refer to the English language (Doyle 2015: 41–42). However, starting from the 16th century, English became "the speech" – simply *Béarla*. Mac Giolla Chríost (2005: 87) claims that the word's meaning was that of "technical language".

throughout the 19th and 20th century (Doyle 2015: 125). Irish was, in contrast, the useless language of poverty back home, a shameful past that was better to be forgotten.

The spread of English was also accelerated by the introduction, in 1832, of general primary education in National schools, which utilised English as the medium of instruction. With regards to this, an image often evoked by Irish people is that of the "tally-stick" hanging around the pupil's neck. If the teacher caught the pupil speaking Irish, he would make a mark on the stick; later the pupil would be punished according to the number of marks on the stick. Doyle (2015: 132–133) presents evidence that not only teachers but also parents were eager to punish their children if they spoke Irish. Does it mean than Irish people willingly abandoned their own language without second-thoughts, in favour of the more useful English? Or was that a sign that they had "internalised the colonisation process" so much that a "subjugation of the mind and the spirits" had occurred (Doyle 2015: 137)? Aidan Doyle doesn't take a stance between these two views, the utilitarian and the post-colonial, arguing instead that the shift from Irish to English was a very gradual process, expanding across several generations:

> But what is important is that Irish declined slowly and imperceptibly for those who participated in the process. In such circumstances, there can be no question of clear choices or individual responsibility. This in turn may explain why many people at the time appear to have had no feeling of loss or traumatisation (…) The sense of trauma and loss was to come much later, and was experienced vicariously on behalf of those who, according to the twentieth-century writers, had sold their birthright. (Doyle 2015: 138)

The language shift mostly likely occurred within four generations. The great-grandparents would have been monoglot Irish speakers who picked up some English as adults; the grandparents learned English at school and used both languages, with Irish as their first language. With the next generation of the parents a change happened: although they were able to speak both languages, they used English more and transmitted only English to their children, who thus became monoglot English speakers, with perhaps a few words of Irish learned from the grandparents. This model, outlined by Adams (1985, quoted in Ó Laoire 2005: 285) applies for the cases where the family lived in the same region: emigration, as well as other factors, might have accelerated the shift from Irish monolingualism to bilingualism and finally English monolingualism. In the 1750s, at least half of the population knew and understood *English* (Doyle 2015: 97); in the 1860s, less than a quarter of the population spoke *Irish* (Romaine 2008: 14).

While common Irish people were put in such socio-economic conditions that drove them to abandon their first language in favour of one with a higher status and functionality, in the 19th century the island's English-speaking elites were starting to look at the Irish language in the quest for political independence from the British rule.[16] They were inspired by Romanticism, in particular, by the views developed by the German Johann Gottfried Herder for whom there was an essential link between language, the people who spoke it and the place they lived in, and who influenced many other contemporary movements for the creation of nation states on the European continent (Doyle 2015: 114). The Irish language was thus mobilised for the creation of a distinctive Irish national identity, which would differentiate the Irish people from the English, and which would legitimise the demand for independence from their colonisers. The Irish language was also conveniently spoken by "pristine" and "unspoiled" rural people, who were envisioned as the last bearers of the ancient heritage of an idealised Gaelic and Celtic past, in line with the Romantics' search for an authentic national character. In contrast, the proponents of this romanticised view of the Irish language and culture were urban upper-middle-class English speakers, who had little contact with the Gaelic culture, and who with their writings and campaigns indirectly contributed to reinforce the role of English as the language of modern political discourse and separatist rhetoric (Doyle 2015: 116–117).[17]

Nevertheless, at the end of the 19th century, a more serious movement supporting the preservation and promotion of the Irish language emerged. In 1893, *Conradh na Gaeilge*, the Gaelic League (which exists still today), was founded with the goals of reviving Irish in the areas where it had ceased to be spoken and of creating a new modern literature in Irish (Ó Riagáin 1997: 8). It is necessary to say that this was a period of intense nationalist efforts, not only in politics, but in all spheres of society (for example, in the realm of sports, with the

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[16]Crowley (2005) notes that even before the rise of Irish cultural nationalism, the Irish language was seen as a differentiating element between the old Irish social order and the new English colonisers, but to a lesser extent than in the 19th century, as it didn't have political significance and its overall role in society was diminishing.

[17] Not all Irish political movements embraced the Irish language. In the first half of the 19th century, the most important political force was the movement for Catholic emancipation, that is, for the removal of all restrictions on Catholics, including that of sitting in the Westminster parliament, which was achieved in 1829. Its main leader was Daniel O'Connell, an extremely influential and popular politician. He had learned both Irish and English as a child, but had a pragmatic approach to language, much in line with the contemporary diglossic experience of Irish people: he saw English as having greater utility than Irish as the language of modernity and progress, and in his famous speeches he addressed the crowds (which would have been composed also by Irish speakers) in English. (Doyle 2015: 108–113).

Despite being sometimes discoursively linked to the Irish language, the Catholic Church (particularly St. Patrick's college in Maynooth, the first catholic seminary in Ireland, established at the end of the 18th century) had also endorsed the English language and contributed to language shift in the 19th century (Crowley 2005: 110, 117).

establishment of the Gaelic Athletic Association), through which people developed a new sense of distinctness and pride in their Irish identity which led, a few decades later, to an uprising against British rule. The Gaelic League was the main player of the Irish language revival movement and, although it was established as a non-political organisation, it later became involved also in the political independence movement. Its Irish language programme had a great influence on the language policy of the Irish state.

Conradh na Gaeilge was founded in Dublin,[18] but branches were gradually established all around Ireland, with the majority of members being Catholics, middle and lower-middle class (teachers, civil servants, bank clerks, priests etc.), younger people and women (Ó Riagáin 1997: 9–10). The League provided Irish language classes, organised cultural festivals with Irish music and dancing, and published several leaflets. It placed a strong focus on education, by leading campaigns aiming at securing Irish-language education and organising Irish language training for teachers.[19] Education remained a hallmark of Irish language policy also after Irish independence from Britain.

The fate of the Irish language, which several 18th- and 19th-century commentators considered to be a dead or dying language (Romaine 2008: 12) would certainly have been much gloomier if it hadn't been for the great efforts of the Gaelic League and its influence on the nationalist republican movement and, later, on the Irish state's language policy and ideology. However, the development of the Irish language movement marked also a new phase for the Irish language, in which the "responsibility for the language passed from the hands of native speakers into the hands of learners" (Doyle 2015: 8).

The end of the 19th century arrived, with native Irish speakers remaining ashamed of their language, whilst the Gaelic League continued working to improve the Irish language's status. The last Irish-speaking areas were quickly turning to English, while League members attempted to revive it elsewhere; the Irish language being viewed as a badge of poverty and backwardness, yet simultaneously becoming a symbol of the Irish national identity. These

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[18] *Conradh na Gaeilge*'s first president was Douglas Hayde, a Protestant. Hayde was an academic, an Irish language scholar, and later became the first president of Ireland (1938–1945). In a speech given in the 1890s, Hayde laid the foundations for Irish cultural nationalism: he urged that Irish people had to de-anglicise themselves (see Crowley 2005: 136–140). For Hayde, Ireland was becoming a mere copy of its British colonizers, while apparently hating it. The Irish language was the last link to a more glorious Gaelic past, to what distinguished the Irish from the British, and had thus to be restored to "guarantee the continuation of the Irish nation" (Crowley 2005: 140).

[19] In 1900, the League achieved the concession that the Irish language could be taught as an ordinary school subject in schools, and in 1910 the Irish language became a requirement for entrance in the recently established National University of Ireland (Ó Riagáin 1997: 11). Great efforts were made to train teachers: starting from 1904, Irish language summer schools were organised, often in Irish-speaking areas (Ó Riagáin 1997: 11).

complex webs of conflicting ideologies and aspirations that became attached to the Irish and English languages were passed on to the following generations of diverse speakers and supporters, furthermore shaping the development of the Irish language in the 20th century. They still influence not only the perception of the Irish language and its use in the Republic but also the lives of Irish language speakers.

2.2 Language policy in the Republic of Ireland

In 1922, after three years of political and military upheaval during the Irish war for independence, and six years after the Easter Rising, a Treaty between the British government and the Irish republicans was signed, marking the establishment of the Irish Free State (six counties in Northern Ireland remained under British rule). For those who fought for independence, the Irish language was one of the key elements of Irish identity; it was now up to the Irish state, to the government of the Irish people, to take care of the language and implement provisions for the realisation of the revivalist dreams of the Gaelic League:

> (…) the leaders of the main political groupings in the new state accepted that the government of an independent Irish state had an obligation to give official support and recognition to the most irrefutable mark of a distinctive Irish 'nation', on whose behalf an independent state had been claimed and established (Ó Tuathaigh 2008: 28)

In the newly independent state, the Irish language became, for the first time, the direct object of language policy. While the shift from Irish to English had been a consequence of a complex history of wider social, political and economic relations, the state now set to implement specific measures to promote and protect the Irish language and reverse the language shift. The Irish state took over, in large measure, the control over the role, the functions, the development and the future of the Irish language. Its language policy has been analysed by several researchers (Ó Riagáin 1997 and 2008, Ó Laoire 2005, Ó Tuathaigh 2008, Ó hIfearnáin 2014, Paulston 1994). In general, they identify two main policy aims. These are: the maintenance of the language in those areas where it is (or is considered to be) still the community language, and its revival elsewhere (Ó Riagáin 2008: 56).

Ó Riagáin (2008: 55) notes that in comparison with other minority language policies, the Irish language policy is unique because it applies to the entire state, rather than just to a region (that where the minority language speakers are present). Moreover, rather than simply protecting the existing Irish-speaking or bilingual communities, the state sought to create new ones. In fact, the Irish language policy was not made to protect a minority: it was made to

foster a sense of common national identity. It had a strong ideological grounding in Irish cultural nationalism, without too much consideration for the complex socio-economical and ideological factors that had led to the abandonment of the language in the first place. There was perhaps a naive assumption that Irish people would resume speaking Irish just because of their exaltation or pride of now being a free, independent nation, rather than one mimicking its former English colonisers.

The Constitution of the Irish Free State from 1922 and the Constitution of Ireland from 1937 both declare Irish to be the national language; the second also conceives it as the first official language, while English is the second official language (Ó Laighin 2008: 249–250). These were mere ideological declarations rather than explicit legislative provisions for the Irish language (Ó Laighin 2008: 250) and in practice, the English language continued to be the main language of the state apparatus, its institutions, legal acts and public services. It's true that Irish gained some higher domains, which it didn't have before, but its role was largely symbolic. English was well established as the language of communication: why would people switch to Irish, if they could effectively communicate with each other in each domain of life through English? Furthermore, although they were now citizens of an independent state, the Irish economy was still very much dependent on that of Britain and the US, with English also continuing to be the language of emigration. It seems that the members of the Gaelic League were aware of that and that they never saw a complete shift back to Irish as being possible or even desirable (Ó Laoire 2005: 259–260). The policy developers never clearly stated what having Irish as the national language meant in practice, what their vision was and, especially, through which concrete steps they would achieve it. Ó Riagáin (2008: 55) warns that, although there has been some confusion about the ultimate objective of Ireland's language policy, the creation of a monolingual Irish language community was never envisaged, but rather – and at most –simply the establishment of some degree of bilingualism in the state. The efforts to protect and promote the Irish language were very much a result of the nationalist impetus, which with the achievement of independence had already lost some of its momentum (Doyle 2015: 212).

Nevertheless, contemporary critics of the Irish language policy must remember that the Irish state was one of the first to develop a minority language policy, long before the field of language planning had been developed, so that the Irish case can now serve as an example (often of bad practices, unfortunately) for others. Conversely, to call it a "minority language policy" is not completely correct, precisely because of its nationalistic grounding. The ideology of Irish as the national language, the language of all Irish people, implicitly denied

the existence of a separate linguistic minority community. This is a crucial point to understand the development of the Irish language in the 20th century and today. As Tadhg Ó hIfearnáin clearly writes:

> (…) the ideology that marked and continues to be behind Irish language policy is that the Anglophone majority are a post-language-shift population and that there are no linguistic minorities; rather, there are varying degrees of linguistic ability and practice with regards to Irish. In such a language-ideology scenario, everybody has some kind of a direct relationship to Irish. (Ó hIfearnáin 2014: 29–30)

The communities where Irish was still a spoken language became integrated into this ideology. They were an instrumental part of the discourse about Irish as the national language, their existence embodying the myth of the Irish nation and its idyllic, rural, unspoiled culture from a distant past that had survived colonisation and modernisation. For the policymakers and the Irish revivalists, these communities were to be preserved as the repository of authentic Irish culture and language. Very little attention was paid to the very different linguistic ideologies and aspirations of the people who were living in these areas. Although they were the last people to speak Irish as a first and primary language, they had no voice in the development and implementation of the state's language policy.

The rest of the country was the locus of the second policy aim: the restoration of Irish. The Irish state viewed the Irish language:

> (…) as the real native language of all Irish citizens, as if it had been forgotten and it is waiting to be liberated through the will of the people and the action of their government. (Ó hIfearnáin 2009: 546)

The state policy thus tried to reverse the centuries of language shift. Education was seen as the primary way to achieve this, mainly through the introduction of Irish as a compulsory school subject. Still today, Irish pupils and students study Irish throughout the 14 years of primary and secondary schooling and have to sit an Irish language exam as part of the Leaving Certificate (the exams with which they conclude their secondary schooling). Provisions were also made to make Irish a necessary requirement for entry in the civil service. With this measure, the state sought to establish the Irish language in at least one section of the middle-class, that of its own employees (Ó Riagáin 1997: 19). Another focus of work was the process of modernisation and standardisation of the language to make it suitable for use in the new domains it acquired as an official language. In the 1950s, the Official Standard, or *An Caighdeán Oifigiúil*, was developed as the standard of spelling and grammar used in official documentation and Irish language teaching in schools.

2.3 The Gaeltacht

Although the Irish language policy covered the whole state – a state where English was the prominent language and the role of Irish as the “national language” was mostly symbolic –, it nevertheless, as already mentioned, recognised and protected the areas where Irish was still spoken by a significant part of the population. These were remote and scattered rural areas on the western periphery of the state, with an “economically depressed and vulnerable community, experiencing heavy emigration” (Ó Tuathaigh 2008: 27). They were called “Gaeltachtaí”, the word *Gaeltacht* traditionally meaning Gaelic (speaking) people (Ó hIfearnáin 2013: 364).

In the above paragraph, I deliberately used the word “area” rather than “community” because the policy was applied territorially, according to geographical boundaries. In 1925, the Irish government set up a commission to determine the criteria to define the Irish-speaking areas and their extent, as well as to make recommendations for policy provisions for the Gaeltacht. The commission, *Coimisiún na Gaeltachta,* designed two kinds of Gaeltachts districts on the basis of the percentage of Irish-speaking population. The *Fíor-Ghaeltachtaí* (the prefix *fíor-* meaning true, very) were areas were 80% or more of the population could speak Irish, while the *Breac-Gaeltachtaí* or partly Irish-speaking districts were those with a percentage of Irish speakers between 25% and 80% (Ó Riagáin 1997: 51). It’s important to note that the percentages referred to the ability of people to speak Irish and not to their effective use of the language in daily life; the extent to which they used English was also not taken into account. Moreover, in designing the areas, the *Coimisiún* considered also the potential that the Irish language might be “restored at once as the language of education, administration, and for general purposes”, which led some scholars to argue that the Fíor-Gaeltacht areas might have been overestimated (Ó Riagáin 1997: 51).

In the mid-1920s, the total population of the Gaeltacht areas comprised less than 16% of the Republic’s population (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005: 114) – some estimates would suggest that even less than 10% (Ó Riagáin 2008: 57). The Gaeltacht Commission reported on the need to develop economic and physical infrastructure in the Gaeltachts. Their main economic units were small family farms, a means of subsistence than was rapidly becoming unfeasible, leading many to emigration (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005: 115). The government tried to stop the decrease in the number of Irish speakers chiefly by implementing a kind of regional development scheme, focused mostly on agriculture (Ó Riagáin 1997: 17). Education through the medium of Irish was also established, and families with children who proved to be Irish

speakers received grants (Crowley 2005: 172). However, the provision of state services and administration through the medium of Irish – an issue the *Coimisiún* had issued recommendations about in 1926 – remained largely ineffective, meaning that the Gaeltacht population had to deal with the state, which was ostensibly working for the maintenance of Irish, in English.

Although their special status might have given to Gaeltacht areas a privileged access to development grants in comparison to other rural areas, from the 1950s there was growing dissatisfaction with the Government language policy. In 1956, a major redrawing of the Gaeltacht boundaries took place, eliminating the distinction between the Fíor- and Breac-Gaeltachtaí. The new, restricted Gaeltacht areas corresponded largely to the previous Fíor-Gaeltacht (Ó Riagáin 1997: 21). However, even these core Irish-speaking areas had suffered from population loss and language shift. Ó Riagáin (1997: 54–55) reports that the Gaeltacht areas in county Kerry (which comprises also Corca Dhuibhne) lost almost 40% of their population in the 35-year period between the Census of Population of 1926 and that of 1961! The late 1950s saw also the establishment of a special Department of State for Gaeltacht Affairs and of a state organisation, named *Gaeltarra Éireann*, for the development of industry aimed at employment creation in the Gaeltachts (Ó Riagáin 1997: 21; Ó Tuathaigh 2008: 35).

Starting in the 1960s in the biggest Gaeltacht region of Connemara, the Gaeltacht Civil Rights Movement or *Cearta Sibhialta na Gaeltachta* developed to demand greater autonomy for the Gaeltacht regions (Coleman 2003: 181). While the Irish state viewed the Gaeltacht as a territory within which to develop special policy measures to keep people speaking Irish and to keep them from leaving the area (by securing employment), the Gaeltacht Civil Rights Movement advanced a view of the Gaeltacht as a community. It claimed that the Gaeltacht people had been neglected and that they should have their say in the Gaeltacht policies that were being developed in Dublin. Moreover, they demanded those services that were available for people elsewhere to be available also for the Gaeltacht community, as they considered it was their civil right to have them (Akutagawa 1987: 135). Their campaigns, backed also by urban Irish language speakers from outside the Gaeltacht, lead to the establishment of the Irish language *Raidió na Gaeltachta* in 1972 and the Irish television channel *TG4* in 1996 (Coleman 2003: 181).

An important aspect highlighted by the Gaeltacht Rights Movement, but often neglected when talking about the Gaeltacht, is the fact that the Gaeltacht areas do not enjoy any kind of political or administrative autonomy. They have a special status exclusively because they are areas in which the *state* implements particular polices; however, the

Gaeltacht Irish speakers have very limited possibility to decide on or influence the policies that affect their communities. The Gaeltachtaí don't have their own local governments (in Ireland, there are no municipalities), but are part of much bigger counties, the regional administrative divisions of Ireland. The *Cearta Sibhialta na Gaeltachta*'s demand for a greater local autonomy was only partially successful with the rearrangement of *Gaeltarra Éireann*, in 1980, to the *Údarás na Gaeltachta* (the Gaeltacht Authority), which had a more democratic organisation and which today serves as "the regional authority responsible for the economic, social and cultural development of the Gaeltacht" (Údarás na Gaeltachta n.d.). Alas, Gaeltacht Irish speakers' participation in decision-making processes that affect their communities and the Irish language, and which take place at the county and state level, as well as in the *Údarás*, is still very limited.

In any case, the significance of the Gaeltacht Civil Rights Movement is in having advanced a grassroot action for the Irish language, steaming from its Gaeltacht speakers, rather than being top-down, from the state. The movements also sought to position the Gaeltacht Irish speakers as a group articulating its own needs and demands, with which the state had to confront. This was in striking contrast with the policy that saw Irish as the national language with which the nation state operates, and left little space to the agency of the Gaeltacht community. However, the success of the Gaeltacht Civil Rights Movement laid in the fact that it could base its demands precisely in the state's linguistic policy, and in the attention and the official status it accords to the Irish language (Akutagawa 1987: 141). Nevertheless, Steve Coleman argues that, by stressing the need to maintain and develop the Gaeltacht community, rather than focusing on language issues per se, the movement contrasted with the prevailing national ideology which separated "the economic and the cultural, the symbolic and the material" and which accorded to the Irish language only the first two (2003: 181).

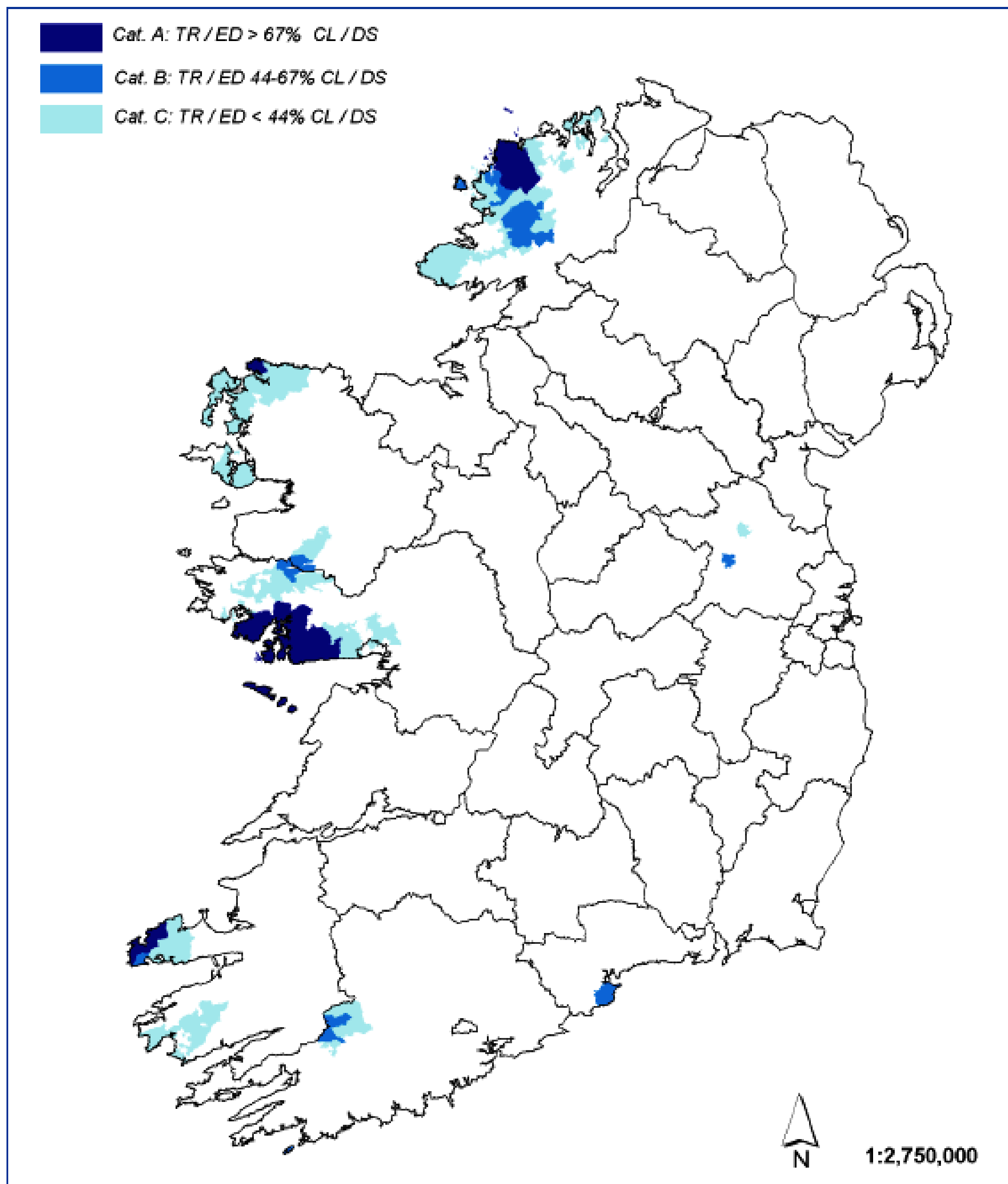

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Figure 1: Map of the Gaeltacht areas (in shades of blue) from the *Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht* (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007: 24). The study divided the Gaeltacht areas into different districts according to the percentage of daily speakers of Irish within the population. On the map, light blue indicates the districts with less than 44%, medium blue those with 44% to 67%, and dark blue those with more than 67% of daily speakers. The latter districts represent the *core* Gaeltacht areas, where Irish is still a community language. According to the *Study*, "the proportion of active, integrated Irish speakers needs to be maintained above 67% for the use of Irish in a community to be sustainable" (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007: 10).

2.4 The Irish language today

Today, the Irish state's language policy is regarded to have been only partially successful. To say it more precisely, many commentators would consider the "revival" part as moderately satisfactory, and the "maintenance" part of the policy as a failure. While the Irish language has gained prestige and recognition at the national level, which it didn't have before, apparently overcoming the stigma that was attached to it during the colonial times, the communities of its traditional speakers in the Gaeltacht are still struggling, though perhaps in some different ways than one century ago. It seems, however, that the Irish state is content to simply keep the Irish language as a symbolic value and a heritage language[20] for the nation, rather than actively engaging with the Irish-speaking communities in the Gaeltacht.

The national linguistic policy has succeeded in instilling in Irish people an appreciation for the Irish language as a symbol of Irish national identity. A significant number of people consider the Irish language as their mother tongue, although they aren't able to speak it or even have no interest in speaking it (Punch 2008). Public opinion surveys report that the majority of Irish people find the maintenance and the promotion of the Irish language important for the country as a whole and to them personally (Watson 2008: 71). At the same time, however, the majority is merely for the maintenance of the status quo, this is for keeping the Irish language in the Gaeltacht, as a school subject and "within the low level of social bilingualism now pertaining", and doesn't support policies that would discriminate more positively for the Irish language (Ó Riagáin 2008: 62).

Nevertheless, the presence and visibility of the Irish language outside the Gaeltacht have increased, and the state language policy has managed to create a substantial number of new second-language Irish speakers or *Gaeilgeoirs*. In fact, there are now more Irish speakers living outside the Gaeltacht than in it, the majority of them in Dublin (Central Statistics Office 2017). The profile of the new speakers differs from the traditional stereotype of the Irish speaker (who would be a rural person of lower extraction), as they tend to be urban, middle-class and highly educated. These new speakers usually learn the language in schools, rather than being socialised into it at home or in the community. As Ó Riagáin (1997: 274) observes, the Irish language networks outside the Gaeltacht don't reproduce themselves, but acquire new

[20] A heritage language is a language that is "reconstructively identifiable with ancestors of a population of users of some other language" (Silverstein 1998: 415) and serves as a vehicle for articulating the identity of a community, although is not used for everyday communication (Romaine 2006: 465). The role of Irish outside the Gaeltacht is, de facto, that of a heritage language.

members mostly through schooling, and are therefore more transient and fragile. There is, in any case, an increasing demand for all-Irish medium schools, called *Gaelscoileanna*, which have, since the 1990s, developed to cater to children from kindergarten to secondary school and provide an immersive education in the Irish language for children outside the Gaeltacht areas. In general, however, the vast majority of the population has very low or no Irish language skills, and debates on the pitfalls in the teaching of Irish as a school subject are very common. Although Irish people study Irish throughout primary and secondary school, they have generally no incentive to develop or use their Irish language skills, as the function of the language in the Irish society is limited to be a symbolic one.

While the *Gaelscoileanna* movement points to a growth in popularity of the Irish language as a prestige second language in the last decades, others would like to relax the requirement to have Irish as a compulsory school subject (Mac Murchaidh 2008: 213). Both attitudes can be connected to contemporary changes in the Irish identity and to a different perception of the utility of the Irish language. For the first ones, speaking Irish is connected to a refashioning and revaluation of the Irish identity to face a changing globalised society (Watson 2008: 70–73), while for the second, claims for the protection of the Irish language as part of a national identity are futile precisely because the nation-building project has lost its relevance in the contemporary context. They think that people shouldn't be forced to learn a language that has no practical use for them (Mac Murchaidh 2008: 214–216), while the first, the Gaeilgeoirs, see in Irish a rare cultural and symbolic capital, which can open up new employment opportunities – for example, in the EU institutions, as since 2007 the Irish language is a full official and working language of the European Union (Ó Laighin 2008: 258–259).

When I was doing fieldwork in Corca Dhuibhne, I was told that I was probably meeting the last generations of native Irish speakers from the area. With every Census of population, the number of Irish speakers in the Gaeltacht appears lower than it was before. It has been noted that "Irish is dying at specific places among specific communities, which are hidden in the generalised data reported for the official Gaeltacht" (Hindley 1990: xvi, quoted in Romaine 2008: 16) and that the state policies have not succeeded in arresting "the course of the moving frontier that creeps ever westward" (Romaine 2008: 16). Both researchers and Irish-language activists have warned about the general vulnerability of the Gaeltacht Irish-speaking communities and, especially, about the weakness of intergenerational transmission of the Irish language there. In particular, the *Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht* (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007), published more than ten years ago, presented an

extremely alarming estimate: the authors predicted that the Irish language would cease to be the main community and family language in the *core* Gaeltacht areas in a 15- to 20-years' time.

Among the reasons for the dereliction of the language maintenance policy for the Gaeltacht, Ó hIfearnáin (2014) writes about a failure to adequately address the Gaeltacht's socioeconomic issues and a mismatch between the covert linguistic ideologies of the state and the local population. This means that while both the state institutions and the Gaeltacht people professed a wish to maintain the Irish language, the latter, in practice, still valued more English as a higher functional language, in line with the ideology developed in the colonial times which saw a shift to English as necessary for personal progress and socioeconomic advancement. Such an attitude is hardly surprising, give that up to the 1960s, the Gaeltacht people lived in a condition of geographical and social marginalisation and underdevelopment, with massive emigration to English-speaking areas. Besides that, it has to be taken into account that Irish language speakers form only a subgroup within the Gaeltacht population, and that a significant portion of the residents in the Gaeltacht areas are English speakers for whom learning or speaking Irish is generally neither a necessity nor a benefit (Ó hIfearnáin 2014). Moreover, while the state wished to maintain the language in the Gaeltacht, the very abstract change in prestige it accorded to Irish as the national language didn't suffice to broaden its domains of use in the community in practice. Its own policies were still overwhelmingly seeing the Irish language as pertaining to the home (for example, one of the main policy measures was the grant scheme for Irish-speaking families) and neglected to effectively develop and legitimate the use of Irish in the administration, the media and other public domains in the Gaeltacht.

In the last decades, the Irish language policy has been described as changing towards a neo-liberal approach, which seeks to service the existing Irish language speakers rather than taking more decided commitments for the maintenance and promotion of the language and especially for the Gaeltacht (Ó Tuathaigh 2008: 36–37). Conchúr Ó Giollagáin writes that:

> The current official view of language policy and management for Irish can be persuasively depicted as a neo-liberal vision for minority language planning – it is to be tolerated as a secondary identity or a cultural hobby for a small section of the national population, but the apparatus and mechanism of institutional and state power are not to be deployed in support of fostering Irish as a living social identity in either its regional (i.e., Gaeltacht) or national contexts. (Ó Giollagáin 2014: 102)

The leading role in developing initiatives for the protection of the Irish language has passed from the Irish state to Irish language activists and organisations, which have to mobilise themselves in order to secure the state's attention and support (Ó Tuathaigh 2008: 37).

Nevertheless, since the 2000s, there have been a number of new policy developments. Among others, in 2003, the Official Language Act for the first time legislated on the provision of public services through the Irish language, providing to Irish speakers the right to use the Irish language when communicating with a number of public bodies (Ó Tuathaigh 2008: 38); and in 2012, the Gaeltacht Act established that each Gaeltacht community would draw and implement its own Language plan (consisting of a set of measures aimed at preserving and strengthening the role of the Irish language in the community) under the supervision of the Údarás na Gaeltachta (Tobhar Dhuibhne n.d.). However, these policies have been repeatedly criticised by different Irish language activists, analysts and even by authors of state-commissioned reports (see, for example, The Irish Times 2015), who reproach the state for the delayed and slow implementation of the legislative provisions and for neglecting or underestimating the seriousness of the current Gaeltacht situation.

A major critique has been that the Irish state has failed to recognise the specificity of the Gaeltacht Irish speakers as a minority community. In the last years, some Irish sociolinguists (for example Ó Giollagáin 2014, Ó hIfearnáin 2014, Péterváry 2016) have started to shift from studying Irish with a "revivalist" approach (this is, considering its position in the Republic of Ireland as a whole) to analyse whether Gaeltacht Irish language speakers constitute a separate (ethno-)cultural group within the Irish society. They have advanced the idea that the Gaeltacht Irish speakers ought to be viewed as a distinct minority group rather than being considered merely in the frame of the Irish language as the national language. For the policies to address the Gaeltacht Irish speakers as a minority community would not mean, as the neoliberal approach would maybe have it, to leave them without a dedicated state support, but on the contrary to recognise that there are major differences between the condition of the Irish language as a minority language in the Gaeltacht and as a second or heritage language in the rest of the country. The acquisition, development and maintenance of a minority language as a first language in a bilingual community is a very different process than the promotion and teaching of Irish as a second language in a monolingual environment, even if it is presented there as the "national" language.

To conclude, in its very complex present situation, the Irish language is simultaneously a minority language of a dwindling group of first language speakers in the Gaeltacht; a prestigious second language for a number of new speakers, who are concentrated mostly in Dublin, the capital, and present different degrees of proficiency and commitments to it; and a symbolic national language for the Irish state and its population as a whole.

3. GOING *BACK WEST*

Figure 2: On the road to Dún Chaoin (photo by the author).

3.1 From Dublin to Dún Chaoin

The journey from Dublin, the biggest city in Ireland, located on the east coast, to the small village of Dún Chaoin, the westernmost settlement on the island, involves, first, taking a bus to the Dublin Heuston train station and then a four-hour train ride – with an interchange – till the terminal station in Tralee, the county town of county Kerry. From there, a bus leaves for the Corca Dhuibhne peninsula five times a day and reaches Dingle/Daingean Uí Chúis, its main centre, in about an hour. To continue the journey to the west edge of the peninsula, one has to be very lucky to catch the bus that travels to the villages "*back west*" twice a week (but that's wishful thinking, I was told), or else find a taxi, or get a lift by helpful locals, as I did.

Of course, one might have significantly shortened the journey and flown from Dublin airport to the small airport located in county Kerry. I might have even found some international flight from Italy directly to Kerry. However, the time I spend in Ireland outside the Gaeltacht (as an exchange student at the university of Maynooth, near Dublin) was informative for my research in the Gaeltacht. It provided me with an insight into Irish culture

and Irish people's views of the Irish language I wouldn't have been able to have if I had simply flown from my home in Trieste to Kerry and back again. Apart from taking an Irish language course at Maynooth University and participating in events connected with the Irish language, I was also able to appreciate the different attitudes towards it among monolingual English speakers and new speakers of Irish outside the Gaeltacht and compare them to those of the native Irish speakers in the Gaeltacht. This proved helpful to understand and put into context what I was told during my interviews with the latter.

The decision to choose the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht as the fieldwork site for my research on Gaeltacht Irish speakers also came as a result of a set of fortuitous circumstances and encounters I made after coming to study in Ireland. I first went to Corca Dhuibhne in March 2018. I stayed there for two weeks and returned back in mid-June to stay almost till the end of July. Supportive people from the area helped me to secure accommodation there and establish contacts in the community. During the total of seven weeks of fieldwork, I lived in three different villages – Dún Chaoin, Ceann Trá and Baile na bPoc – in the western part of the peninsula, the heart of the Gaeltacht, where I was hosted by very welcoming locals. I also spent some days in the small, but lively town of the peninsula, Dingle/Daingean Uí Chúis (also called, in Irish, An Daingean).

3.2 Tell me who your friends (research participants) are…

During my ethnographic fieldwork, I recorded semi-structured interviews with 25 participants. The interviews covered a range of questions regarding their lives and everyday patterns of language use; their attitudes toward the English and the Irish language; their views and experiences as members of the local Gaeltacht community; their relationships with non-Irish speakers and with new speakers of Irish from outside the Gaeltacht; and their perception of the Irish state's language policies. The interviews lasted for half an hour to three hours, with an average recording time per interlocutor of about one hour and fifteen minutes. In a few cases, I was able to meet the research participants for a second interview, during which I asked more specific questions.

In selecting the interviewees I used the "snow-ball approach", meaning that I found new research participants among the acquaintances of my first research participants. As I told them, my aim was to get to know local Gaeltacht native or first language Irish speakers and

learn about their experiences with the Irish language.[21] The people I was thus referred to and with whom I developed closer ties were those for whom the Irish language was an important value and who used it in their daily lives. Many of them were also professionally engaged with the Irish language: they were, for example, Irish language teachers or were working for Irish-language institutions such as the Údarás na Gaeltachta (the government agency for the Gaeltacht), a local development cooperative called Comharchumann Forbartha Chorca Dhuibhne and others. The rest were employed in the tourist industry – an important source of income for the Dingle peninsula – or farmers, and a few of them were studying. All of my interviewees, except one, had been born and/or raised in the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht. Several of the older and middle-aged people I talked with had spent a period of their lives, from a few years to a few decades, working abroad: emigration has heavily marked the people of the peninsula.

As far as possible, I tried to ensure age and gender balance among the interviewees. The number of interviewees per gender and age group is presented in the following table:

Number of interviewees per gender and age group							
Gender/Age	**18–30**	**30–40**	**40–50**	**50–60**	**60–70**	**Over 70**	**Total**
Female	4	0	3	2	0	3	12
Male	2	2	4	0	3	2	13
Total	6	2	7	2	3	5	25

Although the interviews represent the bulk of "data" for this research, many key insights were not provided by them, but rather by casual observations, encounters, and conversations. These were often facilitated by my hosts and I am particularly grateful to them for welcoming me to the community, from showing me around to introducing me to neighbours and colleagues, from taking me along to many Irish-language-related events to inviting me to traditional music sessions in local pubs. They were not just hosting me, but were also very keen and patient enough to discuss with me about my research and answer my countless questions about the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht and the Irish language. I'm grateful to all local people who, without knowing me, welcomed me very kindly and offered help in different ways.

[21] By native speaker I mean "a person who was raised through the medium of Irish in an Irish-speaking community and whose parent(s) speak(s) Irish as the main home language", as defined in the report *Analysis of bilingual competence* (Péterváry et al. 2014: 29). A person's native or first language is not necessarily their primary or dominant language, this is, their most functional language.

3.3 Linguistic shortcomings

A shortcoming of my fieldwork research was that I was not able to speak Irish with my research participants. Although I studied Irish for a semester, attending a beginners' course at Maynooth University, and enjoyed practising what I had learned when I had the occasion, it was of course not enough to converse in Irish with my research participants. I had an ethical issue (how can an anthropologist claim to be doing participant observation research and be interested in getting to know local ways of life when she doesn't have command of the local language?), as well as an epistemological one.

When in groups of people who spoke Irish to each other, I often kept silent, tried to guess what the conversation was about and then maybe offer a remark or ask a question (in English). I couldn't participate actively in spontaneous Irish-language conversations, but, at least, I could observe the linguistic soundscape. I tried to pay attention to which languages were heard in which contexts and to whether there were any instances of code-mixing or code-switching. At the same time, I was conscious of the fact that my presence affected the soundscape. Because of me, people spoke English in situations when they might have otherwise used Irish.

In the semi-structured interviews, I could compensate for my linguistic shortcomings in participant observation by asking specific questions and leading the conversation to the topics I was interested in. As the interviews were one-on-one conversations, I didn't feel self-conscious about speaking in English as I sometimes felt when in Irish-speaking groups. However, talking in English I might have got different responses than I would have got if I had spoken in Irish with the research participants.

Speaking in English and asking about the interlocutor's experiences with the Irish language might have been (unconsciously) perceived by some research participants as a "contextualisation clue" (a term used by Gumperz (1992)) framing the interview by evoking other conversations they had with (monolingual) English speakers about the Irish language. This means that some interviewees might have, at least initially, responded as many of them told me they do in such kind of conversations: by feeling they had to "promote" or "act as an advocate for the Irish language" with what could be yet another annoying or non-understanding English speaker. The research participants might thus have had some

(negative) expectations regarding what would be appropriate to say, what I would like to hear or would be able to understand.[22]

Even when the research participants didn't perceive me in this way, there is another issue: some things might simply not be talked about in the same way in different languages. Irish-language discourses about the Irish language and the Gaeltacht very likely differ from the English-language discourses on the same themes. For one thing, the Irish-language discourse is mostly shaped by and directed to insiders, Irish speakers who share the same values, knowledge and experiences, while the English-language discourse takes place in a much wider arena, which comprises also non-Irish speakers who position themselves in different and even conflicting ways in relation to Irish-language issues. When talking in English about their experiences in the interviews, Irish-language speakers might have found themselves having to navigate between the Irish and the English-language discourses, shifting from one to another or selecting one of them. They sometimes recurred to expressions and ways of saying things (and thus also of seeing things, of positioning oneself in regards to them) common for the English-language discourse about the Irish language and at other times that of the Irish language discourse. In some instances, they used Irish-language "buzzwords" or struggled to find an appropriate English translation for a concept they usually hear or talk about in the Irish language.

Another interesting observation regards the relatively high number of times when interlocutors mistakenly said "English" instead of Irish. Here are two examples from different interviews:

> "Dingle didn't want *English* – emm, didn't want Irish."
>
> "I have a cousin who does make an effort to always speak *English* in the shops in Dingle as well. And they all speak Irish back – sorry, did I say English? Irish, I want to say."

While I don't have an explanation for these lapses, it could be that they come from the confusion to be talking about the Irish language in English.

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[22]As I already mentioned in the first chapter, highlighting that I had a similar (minority) background has, I believe, helped to reframe the conversations in a more favourable way, present me as more sympathetic and create a sort of complicity between me and most (but not all) of the interlocutors, which encouraged them to go past a superficial depiction of the condition of the Gaeltacht and the Irish language.

Figure 3: A tourist map of the Corca Dhuibhne peninsula. The red line represents the main road connecting the town of Dingle with Tralee, the main county town (which is not on the map). The red-and-white hatched line indicates the Slea Head Drive, a panoramic circular route through the *back west* part of the peninsula, which is also the core Irish-speaking area of the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht.
Source: <http://www.angaileearaibeag.com/irelandmap.html>, retrieved 18. 3. 2019.

3.4 Tourism, nature, language and films

The Corca Dhuibhne or Dingle peninsula, also known as West Kerry or Ciarraí Thiar, is located in the county Kerry in south-west Ireland. The official Gaeltacht region comprises the western half of the peninsula, including the town of Dingle/Daingean Uí Chúis. Going to Dingle on the main road coming from the county town of Tralee, a traveller will enter the Gaeltacht area in the village of Lios Póil. In alternative, one could take another narrow, but very scenic road, which leads through the Conor Pass or An Chonair, one of the highest mountain passes in Ireland. Conor Pass also connects Dingle with the two Gaeltacht villages situated in the north-west of the peninsula, An Clochán and Cé Bréanainn. Mount Brandon or Cnoc Bréanainn, whose highest peak reaches about 950m, divides these two villages from those in the westernmost part of the peninsula. In fact, the only way to reach the latter is to go, again, to Dingle, the main centre of the peninsula. From there, country roads lead "*back west*", as the locals refer to the villages situated west of the town. These are Ceann Trá, Dún

Chaoin, Baile na Fheirtéaraigh, Baile na nGall and Feothanach. The roads in this western part of the peninsula form a loop, a circular route, starting and finishing in Dingle, which is known by visitors, who every summer cycle or drive along it, in rented cars and tourist buses, as the "Slea Head Drive" (or Slí Cheann Sléibhe in Irish). Tourists frequently stop along the Slea Head Drive to admire the beautiful views: green pastures, rough hills, steep cliffs and sandy beaches, and the wide, wild ocean. Across the village of Dún Chaoin, the outlines of a set of islands, the Blaskets, uninhabited since the 1950s, form particularly evocative figures. The impressive Dún Chaoin pier, where the islanders once docked their small ships on their way to the mainland, is now featured on large posters showcasing Irish landmarks to visitors in Dublin Airport.

The Dingle peninsula is one of Ireland's major tourist destinations. The "wilderness and roughness" of the landscape, as both local people and tourist guidebooks often describe its inaccessibility and isolation on the edge of the Irish island, and its rural profile – what had helped to preserve the Irish language and traditions, but had also caused a massive emigration of the local population who had to seek life opportunities elsewhere –, have been converted to a tourist attraction and a source of income for the peninsula.

Dé hAoine, an 16 Márta (Friday, March 16)[23]

I had arrived in Corca Dhuibhne largely unaware of the prominence of tourism in the area, but I soon saw how it influenced local life. A Friday morning in March, I took the community bus from Dún Chaoin, where I was staying, to Dingle to attend the meeting of an Irish language conversation club and also to do some grocery shopping in the town, as there was no shop in the village. The community bus connected the villages *back west* with the town once a week; most of the passengers were elderly women and many spoke Irish. Among them was Nora, a neighbour of around 70 years of age, one of the few people I met during my fieldwork who consistently tried to speak Irish with me. She had certainly soon noticed that my Irish skills barely sufficed to talk about the weather – "*Ta sé scamallach… an mbeidh sé ag cur baisti amarach?"* ("It's cloudy… will it rain tomorrow?") was as far as I got with my attempts at Irish language conversations –, but nevertheless still used some Irish language phrases before switching to English, and I felt proud every time I could understand something.

[23] During fieldwork, I took notes and wrote a fieldwork diary, mostly in Slovenian. The descriptions of events, places and people in this thesis are based on these fieldwork notes, though they are not a direct reproduction or translation of them.

Now we were sitting on a bench in front of the supermarket, each with her shopping bag, waiting for the bus back home. It was cold and cloudy and Dingle didn't seem to offer much to justify its fame. The town is small (its population is merely around 1600 inhabitants, according to the Census of Population 2016 (CSO 2017)) and my stroll along its main streets – the Strand Street overlooking the harbour, the Main Street with many pubs, and the Green Street connecting the previous two – had been quite short and dull under the rain. Nevertheless, I had noticed the sudden apparition of green, Irish-themed decorations in the shopwindows of establishments I had previously thought were closed, and observed some men painting the ground floors' fronts of several buildings in bright colours.

Nora pointed to a man that had just left the shop. "*Is Meiriceánach é*." He's American, she told me. I hadn't noticed anything about the man in question that would capture my attention in any way, but Nora explained to me: "He wears a green jumper. You can tell them apart because they always come around this period and wear green". In fact, it was the 16th of March. The next day was *La 'le Pádraig* (Saint Patrick's Day, which is a public holiday in Ireland) and this is when the tourist season begins.

In a few months, there would be queues of tourist buses on the Slea Head Drive, Nora complained, and the ferry from Dún Chaoin to the Great Blasket island will start operating again. However, there are also positive aspects to the tourist orientation of the area: in the town, there is a range of services, events, festivals, shops, restaurants and pubs, which aren't usually found in other country towns of the same size, Nora told me later. People can find employment in hospitality services or earn some extra money by renting rooms and houses to visitors. The many artists and craftsmen residing in the area have buyers for their works, which are largely inspired by the beauty of the landscape and the local traditions. Even the music scene is thriving. The local bilingual biweekly magazine, in which Nora was solving an Irish language crossword on the bus back home, featured a two-pages list of concerts and music sessions. For every day of the week, there was a list of several pubs offering performances of traditional musicians and singers from the area – some of them very well-known in the Irish traditional music scene – and even of *sean-nós* (traditional style) dancers. This wealth of cultural activities is supported by the masses of tourists visiting Corca Dhuibhne every year.

What made Dingle famous was *Ryan's daughter*, a British film that was shot on the peninsula in 1969 and which featured its scenic landscape. Many locals regard the film as a turning point, after which life in Corca Dhuibhne changed: tourists started to arrive every summer, holiday homes were built, and, eventually, all sorts of people – artists, wealthy

foreigners, nature-lovers escaping urban life – started to settle on the peninsula. The peninsula became known for its artistic and cosmopolitan vibe. The local rural population was still there, of course, although it also underwent some changes. In 1961, the last villages *back west* got electricity, and carts were being replaced by cars. Fewer and fewer people were working on the small family farms that had been the traditional way of subsistence. People were still emigrating, but others were returning home, and increasingly local Irish speakers had wives or husbands from outside the Gaeltacht who weren't fluent in Irish. The newcomers who had moved to the area after *Ryan's Daughter*'s success and some of the return migrants also didn't speak Irish. The radio and the television, new media in people's homes, were solely in English. (The Irish language Raidió na Gaeltachta was established in 1972, and the Irish tv channel TG4 in 1996.) Not only was the population changing, but also the languages that were spoken.

In fact, the sociolinguist Pádraig Ó Riagáin (1997: 141) characterises the 1960s as a turning point for the Gaeltacht, both from the socioeconomic and linguistic points of view. Until then, the small farm economy had sustained a pattern of very localised social networks, which were traditionally Irish speaking. However, the strong emigration and the new economic development that the Gaeltachts finally saw in the 1960s weakened these networks. In particular, the growth of non-agricultural employment and of commuting to nearby (predominantly English-speaking) towns for work, education, shopping and leisure meant that Irish speakers were increasingly interacting with English speakers. Economic development, Ó Riagáin (2008: 57) argues, happened at a time when "the minimum threshold population levels were no longer available in many rural communities to support traditional activities". The more the Gaeltacht areas became integrated into wider socioeconomic networks, the more the English language entered the traditionally Irish-speaking communities. For Ó Riagáin (1997: 278), since the 1960s, there has been a shift from Irish being a widespread community language of the Gaeltacht (or, more precisely, of its core areas) to it being merely the language of certain limited social networks in the Gaeltacht.

Incidentally, on *lá 'le Pádraig,* the 17th of March*,* I encountered signs of another film, which was promising to bring even more tourists to the peninsula. A group of participants at the Saint Patrick's day parade in Baile na Fheirtéaraigh, the biggest village on the western end of Corca Dhuibhne, were dressed in *Star Wars*' characters. In 2016, some scenes of the eighth episode of the *Star Wars* film saga were filmed in locations near the village, as well as in other parts of county Kerry. Some locals were delighted with the promotion the film gave

to the area; others though were quite critical. In their opinion, the touristic offer should build on other local assets: the Irish language and the Gaelic culture. The Blasket islands had been the home of Irish language writers whose accounts of the harsh life on the islands, written in the first half of the 20th century, are among the classics of Irish literature, I was reminded. The first visitors to West Kerry were scholars and Irish language enthusiasts who, at the beginning of the 20th century, had come to learn the "unspoiled" Irish language of the locals and collect folklore.

In fact, the Irish language greatly supports the rural Gaeltacht economy, in terms of Irish language courses. The state's language policy, particularly the obligatory teaching of Irish in primary and secondary schools, and the ideology that sees in the Gaeltacht the repository of authentic Irish language and culture have fuelled an important source of income for the Gaeltacht areas for many decades. Every summer, many children and teenagers from all around Ireland spend some weeks in the villages of West Kerry to attend Irish language courses in a traditionally Irish-speaking environment. They usually stay with local Irish-speaking families, where the *mná an tí* ("women of the house") provide accommodation and meals. Apart from the well-established summer colleges, there are also courses for adults, for university students of Education (future Irish language teachers) and for different categories of civil servants, which take place throughout the year. The courses are not limited to Irish language classes, but offer activities related to the local area and culture, such as traditional music and dance workshops or visits to historical sites. In this way, the system of Irish language courses doesn't involve just Irish language teachers, the *mná an tí* and the course managers, but also a whole range of other figures and businesses from the community: from museums to sport instructors, all can get a share in providing students with a full-immersion experience of the Gaeltacht. Ultimately, the whole community participates in creating an Irish-language environment for the visitors: if students don't hear Irish spoken in the local shop or pub, for example, how can be the idea of the authentic Irish-speaking Gaeltacht upheld?

3.5 Language patterns

Although the Gaeltachtaí are commonly described as "Irish-speaking areas", only a part of their population actually speaks Irish. According to the Irish Census of Population 2016 (CSO 2017), of the total of 6,708 inhabitants (aged 3 or over) of the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht, only 1,928 spoke Irish on a daily basis outside the education system, which

amounts to 28,7% of the population.[24] This figure is actually even a bit higher than the average for all Gaeltacht areas, where out of a total population of 96,090 people, 20,586 or 21.4% declared they spoke Irish daily, a number in decline in comparison to previous Censuses. In 2016, about 66% of the total Gaeltacht population declared they could speak Irish, effectively indicating that those regions ought to be more properly called "bilingual" – if even – rather than "Irish-speaking".

Therefore, the people I interviewed and spent most of my time with, do not reflect the whole of the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht population. Their engagement in Irish language issues and activities is what sets them apart from others. They are, in fact, a minority *inside* the Gaeltacht, not just in the Republic of Ireland as a whole. Another peculiarity of my research participants is that they all come from one part of the peninsula: the villages *back west*. This is not casual. In the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht, there is a geographical distribution of Irish language speakers.

We can roughly divide the official Gaeltacht area into three parts: the town of Dingle, the villages east and north of Dingle, and the villages west of Dingle or *back west*. A few calculations based on the data from the 2016 Census provided on Irish Central Statistics Office's website (CSO 2017), tell us that a bit more than half (50.8%) of the people from *back west* speak Irish daily (outside the education system), whereas in the other villages the number drops to about 22%, and in Dingle to 13.6%. There is a West-to-East gradient in the distribution of daily Irish speakers, which is in line with the general direction of language shift in Ireland and is not difficult to make sense of: the western parts of the peninsula that were further out, removed from the main routes and the influence of English-speaking towns had been historically less exposed to language shift than those closer to them. Similarly, historically, towns were the first centres where English was adopted (and from which it then spread to the countryside), which explains why the number of Irish speakers in Dingle is lower than in the rest of the peninsula.

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[24] The Census does not ask about the respondents' native or first languages. It asks about the ability to speak Irish and the frequency of use. However, there are no specifications on what is intended as ability to speak Irish. Usually a very high percentage of respondents nationally declare than they can speak Irish, which is often rather symbolic and does not reflect a real ability in the language. In the Census question about the frequency of use, a differentiation between the use inside and outside the educational system has been added: as Irish is a compulsory school subject, the frequency of use among children and young people was biased (Punch 2008). The frequency of use of Irish is also not a completely accurate measure of commitment to the Irish language: a person could be using Irish every day, but only, for example, for greeting costumers with simple Irish phrases; whereas an enthusiastic, fluent speaker might not be able to use Irish every day if working and/or living in a predominantly English environment. As for the Gaeltacht, it has been shown that Irish speakers there might have a different, less generous perception of their level of linguistic ability than the rest of the Irish population (Ó Riagáin 1997: 93–94).

In fact, analysing Census data from the beginning of the 20th century, Ó Riagáin (1997: 83–84) concludes that the east-west and town-countryside patterns of language distribution in Corca Dhuibhne were evident already in the late 19th and the early 20th century. In particular, the town of Dingle has undergone steady language shift since the middle of the 19th century, while in the villages to its east the Irish language was quite stable till the turn of the century, only to cease to be the primary language of socialisation in the following decades (meaning that children were not brought up speaking the language, while older people were still speaking it). In contrast, at the beginning of the 20th century, the rate of intergenerational language transmission was still very high in the area *back west* and there were also substantial numbers of monolingual Irish speakers (the highest in Dún Chaoin, were in the 1926 Census 48% of the villagers were reported as monolingual in Irish). Even so, in the same period, a number of children (around 25%) in this area were being brought up bilingually or exclusively in English (Ó Riagáin 1997: 87–88).

Ó Riagáin's data show that even in the 1920s, when the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht area was first defined by the state authorities, its population presented very different levels of Irish language use and reproduction. Moreover, as Michie Akutagawa writes, the artificially designed boundaries "didn't correspond to any historically formed unit of population or area composed of smaller identifiable units" (1987: 131). In turn, this means that the population that became part of the Gaeltacht areas didn't have any distinctive sense of Gaeltacht identity. Instead, people had, at most, very localised identities as members of particular townlands, villages or parishes.[25] Besides that, Akutagawa notes that because the Irish language has been already appropriated by the Irish state and associated with Irish national identity, the mobilisation of a distinctive Gaeltacht identity drawing on the language would be extremely difficult (1987: 142–143).

In the next chapter, I show how the Irish language speakers from *back west* have an identity that is based simultaneously on locality and on the language. This identity does not cover the whole population or the whole area of Corca Dhuibhne, but it nevertheless shows how a socio-geographical division (villages vs. town) and a division according to linguistic commitments have been merged to form a sense of Gaeltacht identity for at least one part of the population.

[25] In Ireland, people often talk about "townlands" and "parishes" rather than of villages. Townlands and civil parishes are part of the official administrative division of land, with townlands being the smallest geographical division. The village of Dún Chaoin, for example, is formed by a number of different townlands, each with its own name, while the village of Baile na bPoc comprises only one townland and is part of a bigger parish.

4. DINGLE AND THE GAELTACHT

On one of my first days of fieldwork, I ventured into one of the pubs on the Main Street of Dingle/Daingean Uí Chúis. It was in the late afternoon and as the pub was still quite empty and quiet, I got into a conversation with the barman and a few others who were standing at the bar, enjoying a drink after work and exchanging news. They were amazed to hear that I had come to do research, but they repeatedly urged me to go west of Dingle if I wanted to meet people speaking Irish. It sounded like the "*back west*" was a land much further away than the 15 kilometres separating Dingle from the westernmost village of Dún Chain on the map (a 25-minute drive) would indicate. "You can find Irish speakers *back west* or in the nursing home", a man sitting alone at a nearby table interjected grimly. It took me a second to understand that with the nursing home he meant that those who speak Irish are old and decrepit. A young man who was from one of the villages *back west* told me he never speaks Irish in Dingle, although I had heard him intermixing Irish with English while he was talking with the barman just a bit earlier. But the barman was also from *back west*, he explained.

The geographical distribution of Irish language speakers in Corca Dhuibhne is not merely a statistical curiosity, but one the local people are very aware of. The relationship between the town of Dingle/Daingean Úi Chúis and its western hinterland was a recurrent theme in my fieldwork conversations, as a divide along linguistic, cultural and ideological lines is perceived to exist among the population of the town and the western villages. The spatial configuration is loaded with social meanings and values, which are simultaneously based in and reproduced by linguistic practices.

There are three main aspects to the relationship between Dingle and the westernmost villages, as emerging from the interviews and the fieldwork observations. Firstly, the uneasy relationship between the two is being seen as going back to a time when the rural Irish language speakers were scorned by the English-speaking town population. Secondly, although my research participants acknowledge that Dingle is nowadays more open to the Irish language than it was in the past, they perceive this change as being superficial and opportunistic. They don't perceive Dingle as being part of *the Gaeltacht* – the "real" Gaeltacht community defined by allegiance to the Irish language and rooted in Gaelic, Irish-language culture, rather than the Gaeltacht as a particular geographical area defined by the Irish state. For local Irish speakers, the villages in the western part of the Corca Dhuibhne peninsula where the Irish language is (still) an important feature of community life are themselves *the*

Gaeltacht, a place loaded with particular meanings, values and identities, and not merely a "*back west*" conceptualised only in relation to a centre, Dingle town, although the juxtaposition with Dingle is a crucial element in this place-making process. Thirdly, the perception of Dingle as an English-speaking town rather than a Gaeltacht town is reflected in Irish-language speakers' linguistic practices in the town.

4.1 "Dingle laughed at the natives"

The dichotomy between the urban and the rural is a well-known one in anthropology. The opposition between the town and the village usually involves also other sets of oppositions such as poor vs. rich, educated vs. ignorant, and modern vs. backward. In Corca Dhuibhne, another dichotomy – English vs. Irish – has been historically linked to the ones above. Many of my older research participants recalled a time when speaking Irish in Dingle indexed being ignorant and poor. Despite the state's effort to inculcate the notion of Irish as the language of all Irish people and the growing numbers of urban, upper-middle-class Gaeilgeoirí, it appears that well into the 1950s and 1960s (and perhaps even later) speaking Irish in Dingle was still seen very negatively, as not appropriate for urban people and pertaining only to farmers with little education and low competence in the English language. Many Irish-speaking people from the country felt inferior to the town's people and were self-conscious about their English-language skills. (While today Irish speakers are bilingual in English, in the mid-20th century there were still significant numbers of monolingual Irish speakers or speakers with low proficiency in English in the villages *back west*, not only because of lower education levels, but also because the villagers' network ties were more localised, with lesser influences from the English-speaking world.)

Áine, a middle-aged woman who is very active in the local Irish-language community, told me she sometimes felt there was a kind of "psychological barrier" related to speaking Irish in businesses in Dingle. Although nowadays she finds it easier to speak it there, she is aware of the connections between the Irish language and the west end of a peninsula, which was, until the arrival of tourism, marginalised and underdeveloped:

> "Well, when my parents were growing up here, it was all English in Dingle. So even though people understood Irish in Dingle, business was done through the medium of English. And, emm… Irish was – the Irish speakers, they were from the west of Ireland; they were from the poorest part of Ireland maybe. And, in the west, they were farmers, fishermen. And there was a lot of poverty, I

suppose. It goes back to the Great Famine…, and hunger, and there is a lot of poverty associated with where we come from, where we live, I suppose. (...) I was trying to explain earlier that years ago if you went to Dingle you couldn't really speak Irish. But today you can. I would find it easier today to speak Irish in Dingle than I would or that my parents would have found it. They wouldn't have found it easy to speak Irish, but they were growing up in another era. So there is some kind of psychological barrier about the language, that people feel inferior or that there is… that they are looked down as being… I don't know, I can't explain it. (...) Or they felt poor, they felt less than the English speakers."

Cáit had been raised in the mid-1940s in an Irish-speaking family in one of the small townlands in West Kerry where she still lives. Now that she's over 70, she recalls Dingle in her childhood time in the following way:

"Oh, there was a very bad relationship between Dingle and the Gaeltacht. There were two shops in Dingle that you could do your business in Irish, because people who were there were from – emm, were Irish speakers. But we were laughed at, because… we were looked on like primitive people. We were primitive and they used to call us (misters?) *cábógs* who can't speak English. **Anyone who couldn't speak English was a *cábóg*.**[26] **It means idiot**. (…) I think now that's very rare. But we were sent to shops where we had to speak English. We had to ask my mother how to approach, how to say "How much is that?" or "Give me this," in English. (…) **Dingle laughed at the natives. You know, it's true, we were just the natives, like the American Indians or the Aboriginal in Australia**. That sounds very gloom, but that was what it was. Irish was not spoken, Dingle didn't want (…) Irish. That's a useless language for businesses, for everything, and Dingle was a business town."

Cáit says that for the people of Dingle, Irish speakers were "just the natives" and were "looked on like primitive people" and she isn't the only one who made this comparison. Scorning the Gaeltacht Irish speakers as being from a "primitive society" is complementary to describing them as the carriers and custodians of ancient traditions: it attributes a negative evaluation to what another ideological frame – the Irish state's linguistic ideology – valued positively as an "unspoiled society". Actually, the Irish language revival movement's and the state's idealisation of the rural Irish-speaking districts as a site of pristine and authentic Irish culture can be seen as an attempt to shift their evaluation from negative to positive.

Nevertheless, even though Dingle has been included in the officially designed Gaeltacht area since its establishment in the 1920s, its attitude towards those who spoke Irish was still negative, and indeed also for the Irish speakers from *back west* speaking Irish was linked with having an inferior status. Seeing the Irish language as "useless" and its speakers as

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[26] Interestingly, *cábóg* is an Irish word meaning a clown and a rural, rustic person. In Hiberno-English (the variety of English that is spoken in Ireland), it is used pejoratively to indicate a rude, ignorant person from the countryside who is not accustomed to city manners.

cábógs is an attitude that, of course, was not unique to the area. As we have seen in chapter 2, it stems from the colonial times and is part of the same ideology that fuelled massive language shift across Ireland in the 19th century and which the Irish state's language policy and Gaeltacht policy didn't manage to change well into the second half of the 20th century.

The division between Dingle and the Irish-speaking villages in West Kerry originated as a division between two socio-economic classes (the rural and the town people) where the Irish language acquired indexicality as a register of the people from one (lower) class, rather than originating as a division along cultural or linguistic lines. In fact, from the accounts of the older research participants, it seems that some 40 to 70 years ago speaking bad English was as much a marker of being from *back west* as speaking Irish, and that people felt as much (or even more) self-conscious or ashamed of their English skills as of being Irish speakers.

4.2 On the edge

Colm, an Irish-language teacher in his mid-30s, had heard from the older generations of his family some humorous anecdotes about Gaeltacht people with poor English skills going to Dingle for business. He liked to retell these stories, but was also very thoughtful about the implications of the division between Dingle and its Irish-speaking countryside:

> "English always was the language of commerce. And then people coming into Dingle to buy whatever staple you need, they would have been laughed at a lot at the time because of their poor standard of English. (…) We have many stories, recent stories... Of people going into shops in Dingle asking for paint: "I want white (pronounced like "fight")". You know, white paint. The "wh" is coming out like an "f". Silly stories like that. But if someone from *the Gaeltacht* tells that about someone from *the Gaeltacht* we all laugh, whereas if someone from Dingle tells that about someone from *the Gaeltacht* it would be seen as antagonistic and trying to paint the "enemy" as all the same. (...) In one sense, it might be good to have strong local rivalries, because it might engender in a person at least their national identity, which can be a good thing in face of corporatism, globalism and everyone trying to speak like an American. (...) Pride of place is probably a good thing. (…) But then, unfortunately, there is stereotyping on both sides. Dingle people then would have been seen as less *Gaelach,*[27] they would have been seen as predominantly English-speaking. (…) I hear more proud

[27] The term *Gaelach* was used by Colm and a few other research participants to indicate a person who is particularly devoted to Irish culture. Although the word can also simply mean an Irish person, it has a distinctive meaning. Colm told me that: "It's kind of Irish in Irish ways: someone who is interested in all things to do with Irish culture and heritage and language and music and tradition and Gaelic football and all those things."
Tadhg described it as follows: "it is not just that you're Irish. *Eireannach* is an Irish person. *Gaelach* is someone who is of the language, of the culture – who is living through that and expresses themselves through the culture."
A *Gaelach* is likely, but not necessarily, a native speaker from the Gaeltacht. Not all research participants, either older or younger, seemed to be familiar with this word or with other terms that would describe a similar concept, although it applies to the idea of who an ideal committed Gaeltacht person from *back west* is.

Dinglemen speaking Irish now, which is a very good thing, because they have obviously seen that Irish identity is much deeper than some silly local rivalry. But it's very easy to stereotype and make an enemy out of one class of people based on the actions of one or two. And it's very easy to say that Dingle people are just horrible sell-out English (reekers?) and the Gaeltacht people are just rough uncultured terrible English speakers and all the rest of it."

While Áine and Cáit talked only about how Dingle perceived the Irish-speaking people from the countryside (or how these felt were perceived in Dingle), Colm also talks about how the people from *back west* perceive Dingle. He recognises that there are stereotypes on both sides and while this can be negative, it can also encourage a positive sense of local pride. Seen from a *back west* Irish speakers' perspective, Dingle is a business-oriented town that values profit over a genuine commitment to the Irish language and traditional culture, which are the values ascribed to the villages *back west*. Furthermore, from this point of view, the positioning of the town and the villages is reversed. The traditionally Irish-speaking villages are not the *back west* hinterland of Dingle, this is, in a subordinated position in relation to the town; they are *the Gaeltacht*, the real Irish-speaking community, in which Dingle has only a liminal position. Notice how Colm refers to the stories as being about "someone from the Gaeltacht" and tells how they would laugh at them if told by "someone from the Gaeltacht", but not if told by someone from Dingle. He is implicitly stating that he doesn't consider Dingle as part of the Gaeltacht. Other research participants also referred to Dingle as not being in the Gaeltacht or as being on its edge, and used the term "Gaeltacht people" when talking about Irish-language speakers from the villages of West Kerry. For example, talking about tourists visiting Dingle, Cáit said that:

"I think the magic of Dingle will always be that it is *on the edge of the Gaeltacht* and that they can come *back here* and have the culture of the Gaeltacht, which is still very strong."

Michael Silverstein (1998) writes about the locality of local language communities as a "cultural fact" rather than a natural one, "a relationally produced state in a cultural-ideological order" (Silverstein 1998: 404). Locality has to be constituted in relation with and in contrast to global-scale processes as a "positive dimension of cultural being, for each person an identity-relevant dimension of belonging to a particular group that otherwise can be defined only residually or negatively" (Silverstein 1998: 403). The division between Dingle and the *back west* has been turned into a constitutive element of a Gaeltacht locality conceived not as a state-defined area subjected to particular policy measures (which cover also the town of Dingle), but as a truly Irish-speaking place, inhabited by people with a

particular set of values such as the commitment to Irish language and interest in traditional culture (and which includes only certain villages). In this way, a sense of the existence of a Gaeltacht *community* is carved out inside the Gaeltacht *area.*

While Silverstein (1998: 403–404) writes about how global-scale processes threaten to make locality obsolete, it is interesting that the idea of what a Gaeltacht is supposed to be (Irish-speaking, preserving traditional culture etc.) comes from the higher, nation-state level. The sense of Gaeltacht locality as perceived by the "Gaeltacht people" is thus entangled with and plays on some superimposed, higher-level conceptions of space and identity. Speaking Irish can be both a feature of local identification – indexing that someone is from the villages *back west*, from *the Gaeltacht* – and of national identification as an Irish person. So, for example, Colm mentioned that some "proud Dinglemen" have put aside their stereotypical contempt for the Irish language and speak Irish because "they have obviously seen that *Irish identity* is much deeper than some silly local rivalry". The ideological cartography of Corca Dhuibhne is thus based on internal country-town dichotomies, projected on the linguistic (Irish vs. English) level, and informed by national linguistic projects.

4.3 Is it all for money?

Of course, as the statistics presented in the last chapter show, not all people who live in Dún Chaoin, Baile na nGall or other *Gaeltacht* parishes speak Irish, and not all people from Dingle are opposed to the Irish language. However, historical processes, socio-economic relations and linguistic ideologies have led to the ascription of opposing sets of values to these two places – Dingle and the *back west/the Gaeltacht* – in a way that persists even as the population of these areas, its linguistic practices and attitudes are changing. Interestingly, although I met a few young and committed Irish speakers from Dingle during my research, it was explained to me (by them or by others) that one of their parents was from *the Gaeltacht* or that they frequently visited some "relations" (relatives) "back there". In some way or another, the fact that these Dingle people spoke Irish was linked with *the Gaeltacht*. Also for my younger research participants, who didn't have any direct negative experience with the town people and who spent significant amounts of time in the town (they had attended secondary school there, worked there, had friends from there etc), Dingle remained not only an "English-speaking town", but also a town that doesn't care about the Irish language, contests its value and is driven by a marketing, business mentality rather than

by a concern for the rights and the development of Irish language community living around it or in it.

It is fair to say that Dingle's attitude towards the Irish language has changed in the last decades. As was already indicated by Áine, there is currently much more Irish heard and seen in Dingle than there was once. Not only are there more *Gaeltacht people* working in the town, visiting it for business, shopping and leisure or even living there, but also the townspeople's view of the language has changed. As Gearóid, one of my older research participants, observed:

> "it's hard to say exactly what it is, but there is an awful lot of businesses in Dingle where there are people anxious to use Irish and they wouldn't be as competent as the people back 50, 60 years ago."

Although they were happy that there are more people willing to promote Irish in Dingle now, many Gaeltacht Irish speakers judged Dingle's currently more positive attitude towards the Irish language as somehow hypocritical. Their reproach was that Dingle has started to care about the Irish language only because it is a lucrative marketing asset in creating an image of Dingle as an authentically Irish or Gaeltacht place for the tourist to consume and a way to obtain special grants that businesses operating in the Gaeltacht can get from the state. Dingle businesspeople are perceived as not being really serious about speaking Irish in their daily lives, but rather as merely "putting Irish names up on doors", for example in signage aimed at attracting tourists to shops and pubs. In fact, in an analysis of the linguistic landscape of Dingle, Máiréad Moriarty writes that a "commodification of a rustic capital, of which the Irish language forms part," has occurred "in order to monopolise on the global tourists' quest to experience authenticity" (Moriarty 2014: 470) and that the Irish language has taken on a "tokenistic role" in tourism (2014: 471).[28] Of course, the Gaeltacht villages are also not immune to "the marketing of nostalgia" and "the myth of 'traditional'" (Moriarty 2014:470) for touristic purposes (also for linguistic tourism in the form of Irish summer colleges), but they can claim to be a historically Irish-speaking community (even if a quite fragile one today), while Dingle can't.

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[28] Dingle is not the only town where the Irish language was commodified for business and tourism. For example, Sara Brennan and Bernadette O'Rourke (2018) analyse the use of the Irish language in towns outside the Gaeltacht. Irish language signage is welcomed by many as a way to promote the Irish language, motivate people to use it (even if they only know the *cúpla focal*) and normalise its presence in the linguistic landscape of Ireland. However, it can also run the risk of staying at the symbolic or tokenistic level if not accompanied by other measurers that enable Irish speakers to fully use Irish in their daily lives and Irish learners to acquire a higher command of the language.

4.4 The Dingle/Daingean Uí Chúis naming debate and the school scandal

> "I think the closer you are to the Gaeltacht, the more extreme some people's views are on the subject (the Irish language). Some people love it, some people absolutely hate it." (Bréanainn)

Although the Irish language speakers of Corca Dhuibhne live in an area where their language is protected by special policies, they experience tensions with a part of the population who has very different and conflicting attitudes towards the Irish language and its position in the Gaeltacht. In particular, when talking about Dingle and the Gaeltacht, almost all my interlocutors, from the youngest to the oldest, mentioned two episodes that had occurred in the first decade of the 2000s and had marked the relationship between "Dingle town" and the "Gaeltacht people", polarising the Corca Dhuibhne population around Irish language issues.

The first episode was the Dingle naming debate. It started when, with the Official Languages Act of 2003, the Irish government changed all place names in the Gaeltacht areas from bilingual to Irish only. Dingle then was not to be officially named Dingle anymore, but only An Daingean or Daingean Uí Chúis. The population of the town strongly opposed this, mainly arguing that the name change would damage Dingle as a tourist brand and that, moreover, it was not democratic. The town eventually retained its bilingual name, while all other places in the Gaeltacht are now officially named only in Irish (although the English versions of place names, such as Ballyferriter for Baile na Fheirtéaraigh or Ballydavid for Baile na nGall, are still frequently used when talking in English).

Moriarty writes that the debate was a:

> (…) clash between modernist and postmodernist ideologies, whereby the State is attempting to keep the Irish language to promote a nationalist-type discourse of 'one nation - one language' and locals are more interested in promoting a postmodernist multilingual norm. (Moriarty 2014: 472)

While is certain that the debate brought to the fore the conflicts between different linguistic ideologies and that the state was trying to impose its own on the local community, the Gaeltacht Irish speakers didn't see the campaigners for keeping the name Dingle as promoting a multilingual norm. On the contrary, they saw the campaign as a confirmation that Dingle was essentially an English-speaking town (and not a multilingual one), in a strange reiteration of the old colonial ideology according to which English was the language of progress, business, wealth and modernity – in this case in the form of mass tourism – and not Irish. English was the language to have on road sings to bring tourists to the town, even if Irish was then "sold" to the tourists as part of their Dingle experience.

Tadhg was about the same age as Colm. His parents were Irish language enthusiasts who had moved to the Gaeltacht to live in an Irish language community. Although his family was not originally from Corca Dhuibhne, Tadhg felt very strongly about local issues. He resented that the town of Dingle had monopolised tourism in the peninsula without properly acknowledging its Gaelic, Irish-language culture. For him, the heated debate over the name of the town was a manifestation of a latent, on-going struggle over different senses of locality, its different values and divergent ideas about its development.

> "You know, the people in Dingle wanted to keep the name Dingle, and the people in the Gaeltacht were saying like, "you're getting grants, you want to be in the Gaeltacht, why can't you call the town An Daingean?". Then it just became very messy… It was almost – that issue – emm, it was like a festering tension that was always there and that issue just brought it to the surface, which is like: is Dingle in the Gaeltacht or not? Do you want to be in the Gaeltacht or not? And they do, of course, they do. But they also want to be a big English-speaking tourist town. They want both. Then they get the money for speaking Irish and they get the money from the locals who come in and speak Irish and buy… you know, all the thousands of people who go to Dingle from the surrounding area, they all go to the shops… but they all want the thousands and thousands of tourists to come as well. People in West Kerry want that as well, but, you know, people then promote Dingle and say "come to Dingle to see the beautiful sights". The beautiful sights are West Kerry! You have to leave Dingle to go around. They never say that. It's "Dingle peninsula". It's not! It's West Kerry, it's Corca Dhuibhne. (…) I'm just being a bit cynical now, but there's a business cohort in Dingle now and all they care about is making money. (…) As long as the language and the culture help them make money, then they will back it. But if it's becoming an annoying thing – (with a different voice:) "Ah, I have to make more signs, and I have to speak more Irish or I have to employ people who speak Irish – oh, come on, that's just difficult, you know" – then it's getting in the way of making money."

The second episode, which brought about even greater tension and polarisation in the Corca Dhuibhne community, was related to the local secondary school, Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne, which opened in 2007 after the previous boys' and the girls' schools had been merged together. A group of parents opposed the all-Irish policy in the new school (all schools in Gaeltacht areas are supposed to use Irish as the medium of education) and demanded that their children be taught in English instead, claiming that, otherwise, they wouldn't be able to succeed educationally and therefore also career-wise. The case was brought to the High Court and eventually ended with the agreement that the school would keep its Irish language policy while providing a support programme for students with low Irish language skills (Warren 2012).

Níall was a student in the Pobalscoil at the time of the school strike. He thinks that most of the students participating in the strike didn't really understand what it was about and that they were pushed by a number of parents "who didn't want their children to learn Irish":

"I mean, this was not the students who decided to do this, it was the parents who told them to do this. The parents moved to Dingle because they wanted to live here, because it's a nice town. But they also wanted to send their kids to school and they wanted the school to change for them. You can't do that. (…) There were students who couldn't speak Irish and they were expecting the teachers then to change everything. Everything was taught through Irish, it's how it works, it's an Irish school. **It's the same if you go to a Spanish school: they are not going to teach certain students through English because they can't speak Spanish**. But they were expecting to do that. (…) After that changes did come to the school, where the teachers were a little more lenient to telling students the English of certain things…"

As most of the people I spoke with, Níall thought that if the school had relaxed its language policy, "it would have been the end of the Irish language in Corca Dhuibhne". While the school caters for both students who come from Irish-speaking (or bilingual) families and those who come from English-speaking families, expecting it to accommodate to the latter would mean violating the rights of the Gaeltacht community to education in their (minority) language. If the Pobalscoil had loosened its Irish language policy, the possibility for the young generations to develop advanced Irish language skills would have been severely compromised.[29] The Gaeltacht Irish speakers feared that they would lose one of the main institutions for the production of Irish speakers in the area and where Irish, and not English, was (until then) accepted as the main language. On the other hand, those parents for whom the Irish language didn't represent an important value were protesting because they thought they and their children had the right to choose in which language they would be educated. They claimed they should have the possibility to do it in English, instead of having to accommodate to the Irish-speaking community or the Irish state's linguistic policy for the Gaeltacht.

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[29] As all Gaeltacht schools are expected to use Irish as the medium of education, also children from English-speaking families should have a good grounding in the Irish language by the time they come to secondary school. As some of my interlocutors suggested, the fact that some students weren't proficient in Irish (which was one of the reasons why some parents protested) indicates that some schools don't abide strictly to this Irish language policy. A lack of teaching materials in the Irish language and of properly qualified teachers, instructed on how to teach a diverse class with pupils with different levels of Irish language skills, were also mentioned by my interlocutors. A report about Irish and English competence of Gaeltacht school pupils (Péterváry et al. 2014) highlights, among others, the need for the development of an education model tailored for the needs of minority speakers of Irish; the current model of Gaeltacht schools is directed at learners rather than at native speakers and doesn't pay adequate attention to the specific problems of minority language acquisition.
It is worth noting how the Gaeltacht school system is based precisely on the conception of the Gaeltacht as a geographical area (rather than on a model of school for a minority community), so that every child who lives in the area has to attend an Irish medium school regardless of its ability and interest in the language.

Simon Warren writes that the struggle about the Pobascoil Chorca Dhuibhne was a struggle over a field of meaning, over what a Gaeltacht and, as he says, an “Irish-speaking Ireland” is (Warren 2012: 331). Notice how Níall compered the Gaeltacht Irish-medium school with a Spanish school: if the protesting parents had lived in Spain, they certainly wouldn’t have expected the school to change its language of instruction, but it is the children who would have had to learn the Spanish language instead. This is a line of thought I have heard in several occasions: when Irish speakers were questioning the attitudes of some non-Irish speakers from the area towards the Irish language, they often draw a parallel between the Gaeltacht and a non-English-speaking country (Spain, Italy, France). For them, the meaning of the Gaeltacht is or should be that of a fully Irish-speaking community, which upholds to the Irish language as a defining value, much in line with the state’s special provisions for the protection and promotion of the Irish language in the area. Unfortunately, not everyone sees the Gaeltacht in the same way. In fact, contrary to living in Spain, it is possible and easy to live in Corca Dhuibhne without having to speak Irish. For some, the Gaeltacht is the same as every other place in Ireland (this is, English-speaking), with just a bit of Irish here and there as an “embellishment”. For this reason, Gaeltacht Irish speakers often feel disrespected, misunderstood and in conflict with the non-Irish speakers living in the Corca Dhuibhne.

4.5 Linguistic practices

Speaking or hearing Irish in Dingle is not obvious. In fact, some weeks before I returned to Corca Dhuibhne in June 2018, an Irish newspaper published a letter from a disappointed reader who had visited the town expecting to speak Irish there, but had not met any Irish speakers (The Irish Independent 2018a). The Gaeltacht Irish speakers were not happy to read about that, but not surprised either. “It just depends on where you go,” they told me, “you can have totally different experiences.” They knew where they could expect to have services through the Irish language, and some were able to list me shops, restaurants, pharmacies, pubs and offices where they would be attended by Irish speakers. When I was in town with an Irish speaker, I heard more Irish spoken: they knew, for example, that a certain shop was owned by people with “good Irish”, or recognised a waiter in the restaurant as coming from one of the Gaeltacht parishes *back west* and so felt they could speak Irish to him. If they had the choice, they often also preferred to visit those establishments where they could speak Irish.

However, it was not simply a question of knowing where to go, but of who you were and who you knew. Irish speakers usually spoke Irish only with people who they already knew could speak Irish; those were often people who were from *the Gaeltacht*.

Níall was working in a shop in town. The shop has put a sign on the door indicating to customers that they can speak Irish, but most of the time he uses English with the customers. "Unless someone speaks to me in Irish first I won't speak to them in Irish," he told me. However, he does serve customers in Irish:

> "If I know them and I know that they speak Irish and are the type of people who would prefer to speak Irish. If they are the type of people that won't speak Irish, I won't speak Irish to them. (…) We live in a very small community. West Kerry is a small area. **If they are from West Kerry you can be nearly sure you know who they are, whether they speak Irish or not**. From Dingle back, not including Dingle, from the roundabout back, it's split in 5 different parts. There's Dunquin, Ventry, Ballyferriter, Muiríoch and Feothanach. Everyone in those areas would speak Irish fluently unless they are coming from outside and moving here. If they come in, we speak Irish with them. Well, I speak Irish with them. Not everyone in the shop is fluent."

Níall knows who the "Gaeltacht people" who will be happy to be served in Irish are, but he doesn't address people in Irish if he doesn't know if they would be able and pleased to use it. This is a rule followed by most Irish speakers in their daily interactions. It works because the network of Irish speakers is quite small and they usually know each other. However, it can lead to embarrassing or amusing situations, for example when two acquaintances speaking English to each other suddenly realise they can both speak Irish or when someone is unexpectedly addressed in Irish by someone she doesn't know. It also makes it more difficult for people who have moved to the area and wish to speak Irish to learn or practice the language, as they are, by default, spoken to in English. Strangers, people who one doesn't know, speak English – this is the underlying assumption of this linguistic practice. Speaking Irish is not normal, is not the norm. English is the neutral language of communication, while Irish is attached to only certain places, people and values.

I would like to point out how Gaeltacht Irish speakers have different expectations regarding the use of Irish in Dingle and in the Gaeltacht villages. None of my interlocutors seemed to question the fact that the majority of businesses in Dingle didn't use Irish. Some of them might have felt slightly disappointed that they weren't able to use Irish in as many occasions as they would have wished to, but no one expected all businesses in Dingle to be Irish-speaking. It is accepted that in shops or pubs in Dingle the language of interaction is

English unless there is a person who is known to “have” (this is, to speak) Irish. After all, “Dingle has always been an English-speaking town”.

However, when it came to the few shops and pubs still operating in their parishes (most of the services are concentrated in the town), people showed to be more protective of the Irish language. A small village shop whose owner had moved to the area some years before and didn’t speak Irish was a source of complaint by local Irish speakers. They didn’t want to be rude by insisting on speaking Irish in the shop, but they wished that they could do so and that the shop owner would put more effort in learning Irish. A visit to the shop, a small and banal interaction at the counter, could thus cause uneasiness to the Irish-speaking customers.

Gaeltacht Irish speakers expect to be able to use Irish in the villages *back west*. It is their community, and shops and other services operating there should respect their Gaeltacht values and ways of life. Not being able to speak Irish in the local shop was not only a consequence of the social changes that had occurred in Corca Dhuibhne in the last decades, it was also a threat to the sense of locality of the “Gaeltacht people”, to their perception of the western villages as a “safe place” for speaking Irish and as the home of Irish-speaking people, and to the very survival of their community. The Irish language has been the language of the community for centuries and it is now one of its defining traits – perceived as such not just by the bureaucrats who designed the Gaeltacht area, but also and foremostly by the locals. It is the language of the ancestors, the language in which every townland, field, hill and strand has its name, a language locals can proud themselves on, as it has “survived” in their villages (even if that was mostly due to the social and geographical marginalisation and isolation of the area) while elsewhere it gave way to English. As we will see in the next chapter, speaking about Irish means speaking about the community and the changes both face. Now let me finish with a quote from a research participant, Cathal, who characterised the situation as follows:

> “But it (Irish) is still the language of a community. And it’s still just a means of communication. If we want to communicate, we can all speak English around here, no problem, but that would change the community and change what we stood for hundreds and hundreds of years.”

5. BEAUTY AND RICHNESS

"It feels good to speak Irish because it's so much easier to speak English all the time. English is like junk food. It's everywhere and it's easier; and it's harder to find people who are willing to speak Irish and who've got a good standard of Irish, if you know what I mean." (Colm)

"(It's) such a beautiful, rich language, that… you don't want to lose it! (…) Well, in my opinion, English has great words as well, but it's not as beautiful, to me it's not as melodic. I think English is too easy to learn. And I think Irish is hard, but it's very hard for a reason and it's worth it because it's got beauty and complexity in it…" (Róisín)

"You see, but they are two completely different languages. Irish is a very descriptive, very poetic, very beautiful language. Whereas English is not, is a functional language. So, it's kind of… For me is just a functional language, it's not descriptive – you know, you say something in Irish and translate it into English and it's just two words and…. (…) English, I think, is probably one of the only languages that the people who speak it don't really care about much... whereas Irish, all through the ages, it has always been spoken correctly. And there is an emphasis on speaking it correctly. (…) You know, people feel that if you speak it wrongly it's… it's not good. So, whereas you can speak English incorrectly and nobody cares." (Seán)

The above quotes are representative of the aesthetic and moral evaluations of the English and Irish language by Gaeltacht Irish speakers. One of the questions I usually asked my research participants was if there was any topic they felt they could talk about better in one language (Irish or English) rather than another. I was also interested in how they described and evaluated the Irish spoken in the Gaeltacht. These kinds of questions give insights into local linguistic ideologies and, as it was to be expected, English is usually described as "functional", while Irish is "beautiful"; English is the global language for wider communication, Irish is the language of family, intimacy and the local community; English is for technology, bureaucracy and modern things, Irish is about home, history and heritage. Similar sets of dichotomies have been already analysed in other minority language contexts (see, for example, Cavanaugh 2009). To a certain extent, they align also with the Irish national linguistic ideology, which attributes to Irish a symbolic value as a heritage language and to English a practical one – with the difference that Irish speakers certainly don't want to see the Irish language be left with a symbolic value *only*.

Irish is a language that has to be taken care of. Gaeltacht Irish speakers highly value its richness of expression, the beauty of old sayings and phrases, and the flavour of the authentic *blas* (local accent). However, this attention to linguistic aesthetic is not an end to itself. Rather, I would argue that it is connected with a concern for the language, for its

survival and maintenance as a community language. For Gaeltacht speakers, paying attention to the form, to how one speaks, is necessary to keep the language spoken in the first place. Crucially, when speaking about the Irish language, they often speak about changes: changes in the Gaeltacht community that have caused changes in the quantity and quality of the Irish language spoken there. Besides that, they also speak about differences between the variety of Irish used in the locality and the standard variety, the “book Irish”, developed outside the Gaeltacht.

The people I spoke with, especially the older ones, had been frequently recommended to me because they “had good (or even wonderful) Irish”. This singling out of particularly proficient first language speakers points to the fact that Irish speakers are aware that there is a great range of competencies in Irish and that people with “good Irish” are more of an exception rather than the norm, even in the Gaeltacht. Such description probably wouldn’t be necessary in a community where everyone had roughly the same, high level of language proficiency, but in a minority and bilingual language community (such as the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht) this cannot always be the case. First language speakers may have only a limited fluency in their (minority) language due to the all-permeating influence of the majority language and the limited number of opportunities for developing and practising skills in the minority language. To have good Irish requires a particular dedication: a commitment to using Irish as often and in as a great variety of contexts as possible, attention to the linguistic usages of the people around them (especially of those who are reputed for being good speakers), the development of a sensibility for what the proper, correct and/or traditional ways of expression are, and care in crafting one’s speech so that is not “polluted” by English (at both the syntactical and lexical level). Saying that someone has good Irish is thus not only an aesthetic judgement but also an implicit indication that someone has put an effort into cultivating his or her Irish (except for, maybe, those in their 60s and older who grew up in a time when Irish was the main language in the community and there was less English influence). Having grown up in a dedicated Irish-speaking family plays an important role in having good Irish, but it’s not enough: speaking Irish, living one’s life through Irish requires a conscious decision.

The Gaeltacht Irish speakers’ comments on how people speak, their joy when hearing nicely expressed thoughts and their care for their own Irish go hand-in-hand with their great concern about the changes in the West Kerry community and about the lowering level of command in the language they can witness. In this chapter, therefore, I write about two

seemingly different, but interwoven themes: their evaluations of Irish and English, and the linguistic situation in the Gaeltacht.

5.1 Of *saibhreas* and *béarlachas*

I met Caoimhe, a young woman in her late 20s, in the office where she worked. She comes from an Irish-speaking family, has a degree in Irish and has found an Irish-language related job which has allowed her to stay at home in Corca Dhuibhne instead of having to move to other parts of the country. Irish is clearly an important part of her life and speaking it is natural to her, but yet she feels her Irish is not perfect. Here is an excerpt from our conversation.

Caoimhe: I just speak it (Irish). Like, I don't see that as a big deal. But then I'd still be nervous speaking to older people. I think Irish has changed slightly, like my Irish wouldn't be as good as their Irish. It's the *saibhreas*, it's like the – ...emm, the way I'd say things. Emm, Irish has got lots of English words into it. Like I'd never say "cuisneoir", I'd say fridge. I never say "teilifís", I say television. So, you'd have the older generation whose Irish would be a lot more – kind of stronger or rich. Rich is the word! Richer than my Irish. I think when you speak Irish with somebody that doesn't speak Irish, sometimes you can get bad habits as well. So it's good and it's bad. (…) I have lots of bad habits, so I'd be nervous speaking to some people because I'd be like "Oh, I hope they're not judging me".

Nastja: Have you ever felt under pressure from older generations, like, to speak proper Irish?

Caoimhe: Oh yeah. All of the time. My mom would be giving out to (= criticising, telling off) me all the time. But I suppose you wouldn't want people to think that you don't – that you can't speak Irish, because we should be able to speak Irish, if that makes sense. If you listen to any young person our age around here and then listen to their mom or their dad, there's a difference in the Irish. But it's just a change in time. As time's gone on, it's called *béarlachas*. It's anglicising or anglicisation. So you'd always have some English words on your Irish, it's a terrible terrible habit. I've tried to stop, I'm taking more notice. But I think I speak really really fast… So if I speak so fast I don't think. But I've noticed lately that I'm trying to speak slower and I'm thinking out what I say before I say it. I think there's some pressure. I think you'd almost feel embarrassed that somebody would think that your Irish isn't good enough. To be speaking Irish or something maybe... Even Raidió na Gaeltachta – almost everybody that's on the radio, the have fabulous, perfect, really nice Irish you'd never have. Because they are all like an older generation, so you wouldn't really have young people that would have it. Let's say, my mom, when she was going to school it would have been a lot easier for her to speak Irish with everybody because there weren't people in the area that weren't from the area. Now it's a lot more diluted. There's people coming in (the Gaeltacht) that don't have Irish (...) and I think it's harder on the younger generations than it was, maybe. I think if I was in a room with, say, some of my friends that spoke Irish, but there were people in the room that didn't have any Irish, we would all automatically change to English, because it's just – just the (done?) thing, which it really shouldn't be. I think we need to make more of an insistence that we've got to keep speaking in Irish to us.

The Irish word *saibhreas* Caoimhe mentioned means “wealth” or “richness”; those terms have been used also by others when referring to the Irish language. “The richness is being lost”, “the language is diluted” or “polluted” are common phrases I heard. In the Gaeltacht, there is less Irish being spoken that there used to be, and moreover, the Irish that is spoken now is not as good as it used to be.

Code-mixing and linguistic interference are usually observed in language contact situations, and also in Gaeltacht Irish speech, borrowing English words or directly translating them into Irish (what in linguistics are called calques) is very common. Most Gaeltacht Irish speakers would recur to English for technical terminology, technology and “everything that is not related to a traditional society”. English language loan words are often used to refer to things and concepts that were introduced to the community from the outside, English-speaking world in modern times. A common example is that of the bicycle: instead of using the official Irish word “rothar”, in their everyday speech, most of the people would use the English word and apply to it Irish grammar rules (so “my bicycle” would be “mo bhicycle” (pronounced “mo vicycle”), etc.).

The penetration of English language forms into the Irish language is a reflection on the linguistic level of the general pervasiveness of the English language in the Gaeltacht. Since the 1960s, changes in life patterns have put the Gaeltacht population in increasing contact with the English language: commuting for work, education and leisure to Dingle and other English-speaking towns, increasing consumption of English-language media and immigration of English-language speakers to the Gaeltacht are among the factors that have led to the “pollution” of the Irish language. New objects and concepts are first encountered in English: a fridge is bought in an English-speaking shop, the characters of a popular tv series or cartoon for kids speak in English, a course in computer programming is offered in English, and the politicians debate in English as well. The Irish language is not in-built in all those everyday activities. Speaking or writing about all that in Irish doesn’t come “natural”: it requires learning the appropriate vocabulary, translating and searching for the rights words.

Indeed, if a person doesn’t make a conscious effort to learn to talk about more advanced topics in Irish, eventually it becomes easier for him or her to just switch to English entirely when talking about them. “It’s probably gotten to the stage where there are Irish speakers who probably feel more comfortable speaking through English now,” Tadhg has told me with a sigh, while Gearóid finds that “people are turning to English for serious discussions”. “All they usually discuss about (in Irish) is weather and small talk,” he says.

Let’s go back to Caoimhe. She had studied Irish and was using it every day at home and at work, and yet – or, perhaps, exactly because of this – she knew that her Irish wasn’t “naturally” as good as that of her parents and, similarly, their Irish probably wasn’t as good as that of their own parents. While the 26-year-old Caoimhe mentions Raidió na Gaeltachta for having very good Irish, the 70-year-old Nora used to call to the radio to correct the pronunciation of some of the presenters:

> “To me, if I was listening to them and not knowing where they are from, I might say they went to a Gaelscoil (i.e. Irish-language medium school outside the Gaeltacht area), but I wouldn’t think they are from the Gaeltacht. (…) They don’t pronounce their “R” like I and my generation do…”

Nora gave me some examples of corrections she gave to the local radio: what struck her and other older listeners was that the younger radio presenters couldn’t pronounce what Nora called the “Gaelic R”. Their pronunciation was affected by English.

We see here two issues. Firstly, Gaeltacht Irish speakers don’t get “naturally” equipped for talking about more modern or advanced topics in Irish, as they usually encounter them through English. Secondly, there is clearly a generational difference in the Irish spoken in Corca Dhuibhne, both at the level of vocabulary and pronunciation, and there are fewer people among the younger generation who have *good Irish*.

5.2 The *blas* and the *book Irish*

But what is a good Irish? For Gaeltacht Irish speakers, it is an Irish with little or no English influence and with a distinctive local “flavour” – the *blas*. The *blas* comprises the accent, the mode of pronunciation, as well as the use of local words and sayings. Someone with a proper *blas* speaks in the local variety of Irish with ease and clarity and in a rich and colourful way.

A proper *blas* is very much connected with locality, heritage and history. It reminds people of their parents and grandparents and is a link with their ancestors. Speaking with a *blas* evokes the voices of the ancestors who have lived in the same places, small townlands and parishes of Corca Dhuibhne, for generations. Native speakers can understand and feel deeply the traditional songs and old stories because they are part of their own history, the heritage of their people, family, community. By making an effort to speak with a *blas*, using expressions and sayings they heard from older generations of locals, speakers also reconfirm the link between the language and the locality. They value ways of expression that are

traditional for their community, for the Irish language as it has been spoken in Corca Dhuibhne.

Barry, a passionate *sean-nós* (traditional) singer in his 60s, exemplifies this appreciation for the Irish language as a heritage from the older generations which is very much connected with the local culture. It's not the heritage in the way that the linguistic revivalists and the Irish state saw the language – as a quite distant, removed heritage of an abstract entity, an imagined community such as the Irish nation; rather, for Barry, it is a very tangible, familiar and family heritage.

> "The language that my father had, he got it from his father. I think, my children, if they would be living here now, we would be the 9th generation in one little village. So it gives you an idea of how far back it goes. (…) It is a jewel, it's a treasure – it's a treasure. And it's an honour, it's an honour to me that I'm actually able to speak it, that I'm able to honour the people that came before me by speaking their language. (…) **We are almost as the guardians of the language of the past and not so much even by choice.**"

In Barry's opinion, the Gaeltacht Irish speakers have to fight to maintain their language not only against language shift to English but also against the wide-spreading "*book Irish*". The *blas* stands in contrast with "*book Irish*", the standard register of Irish taught in schools, spoken by learners of Irish as a second language and used in official documents. While a fluent speaker of Irish as a second language might use less English words in his speech than a native speaker, his way of speaking would be perceived as not being "natural" and growing from the tradition of a local language community, but somehow "artificial". Even though he has learned to say "rothar" and not "bicycle", his speech very likely bears English influence on more subtle and deeper levels, in the pronunciation and syntax, as well as in the aesthetic form. The standard Irish has been developed to serve the new domains of use (most importantly official, legal documents) the Irish language got in the 20th century as the official language of the state. Being used for domains where English is predominantly used and for which a continued Irish language tradition didn't exist, it is not surprising that is influenced by English.

In Ireland in general, as observed by Brennan and O'Rourke (2018), and Nic Fhlannchadha and Hickey (2018), being able to speak the *canúint* (dialect) of one of the Gaeltacht areas has been more highly valued than speaking in the standard register (although the growing numbers of new speakers who use the standard register are now challenging the authority of the traditional Gaeltacht varities of speech). This is a quite unique situation, which stems from the linguistic ideology that sees the Irish language as a heritage conserved

in certain places (the Gaeltachtaí) rather than a neutral medium of communication to be possessed and spoken by everyone in the same, standard way. However, the development of a standard register is needed for the Irish language to cover all the domains and functions a modern official language has to provide for and to ease the communication among speakers of different dialects and varieties without privileging one particular *canúint* and Gaeltacht area. Several authors (one of the most prominent is Pierre Bourdieu (1991)) have highlighted how language and power are connected. The unequal command of and control over the standard register perpetuates an unequal access to power and the hegemony of a particular group or social class. In the case of the Irish language, what is significant is that the standard register was developed to serve official bodies (the state's bureaucracy, the education system) in which the Gaeltacht speakers were underrepresented and which were very distant from the realities of the Gaeltacht language communities. The official standard has been in large part controlled by non-native Irish speakers who have a very different social position (urban, middle class, highly educated) and understanding of the language than the native speakers in the Gaeltacht areas. Part of the Gaeltacht Irish speakers' dislike for the *book Irish* thus probably comes from the fact that they could not influence the development of the Irish language in its most used, standard form, and have been thus, so to speak, dispossessed of it.

Colm, the Irish language teacher, was concerned and critical about the direction in which the Irish language is developing – or, perhaps, he would say, regressing:

> "Somebody said on the radio, probably 15 years ago... Emm, they were talking how Irish would be, will Irish survive, and somebody said: "*Is cinnte go mbeidh an Ghaeilge bheo...*" – "Irish will certainly be alive in 20 or 30 years, but the question is: will I understand it?" Do you know what I mean? The way that language changes, it gets simplified maybe, and corners cut, and becomes technical here, while there is a nice traditional phrase for that and they go with this version... And it's trying to keep up with... I think 90% of what is written in Irish now is translated from English. So it's not authentic Irish, not grass-roots Irish coming up. And especially in the Gaeltacht areas, that's the real heartland, that's the real core of the language, the living language as opposed to thoughts coming out in English being put down on paper in English being translated into Irish. It's like filtered English."

Interestingly, Gaeltacht Irish speakers seemed to perceive that the *saibhreas* and *blas* of their language were being eroded and displaced also by book Irish, and not only by English, although to a lower degree. Losing the "nativity of the language", "the local ways of saying things" seemed to be a matter of greater concern, for them, than not knowing more advanced or specialised terminology and having problems in understanding texts written in

the official standard.[30] In any case, committed Irish speakers, such as Caoimhe, were aware of both aspects. They have to both cultivate local ways of speaking which are necessarily limited to the domains the language was used for traditionally and which are more and more "polluted" by English, and familiarise themselves with the new Irish used for/in legal documents, smartphones and a globalised culture that they would otherwise consume in English only. Someone with good Irish is someone who can express herself well in Irish in a wide variety of contexts. In any case, the first step to having good Irish – or be a good speaker of any minority language, I might add – is to realise that your language needs care and attention. As Tadhg says:

> "Even when you are a native speaker, you still have to make an effort with the language. It's the kind of language where you are never finished with it, you have to keep improving it. (…) You know, to have that richness and purity of language."

5.3 "Who is going to talk to my kids in this way?"

It is increasingly difficult to have good Irish. As Caoimhe, the Irish-language graduate who was trying to avoid *béarlachas* in her speech, said, she wouldn't want people to think she can't speak Irish, because "we should be able to speak Irish, if that makes sense". Unfortunately though, nowadays living in the Gaeltacht, going to Irish language schools and having Irish-speaking parents doesn't automatically mean that a child will grow up with good Irish. A report titled *Analysis of bilingual competence* (Péterváry et al. 2014) studied the linguistic competence of pupils from the Cois Fharraige and South Connemara Gaeltacht region, the "strongest Irish-speaking area left" (Péterváry et al. 2014: 16), whose home language was exclusively Irish. It found that children had a generally lower level of ability in Irish than in English, "much lower than that which would be expected of a monolingual speaker, and the term reduced Irish accurately describes the Irish spoken by the pupils"

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[30] It has to be noted that several research participants complained that the quality of Irish language translations in official documents was very poor (or even "disgusting," as Cáit said): according to them, the wording was awkward and unnatural and the terms used were incomprehensible to local native speakers. I cannot judge on the quality of the translations, but I would suggest that one of the problems is certainly that many new terms have to be made up for the sole purpose of translating the documents, often by translators who are second-language speakers of standard Irish and are not familiar with the traditional Gaeltacht varieties of Irish spoken by native speakers. The latter have no possibility to get acquainted with the new terminology in their daily life (or in the school), apart when deciding to avail of state services through the Irish language (for example, to fill out a tax declaration form in Irish). In this case, they might realise they have difficulties in understanding a document or compiling a form in Irish, which can be particularly discouraging for younger speakers who then feel they have neither the "richness" of the older generations nor the knowledge of the new standard some new speakers outside the Gaeltacht have.

(Péterváry et al. 2014: 237). This is a case of unbalanced bilingualism, with one dominant and dominating language (English), in which speakers are more functional than in the other language (Irish), even if the latter is their native language (Péterváry et al. 2014: 237–239). The report names the Irish spoken by young people in the Gaeltacht a "post-traditional Irish", this is a language that diverges from the traditional variety spoken there (my interlocutors would say that it lacks the *saibhreas*), but also from the norms of the Official Standard, due to incomplete acquisition, interference from English and widespread codeswitching (Péterváry et al. 2014: 23).

Síle was well aware of the incomplete acquisition and the reduced fluency of the youngest Gaeltacht generation. She was raised in the mid-1970s in an Irish-speaking family and remembers times when, as a child, she wasn't comfortable speaking English (although she understood it) and when most of the neighbours would speak Irish with her. Now that she is the mother of two young children she observes big changes in the level of Irish in the community:

"People have **reduced fluency** in Irish. (…) When we speak about young children and how amazing Irish they have – it was just normal when I was growing up. And now we find it like: "Oh, wow, she speaks Irish so well!" But actually for us back then, growing up, it would have been normal."

Although Síle only speaks Irish to her children, she has noticed that they have started speaking English to each other. They watch cartoons in English and then use English in their play. She is unsure on how to proceed: although she wants to encourage them to speak Irish, she also doesn't want to interfere too much in their play or pressure them to speak Irish.

"I'm very passionate about the Irish language (laughs). I think it's just very important to keep it alive. When I see the difficulties as we have in doing that and transmitting it to the next generations, it upsets me, or when we don't get the support at the Governmental level that we should… and I suppose **I get sometimes heartbroken when I meet old people around here and I have a conversation with them and I think "Oh my god, who is going to talk to my kids that way?" Like, when they die – just to be very morbid about it – but when they die, what, emm, level of speak is replacing them?** Certainly not me, like, they would be way ahead of me. (…) I remember being somewhere lovely recently, meeting a local old man and he's talking to me and my kids. And the first thought that I have in my mind is: "Can they understand him?" You know, they did understand, I was so happy. (laughs) But they'll never speak like him! They'll never have that. And it's not a kind of a personal thing like that everything should stay the same, but I think in a language what should stay the same is ease, fluency, mastery, emm, flexibility with the language you only get if you are really, really fluent."

Cathal is approximately the same age as Síle and he also has children. He speaks English with his wife, who is not so comfortable speaking Irish, but they both speak Irish to their children. Before their first child was born, they made a conscious decision that they would raise their kids in Irish. He faces similar struggles as Síle:

> "I see my Irish isn't as good as my grandfather's and grandmother's. My kids' isn't as good as mine. You see the dilution right down through the generations. And you see what's happening in front of you. We, my generation, are probably the last generation that were actually properly raised through Irish. Now, I wasn't exclusively raised through Irish, but there are people my age that were. It's important that we preserve that. This place here is a massive archive of Irish language, but it's no point in having an archive, we want it to be a living, breathing language every day."

Although Cathal's parents now speak only Irish with his children, they raised him bilingually. He spoke Irish to his father and English to his mother. "It was complicated, as with most people in the area," he says. He never asked his parents why they did so.

> "They probably regret it now, but there was a school of thought in the 1970s, that if you raised your kids through Irish that they would be deficient in English, which was subsequently proved not to be the case."

Tadhg Ó hIfearnáin (2007 and 2013) has studied the attitudes of the Gaeltacht Irish speakers towards the intergenerational transmission of Irish. His research draws on data from the Múscraí Gaeltacht in county Cork (in the south of Ireland) and shows a striking "discrepancy between linguistic preference and practice" (Ó hIfearnáin 2007: 521): although parents stated they wished their children to speak Irish, the majority of children were raised in homes with some degree of bilingualism (Irish-English) or in English only. This is, Ó hIfearnáin explains, because parents wanted their children to be fluent in both English and Irish. Many relied on the school and the community for their children to learn Irish, and spoke English with them even if they were themselves fluent native speakers of Irish. This was especially true for older generations, who still remembered a time when they were laughed at for not being able to speak English well. Later, when their children were already grown-ups with a lower level of Irish than their parents had expected them to have, they often regretted their language choices. Ó Riagáin's research (1997) in Corca Dhuibhne in the 1980s showed that "in homes where both parents were native Irish speakers, over three generations there was a slippage of 15% in high Irish proficiency in each generation" (Ó hIfearnáin 2013: 350). This means that, in cases were both parents had a high fluency in the Irish language, 85% of their children also acquired a high fluency, and 72% of their grandchildren (provided that their children's spouse or partner also had a high a fluency). If only one of the

parents was fluent in Irish, the rate of intergenerational language transmission was even lower.

As Ó Riagáin (1997: 107) suggests, language shift to English started in the home rather in the community. However, as more and more people were raised with English, the community language also changed, and children and adults started speaking English with their peers. As everyone in the community is bilingual, it's easier for Irish speakers to revert to speaking English with their peers, rather than for those with low Irish language skills to learn Irish. Those parents who thought that their children would learn Irish from the school or the community have thus indirectly contributed, through their choice of home language policy, to the weakening of Irish as a community language in the Gaeltacht.

Cathal thus isn't the only Gaeltacht Irish speaker who has been raised with a mix of languages by his parents. However, he now speaks exclusively Irish with his children. All of my younger interlocutors expressed the intention to raise their children through Irish. Maybe that could be a sign that – as Ó hIfearnáin (2007) auspicates – there is now a growing awareness among Gaeltacht people of the importance of intergeneration language transmission and a realisation that, as sociolinguistic research also shows, families need to adopt a strong and consistent family language policy in favour of the minority language if they want to assure that the children will have a high command of it. The majority language – not the minority language – will be in any case learned through secondary socialisation, although community support is also decisive in forming competent minority language speakers.

Unfortunately, parents might see their effort to rare children through Irish undermined in a community that is only nominally Irish-speaking, but in reality presents a much more diverse range of linguistic practices. They have to actively seek out opportunities for their children to develop and use their Irish language, such as by choosing Irish-language childcare services, enrolling children to extra-curricular activities which put attention to speaking good Irish, and setting play dates with peers who also come from committed Irish-speaking families.

Bríd is 50 years old and has two teenage children. She had lived overseas for several years, but decided to move back to Corca Dhuibhne when her children were small. "I wanted them to speak my native tongue," she explains. But when she came back, she was disappointed. Her children's classmates were not first language Irish speakers and had

entered school with little or no knowledge of Irish. Bríd's children had not enough people around them who would speak Irish naturally. Instead, as also some other parents complained to me, they were picking up many mistakes from their peers. "Children who have good Irish from home can have a worse level after a few years in school", Bríd observed.

Now, Bríd is working to bring awareness among Gaeltacht parents about the process of language acquisition and for providing them support in raising fluent Irish language speakers. While Gaeltacht people commonly point to the English-speaking "blow-ins" (a derogatory term for people who moved to the area from outside) as being the cause for the "pollution" of the Irish language, she finds that most of the time it is local people who chose not to speak Irish with their children. "It probably wasn't a conscious choice, but they might have married somebody who didn't speak Irish," says Bríd.

Analysing data collected in Corca Dhuibhne in the 1980s, Ó Riagáin found that over 50% of his responders had lived outside the area and were either immigrants, who very likely didn't speak Irish, or return emigrants, whose level and attitude towards Irish might have changed (1997: 119). Women were both likely to emigrate and immigrate to Corca Dhuibhne (1997: 117): while a large number of younger women, aged 20–29, were leaving the area, especially the westernmost part of the peninsula, others were moving there from outside and getting married to local men. Up to the 1980s, the most common occupation of Irish speakers was farming: young native Irish-speaking men were staying at home working on family farms and were marrying women from other areas, who often weren't fluent in Irish. These women were then, traditionally, taking care of children.

There have been many changes since the 1980s (farming, for example, occupies only a small portion of the population), but families were only one parent is fluent in Irish are very common. Negotiating the family language policy is not easy. While Cathal today only speaks Irish to his children, although his wife is not proficient in the language, other people married with non-Irish speakers who are not feeling so strongly about the Irish language to make it a priority to speak it with their children, might just start speaking English or mixing both languages with their children. Residual feelings of inferiority related to speaking Irish might also play a role in this non-decisiveness of Irish speakers when it comes to negotiating a family language policy with a non-Irish-speaking parent.

Caoimhe told me she argues with her boyfriend on what languages would they speak with their child if they would have one. Her boyfriend comes from a Gaeltacht family where English, and not Irish, is the home language. Although he has learned Irish at school, he is

not comfortable speaking it. Caoimhe and her boyfriend usually speak English with each other and his family also speaks only English with her. The couple argues because Caoimhe's boyfriend says he would speak English with their child, while she insists that she would speak Irish and that he should also make an effort to speak it:

> "Like, my boyfriend, he's not anti-Irish, but he doesn't see the need to speak Irish, because he wouldn't speak it at home. Whereas I've been brought up differently, that I, like, see the importance of it. Emm, or not even the importance of it, but it's easier for me probably to speak Irish than to speak English."

Even when both parents agree on raising their child through Irish, he or she might have problems with the language. The Údarás na Gaeltachta, the Gaeltacht authority, has developed campaigns aimed at encouraging parents to speak Irish with their children: but what if the Irish the parents speak is not fluent? Bríd reflects on this issue:

> "What happens as well is – uh, it's a really difficult one. So, here we are trying to encourage people to speak the language, right? So you have someone who moves into the area, who marries a native speaker who speaks beautiful Irish, but he's out farming or whatever. So she ends up spending most of the time with the kids. She understands that's really important to him, she's making a huge effort to speak this language to the kids that she doesn't have completely fluently, it's got lots of mistakes and lots of the stuff it's upside down. In turn, her children's Irish is a little bit upside down and inside out as well. And then they go into the system as like the "Irish speakers" who kind of have a huge influence on the other Irish speakers and the other Irish speakers end up speaking Irish like them, to the point that you're like "Oh, my God, it sounds awful". The other parents would be saying "Oh, I nearly prefer them to be speaking English". It's so broken and bity and "*líofa lofa*" ("rotten fluent") it's what they call it. (…) So it's kind of like here we are trying to encourage people to do it, then they do it and we are not happy. So you'd be thinking what's the right thing to do here?"

Although the two aspects are very connected, promoting the use of the Irish language is not the same as promoting and ensuring the development of good Irish language skills. A small organisation based in Baile na Fheirtéaraigh, Oidhreacht Chorca Dhuibhne ("Corca Dhuibhne Heritage"), is trying to tackle this issue by developing programs aimed not only at raising language awareness among young parents, but also at enhancing children's Irish language skills. Their initiative Tús maith ("A good start") supports parents wishing to raise their children through Irish by providing home visits by local first language Irish speakers and organising strictly Irish-language playgroups. The home visits offer the opportunity for parents and children to interact with encouraging and supportive fluent Irish language speakers, whom they wouldn't necessarily have the chance to meet otherwise, in a relaxed

atmosphere. The plays group provides a quality Irish-language only environment for kids outside the home, as well as enabling parents to connect with other families who are experiencing the same challenges in raising their children through Irish. In these ways, Tús maith recreates or enhances the local Irish-language community; it facilitates the creation of Irish-speaking networks for parents and children who otherwise might not have as many opportunities in their environment to be exposed to and develop good Irish.

5.4 An English speaker walks into a pub…

As already mentioned, the Gaeltacht community – even in the small villages *back west* – has profoundly changed in the last decades, both from the populational and the linguisitic point of view. Despite the fact that, for the Gaeltacht Irish speakers, the language continues to be rooted in the community, its history and people, and in the landscape, they are not unaware of the fact that even the traditional stronghold of the Irish language is being transformed and eroded. In this section, I would like to present a recurring theme that emerged from the conversations with my research participants: that of local native Irish speakers switching to English in the pub.

> "You know, you would often get in this area, say four or five or six or seven people who are all native Irish speakers. And you will have one person who doesn't speak Irish and everyone will turn to English. It's just unbelievable… (…) Because it's almost got to the stage where Irish speakers in the area are feeling like, you know, can I go somewhere without feeling that I am insulting anyone if I don't speak English, or feeling left out if I don't start speaking English?" (Tadhg)

Tadhg was sitting at a desk in the front row of one of the two small classrooms of the school where he taught. The school day was over, but he had to correct his pupils' homework and prepare for the next schoolday, before running to Dingle for some errands. He somehow seemed always busy when I met him. Yet, during our conversations, he got carried away and became very animated. Now he was telling me about Irish speakers' relationship with those people living in the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht who don't speak Irish.

Tadhg, like almost all the interlocutors, mentioned the local pubs as an example of a context where people switch from Irish to English as soon as an English speaker comes in. I heard that so many times that it started to sound almost like a joke: "*An English speaker walks into a pub…*" (a reminisce of the "bar type" of jokes). According to some of my interlocutors, there could be as many as ten people speaking Irish and all would conform to the one non-speaker.

It was not a joke, of course. The pubs *back west* feature in these anecdotes because they are traditional spaces of encounters and socialisation for the community. It is a place where older people had once, decades ago, heard only fine Irish and where the young still feel compelled to speak Irish with the publican, given that he or she is an Irish speaker (which is not the case in all the pubs – and some people prefer to visit those pubs whose owners are locals and speak Irish). In a place where hearing Irish was or should have been normal it was now being questioned, because not all the people that one meets in a pub all Irish speakers. Some speak it, others know how to speak Irish, but don't speak it (the so-called semi-speakers), and yet others don't know it at all. The pub shows how far the Gaeltacht has gone from being an exclusively "Irish-speaking area". Its linguistic soundscape is indicative of the changes in the community and in the way people speak, this is of changes in the locality and of what defines it. Hearing English mixing with and prevailing over Irish in the local pub can thus be a source of disappointment and concern for the committed local Irish speakers and this is the reason why my research participants told me about how people speak there.

A category of people the research participants seem particularly frustrated with, when it comes to switching to English in the pub, are the "blow-ins", those who have moved to the area from outside and have no roots in the locality. Some of them have been living in West Kerry for decades and still haven't learnt Irish. Irish speakers feel that by not making an effort to learn it, the "blow-ins" are disrespectful of the local community and its values. They are newcomers to the community, yet they are demanding from the locals to accommodate them and speak English, rather than trying to integrate by learning Irish.[31]

Nevertheless, it has to be stressed that also some local people might simply find it easier to switch to English, particularly younger speakers who have a reduced fluency in Irish (as we will see in more detail in chapter 8). Also return immigrants, who have lived in English-speaking areas and, often, married an English speaker from outside the Gaeltacht,

[31] While those who have immigrated in more recent years could be "excused" – according to some of my interlocutors – for not speaking Irish, as there are fewer Irish speakers in any case and so also fewer opportunities to use Irish in informal situations outside the Irish language classroom, those who moved *back west* decades ago came to a still predominantly Irish-speaking community. Nevertheless, they didn't have a proper incentive to learn Irish; there was no reason to speak Irish if everyone around seemed eager or, at least, kind enough to speak English with them. Linguistic ideologies played their role: if the incomers believed that Irish was a small, useless language, a "dead language", why would they spend energy to learn it, although their neighbours or even their spouse and in-laws spoke it? And if the Gaeltacht people knew that people from as close as Dingle didn't speak their language and looked down at it, how could they even dare to expect someone who came from further away, maybe even from a bigger town, to have any interest in Irish? They spoke Irish to each other – to those who they knew could speak it, and English to the newcomers. I analyse more in details these linguistic practices and the beliefs accompanying them in chapter 7.

and their children are, according to some research participants, among those who are more likely to switch to English in their daily lives.

In any case, the recurrent trope about the Irish speakers who switch to English when a non-speaker comes to the pub is a polysemantic symbol. Firstly, it refers to the changes in the Gaeltacht community. As a result of both language shift within the local population and the immigration of monolingual English speakers who usually have little incentive to learn Irish, there are now distinct "subgroups" of people with different levels of ability and – most importantly – of attitudes and commitments to the Irish language (see also Ó hIfearnáin (2014) detailed discussion on this topic and its implications for the Gaeltacht language policies). Secondly, it reveals the domination of the English language over Irish. English is the language that everybody speaks and to which Irish speakers often feel they have to revert to accommodate non-speakers, even if they are critical of this practice and are aware that, in the long term, it contributes to language shift in their community, as there is less and less Irish being heard and spoken. Lastly, this trope also reveals how there are no "obvious opportunities" – as Bríd said – to speak Irish in the Gaeltacht: those who prefer to cultivate their Irish language and use it in their daily lives have to *create* the opportunities for that. Increasingly, they have to organise and attend specific Irish-language related events and activities: for example, an amateur theatre group staging Irish-language plays in the villages *back west,* Irish-language yoga classes taking place in the Irish language centre in Baile na Fheirtéaraigh, or a weekly meeting of a club where people can improve their knowledge of the local dialect by discussing old expressions and traditions with a knowledgeable older speaker. Gaeltacht Irish speakers also tend to form and move inside particular Irish-speaking *social networks* (to borrow a concept used by Ó Riagáin (1997) for describing Gaeltacht Irish speakers) of like-minded family members, friends, and acquaintances who cherish speaking Irish as much as they do. Cathal expressed that in a very evocative manner, saying that, "we view the language as a drug, you know, where you have to know where to go to get a fix."

5.5 What makes a language beautiful?

Róisín was a young and talented traditional musician. She spoke in a heartfelt, sincere and lively way. When during our interview she said that the Irish language was beautiful, I knew that she really meant it. Actually, I could feel that she felt much more deeply about the language that she could express by words. Saying that the language is beautiful was just an approximation for the strong and intimate connection she felt with the Irish language.

Why did Irish speakers repeatedly describe their language as beautiful? What makes a language beautiful? It's not the language per se, it's all that the language is connected with and all that it signifies. For Róisín, there was a sense of comfort, warmth and familiarity in the Irish language. Irish was her first language and the only language she spoke with her parents and siblings. When Róisín lived for some years outside the Gaeltacht, with an English-speaking partner, she felt different. She felt she was losing her Irish language, which scared her. For her, home is in the Irish language:

> "It was a house full of English speaking and then whenever I went home I felt like "Oh, okay, I'm home," you know, because we were all speaking Irish. I felt like a comfort, a familiarity, an understanding… (...) Yeah, there is a common understanding amongst people who speak the same language even if they are arguing. But at least you are on the same page when it comes to the language and understanding the microisms that go with it. (pensive) I don't know if I'm making any sense, but there's such a special feeling with speaking your native tongue versus communicating in a language like English. There is just a special something with the thing that you've grown up with; with the relationships that you form with your own language. Definitely. (...) Something special in the heart. (...) There is safety and comfort in (...) the language. (…) It's also feeling connected. (...) I think it's the feeling of connection, maybe from the home and earlier life..."

Róisín's love for the Irish language grows from intimate experiences and attachments. For her, it was the language in which her primary identity, formed through her relationship with her parents and family, was articulated and expressed. The language is thus beautiful because it symbolises the warmth of family and community ties and recalls feelings of safety and light-heartedness from childhood. Róisín's words remind me of what the linguist Joshua Fishman wrote in an essay titled 'What do you lose when you lose your language?':

> Another dimension of what people tell you about when they tell you about language and culture is why they like their language, why they say it is important to them. They tell you about kinship. (…)They tell you that their mother spoke the language to them, their father spoke the language, their brothers, the sisters, the uncles, the aunts, the whole community. All the ones who loved them spoke the language to them when they were children. (…) We are tied to each other through the language. (…) It is not an intellectualisation, because it is so emotionally suffused and focused on the internal experience. (Fishman 1996: 73–74)

As the primary avenue of use of a minority language is usually predominantly within the family, its emotional association with the home is direct and strong. When outside the home or the local community everything is in another language, the perception of the minority language as a feature and vehicle of intimate bounds becomes even more clear and powerful. Moreover, as the (minority) language is a language that is perceived to be under threat this link is particularly precious. The weakening or the death of the language would

mean also symbolically losing those intimate bonds with oneself, the family – also in the sense of ancestors and successors – and the community and locality. A (minority) language is beautiful because it is fragile, it is our and it mediates our primary relationships.

Of course, not all Irish speakers have developed the same intense connection with (and through) the language as Róisín has, some might have distanced themselves from it and other were maybe spoken to both in English and Irish by their family. Nevertheless, most of my interlocutors felt that Irish – and not English – was *their* language. As 25-year-old Bréanainn straightforwardly told me: "It is a big part of who I am and where I am from, a connection". Cathal went as far as saying that English "had nothing to do" with him:

> I can speak English just as well as I can speak Irish, but it's not mine. (…) It (English) is not what I hear when I hear my dead grandfather or grandmother. It's not what I see or hear when I look at my family records. It, emm – it has nothing to do with me.

Eilís is only nineteen; she has decided to study Irish at university. She likes English because it's a global language which enables communication with people from over the world, also with a part of her family that lives abroad. "No, I don't have any hatred or anything towards English," she says, but:

Eilís: But it's a different love for Irish. Something more innate, kind of bit inside. More in your heart kind of thing.

Nastja: If you had to describe, what do you associate with the Irish language?

Eilís: **Family, my home, my childhood**. That would all be Irish. And some friends as well.

5.6 Conclusion

Linguistic anthropological research has shown that linguistic ideologies are often linked to one of the following two contrasting axes of social differentiation: to solidarity and in-group authenticity or to power and prestige (Cavanaugh 2009: 6–7). This means that people might value a language because it is the language of social bonding and is associated with intimate contexts or because it accords access to power and indexes a higher social position (Cavanaugh 2009: 7). In the latter case, some authors (see, for example, O'Rourke and Brennan 2018: 2) write about power and anonymity (rather than prestige) to refer to a language which is construed to be the standard, unmarked denotational code in a society, the public language. As it usually the case with minority languages, the values attributed to the

Irish language, as we have seen in this chapter, align clearly with the ideology of authenticity and solidarity. English, on the other hand, is associated with power; my interlocutors described it as a functional and global language. It is also a language of anonymity, which all (Irish speakers included) posses.

The ideology of authenticity locates “the value of language in its relationship to a specific community” and in its rootedness “in a social and geographical territory” (O’Rourke and Brennan 2018: 2). Michael Silverstein writes that “to talk from somewhere is to be “somewhere”; it is to belong” (1999: 112–113). For Gaeltacht Irish speakers, Irish is the language of their community (even if it is experiencing profound changes); it is their link with family, ancestral heritage and locality. Yet, as we will see in the next chapter, they have to conciliate this with its position as the national language.

6. WE, THEY AND THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE

"Cé hí mise? Cé hé tusa? Cé hiad sinne?
Sinne Éire, sinn! Gaeil le bród is brí (...)"[32]
– *Amhrán na nGael* by Méabh Ní Bheaglaoich

Gaeltacht Irish speakers have an ambiguous relationship with the majority of Irish people around Ireland who don't speak Irish, yet consider the Irish language to be part of their national identity. In contrast with most other minority language communities, where the language is seen as pertaining to the group of its (native) speakers and is recognised as being one of the defining characteristics that set them apart from others, in Ireland the Irish language is perceived – also by the Irish speakers – to be a language of all Irish people. *Speaking* the Irish language or being a native speaker of the language has not been used for the formation of an overtly expressed, politically mobilised, exclusive in-group identity for the Irish speakers, due to the fact that Irish has been already "monopolised" by the Irish state and summoned into the identity-building project of the Irish nation as a whole. By this, I do not mean in any way to say that speaking Irish is not an important part of the intimate and individual identities of (native) Irish language speakers and of their Gaeltacht communities, but rather that it has not been "activated", or transformed into a general, openly spoken-of and shared, overarching group classification that would make (Gaeltacht) Irish language speakers a "we-group" standing versus an Other (consisting of the monolingual English speakers) and serve as a starting point for articulating their interests and demands. Gaeltacht Irish speakers have different experiences and feel different from the non-speakers, but this feeling seems to be largely covered by the ideology of Irish as the national language. In the majority of cases, when I heard people in the field talking explicitly about group identity, it was in relation to Irish national identity and to Irish as a national language.

Irish speakers' requests for more efficient state measures for the Gaeltacht are, for example, mostly legitimised by stating that the Irish language has to be "saved" because it's part of the culture and identity of Ireland, rather than by a discourse about a distinct, separate local culture and identity, as is usually the case in many minority language contexts. However, at the same time, a discourse that sees the Gaeltacht culture as different in the sense

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[32] These lines from the song *Amhrán na nGael* ("Song of the Gaels") by Corca Dhuibhne singer and musician Méabh Ní Bheaglaoich (2017) can be translated as: "Who am I? Who are you? Who are we?/ We are Ireland! Gaels with pride and strength…/".

of being richer and more pristine, although not separate from that of the rest of Ireland, can also be observed.

Gaeltacht Irish speakers speak a language which they consider to pertain to Irish people as a whole, not just to them. Yet, it is precisely because they *speak* it that they differ from others**.** This difference is experienced at a personal level, through encounters with non-speakers and state authorities. These simple encounters contradict in practice the idea of Irish as a national language (i.e., Irish speakers experience that not all Irish people have the same relationship with, understanding and appreciation of the Irish language, and that the state, although professing a commitment to the Irish language, in reality functions through English). However, at the same time, the way that non-speakers view the Irish language and its speakers is largely a product of exactly this ideology and of the policies that seek to reproduce it. For the majority of Irish people, the Irish language is an "imagined language", in the sense that it is not spoken, but it is rather spoken *about*; and speaking about the language is what serves, ultimately, as a constitutive element of Irish identity.

This chapter seeks to describe the complex and ambiguous relations that Gaeltacht Irish speakers have with non-speakers,[33] with the ideology of Irish as the national language, and with their own "difference".

6.1 Double attachments or who is the "we"?

Gaeltacht Irish speakers sometimes align themselves with the discourse about Irish as part of the heritage of all Irish people, while at other times present Irish as being distinctive to them; in some cases, the two positions overlap. This can be seen in analysing the interview transcripts. In particular, I noted an ambiguity regarding the use of the words "us" and "our", as it wasn't always obvious whether with "we" the interlocutor was referring exclusively to the (Gaeltacht) Irish speakers or to the Irish people in general. In fact, the referent of the deixis[34] could change from utterance to utterance or be ambivalent or ambiguous. To show

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[33] In chapter 4, I have already talked about the tensions with the part of the Gaeltacht population which doesn't speak Irish and isn't in favour of the Gaeltacht Irish language policies. In this chapter, I talk mostly about the relationship with non-speakers from outside the Gaeltacht, although some of the themes presented apply also to non-speakers living in the Gaeltacht (for example, arguments about the 'usefulness' of the Irish language). Besides this, I also focus on the non-speakers' views of the Irish *language*; I will deal with how the Irish *speakers* are perceived by non-speakers in the next chapter.

[34] A deixis is a word that indexes a contextual variable: its meaning changes depending on the immediate context of the utterance in which it is used (Agha 2007: 39). Examples of deixis are personal pronouns (I, you, we, etc.), demonstrative pronouns (this, that, etc.), and time and place adverbs (now, here, etc.). To understand what or who these expressions point to (who is the "I", where is "here", etc.), it is necessary to refer to the

this, let's look at some excerpts from an interview with Cathal, a middle-aged community worker (as he described himself), who was involved in local Irish-language organisations in Corca Dhuibhne.

Soon after the beginning of the interview, Cathal expressed regret that there aren't more people who speak Irish and appreciate the Irish cultural heritage:

> "You know, in Ireland where we speak *Irish* (stressed). I'm not in any way anti-English (…), but it's just not *ours*. I just don't understand how more Irish people don't understand that."

In the above utterance, Cathal refers to Irish as the language of all Irish people and he wishes that more people would appreciate that. When he says "ours", he means "of the Irish people", not only "of the Irish speakers": Irish is the (real) language of the Irish people, even if they now speak English.

Later in the conversation, Cathal returned to this point and talked about the need to preserve the Irish language as part of Irish national identity in light of homogenising and globalising trends, saying, among other things, that:

> "*We* fought to get rid of the British rule in Ireland and *we* can't just give that up now and just become a pan-European culture. (…) I want Irish people to be European, but I want them to be Irish (too)."

Here, the subject, the "we", is arguably the Irish nation and the Irish language is implicitly considered a part of its national heritage. Cathal here talked about Irish as the national language which should be preserved as every other national language in the EU. He continued by saying that the Irish state doesn't seem to recognise or take seriously its "responsibility to preserve the language". Then, the referent of "we" changed suddenly to signify the Irish speakers only:

> "You (the state's services and officials) are supposed to represent me. I know *we* are only 60 or 80 or 100 thousands of us or whatever, but **we are Irish as much as you are**! I would argue more so, but that's not a fair argument, *they* don't think so and that's fair enough. (…) All the systems of the government need to have within them an ability for us to engage with them through *our own* language, not through *their* language."

In the above statement, which occurred just within a few minutes after the first one, Cathal draws an implicit division along linguistic lines between those who speak Irish and those who don't. Now "we" refers to Irish speakers only and "they" to non-speakers. The role

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contexts in which they are deployed. In this way, a deixis can reveal how the author of a particular utterance or text positions himself or herself. A discussion of deixis can be found in Agha (2007).

of the Irish state in relation to the Irish language is reframed. At first, Cathal said it was responsible for the language, implying that its responsibility came from the position of Irish as the national language. Then, in the above statement, the state's role is presented as being that of providing services through the Irish language for Irish speakers, on the grounds that they are as much a part of the Irish people as the others (the English speakers). The discourse here is framed in terms of the rights of Irish speakers as a minority group within the Irish state. Cathal demands the recognition that, because Irish speakers are "as much Irish as the others", they have the same right to use their language with the state as the English speakers have the right to use their own language. In fact, Cathal told me he was annoyed that services paid for with tax-payers' money – and therefore also with Irish-speaking tax-payers' money – didn't provide for them. As an Irish-speaking citizen, he doesn't feel represented in the state. The language of the state and its services (the "systems of the government") is English, not Irish – at this point of the conversation, there's no reference to Irish being the national language.

The affirmation that the Irish speakers "are Irish as much as you are" and the following sentence in which Cathal states that he thinks they are even more Irish than the rest of the population are particularly interesting because they draw on different discourses at different levels. On one side, as already mentioned, Cathal says that Irish speakers should be treated equally, as English speakers, even if they are only a minority. It is remarkable that Cathal has to affirm that Irish speakers *are Irish*, when only two minutes before he was talking about the Irish language as one of the defining elements of Irish identity. However, it has to be noted that the context of the conversation has changed from talking about Irish at an "abstract", symbolical or ideological level of history and culture to talking about it at an "experiential" level of practice, services and rights.

Cathal returns briefly to the ideological level when he says that he thinks Irish speakers are "more Irish" than the non-speakers ("I would argue more so…"), which is something he had already mentioned to me previously in the conversation (and with which not all Irish speakers would agree). They are more properly Irish because they speak the national language and are more committed to it.

Therefore, we observe that when the conversation is about ideology, culture, heritage, identity and the need to preserve the Irish language, the discourse about Irish as the national language is prevailing and "we" is meant to refer to Irish people in general. As soon as the conversation touches the experiential dimension of speaking and using the Irish language,

these are presented as a separate group in contrast to the rest and the Irish state, a "we" versus a "they" dichotomy.

There is another layer to the division of "we" versus "they". In the same interview, Cathal said he was proud to be different as an Irish speaker. This time, we were talking explicitly about the Gaeltacht. In Cathal's opinion, people in the Gaeltacht tend to take the language for granted and are not working actively for its preservation. He thought that it was not enough to teach the Irish language to children; a sense of what is their identity, an attachment to the place and its heritage should be fostered as well:

> "It's the cultural argument: this is you, this is *your people*, this is what *we* are about *here*. (…) You should want this, because this is *our* culture, and year by year is threatened, and you could be – I always say to my kids, like: "*We* are different and I'm proud that we are different, and I'm delighted, I'm very happy that we are different…"

It is not immediately clear if, in the quote above, the referents of "we" and "our" that appear in the first sentence are the Gaeltacht people and culture or those of Ireland as a whole. We can suppose it is the former, as the theme of the conversation at that moment was the Gaeltacht. However, it could also be both: the culture of the Gaeltacht is also the Irish culture. It is important to remember how the national ideology characterised the Gaeltacht as a repository of pristine Irish cultural heritage. As the Gaeltacht Irish speakers were "more Irish", in Cathal's opinion, because they speak the national language which others don't, so the Gaeltacht can be a place of truer, authentic Irish culture.

It is necessary to stop here to remember that this characterisation of the Gaeltacht as a community maintaining a rich cultural heritage is not only a vision propagated by a certain ideological discourse, but an actually experienced and enacted reality for the Gaeltacht Irish speakers. In Corca Dhuibhne, traditional culture, which is wholly expressed through the medium of the Irish language, in the form of folklore, stories, music, songs, dances, place names, as well as community rituals (such as the celebration of patterns days), has survived to the 20th century and is still cultivated today. My interlocutors expressed a fondness of their "rich indigenous culture", as one of them said, in particular of traditional music. Many had studied or played a traditional music instrument. Most importantly, Gaeltacht Irish speakers feel that the Irish language is the key to engaging with the local culture and to feeling a connection with their locality. Cathal, too, links the Irish language with a sense of belonging

to the community (he says "this is your people") and of being aware of where (in the sense of cultural heritage) one comes from ("this is what we are about here").

The idea of the Gaeltacht as a place with thriving culture is thus common to both the "insider", in-group discourse and the "outsider", national discourse, and in this sense the two overlap. When Cathal says that he is proud that "we are different", it can be safely presumed that the deixis here points exclusively to Irish speakers from the Gaeltacht. Moreover, he later explained to me that they are different, "a bit", "because we are in a minority of people in this country that speak a particular language". Yet, it must be reiterated that he also advanced a position of Irish as the national language.

Cathal, like other Gaeltacht Irish speakers, has a double attachment to the Irish language. For him, it is both the particular language of his local community (as well as of other speakers, in other Gaeltacht areas or outside them) and the national language. In this section, I have analysed excerpts from Cathal's interview to show how this can be seen at the micro-level of utterances and deixis, but similar coexistences or oscillations among the two views are present also in other transcripts (in section 3.2, for example, interviewee Colm mentions Dinglemen who have overcome the *local* rivalry with the *back west* and speak Irish because it's part of the *national* identity). The two aspects, Irish as part of the local versus the national identity, could be taken to form a dichotomy, but in reality they do not. They are compatible with each other and mediated by a discourse about the history of language shift and loss. According to the latter, the Gaeltacht Irish speakers have preserved something which other Irish people (or their ancestors) around Ireland have lost. It is in this sense that they are different. Their difference depends on the fact that they speak a language that others don't, but which all have historically possessed – this is the ideological background which combines the two "we".

This can be seen in the following quote with the interview with Róisín. We were talking about the future of the Irish language and she said that "losing it would mean losing *our* identity". When I asked her what she meant by that and, in particular, whose identity she had in mind, she answered:

> "Irish people in general, because… we all have the same history. Every Irish person has the same history: people who fought for our freedom, for our right to have our own language and culture… (…) I'm not a nationalist at all, but I do believe in keeping our culture and language alive… and spreading it, so that other people, other Irish people would see the benefits and be proud of where they come from, because our history is Irish. And that's our language, so why not keep it?"

Finally, observe that the two instances in which Cathal talks about the Gaeltacht Irish speakers as different from the monolingual English speakers are also one different from the other. The first instance concerns the treatment of the Irish speakers by the state: Cathal talks about them as a group that is being denied the right to use its own language in communication with the state and its bodies, while others can. In this case, the juxtaposition of "us" (Irish speakers) versus "they" (non-speakers) is related to practice (this is, being mistreated) and power (relation with authorities). The sense of difference is a result of experiencing a discriminatory treatment from the authorities.

The second instance is about cultural heritage: in Cathal's opinion, native speakers from the Gaeltacht should be proud of being from a community that has preserved its own language and culture. In this case, a pride in being different grows from a genuine local identity and a sense of connection with the place and the past mediated by the Irish language. By according a special status to the Gaeltacht, the official linguistic ideology legitimises and supports Gaeltacht people's pride in being a community with a long tradition of cultivating the Irish language. However, this ideology also incorporates it in a larger discourse about the Irish language and the Gaeltacht as a *national* cultural heritage.

6.2 An imagined language

The historical processes of construction of national identities and nation states have been widely studied in anthropology, as well as in other social sciences. One of the most influential scholars writing about nationalism was Benedict Anderson, who in his work *Imagined communities* (1983) analysed how language standardisation, the introduction of universal basic education and the spread of media (in particular of "print capitalism") worked to construct the nation as a community to which people perceive to belong. A new common, standardised language, learned in schools, enabled understanding within a wider group of people. Both the school and the media contributed to creating a sense of common history and shared present with a greater group of people than simply the local community – the nation. The national community is so big that an individual can never meet most of his or her fellow nationals personally, yet they all share the same idea of the nation and identify as its members. Therefore, for Anderson, the nation is "an imagined community", a social and political artefact that exists in people's minds.

Irish has been used to construct the imagined community of the Irish nation, yet it functions through the use of English. The *Taoiseach* (prime minister) and the *Uachtarán*

(president) might say a few sentences *as Gaeilge* at ceremony occasions, but they do conduct everyday political affairs in English. The police were named *An Garda Síochána* and the national railway company *Iarnród Éireann*, but their services are mostly only in English. It would be very difficult, if not impossible, to imagine a monolingual Irish speaker being able to function and to integrate in Irish society today.

Instead, the Irish language lives mostly in the collective imagination of Irish people and is part of their idea of what they and their culture have historically been, as well as of their visions about how they should develop. Therefore, Irish is an *imagined language*, in the sense that people have a strong mental image, but very limited knowledge of it, and lack direct experience using it and understanding of what speaking it entails. In a study of literature in European minority languages, Barry McCrea writes:

> Ever since it could no longer be taken for granted as a generally used language of everyday life, Irish has had a dramatic second life, or, we might say, afterlife, as a linguistic ideal, the focus of an enormous amount of projections, hopes, fears, and disappointments (…) (McCrea 2015: 32)

While English is everywhere, it is rarely talked about. I haven't come across debates regarding the position or the development of the English language in Ireland, or its "beauty" or "richness". If I heard Irish people talking about language, it was usually about Irish, and often in English. Moreover, discourses about Irish are centred in the language as it is imagined by non-speakers, while the views and experiences of those who actually speak it are marginal or absent. As the majority has at most a passive knowledge of the language and has perhaps never met an Irish speaker, there is very little understanding that Irish can be simply a language of a group of people who habitually speak it. The discourses surrounding the Irish language are largely controlled by and aimed at non-speakers, either centered around if they are in favour of or against the current Irish language policies in the Republic.

One of the images often accompanying the Irish language is that of its death. The Irish language was considered dying or dead, by some, already at the end of the 18th century (Romaine 2008: 12) and, in fact, this image goes hand-in-hand with the ideology accompanying language shift during the colonial times, which saw the language as bound to the past and to poverty, deemed as irrelevant for the present. In fact, doesn't something dead already fit this characterisation?

The idea of death is exploited in several ways and is used to articulate divergent stances towards the Irish language policy. The Irish language is described as being dead and useless by those who oppose its role in the education system and the state's expenditure for

protecting the language, but cries that Irish and the Gaeltacht will die unless the Irish government takes a radical action for their support are also used by Irish language activists who want to "keep it alive". McCrea describes the issue as follows:

> The question of whether the language is dead or alive—even if such a simple binary is inadequate to describe its situation—is, and has long been, central to discourses about the language. (…) Those who oppose the language's continued role in education and government describe Irish as dead, and its proponents' key claim is that it is a "living language." (…) So whether one believes that Irish is dead or alive, or whether one wishes it were one or the other, in the twentieth century (and in the twenty-first) the idea of Irish is inescapably bound up with the idea of language death. The terms of life and death, of survival, revival, renaissance, terminal decline, and so on, (…) are part of what the language has come to mean. (McCrea 2015: 31–32)

The image of language death is undefined: there's no clear definition of what it would mean for Irish to be dead, and statistics and other data can be used both to claim it is living (for example, by mentioning the number of new speakers or its use in modern contexts such as social media) or dead (for example, referring to the decline in competence and use of the language in the Gaeltacht). However, it is powerfully evocative for both those in favour or against the language and is thus one of the most prominent ideas of Irish as an imagined language.

As a result of the only partially successful policy of Irish revival, the members of the Irish "imagined community" don't speak Irish, but remember a *cúpla focal* (few words) from school. Monolingual English speakers tend to view the Irish language predominantly as a school subject that "was badly taught" and, indeed, school is often the only venue where they had some direct contact with the language.[35] Mentioning the Gaeltacht usually seems to evoke the experience of Irish language summer courses for teenagers (and adults) which normally take place in Gaeltacht areas. These two aspects – the experiences of having had to learn Irish in school and the image of the Gaeltacht as a place where people, especially

[35] It is significant that a trope I usually heard in relation to their Irish language experience is the recalling of the phrase "*An bhfuil cead agam dul go dtí an leithreas?"* ("Can I go to the toilet?") they had to learn to ask the Irish language teacher in school. They still remember it, probably because it was one of the few instances when they actually got to use the Irish language in a real-life interaction. The trope is more than a simple anecdote: it represents a telling synthesis of the attitudes towards the Irish language among a part of the Irish population. It evokes a feeling of constraint, of submission to authority, and references the idea that Irish was imposed on the children by the school system, personified by the teacher they had to ask for permission to leave the class. The fact that it was a permission for going to the toilet links the Irish language experience with the general low connotations everything having to do with body waste has. The Irish that children acquired in school was just good enough to go to the toilet, this is – bad, of low prestige and utility.

teenagers, go to Irish courses – are, ultimately, what contributes to creating a sense of shared experience within the Irish “imagined community”.[36]

6.3 “Living, breathing human beings”

“Some people have that view, even on the island (Ireland), that it (Irish) is not even really a language. (…) We (Irish speakers) are like mystical creatures that speak this magic language. When I see that it makes me feel that we are a minority.” (Eilís)

Gaeltacht Irish speakers have to continuously confront themselves with the predominant (English speakers’) perceptions and discourses about the Irish language described in the previous section. During fieldwork, I have heard several anecdotes about the reactions of non-speakers when hearing Irish spoken outside the Gaeltacht. Although nowadays Irish can go unnoticed or even be confused with one of the many foreign languages spoken by immigrants and visitors in Ireland, as the older research participants observed with some relief – but also a hint of indignation –, speaking Irish still draws attention. Speakers are met with both positive (like “Wow, you are so lucky to speak Irish!”) and negative (along the lines of “Why do you speak this useless language?”) comments. Here are some of the most telling examples from the interviews:

1. (About speaking in Irish at a party outside the Gaeltacht:) “We were standing in a corridor talking, it was amazing, but people were walking by watching us as if it was the weirdest thing, while there were literally people in the kitchen talking in Chinese and no one even looked twice. (…) That was a very strange feeling, because.., why would people think it’s stranger that people are speaking Irish, the first language of the island, as opposed to people speaking a completely different language?” (Bréanainn)

2. “I suppose maybe you kind of feel… different. When you are in Dublin and you’re speaking Irish, let’s say, and people are looking at you. But it’s kind of good. Mam and I were in Dublin last week and we were speaking Irish in a shop and there were about 5 kids in front of us and they were recognising that (whispering) “Oh my god, they are speaking Irish”. They were excited because we were speaking Irish and we pretended we didn’t take any notice at them and just kept speaking Irish. So it was lovely to see that they were so excited, like kind of “Oh my god, it’s so weird, but it’s so cool”. It’s nice that possibly the attitude is changing and becoming more positive.” (Róisín)

[36] This is shown also by the fact that these two aspects have been employed (and consequently also reproduced) in advertising. For example, in a television commercial for beer (Carlsberg 2007), a group of Irishmen abroad recite “a poem in our native tongue”. The joke is that what they really recite is a series of unconnected, very simple words and sentences, such as are usually learned in primary school. Another advertisement by an Irish telecommunications company (Vodafone Ireland 2018) features a teenage girl calling her mother from the Irish summer college in a Gaeltacht. The tagline of the ad is “Family life is full of firsts”, referencing the fact that an Irish course is the first trip away from home for Irish teenagers.

3. “They (English speakers) say things they don’t mean to be patronising at all, but I remember as a kid having visitors in the house and they’d say: “Oh my god, it’s so wonderful to hear the children speaking Irish! Oh, and isn’t it amazing…!” And I remember thinking, like rolling my eyes at that, as a kid, but also at the same time being proud. So there were the two sides to it.” (Síle)

4. “I met people who don’t even want to hear Irish. I met people who hate the language. I found it so weird, how can you hate a language? It has never done anything to you. (different voice:) “Yeah, but I was forced to learn it. My teacher…” – That’s your teacher. You don’t hate the language. You might hate your teacher. There are pretty negative views of it as well, you know.” (Bréanainn)

5. “I know people from Dingle who would be older than me, but not too old – between 35 and 50. I would have had encounters with them. Let’s say they’ve heard me speaking Irish, they have been in the queue, they’ve been buying something and they would have said something along the lines of (deep, mean voice:) “Don’t get too used to speaking that.” And they think it’s funny. And I would say that why and they’d shout: “There’s only a couple of years left”. It’s got to the point now I have two people who constantly say it to me and the remark I’ve started to say back to them is the Irish language is going to outlive them.” (Níall)

In the first two quotes, the research participants felt strangers were looking at them for speaking Irish. While this in itself is not surprising, it’s worth noticing how Bréanainn (in example 1.) evaluates the experience in terms of the idea of Irish as a national language. In his opinion, a person shouldn’t be standing out if he or she speaks Irish; people should be used to hearing it because it is “the first language of the island,” as he says. Yet, it is the opposite: speaking Irish draws attention (both positive and negative) not only because it is not common to hear it spoken (as goes for Chinese, for example), but also because it is a powerfully imagined language. This is evident in the second and third examples, as well as in the opening quote at the beginning of this section, in which Eilís compares Irish speakers with “mystical creatures”.

Both the enthusiasm and annoyance manifested by non-speakers towards the Irish language and its speakers are products of the state’s Irish language policies outside the Gaeltacht and the related discourses. When meeting them, Irish speakers become the targets of the views of the language as it is imagined and experienced by non-speakers: a school subject, a dead language, a language that is strange or amazing to hear. The confrontation with non-speakers’ attitudes can be frustrating and tiring because it shows how different the experiences and perceptions of speakers and non-speakers are. Irish speakers felt their own experience of Irish as a *lived language* was overlooked, non-understood, or even denied and disparaged by non-speakers. Some of my interlocutors described non-speakers as lacking in empathy and inconsiderate of how Irish speakers feel about the language.

To illustrate this, I've decided to quote two excerpts from interviews, even if they are quite long. Síle's and Tadhg's words, which were uttered briskly and with a serious and upset voice, clearly show their exasperation and vividly describe how Gaeltacht Irish speakers would like their language to be seen.

Síle

"I was living in Dublin and, emm, I just got very very weary of having to explain myself and listening to the same things over and over again. Like once they realise what you do, "So I teach Irish to adults" – "Oh my god, I used to hate Irish in school..." And when you hear that a couple of times – like, I've been hearing that all my life anyway – but then you hear it all the time, I kind of think: "Look, I don't give a shit. It's nothing to do with my life. Give me a break from this."

It's like **people think of Irish as a school subject, they don't think of the living, breathing, human beings** who are getting up in the morning, going to work, getting their kids up or, you know, doing their various jobs and that they happen to be doing that through Irish. They don't imagine that at all. They only imagine the school subject, which is fine, because that is their life experience. But that is not my life experience.

So what I always would like to say to people is: "When you are going to say something about Irish, test it first in your mind and say the very same thing about English. And if it still makes sense, if it's still okay with you, then go ahead and say the thing about Irish. But if not, if it would be a weird thing to say about English, then it would be a weird thing to say about Irish as well." For example, if, let's say, as an English language speaker you are over to France and someone says, "O my god, I used to hate English in school," you'll think, "Oh well, that's a shame," but you are not going to take that on as like, you know, that that experience you had in school was what the English language is. It's not."

Tadhg

"I suppose it gets tiring for Irish speakers to talk about Irish. (…) Yeah, it does because I like speaking Irish and I like speaking about sport, I like speaking about politics through Irish rather than talking about the language. (…) And I think that's one of the difficulties with the language within the general population of the country.

(…) And then you have to have the same conversation where "I really liked Irish, but I never learned it in school, I had a really bad teacher" or "I hate Irish and I just don't' understand why that's been taught us" and you can't – For them, it might be the first, the second or third time they're having this conversation, for you it's probably the one millionth. And you have to pretend that "Oh, yeah". And then you have to kind of be – you have to feel like you're a salesman for the language then. You have to get the pitch. "Oh, it's great, do you know. It's a lovely language; it's a part of our culture… You know, I speak it every day" and blah blah blah… And, you know, that's important, you have to – You know, if I don't do it, if we don't do it, no one will. But it gets exhausting. It becomes very tiring. While you just want to live through Irish. Emm…**You just want to live, and that you don't even have to think "I'm doing this through Irish". It's just a language**. But it is *our* language and it is important that – emm, I suppose, I'm not asking other people in Ireland to all become Irish speakers. I've given up on that. Fine. But don't tell me not to be.

You know, there is an attitude out there "why do we waste our time with this; Gaeltachts get too much money; why should we do this?". (…) Like, I don't care if you don't speak Irish, but I

should have – it's my constitutional right, it's my legitimate right to be able to live my life through my language – as much as possible. And it's feasible. And anyone who says otherwise – that's what makes me angry. When other people belittle the language or belittle the speakers, not just the language, but all who are trying to live our life through the language, just rear our children and teach and – and play football through Irish or just go and have a cup of coffee and speak through Irish and just have a bit of craic[37] and… – It's when people say "What's the point?", you know. **I don't care what's the point. It's my language**. I don't care if you don't have a point. I shouldn't have to give a utilitarian defensive meaning of monetarily what it means to the country or… It's – it's my right, that's it."

Síle and Tadhg talk about slightly different things; nevertheless, they both foreground the speaker, the person, "the living and breathing human being" – as Síle says – rather than the language itself. Síle stresses that monolingual English speakers fail to realise that Irish is not merely a school subject, but a language for *talking* and through which people live their everyday lives. They should understand that Irish is a language as much as English: if a remark about English would sound weird, so it would if it was about Irish. Though she later added that this isn't always completely true, as Irish as a minority language "has extra complications", the point is that she wishes English speakers would appreciate that being an Irish speaker can be a simple and normal matter of everyday life.

Tadhg affirms that speaking Irish is his right – a right granted by the Constitution, moreover – and that as such it shouldn't be questioned. He rejects the idea that the language should have a utilitarian value and be economically advantageous. "It's my language," he says. However, it's interesting to observe how in the second paragraph he also refers to it as "our language", where the deixis "our" presumably refers to the collective of Irish people; similar to what has been shown in the analysis of excerpts from the interview with Cathal, he simultaneously talks about Irish as the language relevant to all Irish people and to a particular group of them. Tadhg feels he has to present the Irish language as cultural goods to non-speakers. Perhaps non-incidentally, he describes this with words that evoke a business context ("…you have to feel like you're a salesman for the language…").

The research participants found that monolingual English speakers cannot relate to their experience as native Irish speakers: this is, to a deep attachment to the Irish language deriving from having been raised through it; to the fact that they can easily speak and switch between two languages; and to their wish to simply live their lives through Irish, as much as

[37] Craic is a common word in Hiberno-English, which, according to the Cambridge Dictionary of English (n.d.), indicates an "enjoyable time spent with other people, especially when the conversation is entertaining and funny".

possible, without having to always explain, defend or apologise for that. Furthermore, some of my interlocutors told me that even if English speakers could somehow appreciate this, the question was whether they would be open and interested to do that in the first place. Their assumption was that they would not be – except for the new (second language) speakers who put considerable effort into learning Irish. In general, Gaeltacht Irish speakers feel misunderstood by the majority population and misrepresented in the popular discourses about the Irish language.

6.4 Irishness and usefulness

My interlocutors made sense of the non-speakers' disinterest, misunderstanding, and even adversity towards the Irish language and the needs of its speakers and the Gaeltacht in different ways. Some, like Síle, for example, thought that this was so simply because monolingual majority language speakers generally don't have the opportunity to experience the same things as a bilingual minority language speaker usually does: their lack of interest in the Irish language and of empathy towards the speakers was a consequence of their different background, and they couldn't be blamed for that.

Other interlocutors tended to interpret the situation more in the light of the national linguistic ideology: the fact that, for example, some of their English-speaking compatriots question the "usefulness" of the Irish language was for them a sign that there was something wrong with the Irish people, the State and the Education system. How can some Irish people hate "their own" language? How can they be disrespectful towards those who are trying to maintain their language alive? Do they not value their heritage? As they had to come to terms with these questions, it seems that my interlocutors' perception of Irish as the national language made their relation with the majority's attitudes towards the language even more disconcerting. Barry, for example, expressed it as follows:

> "There are many people in Ireland who hadn't had the opportunity to learn Irish. The fact that they don't have the Irish language doesn't mean they are not Irish. It's not their fault. There are plenty of people who can't speak Irish and they are Irish. There are other people frowned on the Irish language. I find it hard to understand how they can go abroad and, and – **how they can go out into the world and say, "we are Irish," when they are frowning on the most important element of their Irishness**. I find that – I find that hard to believe. "

For Barry, as well as for many other Gaeltacht Irish speakers, the Irish language is an important marker of Irish identity. This doesn't mean that a person has to know or speak the

language to be considered a "real" Irish person, but that she or he should appreciate and respect it (and, consequently, also be in favour of the state policies for the protection and promotion of the language). According to my interlocutors, a person who is a committed Irish speaker is very likely also interested in traditional Irish or Gaeltacht culture and has a stronger sense of Irishness; this can hold for both native speakers and new speakers.

Sorcha, a young university student, wished the whole of Ireland would speak Irish, and she was probably not the only one:

> "I suppose if you are born in Ireland, the language should be yours. It doesn't just belong to us (Gaeltacht Irish speakers), what we are trying to do is to spread it. We want more people to have it. (…) It's a pity that Ireland isn't just one big Gaeltacht."

Notice how Sorcha described the Irish language as *belonging* to all Irish people and not just to those from the Gaeltacht who speak it. We will return to this idea of language as something that can be (symbolically) possessed later, now let's look at another example from the interviews.

Róisín was delighted when she met people from outside the Gaeltacht who were genuinely interested in the Irish language and Gaeltacht culture:

> "Irish is definitely not just for the Gaeltacht people. I love it when people come down from Dublin or Kilkenny or Limerick and whatever and they speak Irish. It's just such – *ardaíonn sé mo chroí*, you know, it lifts my heart when… because they prove to me that there are some people out there who do make an effort and who want to learn it and haven't brainwashed their brains into thinking "Oh, it's a useless language, I'm not going to bother.""

Róisín says that those people who have a negative view of the Irish language have been "brainwashed". The implicit idea here is that Irish people should, ideally, have an interest in the Irish language, because it is, after all, a part of their identity; the problem is that they had been conditioned to think otherwise. Considering the history of language shift in Ireland, this view is not surprising. Róisín, as Tadhg, was against the idea that the Irish language should have an economic value; however, her argument is very different from his:

> "I can't stand people who think that why: why did a language have to have a use? You know, French doesn't have – you know, French people don't question their language and go "Oh, what am I ever going to use this for?" Why should you even question what your language is used for?! Well, it's communication, so you are able to communicate. And there's a whole different psyche to different languages, and definitely Irish has its own psyche and its own traditions and its own ways of saying things and its own humour. You know, as every language does. I think every

language has its own personality attached to it. Or has its own character anyway. And it's so important to keep it alive, otherwise you are just killing an entity."

Róisín questions the need for a language to have a "use", this is, to have an economic value. It is certain that a language does not necessarily have to have an economic value on the market, but can still have a symbolic value (as the Irish language has for the Irish nation) or, perhaps even more importantly, an emotional value for its primary speakers. However, to compare Irish with French is a fallacy: when it comes to the value of Irish on the linguistic market,[38] its condition is comparable to that of other minority languages, and not to that of a national language as French, which is a dominant language of hegemonic power. French people don't even think of questioning the utility of their national language because it is obvious, although implicit; it has been continuously enforced and reproduced for centuries by the French state, its institutions and elites through a powerful linguistic regime. In contrast, a minority language's position on the linguistic market is much weaker, and "utility" is perhaps one of the first qualities it loses in the process of linguistic subordination. The all-present discursive view of Irish as a national language obscures exactly this reality to its primary speakers. It is a sad irony that the history of symbolic domination of French over other non-standard varieties and the several (minority) languages spoken in France (see, for example, Eckert 1980) is similar to that of the English language over Irish.

6.5 Whose voices are those?

In contrast with Tadhg, who rejected the idea of "utility" by stressing that speaking Irish was his right regardless of whether it had an economic value or not, Róisín adopted another argument. In the last quote, she talks of the "psyche" of the Irish language and of language as an "entity". This is somewhat reminiscent of other arguments often heard in relation to endangered languages (see, for example, Hill 2002): languages have to be preserved as otherwise their culture, their particular ways of expression and of interpreting the world will be lost. This kind of rhetoric is, according to Jane Hill (2002), aimed at members of the dominant language community, while it doesn't (usually or necessarily) reflect the in-group discourse about the language. Similarly, a discourse which foregrounds

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[38] The concept of the linguistic market has been developed by Pierre Bourdieu. It refers to "the broader macro-social, economic and political context impacting on language attitudes and behaviour at a more micro level" (O'Rourke 2011: 15). In Bourdieu's model, while linguistic ideologies and practices are acquired or constructed through the habitus, they are determined by the linguistic market.

belonging, this is, the (symbolical) possession of language by all Irish people, even the non-speakers (as in the short quote by Sorcha), is very different from one that stresses the “living, breathing, human beings” who (want to) live through the language (as Síle said).

Yet, in the analysis of the interviews, I have come across both. I would argue that this is because in certain instances some interlocutors adopted a rhetoric coming from outside the Gaeltacht community and intended for non-speakers.[39] These kinds of discourses are prominent in the Irish society, whereby the condition of Irish as a minority language is dependent on the goodwill and support of the majority, of non-speakers, learners and new speakers. Addressing them with arguments that are compelling for them is thus paramount. Remember how Tadhg complained that Irish speakers always have to promote the Irish language to non-speakers and act like “salesmen” for the Irish language. Presumably, he was talking about this.

In his work about discourse, Jan Blommaert (2005) refers to the concept of intertextuality, developed by the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, writing that:

> (…) whenever we speak we produce the words of others, we constantly cite and re-cite expressions, and recycle meanings that are already available. (Blommaert 2005: 46)

In this vein, whose words and discourses was I hearing during the interviews? I would argue that the dominant discourses about the Irish language, which are produced and circulated by the English-speaking majority, are overshadowing the views and experiences of Gaeltacht Irish speakers, as they may use rhetorical devices and voice positions that do not originate from their own experiences and perceptions but reflect the prevailing discourses. In a context where the Irish language serves as the imagined language of the Irish national community, it becomes difficult for its native speakers from the Gaeltacht to make sense of and clearly articulate their own difference and their own relationship with the language. The national ideology and the state policy for the Irish language have effectively gained control

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[39] In the last quote, Róisín could be seen as addressing those people who question the usefulness of the Irish language: she talks while having them in mind, saying what she would say to them. Besides that, the questions posed during the interviews also influenced the rhetoric adopted by the interlocutors. For example, a few times I asked the interlocutors why they thought it was important to speak Irish or why the language ought to be “saved” and the answers I got were much less personal and more in line with the general discourses about endangered languages as described by Hill (2002), as well as with the ideology of Irish as the heritage of Irish people. These questions framed the context of the conversation in a way which, perhaps, made the interlocutors feel they had to promote the language *to me* and to consequently reproduce these kinds of discourses. In contrast, asking about relationships with non-speakers provided more personal answers which highlighted the feeling of being different and misunderstood by the majority.

over the Irish language and left little agency to the Gaeltacht Irish speakers. Largely dispossessed of the control over the development of the Irish language, language-related policies and discourses, their voices often fail to be heard – not just to be heard, but even to come out in an explicit way. Therefore, they sometimes talk of "they" and "us", and other times solely of "us". It is in practice, in their experiences and attachments, more than in their ideology and the discourses they reproduce, that the Irish speakers differ and feel different from non-speakers.

Colm expressed the ambiguity related to the paradoxical position in which Gaeltacht Irish speakers find themselves as minority speakers of a national language in a sort of a joke. He said, in a funny tone – either because he felt uneasy in expressing his own view or because he was mocking others who have that view – that Irish speakers are "proper Irish people". Then, in the same utterance, he also said that they "are the different ones":

> "So, the question was how they (non-speakers) are viewed by Irish people, emm, Irish language speakers... (fast funny voice:) – by *proper Irish people*. They are kind of viewed as the norm. It's not like that they are viewed as anything different. It's like probably we are the different ones (laughs). Maybe that's not true, but that's true to me to an extent. (…) Well, we are in a minority…"

The Irish language is far from being a normative or neutral medium of communication, even in the Gaeltacht. Although it is the native, habitual and preferred language of the people I met in Corca Dhuibhne, and it is completely natural for them to speak it on a daily basis, they have to confront the fact that it is not so for the majority of people around them. Speaking Irish makes you different, be it for the better or for the worse. As we will see in the next chapter, in the strangely diglossic Irish society, Gaeltacht Irish speakers have to daily negotiate their position and their language use with respect to their own and others' assumptions of what is normal and acceptable – and what not, and of what speaking Irish indexes.

7. DISCOMFORT

> "It's a shame that it has to be the case that to speak Irish in Ireland is a source of… discomfort, at least, for native Irish speakers." (Colm)

If I had to find one word to describe the topics I write about in this chapter, it would be *discomfort*. Although only a few people expressed this as explicitly as Colm did in the above quote, speaking Irish in a context where English is the expected norm can make them uncomfortable. In this chapter, I present three aspects in which Gaeltacht Irish speakers' linguistic practices are related to feelings of discomfort and uneasiness.

Firstly, in interactions involving non- and semi-speakers, switching from Irish to English is justified by claiming that, otherwise, one would be rude and impolite, awkwardly "forcing Irish down the throats" of people who "might not be comfortable" speaking it. Choosing to speak Irish means breaking the implicit expectations on what the appropriate linguistic code to use in these contexts is. Secondly, language use can index personality traits: through their linguistic practices, individuals are assigned certain identities. By speaking Irish or expressing particular opinions about it, one risks being judged in negative ways, as an "extremist", "nationalist", "elitist", "fanatic", and even a "language Nazi" or "language fascist" (a term which puzzled me and made *me* feel uncomfortable, given the very different and strong connotations the word fascist has for a Slovenian from Italy). These prejudices originate in the developments of Irish language policies and the Irish language movement outside the Gaeltacht, and some of them present a clear contrast with the older attributes ascribed to Irish speakers (such as "poor" or "backward"). Thirdly, I argue that my interlocutors' concern about "sounding like an elitist or extremist" is connected with deeper internalized prejudices and feelings of discomfort, which are probably rooted in the historical stigmatization of Gaeltacht Irish speakers. In other words, Gaeltacht Irish speakers' self-consciousness about how they might be negatively judged for speaking Irish reveals the persistence of the older ideology which had the Irish speakers as inferior, so that people felt ashamed of speaking Irish. To illustrate this, I present two examples of situations, related by some of my younger research participants, in which – despite their *grá* (love) and commitment to the Irish language – they felt uncomfortable because they had to speak Irish in the presence of non-speakers. In the end, as Seán told me, "nobody wants to be different". Although Gaeltacht Irish speakers feel they have a different experience, understanding of and relationship with the Irish language than others have, no one of them wants to be (negatively) marked and singled out because of their linguistic choices and behaviours.

Seen from another perspective, in this chapter I try to analyse why Gaeltacht Irish speakers – like most minority language speakers – generally refrain from using their language outside their own network of speakers and distance themselves from certain behaviours and opinions that could be characterized as particularly vehement or assertive – even though they have a strong linguistic consciousness and express a great love and commitment for the Irish language. Among the reasons for the mismatch between overtly expressed attitudes and actual linguistic behaviour, Bernadette O'Rourke (2011: 14) lists situational factors, which include the presence of certain people in certain contexts and normative prescriptions of what the appropriate behaviour in the context is. In particular, O'Rourke urges to give attention to the "expected and actual consequences of various behavioural acts such as how a person is perceived by others if he or she speaks the minority language" (O'Rourke 2011: 14).

7.1 "Bullying" with Irish?

"If I was in (an establishment in Dingle), I wouldn't speak English, but I know the people behind the counter. (…) I know they have Irish, so I wouldn't *feel bad automatically* speaking Irish to them…"
(Caoimhe)

Gaeltacht Irish speakers mostly refrain from initiating interactions in the Irish language with anyone who they don't know is proficient in the Irish language and willing to use it. This applies also to their interactions with the many semi-speakers in the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht, this is, people who don't habitually speak Irish, but have a (limited) competence in the Irish language.[40] They use English with employees in shops, restaurants, offices, etc. (in and outside the Gaeltacht) unless they know it is acceptable for them to speak Irish (either because they know the employee attending them, or, if dealing with public bodies, because the law grants them the right to do so). Some of my interlocutors try greeting with a "*Haigh, conas atá tú*?" ("Hi, how are you?") to gauge from the other person's reaction if they are comfortable speaking Irish. "Sometimes you can leave small hints," as 60-year-old interviewee Barry told me, "like a *go raibh maith agat* (thank you) or a *slán* (goodbye)", both to manifest that you are willing to use Irish and to familiarize non-speakers with some basic

[40] Most semi-speakers acquire Irish in the school only. Others are exposed to the language also outside the institutional setting, for example in their family of origin, as in cases where one of the parents is an Irish speaker, but the family language policy doesn't favour the use of Irish. Semi-speakers differ from native speakers – and also among each other – in their levels of linguistic ability, attitudes towards the Irish language, frequency of use of Irish and involvement in Irish-speaking networks. The concept of the semi-speaker was first developed by Nancy Dorian (2014 (1982)) in a study of a Scottish Gaelic language community experiencing advanced language shift, to account for those individuals who were at the margins of the community, differing from both the native and habitual Gaelic speakers and the monolingual English speakers.

Irish-language expressions – to normalize, thus, although in a minimal way, the use of the Irish language at the shop or office counter. In any case, however, the common linguistic practice for Gaeltacht Irish speakers – as for most minority language speakers – is to switch to the dominant language (English) in these interactions, without making any attempt to use Irish or to signal that they would (perhaps) prefer to use it. In this section, I am interested in how Gaeltacht Irish speakers conceptualise, justify and reflect on these linguistic choices and behaviours.

Áine's days were full of Irish: she spoke it at work, with her family and friends, and she also preferred, when possible, to engage in free-time activities and attend events that were taking place through Irish. However, she didn't try to use Irish with those people who were not part of her network of Irish-speaking acquaintances, or outside those contexts where the use of Irish is explicitly legitimised. Let's see how she reflects on this common practice, and on how the decision to speak Irish would be perceived by her interlocutors:

> "Now, we are very strange people I suppose. On the one hand, if I go into a shop and I speak Irish to the person with me, the person behind the counter is, "Oh, it's lovely to hear Irish spoken". If I go into a shop and I speak Irish to the person behind the counter, they feel threatened. It is okay for them to hear me speaking it to somebody else, but don't speak it to me, that's… you know, the feel... Unless they are fluent or… not fluent, comfortable, that's the word: comfortable. (…)
>
> Well, if you go shopping, for example – **I would speak English because I don't want to… emm… to threaten or to make the person at the other side of the counter feel that I am being awkward**. Really, because everybody knows we all speak English, so… But there is this view that if you go speaking Irish that you are simply being awkward or being impossible or… emm, or as they say, *ramming* Irish at them. You know, **pushing the language**." (Áine)

The person behind the counter would feel "threatened", Áine says, if she were to address him or her in Irish unless he or she was comfortable enough to (try to) engage in an Irish-language conversation. She would appear as "ramming Irish" and "pushing the language": as if trying to force other people to use it when and where it was not appropriate. Similarly, other interlocutors talked about feeling like they were "imposing" the language on others and of being embarrassed to be seen as "bullying people" by speaking Irish. All these expressions create an image of the semi- or non-speaker as being vulnerable and experiencing danger and pressure, and of the Irish speaker as being impertinent, menacing, forceful or even blustering. Áine was critical of this perception and distanced herself from it: notice, for example, how she says "there is this view that…" rather than presenting the view as her own. Nevertheless, she said she didn't want to make others feel uncomfortable. According to my

research participants, this was one of the main reasons why they refrained from using Irish in their interactions.

Níall, for example, told me that he had once decided to speak Irish in an establishment that had a sign, similar to the one hanging on the door of the shop in which he worked, saying customers could speak Irish. He said that he was "genuinely curious" to see whether he would be able to converse in Irish with the sales assistants. However, as soon as he started talking, he noticed that they became uptight, and he felt that he was being rude and inconsiderate.

> "People are looking at me and they are like "Watch this judgemental person!" But it's not really judgmental; because I'm not going to turn on to let them know if their Irish is poor."

The shop attendants might have thought that Níall would judge the way in which they spoke Irish because he speaks it fluently and with ease, while they might be learners who use Irish only sporadically. They might not know how to respond when an Irish speaker unexpectedly walks into their shop, and they might feel embarrassed in front of someone who speaks Irish better than them.

Most of the people in the Gaeltacht areas are semi-speakers, and many outside the Gaeltacht can remember some words of Irish from their school years. This has to be taken into account when trying to understand why Gaeltacht Irish speakers feel they would be "imposing" Irish on those who are not proficient in it, if they decided to speak it with them. They felt as if, somehow, they would be perceived as "showing off" their Irish language skills in front of those who have a lower level of ability. They would cause discomfort to people because they wouldn't know how to react to hearing Irish. Some might feel embarrassed about failing to understand what had been said or struggling to articulate an appropriate answer in Irish; others might be visibly annoyed. The research participants told me they would be delighted if semi-speakers – be it friends, acquaintances or sales attendants – showed the willingness to try to practice their language skills by conversing with them in Irish. However, they didn't like to feel that the semi-speakers were switching to Irish just to accommodate them, as Caoimhe specified while talking about her patterns of language use:

> "I wouldn't speak Irish to somebody who would have been uncomfortable speaking Irish. I wouldn't make somebody speak Irish, **just because I can speak Irish**."[41]

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[41] It would be interesting to compare Gaeltacht Irish speakers' idea that by speaking Irish they would be "bullying" those who have a lower ability in the language with the experiences and opinions of the semi-

Speaking English is thus not simply a matter of practical consideration; this is, Gaeltacht Irish speakers do not choose to speak English purely because they know that the chance that the addressee would be able to communicate in Irish is low, while everyone is able to speak English. They address strangers and semi-speakers (many of whom are able to understand them and maybe even to answer in Irish) in English, because the use of Irish would perturb what would otherwise be a short and innocuous conversation. It would influence the very meaning of their utterance, the way in which it would be interpreted by the other person, and also the way in which they project themselves in the conversation and are perceived by their interlocutor. Ultimately, speaking Irish can determine the unfolding of the whole interaction.

A useful concept for explaining language choice and code-switching is that of markedness. The concept was developed in linguistics and later applied to other social and cultural phenomenon, also within linguistic anthropology (Woolard 2004: 80). An unmarked code is the expected code in a particular type of interaction: it is neutral and also more frequently used and is thus considered the appropriate choice in that context. In contrast, a marked choice is "characterized by the conveyance of more precise, specific, and additional information than the unmarked term provides" (Jakobson 1990: 138, quoted in Woolard 2004: 80). Clearly, in the present case, English is unmarked, while Irish is the marked code choice. Gaeltacht Irish speakers have learned (through socialisation processes) that it is generally not "normal", appropriate or acceptable to speak Irish with people who are not members of the same group of native, habitual Irish-speaking acquaintances and that English – rather than Irish – is the expected, uncontested and "natural" language used with semi-speakers, strangers, in shops and offices, official documents, by public bodies, on social media, etc. English is the unmarked code choice in most public domains.

A marked code differs from the norm and, besides that, it is loaded with meanings. It projects a particular image or identity of the speaker, situating him or her in a certain way in respect to the interlocutor and to the wider social field in which the specific interaction takes place. In this sense, it is not just language that is marked, but also the corresponding

speakers living in the Gaeltacht. A woman who had married into the Gaeltacht and learned the Irish language, for example, told me in a casual conversation that she couldn't practice her Irish because the proficient speakers would always switch to English when speaking with her, even if she tried to speak Irish with them. "They don't have enough patience to put up with my grammatical errors," she said. She felt they didn't like to hear her imperfect speech and that it was easier for them to speak English rather than having to correct her. It has to be noted, though, that the fact that she decided to learn Irish as an adult shows a higher-than-average commitment to the Irish language.

positioning or identity which one assumes by speaking it. For this reason, Kathryn Woolard (2004: 81) argues that markedness is really about indexicality. This latter concept refers to the capacity of language forms and discursive practices to index, this is, to point to "contextual factors about speakers, settings, attitudes, orientations, stances, etc." (Cavanaugh 2009: 9).

Consideration for the feelings and preferences of semi-speakers and non-speakers is only one of the reasons (or, maybe, only a justification?) why most Gaeltacht Irish speakers don't speak Irish with them. Even those among my research participants who showed to be critical of the idea that semi-speakers and non-speakers would be uncomfortable if they were to speak to them in Irish – like Áine, who felt that while Irish speakers were empathetic and considerate of semi-speakers and non-speakers, the latter seldom reciprocated – nevertheless preferred not to "break the rules" about the appropriate and expected language to use. Considering this, I would argue that the way in which they would be perceived by others if they were to speak Irish in contexts where English is the unmarked code – in other words, the indexical meaning associated with speaking Irish – plays a significant role in the decision of most of my interlocutors not to speak it. Deciding to use the marked code (indeed, one has to make a conscious decision to use Irish, while speaking English when approaching a shop counter or meeting a semi-speaker generally happens unconsciously) bears a too high opportunity cost: it makes the Irish speakers feel uncomfortable – not only their interlocutors. By choosing to speak Irish, one doesn't only frame the interaction in a different way than it would be framed by English and prompt a certain reaction in the interlocutor (for example, make him feel uncomfortable), he or she also assumes a distinct position: he or she becomes someone who is "awkward", a sort of a "bully" who is "ramming the Irish language" down people's throats. There is more: as we will see in the next section, speaking Irish with semi-speakers and strangers is one of the practices by which an individual might get a label such as "language fanatic", "fascist" or "Nazi". Tadhg, for example, told me that:

> "(…) you have people who want to speak Irish and they would try to speak Irish, but they would feel – and I have felt that as well – that I don't want to stand out, I don't want to be picked on for being: (different voice:) "Oh, you are an **Irish language fascist**" – you are zealot..."

Individuals construct, perform, and reproduce their positionings or identities through interactions with others, and language is one of the means for doing that (see, for example, Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001; Bucholtz and Hall 2004). However, they are not completely free to fashion and project their identities as they prefer; rather, they might be contested by others and face constraints imposed by social norms and hierarchies. In this sense, Adrian

Blackledge and Anita Pavlenko use the concept of negotiation of identities to highlight "the interplay between reflective positioning, that is, self-representation, and interactive positioning, whereby others attempt to reposition particular individuals or groups" (2001: 249). In the next section, we will see what could be considered as a particular example of the negotiation of identities in conversations. This time, through describing how they "sound" when they voice certain beliefs and ideas about the Irish language, my interlocutors simultaneously acknowledge what identity (or stereotype) they might be ascribed by others because of their opinions, but also try to mitigate them as a way to avoid being assigned that identity.

7.2 "I sound like Hitler"

Several times during our conversations, my interlocutors seemed to feel the need to apologise when expressing a stronger stance for the Irish language by adding a comment that would soften it. For example, after talking about their great *grá* (love) for the Irish language, they would quickly add that they, of course, loved English as well. Most strikingly, they also often used expressions such as "I don't want to appear nationalistic, but… " or "I know that sounds elitist, but…" before they talked about the importance to preserve the Irish language in the Gaeltacht, their preference for Irish over English or their relationship with non-speakers. They were self-conscious about voicing opinions that could be labelled, in their own terms, as "extreme" or "fanatic". Some even made a point to say that they weren't "activists" for the Irish language, even though they were very engaged in Irish-language-related activities or organisations in Corca Dhuibhne. Here are some examples from the interviews:

1. "I think it's important to… It's funny because you could make the case – <u>but I can't even say the word without sounding as an elitist</u> – but you could say that the Gaeltacht is an inherent part of Irish culture and that it should be protected."(Colm)

2. "My assumption always is if people don't speak Irish and if they don't go out of their way to learn it, they probably don't care that much about it. Now, they might, I could be wrong. But I'm sure they could relate (to Irish speakers' experiences)… uh, but probably not to the same extent. But I don't want to sound… I don't know what the word is, but <u>I don't want to sound like overly snobbery about it because of the fact that I speak Irish</u>." (Níall)

3. "…<u>I sound like I'm being very nationalistic</u>, but I'm not. Like there are plenty of things that are wrong with our – with this country, that I do not agree with, so I'm not a nationalist at all, but I do believe in keeping our culture and language alive…" (Róisín)

4. (Talking about English speakers who moved *back west* and are active in a local Irish-language sports club:) "It would be easier – a lot easier – if they just kind of learned the (Irish) language or

appreciated that in order to be speaking out so publicly (at club meetings) they had to have the language. I sound like – I don't know, I sound like Hitler, like..." (Cathal)

Although I actually never thought their views were extreme, nationalistic or elitist, these examples indicate that my research participants were aware they might be assigned such positions in the English-language discourse about Irish language issues. In fact, they told me that they often felt they were stereotyped by non-speakers, and they feared how they would be seen by them. If they voiced certain opinions or spoke Irish in contexts in which it isn't normally used, they might risk getting weird looks or even nasty comments. By insisting on speaking Irish (with or in the presence of non-speakers and semi-speakers) or demanding rights or protections for Irish too vehemently, they would project a negative image of themselves.

Irish bears a powerful indexicality: if you are someone who speaks Irish, then you are a certain kind of person. Some associations can be positive: as we have seen in the previous chapter, being interested in the Irish language can index, for example, being a more proper Irish person. An Irish speaker, especially one from the Gaeltacht, is – according to both speakers and non-speakers – more likely to have a greater appreciation for cultural heritage and to be interested and involved in traditional culture. Eilís, for example, told me jokingly that her friends from outside the Gaeltacht probably thought she was "around Irish dancing and playing all this (traditional) music all the time". Nevertheless, my interlocutors overwhelmingly felt that if they spoke Irish, particularly in the presence of non-speakers, they would be ascribed undesirable personal traits.

Colm Ó Broin, an Irish language activist and a member of the Irish language organisation *Conradh na Gaeilge*, collected several examples of descriptions of Irish speakers that have appeared in Irish media in recent years. At the end of his article on the topic, he lists the numerous prejudices against Irish speakers expressed in newspaper articles, television debates, etc.:

(…) to summarise, I've nothing against Irish speakers – they're just inferior, extinct, dead, poor, rich, snobby, dishonest, fundamentalist, savage, sinister, racist, terrorist, Sinn Féin-IRA, Commie, Nazi child sex abusers. (Ó Broin 2018)

There is a remarkable contradiction between some of the traits attributed to Irish speakers: they are "inferior", yet "snobby"; "poor", but at the same time also "rich". This shows the simultaneous coexistence of different ideological stances towards the Irish

language and their intermixing in the creation of stereotypes about Irish speakers. For a long time, Irish has been linked to a backward rural background; this association is still present, although it is not as prominent as it once was.[42] However, what seemed to concern my interlocutors the most was not being considered "poor" or "inferior", but snob or fanatic.

Moreover, it is important to observe that, for my interlocutors, "sounding like an elitist (or an extremist, etc.)" is not linked just to speaking Irish in general, but to certain behaviours and to expressing particular opinions. One is an elitist if he or she demands better provisions for the Gaeltacht or for Irish language speakers, or if he or she insinuates that Irish speakers are somewhat different from the non-speakers. Those who argue that Irish should be preserved because it is part of the Irish cultural heritage are nationalists. Lastly, Irish speakers who would like the non-speakers to conform to the specificity of the Gaeltacht as an Irish-speaking area and who try to use Irish as much as possible – not just within their network of Irish speakers, but also with half-speakers or with public services (by law, these should be provided also through Irish) – are deemed fanatics or extremists. The characterization of "language fascist or Nazis" perhaps combines all those aspects, denoting someone who exalts one's own group at the exclusion of others, has extreme views and, besides that, wants to harshly impose them on others. A similar epithet given to Irish speakers is "terrorists". During the protests about the language of instruction at the Dingle secondary school, for example, an article, published in a national newspaper, compared the school to the Finsbury Park Mosque, a London mosque notorious for being associated with radical Islamism and terrorism (Warren 2012: 318). The fact that those who wish to protect the Irish language or assert their rights as (Gaeltacht) Irish speakers are compared to Nazis, fascist or terrorists suggests that – despite (or maybe because of) all the efforts to present Irish as the national language – Irish people fail to really uphold, in practice, English-Irish bilingualism as a value and to accept that special provisions are needed to ensure that a minority language can be preserved and developed.

[42]The association of Irish, and particularly of the Gaeltacht, with rural backwardness was felt also by some among my younger interlocutors. Bréanainn, for example, was surprised to be told by classmates at university that "you don't look like you are from the Gaeltacht, like backward farmers." "Sometimes they think," Bréanainn explained, "we are all just farmers who are way behind times in terms of how you present yourself, how you speak, what you do." He objected to the stereotype that Gaeltacht Irish speakers were rustic, poorly educated farmers.

7.3 The origin of the prejudices

In this section, we shall consider what the origins of some of the stereotypes surrounding Irish speakers are. How did they come to be perceived as elitists, if Irish has been traditionally associated with poverty and inferiority? It is a consequence of the Irish state's language policies. Writing in 1990, Reg Hindley acknowledged that they have transformed Irish "from the first language of an impoverished and geographically remote population into the modern second language of a privileged urban elite" (Hindley 1990: 42, quoted in Romaine 2007: 19). By linking Irish to education and the civil service (among others, Irish is a requirement for enrolment into the National universities and, until 1973, it was also necessary for entry into the civil service), the policies created new Irish speakers among the urban middle classes (Ó Riagáin 1997: 276–277). Outside the Gaeltacht, the social stratification of the Irish language was found to be reflected also in the geographical distribution of Irish speakers: they are concentrated mostly in middle-class suburbs in larger urban areas (Ó Riagáin 2007: 60). For these new speakers, Irish represents a symbolic as well as an economic capital. It is thus not surprising that they might be seen, by those who don't possess it, as exclusivists and elitists. The idea of Irish speakers as elitist thus grew from a history of the Irish language being associated with middle- or upper-class civil servants, people who could afford to go to Gaeltacht courses and to attain higher education, as a result of the state's Irish language policies, which affected mostly those segments of the population.

In particular, Gaelscoils (Irish-medium schools) have been often described as catering only for middle-class Irish nationals, even if they can be found also in working-class areas and have children of different (immigrant) nationalities among their pupils (Mac Murchaidh 2008: 217–218). I found this idea also among my interlocutors. During an interview, a man asked me to stop recording to tell me, almost whispering, that there were some parents who were sending their children to Gaelscoils in Dublin just so they wouldn't be in class with children of other nationalities. In other words, they were racists. They certainly formed just a small percentage of all Gaelscoileanna's parents, the man said, but they were throwing a bad light on all Irish speakers.

In general, Irish language activists and organisations (which are mostly outside the Gaeltacht and formed by non-speakers) have built on the ideology – and constitutional status – of Irish as the national language in advocating for Irish-language issues, but are perceived as a clique only preoccupied with advancing its own interests by those who either disagree with this ideology or see themselves as excluded from the benefits accorded by it.

Unsurprisingly, the prejudice that Irish speakers are nationalists originates from the link of the Irish language with nation-building ideologies and politics. At the end of the 19th century, the Irish language was instrumentalised by those who advanced Irish independence from Britain. Moreover, later it was also associated with the nationalist and republican movements in Northern Ireland, which advocated for its separation from Britain and unification with the rest of Ireland, and even with the IRA, a paramilitary organisation that operated in Northern Ireland during the Troubles.[43] One of my interlocutors, for example, told me he was asked if he "kept guns under the bed" after he decided to give a speech in Irish during a public occasion; the guns were an allusion to activity in the IRA.

However, nationalistic fervour is not necessarily perceived as linked to political or military activity, but also as linked to extreme cultural nationalism. Cáit, for example, told me that, during her youth, she had met some Gaeilgeoirs (who used to come to Corca Dhuibhne in the 1950s or 1960s to perfect their Irish) who were "very serious, religious about Irish" and opposed any kind of English influence. She heard that one of them, apparently, had built a fence around his house (which was in a city outside the Gaeltacht) and refused to let in anyone who couldn't speak Irish. Whether or not this is true, according to Cáit, such radical behaviours contributed to the negative reputation of Irish speakers.

The historian Tony Crowley argues that the "unholy trinity of language, nationality and religion" (2008: 157), this is, the association of Irish with the nationalist, strictly Catholic and conservative politics that characterised the Irish state for most of the 20th century, had an averse effect on the Irish language, which the policies for the promotion and protection of the language – informed by the same ideologies – could not really counteract:

> One of the great peculiarities of twentieth-century Irish history is that it was precisely the link between the language and a specific conservative ideology which proved so damaging to the health of Gaelic. Rather than saving the language, the actions of the state, the Catholic Church and the language movement placed it further in jeopardy. (Crowley 2008: 156)

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[43] The Troubles were a period of tense political conflict and sectarian violence in Northern Ireland between the Catholic Nationalist and Republican forces, who wanted Northern Ireland to join the Republic of Ireland, and the Protestant Unionist or Loyalist, who wanted it to stay in the United Kingdom. The conflict erupted in the late 1960s and ended in 1998 when the Good Friday Agreement was signed.
During the Troubles, many Northern Irish Catholics started to learn and speak the Irish language, which became for them a symbol of their ethnic identity and was linked to the Republican struggle against British rule. (Crowley 2008: 159). With the Good Friday Agreement, the British state, which had been previously hostile to the Irish language, for the first time committed to its protection and promotion (Crowley 2008: 160–161). Olaf Zenker's book *Irish/ness is all around us* (2013), based on an ethnographic research among Irish language learners, speakers and activists in Catholic West Belfast in the years after the Agreement, provides a rich account of the Irish language revival in Northern Ireland.

The prejudices about Irish speakers as elitists, nationalists and extremists derive from outside the Gaeltacht and are linked, in one way or another, to the ideology of Irish as the national language, or are a consequence of policies seeking to reproduce this ideology. It is remarkable that although these prejudices primary target new Irish speakers and Irish language supporters from outside the Gaeltacht, they affect native speakers in the Gaeltacht, whose primary reason for speaking Irish is not ideological, political or linked to social status, but simply the fact that they come from a traditionally Irish-speaking community. As Colm said:

> "It's more fashionable now to speak Irish in some places. (…) But it was never really in fashion here (in the Gaeltacht), it was just done. (…) It was just life. It was everyone speaking in this language and that's what it is, that's life."

Gaeltacht Irish speakers denied being extremists, elitists or nationalists and felt that they were misrepresented and stereotyped by the majority; yet, there was a sense that these labels could indeed apply to some Irish speakers and activists, who were mostly from outside the Gaeltacht. Some of my interlocutors also believed that there were individuals who were too aggressive in their demands for rights for Irish speakers and verged big battles over issues with little importance; or who, supposedly, choose to ostentatiously speak Irish to make those who can't speak it (properly) feel inferior. However, if such "elitists", "exclusivists" or "nationalistic" people existed, they were not – according to my research participants – (originally) from the Gaeltacht, but some remote and particularly fervent or inconsiderate Gaeilgeoirs.[44] In contrast, Gaeltacht Irish speakers were "much more relaxed", as someone told me in a casual conversation. In the Gaeltacht, speaking Irish was simply "a fact of life". In my interviewees' opinion, having Irish *ón gcliabhán* (from a young age, or, literally, from the cradle), this is, being a native speaker, was very different from having learned it as a second language in school or in later life. A native speaker from the Gaeltacht has Irish "in the DNA", as some people told me. They meant to say that native speakers have a greater personal connection with the language, a more intimate and natural feeling for it; but also, perhaps, a greater legitimacy and authority due to having acquired it naturally from a line of Irish-speaking ancestors – even if the Gaeilgeoirs are now the main actors in the Irish

[44] In fact, although the term Gaeilgeoir literally means "Irish speaker", my interlocutors didn't identify with it. For them, a Gaeilgeoir is someone from outside the Gaeltacht, who has learned the Irish language in an institutional setting and is actively involved in the Irish language movement. Furthermore, it is someone who is "almost fanatical" about the Irish language, not a simple learner or new speaker. In Irish society in general, the term Gaeilgeoir has some specific and sometimes negative connotations. I use the term to indicate a new speaker who is particularly committed to the Irish language or active in Irish-language-related networks outside the Gaeltacht.

language movement. For Gaeltacht Irish speakers, Irish was intensively interwoven with belonging to the local community; they felt that this connection was lost on the Gaeilgeoirs.[45]

The majority of the research participants, even those who were working in Irish-language organisations and were very engaged in Irish-related issues, didn't feel they were really part of the Irish language movement that had mostly developed outside the Gaeltacht. Áine explained, for example, that she "wouldn't be interested in marching and protesting, at least at a personal level"; she would prefer to work on projects which encourage Gaeltacht people to embrace their culture and speak the Irish language, rather than taking part in demonstrations demanding more Irish language rights or funding from the government (even if those are also needed). Yet she, like others, also acknowledged that much has been achieved for the Irish language thanks to the support of individuals and organisations from outside the Gaeltacht.

Gaeltacht Irish speakers' relationship with the Gaeilgeoirs and the Irish language movement was thus nuanced. Although my interlocutors generally saw very favourably the great commitment to the Irish language shown by some of the Gaeilgeoirs, the new speakers and activists, they also distanced themselves from those Gaeilgeoirs' behaviours and positions that they considered too militant. On the one hand, they talked about how it "lifted their heart" (as Róisín said in chapter 6) to meet people from outside the Gaeltacht who were passionate about the Irish language. They recognised that these new speakers had to put a significant effort into learning Irish, as can be seen from the following quote from an interview with Mairéad, a retired schoolteacher:

> "I think the people who come from outside the Gaeltacht and speak good Irish have put a lot into it. *A lot into it* (stressed). And usually they are quite – they are very supportive of anything through Irish: drama, choirs, everything… Very supportive, because they know how little there is and how hard it is."

[45] In contrast, some of the new speakers of Irish I encountered in Dublin and Maynooth believed that the Gaeltacht Irish speakers don't "really appreciate the Irish language" and aren't "doing enough" for it. I don't know if they were aware of the very broad range of competencies and commitments to the Irish language within the Gaeltacht population. In general, it seemed that both groups – the Gaeltacht and the new speakers –viewed Irish speakers as pertaining to two distinct categories, united by a common interest and concern for the language.
Let me note that, in recent years, there has been a growing interest in researching the new speakers of Irish (as well as of other minority languages), with several studies focusing on their relationship with the Gaeltacht and on struggles over language ownership and authority between native speakers and new speakers (for example, O'Rourke and Walsh 2015; O'Rourke and Brennan 2018; Nic Fhlannchadha and Hickey 2018).

However, on the other hand, the research participants also felt that the Gaeilgeoirs' motives, attitudes and views on the Irish language question were, in some aspects, different from that of the native speakers, and could even have a negative impact on the general image the majority population has of Irish speakers. “They do incredible work,” some interlocutors described these Irish language activists, “but they can turn off people as well”.

7.4 The elitist paradox

Reading through my fieldwork notes, I realize I sometimes felt almost exasperated by the apparent paradox of my interlocutors' concern of sounding elitists or extremists. I found that stereotypes that had originated from policies, ideologies and other developments in which Gaeltacht Irish speakers had been merely involved now seemed to have a great effect on them, regimenting their behaviour, and it felt unjust. How could they fear being considered elitists when they have been looked down on for a long time? How could they worry about being extremists for demanding to be able to live their lives through Irish, if they were living in what is officially protected as an Irish-speaking area?

Yet, my interlocutors' anxiety about being negatively judged for speaking Irish or taking a more decisive stance for the language is very much connected with the diglossic linguistic regime in which they have to negotiate their linguistic practice and in which English occupies most of the public domains, as well as with the ideology of Irish as an inferior language which accompanied the development of this linguistic regime. My research participants' preoccupation with “sounding like an elitist (or extremist, etc.)” is not at odds with their historical experience of feeling disparaged for being Irish speakers (from *back west*). Rather, one could argue that an old but persisting sense of inferiority has contributed to their uneasiness about being different, standing out and “imposing” (as they say) the Irish language on others.

The relation between marked and unmarked codes, as well as between marked and unmarked identities, is a hierarchical one (Bucholtz and Hall 2004: 372). The power of or behind the unmarked term is hidden; moreover, it is precisely this power that makes it unmarked, implicitly assumed as the norm. Irish, the marked language, is subordinated to English. However, the domination of English is naturalized, and the dynamics that led to the

establishment of this hierarchical ordering concealed.[46] The linguistic ideologies that accompanied the subordination and stigmatisation of Irish and the consolidation of English as the dominant, preferred and desirable language to use in public domains are those which indexically linked speaking Irish with being inferior, poor, backward, uneducated, etc. The origins of Gaeltacht Irish speakers' practice of speaking English with or in the presence of semi-speakers, non-speakers and strangers, do not lay in the current stereotype about "language Nazis" or in the fear of making the addressee uncomfortable in case he or she isn't able to speak Irish, but rather in the shame of being seen as *cábógs* (to quote a term used by Cáit in chapter 4).

The indexical qualities embedded in speaking Irish have been changing as a result of the policies seeking to re-evaluate the role and the prestige accorded to Irish and of the emergence of a particular group of new speakers outside the Gaeltacht for whom the language represents a symbolic capital and who are often more outspoken and decisive in asserting the rights of Irish language speakers and campaigning for their interests than Gaeltacht Irish speakers are. However, while the traits linked to speaking Irish are now different, so that one can "sound like Hitler" rather than like a depreciated rustic, the fundamental condition of Irish language subordination experienced by Gaeltacht Irish speakers remains the same. Behind the concern about being negatively judged as "elitist", "extremist," etc., for speaking Irish, lurk feelings of discomfort, embarrassment and shame, as we will see in the two examples presented in the next section.

7.5 Feeling shame

During our first interview, Colm mentioned that when he was a child, in the 1980s, there was a boy in his school "who spoke all in Irish and he was an exception". This boy, Colm said, "wasn't one bit ashamed of speaking Irish all the time". This remark prompted me to ask Colm if *he* was ashamed of speaking Irish then. At first, Colm dismissed it. Kids simply like to tease each other, he told me, and they would make fun of you for speaking

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[46] To explain this process of normalisation and subordination, Blackledge and Pavlenko (2001) refer to the concept of symbolic power, this is, a power that is implicitly assumed also by those whom it puts into a subordinated position. Pierre Bourdieu, who developed this influential concept, described it as:

(…) that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it. (Bourdieu 1991: 163, quoted in Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001: 247)

Relationships of power and the processes of marking and unmarking certain identities and languages involve different levels, from the wider social level to the microlevel of everyday interactions between individuals (with different theoretical frameworks focusing more on the one or the other dimension).

Irish; but it was just innocuous and friendly "slagging" (a term used in Ireland to indicate well-meaning teasing among friends). However, he turned pensive and, after a short silence while I was taking notes, he told me about a time when, during his master's studies, he found himself in a situation in which he had to speak Irish in front of other students who were English speakers.

"You have to have a bit more confidence to just – I suppose, to just speak Irish in a group or wherever where they speak English. People like to fit in. (…) Yeah, even in my twenties, I remember one time in particular. I was probably twenty-five and we were just sitting in a kind of a lounge type of place with seats for no more than probably eight or ten people. We were sitting around and people wouldn't have necessarily known… I was doing a master in (an Irish city). (…) People (the master's students) were sitting down doing their own thing, they might just recognize each other but not know about each other or know each other's names. And then another person sat down who had Irish and she spoke to me in Irish, kind of across the way, so... (pause) So I had to *speak up* and I was *quite uncomfortable* with that. Embarrassment is a strong word, but I was quite uncomfortable with speaking that. And that is in my twenties. (…)

I was kind of annoyed with myself at the time. You know, I was like "why am I so uncomfortable? Jesus, what's wrong with me?". I was kind of saying to myself: "Just be proud of it, not f***ing ashamed of it". I'd be different now, I suppose, but... Yeah, maybe there's still some kind of shyness in there, I think, about that, for some reason. Yeah, I still would be not comfortable speaking Irish..."

Perhaps it would have been okay, Colm thought, if he and her friend were on one side of the room, while the others were on the other side. However, the seating arrangement was such that he was sitting close to non-Irish-speaking students and had to speak louder to his Irish-speaking friend. He particularly disliked having to talk "over people's heads", he told me. Speaking in Irish when there were bystanders around seemed to be much more inappropriate and impolite than being overheard speaking English. Although no one of the other students reacted in any special way to hearing Irish being spoken, for Colm, speaking Irish in front of them meant being exposed and vulnerable. He felt he was drawing attention to himself: by speaking Irish he was revealing particular, intimate aspects of who he was, and was possibly being subjected to negative evaluations by others.

In reality, there were no objective danger or any particular consequences for speaking Irish: Colm did not have to face other people's judgments, but his own. When his friend spoke to him in Irish, he found he had to overcome his own attitudes and feelings about using Irish in public, which had been until then largely unconscious. In this sense, the episode provided also an opportunity to acknowledge and confront these deeply ingrained beliefs and emotions.

Bréanainn, who is about ten years younger than Colm, also experienced a similar situation, in which he felt embarrassed about being heard speaking Irish in public, even though he is generally proud of having Irish. We were talking about whether there was any difference in how Gaeltacht Irish speakers approach the Irish language in comparison with those who don't speak Irish as their first language, when he affirmed that some native speakers don't speak Irish because they are ashamed of it:

Bréanainn: Now, I know some people who – it's not their first language, but they live here and they have brilliant Irish. They are really putting in the effort, they speak it with their friends, with people… **and then I know people who – it is their first language and who never use it – never use it in the Gaeltacht. They can speak proper Irish, but they never, never use it given the chance because they are ashamed.**

Nastja: Do you think shame is present, really?

Bréanainn: I think so. Why wouldn't you use it otherwise? Why wouldn't you? If you are a bit embarrassed or ashamed maybe… Because if you have it as a first language, then you can't have bad Irish. Maybe you are grammatically not perfect. I'm not good grammatically, I know that I'm not perfect – I don't care. (laughs) Maybe my tenses are a bit off sometimes… but I don't bother, because I'm just proud to speak it.

Nastja: So why would people be ashamed of speaking Irish?

Bréanainn: Because of the whole way it has been viewed in the past... **It's has been looked down on and… I don't think we've quite gotten over that.** (…) I remember being younger and I got a phone call on a bus and I was a bit embarrassed to answer it, because I had to speak in Irish, you know, which is crazy. But this is how you feel. Obviously, I'd be young at the time… you don't know any better… But yeah, I found that… like I never understood that. **I could never understand that, how does it work when I'm living in Ireland and I speak Irish, it's my first language, I'm very proud of that, but then you ask me to speak it in public, in front of people, and I'm a bit like… embarrassed**. This doesn't make sense. So that's when I kind of started to realize that you should be proud of it, use it as much as possible and just kind of carry your heart on your sleeve.

For Bréanainn, it is difficult to conciliate his pride and love for the Irish language with the embarrassment he feels when having to speak it in public. However, this apparent duality is not at all unusual among speakers of minority languages. In an ethnography of the Navajo (a Native American ethnic group), for example, Anthony Webster (2015) shows how people feel deeply emotionally attached to language and particular linguistic forms, even though they know they are negatively evaluated by outsiders (and, in some cases, also by insiders); while they can be a source of embarrassment, they connect the speakers and contribute to a shared sense of in-group identity. (This is true also for Gaeltacht Irish speakers, as we have already seen how Irish is, for them, connected to locality and intimacy.) It should be noted,

however, that the feelings of discomfort, embarrassment and shame linked to speaking Irish are, in most cases, not explicitly acknowledged. Instead, they operate covertly, influencing the speaker's behaviour, while he or she claims – and, indeed, truly and sincerely feels – pride, love and commitment to the Irish language.

According to Ferran Suay i Lerma (2016), a Catalan psychologist and minority language activist, linguistic consciousness does not necessarily implicate linguistic assertiveness. This means that minority language speakers can be aware that their language is threatened and want to preserve it, and are also ideologically and emotionally attached to it, yet this commitment to their language does not automatically translate into a confident and self-assured affirmation of one's opinion, rights or identity (without being either aggressive and disrespectful or submissive). The gap between the two is, in Suay i Lerma's explanatory model, determined by a series of beliefs or prejudices against the minority language, which have been internalised by both the minority and the majority language speakers as a result of the process of linguistic subordination. These internalised beliefs then influence the linguistic behaviour of minority language speakers and perpetuate the vicious cycle that associates speaking the minority language with awkwardness and discomfort (Suay i Lerma 2016).[47] In a book aiming at helping minority speakers to break this pattern, Ferran Suay i Lerma and Gemma Sangines (2013) suggest that individuals can do so once they recognise that their internalised beliefs are a form of prejudice regulating and limiting their actions, and are empowered to learn a different mode of behaviour.[48]

After talking with Colm, I decided to ask some other research participants if they had ever felt uncomfortable speaking Irish. However, it proved difficult to hear about first-hand lived experiences. Many interlocutors, especially the older ones, evaded answering the

[47] A common example of prejudice, which Suay i Lerma observed among speakers of Catalan, is that it is a matter of courtesy to shift from Catalan to Spanish (the dominant language) in the presence of its speakers, and that failing to do so would be impolite, rude or offensive. I have observed the same type of beliefs in the Irish case.

[48] The much more elaborated and influential concept of habitus, developed by Pierre Bourdieu, can be helpful for a rudimentary understanding of how Gaeltacht Irish speakers come to acquire or develop the interiorised beliefs that Suay i Lerma talks about. The habitus is a system of dispositions, which are internalized by individuals through socialisation processes and inscribed in the body, so that they influence the very way in which people move, feel and think (Bourdieu 1991: 7). The dispositions forming the habitus are a product of history and, at the same time, through structuring people's behaviours and perceptions, reproduce history (Bourdieu 1991: 13) The linguistic habitus influences the way in which individuals negotiate their language choice in different situations by giving speakers a "practical sense" of what the appropriate linguistic behaviour in a certain context is and of how a particular way of speaking will be evalued on different linguistic markets (Bourdieu 1991: 7). With the concept of habitus, thus, Bourdieu provides a link between larger-scale social processes and relationships and individual's linguistic practices, highlighting the deeply internalized and at least partially unconscious nature of behaviours and beliefs. However, a much more detailed and ethnographically grounded theoretical framework would be needed to trace the working of the linguistic habitus in the specific case presented in this chapter.

question directly by talking in general terms about how speaking Irish was (once) viewed negatively. In particular, instead of using the first person ("I did, I felt…"), they used constructions like "it was…", "people say…", thus distancing themselves from the topic. Besides that, a number of other interlocutors seemed to understand the question (maybe because of an imprecise wording) as asking about their competence in Irish (this is, if they had ever felt uncomfortable because their Irish was not good enough) and so answered accordingly. This indicates that some (native and non-native) Irish speakers in the Gaeltacht may indeed feel uncomfortable because they don't consider their linguistic skills as good as they should be. Notice that, however, Bréanainn rejected this possibility: in his opinion, this cannot be the real reason why native speakers feel embarrassed and don't speak Irish. He believed that the feeling of discomfort was rooted in the way "Irish has been viewed in the past", which has not yet been overcome. Similarly, Colm wondered if it wasn't perhaps some "postcolonial residue".

The small number of first-person accounts of feelings of discomfort and shame collected is understandable, as talking about personal emotions usually requires a certain amount of openness and courage, as well as having a relationship of trust with the interlocutor, which is difficult to develop in the short time of a conversation or a few encounters. In fact, Colm and Bréanainn only mentioned how they personally experienced discomfort after a moment of reflection, which had followed an instance of downplaying the issue (in Colm's case) and talking about how other people feel ashamed (in Bréanainn's case). Both of them are also quite young; this might be another reason why they were more open to talking, and, moreover, also more inclined to question their feelings of discomfort. However, their age also reveals that insecurities affect the younger generations of Irish speakers to a much greater extent than the older interlocutors, who have witnessed the gradual re-evaluation of the Irish language (from a poor farmer's language to a fashionable, if not even "elitist" language) and the drastic changes in the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht during their lifetimes, seem to believe.

Finally, I would like to point out the emotional dimension of language practice, which emerges from the cases presented in this chapter. Several linguistic anthropologists (see, for example, Cavanaugh 2009, Webster 2015) have shown how "people nearly always feel what they speak" and explored the intersection between emotion and power (Cavanaugh 2009: 10). However, their research has mostly focused on the emotional dimension of aesthetic evaluations of language forms (for example, on how a particular expression feels beautiful, etc.). In this section, we have seen a different type of situations, in which people felt

uncomfortable for transgressing their own internalised beliefs regarding marked and unmarked forms of talk in a given context.

When we analyse how the use of a language in certain contexts is considered inappropriate and how, by pointing to certain negative personal traits, a form of talk can situate the speaker in an unfavourable position in relation to others, we should also pay attention to how the speakers emotionally experience these processes. Indexical meanings are inscribed into linguistic forms and implicit rules control its use, but it is the individual who feels uncomfortable or awkward or embarrassed. In other words, it is not just about how language feels to people, but foremostly about how people feel about themselves when they use their language in certain contexts.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen how, on the one hand, Gaeltacht Irish speakers are sometimes self-conscious or ashamed of speaking Irish in public, and on the other, they are concerned about passing for "fanatics" or "elitists" in their opinions or behaviours. A Gaeltacht Irish speaker can feel inadequate and inferior when speaking Irish but also worry about being judged as appearing superior. The two aspects are, in turn, also connected with one of the two contrasting linguistic ideologies surrounding the Irish language and its speakers. The first is the old view of Irish as a marginalized language of a lower social class, which originated in colonial times and was linked to the processes of language shift. It was also implicated in the marking of Irish as a code that is not adequate for use in most public contexts and in interactions involving semi- and non-speakers. The second is the linguistic ideology of the Irish nation-state who sought to promote Irish as a national language and to accord it a greater prestige. However, the state policies did not make the use of Irish more normalized; instead, it became linked to a privileged category of speakers.

In the last instance, these two ideologies – or, to say it differently, the resulting indexical values attached to speaking Irish – both have a similar effect on Gaeltacht Irish speakers. They make them feel uncomfortable with their own language in relation to those who don't (habitually) speak it and, therefore, also prevent them from using it in a wider range of situations and from taking a stronger stance for Irish-language-related issues. Being "less" (inferior, poor, backward, etc.) and being "more" (elitist, extremist, fanatic, this is, *too* demanding and imposing) are just two sides of the same medal. In both cases, there is an

underlying sense of being marked, for one reason or another, as being different from the norm (which is the non-Irish, English speaker).

I heard only of a few Gaeltacht Irish speakers being described as “fanatics” or “extremist”. In these instances, the meaning of these terms was overturned to assume a positive connotation. For example, 70-year-old research participant Mairéad talked about:

> “…people that are so passionately devoted to the cause that they are pretty much fascistic about it… (…) **Yet that`s not a term of abuse. That’s one of my favourite people.**”

There was certainly a sense that those individuals might be exaggerating and transgressing the conventions about what appropriate linguistic behaviour is. Yet, they are considered different from the “radical” Gaeilgeoirs because their extraordinary commitment to the Irish language is grounded in their engagement in the local community and in their care for the wealth of the Irish language as it is locally spoken. Although the terms used to refer to these individuals originate from very different discourses, in these contexts they express another, double meaning. They reveal admiration for these “fanatics”’ consistent use of Irish in most aspects of everyday life, this is, for enacting their *grá* for the Irish language and their local community through their linguistic practice.

Dé Sathairn, an 10 Márta (Saturday, March 10)

My host has kindly offered me to come with her to visit Stiofán in the afternoon. When we came to his farm, we found him tending the cows, but he has invited us into the house for a cup of tea. He spoke Irish with my host, and for some time at the beginning of our interview, he spoke bilingually with me: first in Irish and then translating into English.

Stiofán is well over 70 and has seen the community and the language in Corca Dhuibhne greatly change and shrink since his childhood times. His grandparents had lived through the times of English colonialism when Irish “was made a poor man’s language”. It saddens him to see that today the number of Irish speakers is decreasing and that some people disparage the language, despite it being protected by the Constitution and several provisions. He thinks this is a consequence of colonialism, a feeling of inferiority the Irish population has towards its own roots and culture that had been instilled into them during colonial times, and which causes them to be ashamed of their own language.

I have decided to ask Stiofán if he has had any negative experiences related to speaking Irish. He has. “It hurts. I’ll tell you that, it hurts,” he says simply but emotionally, which makes me feel I shouldn’t insist on asking more details. Thus, we talk about other topics. I ask him what language he normally uses when he goes to a shop, a pub or an office. He always tries to speak Irish:

Nastja: Always?

Stiofán: No matter where I go.

Nastja: And how do people react then?

Stiofán: What to say, either they have it or they haven't. I have no problem with that. (…) There are people that wouldn't speak Irish to me, regardless. But that's not a problem. **The onus is on me to speak it.** So when I go, no matter where I go, it would be all Irish. The area I'd be in is an Irish-speaking area.

There is no mention of any people feeling uncomfortable, which is in striking contrast to what I have heard from other Irish speakers. Certainly, speaking Irish can hurt, but it is the speaker’s responsibility to try to use it. If one is going to wait for the external circumstances to change, or for others to start addressing him or her in Irish, he or she will never get to use it – this is Stiofán’s message. “The onus is on me to speak it,” he states very clearly. He certainly doesn’t demand that other people speak Irish, but has overcome any feelings of discomfort and doesn’t seem to be affected by how others might judge him for speaking Irish. He has a kind and calm, but self-assured demeanour.

I wonder if Stiofán is what some people would call a fanatic, although a local one. But then, he is surprised because I’m drinking *tae dubh gan bainne* (black tea without milk) and *gan siúcra* (without sugar). I haven’t added anything to my tea – this also isn’t really normal.

8. LIP SERVICE

"There's no real state support, to be honest…" (Gearóid)

"The state has been the *ruination* of the language… (…) It's just that the state never really gave a proper recognition to the Irish language, not just in the Gaeltacht area, but in the whole lot of the state. They never took it seriously." (Bríd)

"It should be compulsory that you would get to do your business (with public bodies) through Irish. Emm... the way it is at the minute… how would I explain it… It's just impossible, nearly, really, because the state on the one hand is supporting the language, but on the other is not. It's – as they say it here – it's *lip service*, you know." (Áine)

"I think there is a *conspiracy*. I think the laws of the country say that Irish is the national language, the first official language; I think the laws of the Department of Education and Science say we teach Irish in all our schools; and I think nobody expects those laws to lead to anything. Nobody cares if the targets are achieved. There is an unspoken agreement that it doesn't matter. (…) Are we doing enough for Irish? We say we are, but we are actually not." (Mairéad)

"I think if it (Irish) dies, long term they (the state) might be thinking that might save us some money – unwarranted expenditure in translating things to Irish and putting services that nobody uses." (Colm)

The list of quotes similar to the ones above, which express the research participants' deep distrust of the state, could go on and on. The majority of Gaeltacht Irish speakers (as well as new speakers) I met was dissatisfied with the way the Irish state deals with its national language and with the Gaeltacht. For them, the state is hypocritical: one the one hand, it promotes discourses about Irish as the national language, on the other, the actual development and implementation of Irish language policies is very lacking.

Routinely, the Irish government, various state commissions and departments issue documents in which they commit to reach ambitious (and probably unrealistic) objectives in the promotion and protection of the Irish language. One of the latest such documents is, for example, the *20-year strategy for the Irish language 2010 – 2030* in which, among others, the Irish government set the goal of triplicating "the number of daily speakers of Irish from the current level of approximately 83,000 to 250,000" in a 20-year-time (Government of Ireland n.d.: 9). While welcoming the government's efforts, the research participants were critical of both the viability of such goals and the actual will of the state to take the necessary steps to try to reach them. This is just "window-dressing," I was told by a research participant, a way for the state to show that it does care about the Irish language, without, however, actively employing its resources to develop effective measures for supporting Irish language speakers,

particularly in the Gaeltacht. To put it differently, as Tadhg O hIfernáin (2014: 48) observes, there are "doubts among Irish speakers as to the veracity of the state's overt aims to support the language and its speakers."

It ought to be remembered that the Irish language has been the object of sustained state's attention for almost a century, and that other minority languages can hardly compare with the amount of policy measures for the promotion and protection of Irish that have been developed in the Republic of Ireland. In a talk, Conchúr Ó Giollagáin (2016) described the Irish language as "the spoiled child of minority languages". Yet, Gaeltacht Irish speakers felt that these policies did little to address their needs and problems, to sustain their community and to enable them to effectively live their daily lives through Irish. It seemed that the state was more concerned with *presenting* itself as supporting the national language, rather than really supporting it, and that the main role of its strategy documents, laws and provisions was limited to the reproduction of Irish's status as a symbolic language of the Irish nation – an imagined language (to use a term employed in chapter 6) and not a lived language. The obligatory teaching of Irish in all public primary and secondary schools was, according to Mairéad, an example of this "conspiracy", whereby it was important to have Irish on the school curriculum, but not to actually achieve a reasonable degree of ability in the language. The conspiracy Mairéad talks about lies precisely in the fact that the Irish language is generally attributed solely a tokenistic role as an element of the identity of a nation that otherwise functions through the medium of English.

There is, thus, a significant difference between the national discourses about the Irish language and the practical implementation of state policies. It is for this reason that my interlocutors described the state as "not really caring", "window dressing," "not taking seriously" and "paying lip service to" the Irish language. They are well aware of the deep gap between the image of the Irish people as an *Irish-speaking nation*, which is reproduced by the state's discourses, institutions and policies, and the actual reality of an *English-speaking state* that is not too committed to accord the Irish language much more than a symbolic value.

Furthermore, Gaeltacht Irish speakers are dissatisfied with the state also because the latter has often treated the Irish language as if separated from its speakers and the issues they face. For Gaeltacht Irish speakers, the Irish language is intrinsically linked to other aspects of their life experiences. When they think about the Irish language and its future, they actually think about their own lives, their community and their future prospects. The problem of Irish language maintenance cannot be tackled if other problems, which are not directly connected

with the Irish language, but nevertheless affect the community of its speakers, are not simultaneously addressed.

For example, a current pressing issue for people in Corca Dhuibhne regards planning permissions, this is, the permissions to build new houses in the villages *back west*, which have to be granted by the Kerry county council. Several locals, among whom there are native Irish speakers who have importantly contributed to the development of the Irish language and culture in the area, have been denied the permission to build houses for themselves and their children on lands that their families have owned for generations – an issue which has also been brought to the attention of the national media (The Irish Times 2017). At the same time, there has been an upsurge in the number of holiday homes which are rented to tourists or sold to wealthier newcomers and, as a consequence, the price of local housing has significantly increased.

Planning permissions do not seem directly connected with the Irish language. Yet, some research participants talked about them as a problem of *Irish language speakers' rights*. They argued that if native Irish speakers cannot live in their home region, while at the same time new non-speakers are moving into the Gaeltacht, the Irish language cannot survive in Corca Dhuibhne. Clearly, the language cannot exists without the community of its primary speakers.[49] This is thus another sense in which the research participants perceive that the state authorities are paying lip service to them: they promote the Irish language, but seem oblivious of its primary speakers and of the need to sustain their communities if they want to maintain the Irish language in the Gaeltacht in the first place. Gaeltacht Irish speakers thus felt that the state did not properly acknowledge them and that it disregarded their needs.

The problem of planning permissions foregrounds also the very limited impact that Irish speakers in the Gaeltacht have on decision-making processes. Because the Gaeltacht areas are very small and geographically distant from each other, it is almost impossible, for Gaeltacht Irish speakers, to elect political representatives who would advance their interests in the county council or in the parliament. Yet, only a couple of the research participants mentioned the lack of political representation of Gaeltacht Irish speakers. The majority did not seem to consider this as a problem. Sometimes, I had the impression that they implicitly assumed that the state authorities were the ones responsible for the Irish language and the

[49] This concern has been highlighted also by the *Comprehensive linguistic study of the use of Irish in the Gaeltacht* (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007: 39–41), which recommended that linguistic criteria and the long term sustainability of the Irish language communities should be made a priority in making decisions on planning applications, and that the Gaeltacht people in the core Irish-speaking areas (like the *back west*) should be more directly involved in local planning.

Gaeltacht, even if they found them very distant from and disregarding of the Gaeltacht Irish speakers. In any case, it ought to be remembered that, since the establishment of the Gaeltacht in the 1920s, most of the activities aimed at the promotion and maintenance of Irish have been highly institutionalised and controlled by, or at least (financially) dependent on the state, so that the Irish-speaking communities "have lived as 'targets' of national language planners" (Ó hIfearnáin 2014: 36).

In the next pages, I focus in more detail on another aspect that regards Irish speakers' relationship with the state: the provisions of state services through the medium of Irish. Several authors in the fields of sociolinguistics and political science, as well as policy developers and minority language activists, are concerned with analysing or advocating for legislation that gives to minority language speakers the right to deal with the state in their language and allows for a minority language to be a working language in the state or regional administration or in other public bodies. While policy analysis is predominantly focused on legislative and institutional aspects, I would like to highlight the experiential dimension of the policies that regulate the provision of services through the medium of Irish.[50] For Gaeltacht Irish speakers, requesting services through the Irish language is a particular type of experience, which is in many cases discouraging and unpleasant and which requires some determination and tenacity. Ultimately, it is the quality of this experience that shows whether the laws have been effectively implemented and whether speakers feel that they can actually exercise their linguistic rights.

Finally, I conclude this chapter by describing a sense that emerges from the research participants' experiences with the state authorities, but which applies also to other aspects of their lives as Gaeltacht Irish speakers: namely, a sense that speaking Irish entails significant struggle and constant "fighting".

[50] Sharma and Gupta (2006) write about the necessity of an anthropological and ethnographic approach to the state. Dealings with various departments and offices, interactions with public servants and large amounts of documents are a significant part of people's everyday lives and as much an element of their social reality as others. Besides that, everyday practices and bureaucratic procedures are – along with explicit discourses and public representations of statehood – also the very way through which the state constitutes itself as a particular entity or social institution (Sharma and Gupta 2006). Sharma and Gupta (2006: 11) highlight that "what the state means to people (…) is profoundly shaped through the routine and repetitive procedures of bureaucracies."

8.1 “Almost second-class citizens”

The state policy for the Gaeltacht was set to protect the Irish language, yet, until the early 2000s, it didn’t provide Irish speakers the possibility to use it in relation to the public services and the administration. The decades-long delay in the development of Irish language services and administration in the Gaeltacht indicates, once again, how the Gaeltacht was established chiefly to serve the purposes of the power outside it, rather than to actually empower the local native Irish speakers and facilitate their full participation in society through the medium of Irish. The state has used the Irish language as one of the central elements for forming and asserting its own legitimacy as the authority representing and governing Irish people. However, through a covert ideology of English monolingualism in bureaucracy and administration, the state effectively perpetuated the asymmetrical ideological evaluation of English and Irish, and the corresponding hierarchical ordering between their speakers. The exclusion of Irish from the domains of state authority reinforced the indexical link between Irish and inferiority, and legitimised English as the language of power.

Furthermore, the absence of Irish in the Gaeltacht public bodies exacerbated the alienation between the authorities and the Irish-speaking citizens. In the past, when many Gaeltacht Irish speakers weren’t proficient in English, their ability to access and participate in the state’s institutions was severely limited. It is for these reasons that Áine, in the quote below, says that Gaeltacht Irish speakers once felt “almost second-class citizens”:

> “You know, the state the one hand – yes, they were trying to protect the language, but they didn’t provide the facilities. You know, if we were dealing with the state, it was all through the medium of English. So how would you feel – I mean, how else would we feel except low and… emm, almost second-class citizens, because you couldn’t speak the language you were used to?! And when people had to deal with the state, you know, do your business with the state through the medium of another language, well then it’s a huge challenge.”

In 2003, the *Oireachtas* (the Irish Parliament) passed the first legislation that sets rules for the use of the Irish language by public bodies. Before that, it wasn’t specified what the status of Irish as one of the official languages of the Republic of Ireland meant in practice, and the use of Irish by public bodies was never clearly regulated. The Official Languages Act 2003 (the same that caused the debate about the name of Dingle/Daingean Uí Chúis) provided, for the first time, a “statutory framework for the provision of public services through the Irish language” (Ó Tuathaigh 2008: 38), with the aim to organise and increase the

availability of public services through the medium of Irish (Ó Laighin 2008: 252). According to the Act, a person has the right to use the Irish language in the courts and in the Oireachtas (Ó Laighin 2008: 253). He or she has also the right to write in Irish to the public bodies and receive a reply in the same language; furthermore, public bodies have to provide information to the public via post or email in Irish or bilingually, and to publish some of their key publications in both languages simultaneously (Ó Laighin 2008: 253). The public bodies affected by the Act are "government department and offices, local governments, and various state agencies, boards, and companies" (Ó Laighin 2008: 252). The list includes also the Garda Síochána (the police), the post, railway and bus companies, public health services, hospitals, universities, and others (An Coimisinéir Teanga n. d.).[51]

The Official Language Act places particular obligations to the bodies operating in the Gaeltacht. The latter should ensure that, over time, "Irish becomes the default language of service delivery in the Gaeltacht", as well as the working language of their offices in the Gaeltacht (Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs 2014: 26–27). This means that the ability to work through Irish should be a requirement for staff employed by public bodies in the Gaeltacht. The Official Languages Act thus seeks to establish the use of Irish in all official, institutional contexts in the Gaeltachts and provides Irish speakers with the right to conduct their business in Irish in a range of other institutions outside the Gaeltacht.

8.2 Little things, but basic rights

"These are just little things… but basic rights." (Bríd)

Today, Irish language speakers have the right to use the Irish language in communication with the public administration and to be provided a range of services in their language. However, in practice, the situation is very different than that set on paper, as the implementation of the provisions has been slow, difficult and incomplete.[52] For example, Robert, a middle-aged research participant, observed that:

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[51] Each public body has to prepare a "language scheme" in which it details what arrangements it is going to take to satisfy the obligations set out by the Act and outlines what services and information it is going to provide through the Irish language (Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs 2014: 19). A language scheme has a validity of three years, after which a new scheme has to be adopted. The aim of this mechanism is to gradually increase "the volume and standard of services available in Irish" over each 3-year-long period of implementation of the language scheme (Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs 2014: 19).

[52] This was manifested, among other, with the resignation, in 2013, of the Irish language Commissioner, *An Coimisinéir Teanga*, appointed to ensure the implementation of the Act. He was disappointed with the "state's lack of commitment to the protection of Irish speakers' rights" (Irish Independent 2013).

"The legislation always has a caveat to it. Basically it says "you must provide a service through Irish, insofar it is practicable" or some other kind of term that basically means "if it suits you.""

Talking with the Gaeltacht Irish speakers, I heard about many bureaucratic vicissitudes involving the Irish language: from the "classical" stories about very long waits to get a piece of information, a document or an appointment in Irish, because there are not enough Irish-speaking employees in public bodies, to "horror" stories about people who decided to use Irish in the court and presumably lost their court case because of the inaccurate and misleading translation service that was provided there.

Generally, it is inconvenient to use the Irish language when dealing with the state institutions. It requires additional effort and more time than using English, which can be discouraging and frustrating. The research participants varied in their commitment to the Irish language when dealing with the state. Some told me about how they consistently used Irish whenever there was the possibility to do so. A couple of research participants had occasionally even refused to accept or provide documents written solely in the English language when the corresponding Irish language documents had not been supplied, thereby potentially risking to incur into sanctions. For example, Stiofán told me that he had repeatedly written – in Irish – to the Department of Agriculture to ask that some forms, which farmers have to compile every year, be made available also in Irish. He decided he would not fill out the forms until he got an answer from the Department, but there was no response. However, some months later he was visited by agricultural inspectors who found that his farm did not have all the required documents. The inspectors did not know what to do: the forms had not been translated into Irish because there had not been enough demand for them (this was one of the "caveats" Robert talked about), yet Stiofán insisted it was his right to get them. At the end, the agricultural inspectors did not report on Stiofán – but he has not obtained the forms in Irish either, and he believes that he never will.

Conversely, a few of my interlocutors only availed of Irish language services if this option was explicitly given to them. For example, if they got a form written in both English and Irish, they filled it out in the latter language, but did not take the initiative to use the Irish language otherwise.

The majority of the research participants were somewhere in the middle between the two extremes mentioned above: they used – or demanded to use – Irish in written or oral communication with state officials by their own initiative, if it was not *too troublesome*. This means that their choice to use Irish depended on the particular situation, the public body

which they were dealing with and the facility with which it was possible to conduct business through Irish with it, and the alleged negative consequences this choice might have. Besides making a person stand out and feel uncomfortable, getting a service through Irish can be too troublesome if it takes more time that one is able or prepared to wait, if it requires some extra steps, and if it might cause complications or even generate confrontations with the officers. In Áine's opinion, practical considerations often prevailed over Gaeltacht Irish speakers' preference for Irish:

> "The majority (of Irish speakers) now would know that there is an option (to use Irish). But it's an option, that's all… Then is like everything: if you need something or if you want something bad enough, then you don't care how you get it, as long as you get it. Irish or… you know, language is not on top of the agenda sometimes."

For example, if stopped by the Gardaí (the police), a person has the right to demand to be spoken to in Irish. However, some interlocutors told me it was better not to do so. When a driver is pulled over by the Gardaí for a routine check of "license and registration" (in English), his or her interaction with the police is usually simple and predictable and takes only a few minutes. But what happens if the driver asks to be spoken to in Irish and the Gardaí are not able to speak it? At the very least, he or she will have to wait while the police officers decide on what to do and try to contact an Irish-speaking colleague. At worst, the interaction with the police officers might quickly escalate if the driver's insistence on speaking Irish is perceived by them as defiance of the authority they represent as members of the Garda Síochána. The police are one of the institutions that most emblematically represent the state's force and power to control and coerce people. The simple act of making a request to the police officers who have pulled over one's car is a transgression of the expected way in which a citizen has to behave with the police. To ask to be spoken to in Irish is, in a way, a refusal to comply with the power that the police enacts through the medium of English. Therefore, although the driver has the right to do it, he or she has to be really bold to demand to be spoken to in Irish, when the majority of the Gardaí cannot speak it. It has to be added that all police officers stationed in the Gaeltacht have a statutory obligation to be able to carry out their business through Irish, but, according to my research participants' esteems, at present only around half of the Gardaí operating in Corca Dhuibhne have an adequate level of Irish to do so.

The above example of the police pulling over an Irish-speaking driver is, so to speak, an extreme and less common one. Most everyday situations in which Irish language speakers

have the possibility to use Irish involve bureaucratic matters, such as phone calls, written correspondence and visits to the offices of the County Council (the local authorities) and various other state departments and agencies, for example, to apply for a passport, register a new car, get married, build or rent a house, apply for different social welfare benefits, and – in the majority of cases – pay a range of taxes, declare one's income or ask for tax reliefs. The Revenue, the government agency responsible for taxation matters, was the state body most often mentioned by the research participants. The Revenue's provision of Irish language services was considered to be one of the best among all the state agencies. In contrast, the national health services were considered the most lacking.

Bríd, a middle-aged research participant, described what it is like to try to conduct one's business with the state agencies through the medium of Irish. As it can be seen in the following excerpt from our conversation below, using the Irish language in interactions with civil servants is a situation in which Gaeltacht Irish speakers often feel uncomfortable; after all, it requires using the marked code (with all the implications already discussed in chapter 7).

Bríd: Different state bodied organisations are supposed to have a language plan. So you call a place and it says "Press 1 if you want to speak in Irish", so you press 1. And it's ringing and ringing and ringing and nobody answers and then it goes to – Emm, it might go to a voice mail and then you wait for two days for that person to answer, or else it would get transferred to somebody else with very very broken Irish. They can't understand what you are saying, so inevitably you have to change to English. That kind of stuff – **I find it very upsetting and disappointing**. **Or if you do fill a form in the Irish language, they are like "Uh god, you are one of them, are you?"** You know, when you are supposed to have the right to do this. Or if you go to place and they say "Name, please?" and you say "Brid Ní B…," and they say "B. (English version of surname), is it?". – "No, it's Ní B…." – "But it's B. in English, is it?" And I'm like "Oh my god, would you say that to a French person if they came in?" It really annoys me. Why do you do that?! I get that all the time, they just feel the need to say it. (…) I think there are lots of rights written into law. Whether you can feel that you can actually request those rights, you might feel…. One of the rights is that if the garda stops you, you are allowed to demand that they speak to you in Irish. It can cause a lot of hassle, depending on where you are. So, **you are told you have these rights, but then executing these rights, you don't feel a 100% comfortable in doing so**. (…) So people get really disappointed, they keep trying in and eventually they lose courage and they say "F***, I'll just do it in English".

Nastja: So do you think people are requesting things in Irish? Or not?

Bríd: No. I think you have to be a very special type of person to do it. **Most people are kind of apathetic**. (…) Because **it's easier to do things in English**, so why would you bother? So that's what happens. **In that sense the state has failed us. It should be as easy choice to do as either/or**. Not complicated, not like "Oh, hang on a second now, I'll get John for you", when I could do it just here with you, but now we have to get John and it's all this big thing and I'm feeling uncomfortable. I'm

feeling like I'm asking something that's so awkward when you have a sign there saying I can do this in Irish.

The general low quality of Irish language state services – the frequent delays, bad translations of documents into Irish, and occasional hostile responses of officers – can be explained by the lack of appropriately qualified civil servants able to work through the Irish language. However, for Gaeltacht Irish speakers, it represents yet another confirmation of the hypocritical attitude of the state authorities towards the Irish language. For example, Gearóid, who is not at all afraid of demanding a consistent use of the Irish language from the state and has put significant energies into this quest, described the partial implementation of the statuary provisions for the Irish language as a farce. In the following quote, he expresses his frustration with the tokenistic deployment of Irish on the website of a state agency:

"When I asked them about getting the information they said "Look at our website". And I said "Do you have it up in Irish?" and they said "Yes, there's an Irish version". I went to the Irish version of the website: all it had was the home page! Absolutely nothing behind it! And the English version was absolutely full of documents of all sorts. So, I mean, this is a game of hide and seek and shadow and so on… And most people don't bother doing it, it takes a lot of time. **I do it because I think if it's not done the whole thing is a farce. It is a farce as it is**."

8.3 Problems with names

"That's another question I hate: "What's that in English?" They all ask that…
That's my name!" (Róisín)

In the quote presented in the previous sections, Bríd mentioned the problematic use of Irish language names and surnames in official documents. She, like many other research participants, is often asked what her name is in English. To illustrate this, let's think of some common Irish surnames, like Kennedy and Sullivan. These surnames are actually English versions of the original Irish variants, Ó Cinnéide or Ní Chinnéide, and Ó Súilleabháin or Ní Shúilleabháin, where the first form is used for men and the second for women. Some Irish names of Christian origin also have their corresponding version in English: for example, Máire is Mary, and Seán is John. The majority of my research participants opt to use the Irish versions of their given names and surnames in official documents (passports, driving licenses, credit cards…). In fact, it is not entirely correct to talk about "Irish versions", as for some of my interlocutors, these were *the only* forms which they recognised as being their proper name and which they consistently used in all circumstances. They rejected the idea that their names

and surnames could be "translated" from Irish to English and were exasperated by the question, "what's that in English?" they were frequently asked by both civil servants and other English speakers when they introduced themselves.

Middle-aged and older research participants had their names and surnames written in English on their birth certificates, as they were born in a time when very few parents felt they could ask for their children's names to be registered in Irish. This led to a kind of "double identity", as Áine said, whereby the name they identified with and which they used in their daily lives was not the same name by which they existed for the state authorities. Although many still use the English versions in legal documents, several decided to legally change their names to the Irish versions as adults. For them, using the original Irish form of their name is a way to attest their identity as Irish speakers. Mairéad, for example, expressed that as follows:

> "The thing that I give you my name in Irish, I think that's actually quite fundamental, because that's a statement. You don't have to say anything, but as soon as your name is given in Irish, people know that Irish is… an element of your life."

However, Gaeltacht Irish speakers often found that civil servants did not understand or know how to spell Irish names and surnames, or that their computer systems did not allow them to use the *síneadh fada*, the acute accent, which is an essential element of Irish orthography, but is not generally used in English. If a name is written without the acute accent, its pronunciation and its meaning are changed. Besides that, inconsistencies between the ways in which names are written on different documents can cause several problems. For example, I heard about people who were not allowed to board a flight because their surnames were written with a *síneadh fada* on their passports, but not on the boarding passes.

8.4 Fighting

> "Sometimes I wonder what it would have been like to have been born into a house where language is just language and not something that you had to continually fight for the right to use it in the way you wanted it to be used." (Bríd)

From Gaeltacht Irish speakers' accounts about state services in the Irish language, a general sense that to use Irish requires significant struggles and a constant effort emerges. I remember in particular a conversation I had with Róisín. We were sitting at the kitchen table in her parents' house and, just while she was telling me about a letter of complaint she had recently written in Irish to a public body, her mother entered the room. For some minutes, mother and daughter talked energetically about the Irish language situation. They recalled

several episodes in which they and their acquaintances had successfully or unsuccessfully used Irish in relation to the state. It was clear that this was an issue about which the family talked very often, sharing indignation at the frequent complications that using Irish entailed, or surprise, such as when Róisín received a quick and positive reply, in Irish, to her letter of complaint. In the end, Róisín's mother observed:

Mother: You kind of have to fight for Irish, don't you?
Róisín: You do.
Mother: **You have to fight every step of the way.**

Although this sense of "fight" was foregrounded especially when talking about Gaeltacht Irish speakers' relationship with the state, this trope applies also to other aspects of Gaeltacht Irish speakers' experiences. For example, Mairéad told me that:

"There is never enough opportunities (to speak Irish in Corca Dhuibhne). It is a minority language. It is **a language that is kind of *fighting* to keep its presence alive**."

The extent to which speaking Irish or being an Irish speaker is experienced as a "fight" is especially evident in an excerpt from a conversation with Fiona, a middle-aged interviewee. I asked her about her experience with the provision of state services through the Irish language and she connected it to two other aspects in which Irish entails particular struggle. These are the transmission of the language to the younger generations and the effort to counteract codeswitching to English. In other words, to simply continue to speak (good) Irish is, in itself, already a "fight".

Fiona: If I ring the County council or something and somebody answers, I probably will try and speak Irish to them. But then they'll say "Oh, I don't have Irish, but I can call someone that does speak Irish," so it's a whole lot other couple of steps and you are like: "Look, I've five minutes to make this phone call, it's fine, just speak English to me." **It's always the hardest option. You always have to go that extra mile if you want to do anything through Irish.** And that's multiplied by a hundred for people who want to raise their children through Irish, even in the Gaeltacht. (…) And now I've noticed that my neighbours – they would speak English together. Well, they'll speak a mixture, but it's heading towards English. You know, these are people who have worked outside and have returned (to the Gaeltacht)… (…) **I think people get just tired.** You know, you just get tired, **it feels like a big fight all the time**. It feels like you are pushing against this big thing all the time. So sometimes you are just (different voice:) "Uh, oh my god, let's just speak English." You know, nobody says that, but in your head you're just – it's just easier sometimes. So, yeah, I've noticed that.

Nastja: What is particularly tiring for you, in this situation?

Fiona: **You just feel like you are fighting**. **Feel like you are making a big effort all the time when you want to speak Irish to certain people or in certain areas, certain situations**. (…) Sometimes it is just more of an effort to speak Irish.

The "fight" Róisín, her mother, Fiona and other research participants talked about is at the same time a decision, an experience and, especially, a feeling. Firstly, it is a decision because Gaeltacht Irish speakers have to continuously reaffirm their choice to use Irish in their daily lives. For example, availing of state services through English is much simpler, yet they choose to communicate with the public bodies through Irish and take all the necessary steps to do so.

Secondly, the "fight" for Irish is an experience in the sense that Gaeltacht Irish speakers often find themselves in situations in which they have to endure some kind of pressure. For example, they might have to interact with civil servants who, probably without meaning to be rude or hostile, ask them why they don't just use English or comment that it is difficult to spell their name with the *síneadh fada*. Cathal described these as:

"(…) small, subtle little ways of making you feel like you are a nuisance for wanting to speak your own language in a country."

Although these can seem insignificant episodes, similar instances occur quite frequently. Therefore, Gaeltacht Irish speakers' experience that their decision to use Irish is continuously disregarded, misunderstood, questioned or opposed. In this sense, it could be said that they find themselves involved in "fights" which they have not intended to start, but which are triggered by the mere fact that they try to live their life through Irish.

Finally, the above two aspects combine to form a sense of "fighting" as a personal and intimate feeling. Many Irish speakers feel that having to constantly assert the right to use the Irish language is a tiring and never-ending battle. It can be annoying, upsetting and disheartening. "There's only so much fighting you can do," Áine told me when she was explaining me why people sometimes prefer not to request public services through the medium of Irish. In the quote opening this section, Bríd wonders what it would have been like to be born into a house where "language is just a language", something you don't have to constantly fight for. Yet, despite this sombre feeling, she and many other Gaeltacht Irish speakers continue to reaffirm their very personal commitment to the Irish language throughout their daily lives.

9. THE YOUTH

> "Now there is a new mentality coming with younger people. (…) It is now gaining sophistication to be able to speak Irish. And that's all over Ireland…" (Cáit)

When, towards the end of my first stay in Corca Dhuibhne, in March, I went through my list of the research participants I had already interviewed, I realised there were no young people listed. Some of my interlocutors were in their 30s, but I had not met young adults between the ages of 18 and 30. The majority of the young generation was working or studying elsewhere and, in any case, young people were seldom among those my hosts or research participants recommended me to interview.

A conversation I had with Colm was very telling in this regard. We were talking about where you could speak Irish in Corca Dhuibhne and I discovered that he connected seeking out opportunities to speak Irish with meeting older people. Colm felt that he should take more time to visit older relatives and elderly neighbours, with whom he could talk in "nice Irish", while he didn't expect the majority of people of his age (this is, around 35) or younger to be willing and able to converse in Irish. Indeed, due to a weak intergenerational transmission and increasing numbers of semi-speakers and monolingual English speakers, it is more difficult to meet people who have good Irish and/or are interested in speaking it among the younger age group than among the older. Nevertheless, during my second stay in Corca Dhuibhne, I managed to meet some young and passionate Irish speakers. They come from Irish-speaking families, and in many cases, their choices of studies (such as Irish language or Education) and occupations reflects their commitment to the Irish language and attachment to the local community. While I have already introduced my younger research participants (Róisín, Caoimhe, Bréanainn, Níall, Eilís and Sorcha) in previous chapters, in this one I present those experiences and attitudes that were particular for the young generation.

9.1 "We always speak English to each other"

Déardaoin, an 28 Meitheamh (Thursday, June 28)

After having recorded an interview with Bréanainn in the afternoon, I was invited to join him and his friends for a drink in a pub *back west*. The evening was unusually warm, so we decided to head outside and sit at one of the tables that were overlooking a sandy beach and a small pier with a few fishermen's boats. It was clear that many other people had had the same idea. Bréanainn stopped to exchange greetings and small talk with several of them, and

others approached our table to do the same. The majority of these people were older and their interactions with Bréanainn took place in Irish. While I was observing them, I felt I had the confirmation of what he had been repeatedly telling me during our interview: that he is very attached to his community and especially proud of where he comes from (*the Gaeltacht*, he would never say that he is from Dingle). "I am probably most proud that I am a native Irish speaker from the Gaeltacht," he told me.

Therefore, I was surprised that the conversation at our table was in English only. Bréanainn's two friends were from his same village *back west* and they told me that they also speak Irish. Yet, they said no word in Irish to each other during the whole night, even when they were talking one-to-one and I was not directly involved in the conversation. Worried that I was maybe the reason why everyone at the table had switched to English, I asked Bréanainn if they were speaking English because of me and if they would have spoken Irish otherwise. "No," he explained to me, giggling slightly, "we always speak English to each other".

Bréanainn was aware of the strangeness of the situation. In fact, a few hours before, during our interview, he had mentioned to me that he had a friend who had "perfect Irish":

> "But we don't speak it unless someone else comes, a third person, to speak Irish. We're just mental… (…) I think about it, you know…"

Later I discovered that while one of Bréanainn's friends I met that evening comes from an Irish-speaking family, the other does not. Since the time they have gone to school together, English has been the dominant language among the three of them, although two of them are native Irish speakers and the third is able to speak it (he is a semi-speaker). While Bréanainn didn't question speaking English with the friend from English-speaking background (he just assumed that he wasn't interested in speaking Irish), he had started to find it unsettling to speak English with the other friend, who he knew spoke Irish at home. The two usually spoke English with each other even when they were alone. Maybe, Bréanainn wondered, his friend also thought that they should "make more of an effort" to speak Irish together, as he did, but he had never talked about that with him. I had the impression that the idea of bringing up this subject with his friend made Bréanainn somehow uncomfortable: it required discussing personal linguistic preferences and commitments, which was not something he and his friends were used to openly reflect about, and which might compromise their relationship. Rather than risk creating an awkward and tense

situation, it was easier for Bréanainn to comply with the established linguistic practice and continue speaking English. I remembered how Caoimhe had told me:

> "Obviously, I have friends that have zero interest in Irish. Not that they refuse to speak in Irish, but they don't care about it. But we don't talk about it, because we probably wouldn't be friends if we did."

Old habits die hard – this is my research participants' popular explanation for why many young native Irish speakers speak English to each other. The dominant language of their peer network is English and they have grown accustomed to speaking it with each other. It has been shown that:

> (…) those who learn Irish on outside the home setting exert a stronger effect on both language ability and language use patterns of native speakers of Irish than native speakers have on learners of the language. (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007: 11)

The presence of a person who doesn't speak Irish as the home language can dictate the use of English among a whole group of children or teenagers, also among those whose first language is Irish. The *Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht* (Giollagáin et al. 2007: 11) reported that around 46% of children in the *core* Gaeltacht areas (this is, in the case of Corca Dhuibhne, the area *back west*) started school with little and no knowledge of Irish. It is clear, then, that school, especially the secondary school in Dingle, is a place of English-language socialisation. Peer pressure can be a powerful factor in language shift for a young person who strives to be accepted by schoolmates and friends. Róisín, who was only some years older than Bréanainn, observed that:

> "I think it's a funny relationship we had with it (the Irish language) – or I had anyway, I can't really speak for the rest, but – that I spoke it because it was my language – that was my first language and that was my first language of communication. And then… I think I went away from it when I was in primary school because there was that stigma or whatever against it, like (different voice:) "That's not cool"."

Although nowadays children, teenagers and young adults communicate in English with each other to a higher extent than in the past, socialisation through the English language is not an exclusive feature of the current younger generations in West Kerry. Mairéad, a seventy-year-old research participant, reported noticing it among her own peers when she was a teenager in the 1960s. She had been sent to an Irish language boarding school; when

she came home during the summer, she found that her friends in the village had started speaking more English than Irish to each other. They were going to dances in Dingle, Mairéad remembers, where you had to speak English to be fashionable.

Nora, who was about the same age as Mairéad, had a vivid memory of a time when she heard her older son (A.) and his cousin (C.) talk in English with a neighbour's son with whom they were attending secondary school together:

"Some years back – it's 20, maybe nearly 30 years ago that this happened – our son A. was playing – he was a football player. And this particular night they were getting medals and we were bringing them to wherever this function was. And A. and C., his cousin, and B., who was still in primary school here, and another neighbours' son – they were all in the back seat. And this neighbours' son, he spoke to – the three of them at this stage were in the secondary school in Dingle – so he spoke English to A. and C. and he spoke Irish to B... Because they were in school, and that was what they were used to speaking to each other in school. (...) In their early teenage years, the language didn't matter at all. **(…) I always remember that he spoke Irish to B., the child who was still going to primary school, and then he spoke English to the others."**

For Nora's neighbours' son, younger children were to be talked to in Irish, while his peers from secondary school in English. It is remarkable that the choice of the appropriate code to use when addressing a person can depend on his or her age. So, for example, a teenager might speak English with a friend, but address the friend's parents in Irish, the implicit assumption being that Irish is the language of communication with the older generation and, especially, with the authorities (parents and teachers).

What happened with those teenagers from Irish-speaking families who switched to speaking English within their peer group twenty or even fifty years ago? Some had probably continued to follow the differentiation pattern of speaking Irish with the older generations and English with their peers and thus contributed to the language shift in West Kerry. This is often how a language ceases to be a community language: gradually, as the generations pass. The oldest speakers might not even fully realise the intensity of the change happening around them, as they primary socialise within their own age cohort in their own language, and are also addressed by younger people in the minority language. However, when their grandchildren reach their age, they won't be talking to each other in their language anymore.

Nevertheless, other teenagers do switch back to speaking Irish with each other as they grow up. Fiona, who is just over forty, is such an example. She is genuinely passionate about the Irish language and the Gaeltacht culture. She even admitted that she can't stand it when she addresses local people (especially younger people) in Irish and they answer back in

English. However, when she was a teenager, she behaved in very much the same way. She revealed that at the time she refused to speak Irish:

> "I spoke English to my friends and I spoke English to my parents. Even though they spoke Irish to me all the time, I answered them in English. (…) I think I was embarrassed to speak Irish because whenever I'd speak it, I'd have something wrong. (…) And so I used to get really frustrated and it was just easier to speak English. And also because English was more fashionable and more available…."

That changed completely when she was in her 20s:

> "I realised that I was able to speak the language and it wasn't, emm, a bother to speak it and that I was well able to do it. (…) I became really proud of my culture and, yeah, more of an advocate. (…) With my schoolmates, a funny thing happened to us. Like we all spoke English at school and then, when we got into our twenties we all started speaking Irish together. I mean, we speak a mixture of it now, when we get together. (…) It was kind of uncomfortable for the first couple of conversation, but then it just became more normal."

For Fiona, switching back to Irish was a conscious decision, which gradually grew from a greater awareness of the importance of cultivating Irish. It required an effort to overcome the habit of speaking English and embrace the strangeness of speaking Irish in a context where she wasn't used to, as well as the embarrassment caused by the fact that she found, at times, easier to have a casual chat in English rather than in her native language.

9.2 Reevaluating Irish as a cultural capital

Fiona thought that her love for the Irish language "was something that was always there and was instilled by my parents". However, her appreciation of and commitment to it were, as she told me, kindled by a casual encounter with a foreigner who had learned the Irish language. The meeting with an outsider who was enthusiastic about her language and had got at lengths to learn it encouraged her to embrace her cultural heritage, reevaluate her attitudes towards the Irish language and question her linguistic practices.

Similarly, for my younger research participants, seeing the Irish language – as well as their own condition as native speakers – through the eyes of certain people from outside the Gaeltacht had a significant impact on their own appreciation of it. In particular, there were two main ways in which their attitude towards the Irish language had been formed by experiences outside the Gaeltacht. Firstly, through encounters with young people who were enthusiastic learners and Gaeilgeoirs and by attending events where the Irish language was

used in a fun, fresh and modern context, they changed their perception of Irish as a language pertaining to the older generation only to that of Irish as an attractive language of a dedicated youthful “subculture”. Secondly, the appreciation with which they were met in the Irish-speaking networks outside the Gaeltacht because of their status as Gaeltacht native speakers, coupled with the realisation that the knowledge of the Irish language among the Irish population is generally very low, made them aware that they were bearers of precious cultural capital.

It has to be noted that the majority of people whom young Gaeltacht Irish speakers meet when they leave Corca Dhuibhne, are (still) indifferent to the Irish language – some are even hostile to it –, and, at times, my interlocutors (especially those who studied Irish in college) have to argue about why they speak (or study) a “useless language” and face the stereotype of being a Gaeltacht “culchie”. However, the support of Gaeilgeoirs’ networks, the new fashionable venues of use of Irish and the possibility to convert it into a marketable asset positively affect young Gaeltacht Irish speakers’ sense of their own worth and motivate them to cultivate their language. This is a striking contrast with the negative experiences of previous generations who, not so long ago, outright found that the language was disparaged and of “no use” to them as they left their Gaeltacht communities.[53]

During her first year at university, Eilís visited the *Oireachtas na Samhna*, a festival dedicated to the Irish language, music and dance, where Irish language speakers and Irish culture enthusiasts of different ages and backgrounds (both Gaeltacht and new speakers) gather every year. For Eilís, attending the festival signified a shift of her perception of the Irish language:

“That was the first time I realised there is this whole life... You know, I **had thought that Irish is sometimes just a subject or just what we spoke at home**. But **I didn't realise that there were all people of all ages and you could do...** (lower voice:) **like lots of *fun things*** (laughs) **through Irish.** I met a few that were in my university there and then after that, I went out with them, and then we just became friends. We always speak Irish together now. It was really great, I felt so... Because I had been disheartened to go a few times and then to meet people my own age rather than older

[53] I have often heard Gaeltacht people lamenting that Irish didn’t (and, for some, still doesn’t really) have “practical value”: one “couldn’t really go far with it”, both in the literal and metaphorical sense. The practical value they talk about is, using Pierre Bourdie’s (1991) terminology, cultural and symbolic capital. On the linguistic markets that really mattered, their language was devalued: Irish could not be converted into economic capital and provide them with a satisfactory means of subsistence and socioeconomic advancement. Currently, however, this perception has been changing, especially among the younger Irish speakers, as I show in this section.

people… (…) It was great to meet people my own age and actually talk about current stuff... It was definitely refreshing and I was just "Wow, this is really great!""

Eilís had to go to a festival outside Corca Dhuibhne to experience Irish as a fully alive, fresh and fun language that is not spoken only by older people or just a school subject. The *Oireachtas na Samhna* showed her that there are broader horizons for Irish too, that it is not limited to the family and the local community, but it is possible to use it for communication in other contexts. Before that, Eilís associated youth, entertainment, fun and contemporary topics with English and she didn't imagine the Irish language could pertain to these domains as well. She had limited opportunities to experience these through Irish, as her life outside of the home and the classroom was mostly in English. Although she loved the Irish language and had decided to study it, she felt there was a sense of gravity about it. It was something precious that was under threat and was to be kept and preserved so that it wouldn't get lost. You had to speak it so that it wouldn't die. Before attending the festival, Eilís didn't feel that it was a language through which young people could socialise in a lively and spontaneous way.

"When I was younger, we didn't understand why we needed to... to savage the language or use it so that it will be spoken. All we heard was just: "Speak Irish, speak Irish". So then it kind of put the language down. But then I went to university and I met people who didn't have that kind of outlook on the language... It changed my view. So it was people who just had a love for the language just from their own. Their family had nothing to do with Irish, they weren't raised through Irish and didn't go to any Gaelscoils, but they just made an effort and really liked the language. (…) It's sad, but to be honest, sometimes young people in West Kerry feel kind of an obligation to speak Irish. "

"*Labhair Gaelainn!*" ("Speak Irish!") is a frequent reproach several of my research participants – not only the youngest but also those in their 30s and 40s – have heard from their parents and teachers in their childhood. They were also habitually corrected when talking in Irish with parents and older relatives or other people from the community. The older generations as bearers of the proper local *canúint* (dialect) were the authorities when it came to the Irish language. Most of my research participants said that they were grateful for the corrections as it was a way to improve their language.[54] However, reproaches and

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[54] A study among Gaeltacht teenagers by Ó Murchadha (2013) found that while they generally declared the local traditional Gaeltacht Irish speech to be "the best" variety of Irish, the two varieties spoken by new speakers (the so-called Post-Gaeltacht speech, which is not linked to the traditional variety of any Gaeltacht area, has more pronounced English influence and is spoken outside the Gaeltacht) and by the Gaeltacht youth (in which some of the traditional local features are lost, while others are similar to those of the Post-Gaeltacht speech) were linked with more favourable personal traits. The youngsters perceived the speakers of the latter two varieties as "more enthusiastic, trustworthy, adventurous, interesting, self-assured, intelligent, nice and fashionable than their traditional speaker counterparts" (Ó Murchadha 2013: 89). According to Ó Murchadha, this shows that

corrections can have an adverse effect. As Eilís said, speaking Irish can feel like an obligation. Parents and teachers expect youngsters to speak Irish, while at the same time the latter might feel like they aren't capable of speaking it well if they are overcorrected. A rebellion to what they experience as an imposition by authority figures is likely another reason for language shift among teenagers, apart from the influence of English-speaking peers. Fiona, for example, said that she was embarrassed to speak Irish, because "whenever I'd speak it, I'd have something wrong".

In contrast, the young Gaeilgeoirs whom Eilís met at the *Oireachtas* festival and in college didn't have any such experiences. They had decided to speak Irish by themselves; for them, it was not a burden from the past which they had to take on for the sake of older generations, as sometimes even very committed young speakers from the Gaeltacht, like Eilís, felt it was. While most of her peers from Corca Dhuibhne have reverted to speaking English, she found that there were others around Ireland who were very motivated to speak Irish:

> "They have such a love for it, such a passion and... They really see a future in it, and jobs and everything in it, so... yeah... It was definitely refreshing and a totally different attitude from what I had heard from the young people beforehand."

Another research participant, Sorcha, regretted that she wasn't able to study her chosen subject through Irish in college. As she wanted to make Irish-speaking friends, she decided to join the Irish language society at her university. The members of the club were mostly students of the Irish language or Education. Sorcha was surprised by the enthusiasm and admiration with which they welcomed her:

> I remember when I went to college and joined that club and I introduced myself, like "Where are you from?" – "Oh, I'm from the Gaeltacht." And: "Oh my god, you are from the Gaeltacht!" I didn't really feel like that was really a big deal and I said that to them and they were "Oh, wow, your Irish must be so good!" I didn't really take any notice of it until they said it."

The club's members were eager to talk with Sorcha to practice their Irish language skills. They admired her because she is from the Gaeltacht and speaks Irish fluently, and some were even envious of her. Sorcha, who nevertheless felt that her Irish was "not as good

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despite the prestige accorded to traditional speech, there is a covert ideology present among Gaeltacht youth, which guides them towards adopting the other variants, as they index more desirable personal traits than the former one.

as my grandfather's", found that being a native speaker from the Gaeltacht accorded her a special status in the eyes of the new speakers.

Sorcha, as the other young research participants, discovered that proficiency in Irish was an ability that made her stand out among others. In particular, she found that it could give her an advantage in terms of employment. Some jobs are accessible exclusively to those who possess a high command of the Irish language: for example, work in Irish-language media, in the Gaelscoils, in EU institutions, and certain positions in the civil service. In other words, Irish could be converted into a marketable asset and have a practical value for its speakers, not only a symbolic and sentimental one as part of one's identity. Caoimhe, for example, was convinced that Irish could be useful:

> "I think there are lot of people that don't think there's any use to Irish any more. (…) But I think if they saw the opportunities that are out there… Like there are lots of top opportunities where they say that Irish is a requirement or, the majority of them will say "Irish preferred". But I think if you go to any job interview and say you speak Irish, it's not going to be a hindrance in any way. It might be an advantage, but it definitely won't hurt. **I think it's going to be better for you to be able to speak a second language…**"

The value of Irish as a cultural capital strictly depends on its status outside the Gaeltacht: in particular, we can mention two aspects. The first regards the policies for the promotion and protection of Irish and the amount of funding accorded to Irish-language-related activities and organisations; these indirectly affect the number of jobs in the Irish language sector. Secondly, the current value of Irish is connected also to a more general process of "commodification of language" (see Brennan and O'Rourke 2019) occurring in the last few decades, whereby the knowledge of Irish (like that of other languages) is framed as an economic resource and appreciated as a desirable skill that can increase one's employability. For example, notice how Caoimhe, in the excerpt above, thinks that speaking a second language, besides English, gives you an advantage.

Although the number of Irish-language-related jobs has been growing in the last two decades, also in the past, speaking Irish could accord an advantage in terms of employment opportunities (for example, in education or the civil service). However, the rural Gaeltacht population was not able to benefit from the cultural capital Irish represented. Before the gradual spread of higher education among all social classes, from the 1960s onwards (Ó Riagáin 1997: 275), many native Irish speakers from the Gaeltacht did not qualify for Irish-language-related job positions, which were occupied instead by the highly educated urban middle-class speakers of Irish as a second language. Today, young Gaeltacht speakers can

access these employment opportunities, which are, in many cases, outside Corca Dhuibhne. Even if all the young research participants stated that they would prefer to live on their native peninsula, most of them considered moving outside the area, to bigger towns or cities, to get better employment. Paradoxically, it is for the small numbers of young people opting for the traditional Gaeltacht activities of farming and fishing and for many of those employed in the local tourist industry, that the Irish language does not represent an immediate practical advantage.

Already in the 1990s, Pádraig Ó Riagáin (1997: 281–283) wrote that there was no survival without revival, meaning that in order to maintain the Irish language in Ireland, new speakers had to be recruited among the English-speaking population. As the position of the Irish language as a community language in the Gaeltacht is weakening and its use there is not as self-evident as it once was, the promotion of Irish taking place in the rest of Ireland is important also for encouraging and maintaining it among the Gaeltacht population itself. Through the positive experiences they had outside the Gaeltacht, my interlocutors realised Irish was not merely a language of the past, but was capable of being a language for the present and the future, both in terms of being a lively language of youth socialisation and of representing a cultural capital.

9.3 Changing outlooks

Today, Irish speakers from Corca Dhuibhne have stronger links – both personal and through the (social) media – with Irish language speakers from other Gaeltachts and from the rest of the country than they ever had before. More specifically, young Gaeltacht Irish speakers' point of view on the Irish language is increasingly converging with that of the new speakers from outside their Gaeltacht community. Their outlook on the language is broader and not as strongly centred in the Corca Dhuibhne community as it is for the older generations.

For example, while the older generations tend to compare the present-day situation in Corca Dhuibhne with that in the past, the younger compare it with that in the rest of the state. They don't have a long-term perspective, as they haven't experienced a time where Irish was the main language of their community: for them, the present-day bilingual situation with advanced language shift, reduced fluency in Irish, "blow-ins" (people who moved to the Gaeltacht and who in many cases don't speak Irish), mass tourism and the dominating presence of the English language is the reality and *normality* of the Irish language condition

in Corca Dhuibhne. While 40-year-old research participants could recall a childhood time when Irish was heard all around in their parishes, those in their 20s had learned already in their childhood that it is more common to speak English than Irish. For example, Róisín observed that:

> "Our house would have been much more Irish than English (…) My friends, whenever I went to their house, it was mostly English that they were speaking at the dinner table together, even though they all had perfect Irish…"

Not surprisingly, perhaps, the younger generation, who has not directly experienced the changes in the Corca Dhuibhne Irish language community, has a *slightly* more positive outlook on the future of the language than the older. While they reckon there are several issues with the Irish language in the Gaeltacht (for example, with those friends who don't seem to really care about it), they find greater solace in the new speakers of Irish and appear confident about the impact the Irish language movement developing outside the Gaeltacht can have on its survival. The growing demand for Gaelscoils, the popularity of initiatives such as the *Pop-up Gaeltacht* (an informal monthly event, whereby speakers and learners of Irish meet in a different pub in Dublin every month to chat in Irish), the handful of young Gaeilgeoirs they have met seem to give to many of them enough hope for the future of the Irish language, even if all of these can't really compare to a fully-fledged community of fluent daily speakers of the language, as it still survives in the western part of Corca Dhuibhne at present.

Moreover, although they feel there is a substantial difference between being a native speaker from the Gaeltacht and a learner of the Irish language from outside (both in the senses described in the previous section and in chapter 7), some of the younger research participants seem more inclined than the older interlocutors to embrace a "*cúpla focal* discourse", according to which it is enough that people speak a few words of Irish now and then to maintain it (see Brennan and O'Rourke 2018: 127–130). In short, some (although not all) younger Gaeltacht Irish speakers seem to tend to think about the Irish language not as a community language anymore and not in such a strict connection with the Corca Dhuibhne community as the older generations do.

One significant aspect in which the view of (some of) my younger research participants differs from that of the older ones regards the characterisation of their condition as native Irish speakers from the Gaeltacht. The younger tended to think that being a (native)

Gaeltacht Irish speaker represents an advantage. They often used the word "lucky" to describe that. Here are some examples from the interviews:

"I was *lucky* enough to have grown up with the Irish language..." (Bréanainn)
"It upsets me when people don't see how great it (Irish) is and how *lucky* we are to have it..." (Eilís)
"Others wouldn't have fluent Irish, so you'd have an *advantage*." (Níall)
"I think I'm *privileged* because I live in a Gaeltacht." (Caoimhe)

These statements confirm that the younger interlocutors have a very positive attitude towards the Irish language and the Gaeltacht. In fact, it might be the case that they have a greater appreciation of them than the older generations had, as the latter grew up in a time when Irish was of "no use past Dingle" and Gaeltacht Irish speakers were looked down upon (the feeling of shame connected to speaking Irish in certain contexts is, in any case, still present also among the younger generation, as we have seen in chapter 7). However, their appreciation for the Irish language is very much connected with the reevaluation of the Irish language taking place in the larger Irish society, whereby Irish can represent a cultural capital to those who "have" it. Eilís, Bréanainn and the other young people I met in Corca Dhuibhne consider themselves "lucky" or "privileged" because they compare to people in the rest of the country (and even in their own region) and see that they have a better share of the Irish language than others have. Their proudness of being Gaeltacht Irish speakers derives, partially, from knowing that they possess something that is seen as admirable or desirable by some other people in certain circles outside the Gaeltacht community.

By this, I do not at all intend to say that the positive attitude and commitment towards the Irish language expressed by the younger interlocutors are in any way less authentic, important or commendable. Yet, it should be noted that at the same time that the value of Irish as a cultural capital seems to be increasing, its actual use in the Gaeltacht communities is decreasing. While there are signs of a renewed interest in the Irish language among the Irish population, the future of Irish as a community language in Corca Dhuibhne has been generally described by my interlocutors as "bleak" and "gloom". Young Gaeltacht Irish speakers are caught between these two processes – the reevaluation of Irish as a cultural capital, and the advanced language shift in the traditional Irish-speaking communities. It is a sad irony that just when speaking Irish can mean "being different" (to use an expression from chapter 6 and 7) also in a positive, favourable sense, it is becoming less and less frequent in Corca Dhuibhne.

In fact, the younger research participants' idea that they were lucky to speak Irish indicates just how rare and unusual being a young native or fluent Irish speaker is at present. For older generations in the Gaeltacht, speaking Irish was a normality of everyday life. They would not describe themselves as being "lucky" for speaking Irish – not only because the language did not offer any particular advantage, but especially because it was simply what everyone spoke in their community. In contrast, the younger generations have been socialised into a community with advanced language shift, where Irish represents an important value, but not so much a communication code.

I would like to compare the above statements made by the younger research participants with a quote from an interview with Seán, a man in his late 40s, who was employed in an institution where Irish was one of the working languages. When I suggested that he was lucky to be able to work through the Irish language, he appeared slightly irritated. This is how he answered:

> "It's just the way it is. When you use sentences like "you're lucky", or "is it bother?", um – you're making an issue of something. It's just the way it is, okay? If you go to France, you speak French; if you go to Italy, you speak Italian. (…) **What I'm saying you is, don't just kind of be thinking** (stressed, almost as in a mocking tone:) **"Oh my god, I'm speaking Irish", it's just what it is**. Or "I'm so lucky" – it's just your language."

Seán doesn't like it when people, usually learners and non-speakers from outside the Gaeltacht, tell him that he is lucky because he speaks Irish. For him, saying that one is lucky to speak Irish equals stating that it is not "normal." His repetitive statement that "it's just the way it is" can be seen as an attempt to stress that he wishes that speaking Irish in Corca Dhuibhne was just as ordinary, unmarked and accepted as speaking English is. For him, using Irish is a simple fact of his everyday life and he does not want to be singled out because of this. According to Seán, describing those who speak Irish as "lucky" is just another way of marking them for being Irish speakers. Although it sounds positive, it is a mark that is imposed from outside, as much as other prejudices (which we have discussed in chapter 7). Seán rejects this mark, perhaps also because it reminds him that, after all, unfortunately speaking Irish is not as normal as he personally experiences it and as he would like it to be in Ireland. Conversely, the younger research participants accept this mark because their experience with and outlook on the Irish language is closer to the general attitude towards the Irish language in wider society.

9.4 A problem of linguistic awareness

In this section, I'd like to analyse some statements from an interview with Níall, a twenty-five-year-old interviewee with a degree in Irish. I met him through another research participant and when he heard about the research I was doing, he offered to help me and volunteered for an interview. However, some of the things Níall told me during our conversation profoundly puzzled me, because they reveal a very different attitude towards Irish as expressed by other research participants. For Níall, Irish is a skill someone can possess rather than a language for talking, a means of communication in everyday life. This attitude is linked to what we have seen in the previous sections: the limited use of Irish among the Gaeltacht youth and the increasing value of Irish as a cultural capital. Moreover, I suggest that Níall's linguistic beliefs and practices indicate a lack of proper linguistic awareness among the younger generations of Gaeltacht Irish speakers.

Níall told me that his friends don't seem to really care about the future of the Irish language in Corca Dhuibhne, while he does. He and his girlfriend have decided that, if they have children, they will speak to them in Irish. However, Níall does not speak Irish with his girlfriend:

Níall: It would bother me if it (the Irish language) was to cease. It can't just cease obviously. When I grow up I will have kids and I will definitely have them speaking Irish at home and they can learn English outside. That's my plan, of course, things can change. (…) My girlfriend speaks Irish, she's from (a village *back west*), and there's no doubt, she agrees on this completely. She has a baby sister now, she is 4, and every time I meet her I speak Irish to her.

Nastja: So you speak Irish with her?

Níall: Yeah – her baby sister, not my girlfriend. I speak English with her. **Well, you see, I want her baby sister to learn good Irish. I don't need to teach my girlfriend Irish, she knows Irish.**

It is striking how Níall seems to connect Irish with learning and teaching rather than with speaking: he doesn't have to speak Irish with his girlfriend, as she already knows it. She comes from an Irish-speaking family and works in a Gaeltacht school, yet the couple doesn't speak Irish to each other, apart from when she is in the school. Níall admitted that it was "strange", but they had met as teenagers in secondary school, where they spoke English to each other and had simply continued to do so to this day. However, they did "care" about the language and had decided they would pass it on to their children.

There is something profoundly contradictory in Níall's beliefs. He sees the Irish language as a fundamental part of his identity, yet he doesn't actively try to speak it more. "I

speak it at home every day with my parents," he told me and seemed content with that. He got several compliments from people saying he had a "lovely Irish" and he and his girlfriend know Irish well; they aren't children anymore, they don't have to learn or practice it, and therefore they can speak English to each other – this seemed to be Níall's line of thought. For Níall, the Irish language is a possession that you have stored somewhere and, eventually, pass on to the next generation. It's an object that you have to guard well, a family treasure. It escapes to him that you have to use it to keep it: it's the non-use that spoils it.

Moreover, Irish for him remained fundamentally linked with and limited to two childhood domains: home and school.[55] Children have to be spoken to in Irish, adults don't need to be. This seems a weird turn compared to older generations. Some of my older (40- to 60-year-old) interlocutors reported that their parents used to speak English to them and their siblings when they were toddlers, because they believed that they would learn English easier if they heard it from a young age. As we have seen in chapter 5, Gaeltacht Irish-speaking parents frequently raised their children through English because it was a skill they wanted them to have, but they spoke Irish with each other or with people in the community. Now, the reverse is happening: Níall and his girlfriend would like their children to have Irish, but they predominantly speak English in their daily lives. Níall feels that by raising his children through the Irish language he will have done his duty in preserving the Irish language and the Gaeltacht culture. Furthermore, if children are spoken to in Irish at home, they won't have problems learning it in school and will have better employment opportunities later in life. While once English was the language to "have", now it is Irish. Here, "to have" doesn't imply that the language is used to talk, but rather possessed as a skill.

Níall's determination to have Irish-speaking children shows there is a growing appreciation among Gaeltacht youth of the importance of rearing children through the Irish language. However, although securing the intergenerational transmission of the language is paramount, the maintenance of the Irish language cannot be limited to its transmission to

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[55] In an analysis of the linguistic practices and discourses of a Scottish Gaelic family, Cassie Smith-Christmas shows how although the adults of the family wish to pass the language to the next generation, their practices reify the language as an abstract object, "separate from the people speaking the language" and linked instead only with the school (2017: 43). She writes that "although the adults appear to think that they are encouraging Maggie (the child) to use Gaelic, in reality, the way in which they frame Gaelic reifies English as the language for (…) 'talking' and equates Gaelic with didacticism" (Smith-Christmas 2017: 33). Children thus associate their minority language mostly with the school and are aware that there are not many other opportunities to use it outside; furthermore, they don't show the desire to use it outside the classroom, thus perpetuating the language shift in the community. The examples of Níall, as well as of Eilís, about whom I wrote in a previous section, show that children in the Gaeltacht, even if they are raised by Irish-speaking families, develop similar associations.

children, otherwise one risks creating a scenario in which Irish is spoken to children by parents and teachers, but is not used by the adults in the community. This, in turn, undermines also the intergenerational transmission of the language, as the lack of opportunities for socialisation in Irish ultimately compromises the ability of parents to raise children through it. Furthermore, it is known that children don't simply learn a language: they are socialised into it, meaning that they simultaneously learn what the values attached to it are and how it is used in different contexts (Cavanaugh 2009: 12). Therefore, apart from encouraging and supporting parents in raising children through Irish, both youth and adults alike should also be motivated to reflect on their own linguistic practices and attitudes.

Níall lacked a fundamental linguistic awareness of what the realities of language minoritisation and shift entail. He, as some others among the younger research participants, was not able to conceptualise or make sense of why, for example, the relationship with his girlfriend had developed through English, or of why many Irish speakers were uncomfortable speaking Irish in front of English speakers. At most, he characterised these instances as "weird" or "strange". He wasn't consciously aware that they were consequences of processes of language shift towards English and of Irish language minoritisation. Similarly, although Níall observed that his girlfriend's little sister was reluctant to speak Irish and linked it to the influence of her older siblings, who speak English to each other, he admitted that he had not thought that he might face similar problems when raising his own children through Irish, if he spoke English to their mother.

During our conversation, I asked Níall if he thought there were enough opportunities to use the Irish language in the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht. The majority of the research participants answered to this question by saying that there were never enough opportunities and that one had to actively seek them out or even "fight" (as we have seen in chapter 8) to stop the shrinking use of Irish. However, Níall was not sure what to answer:

Níall: Oh, I don't know. Because what can you do for a language outside of promoting it? I mean**, if I start speaking Irish with all my friends now, who understand it, I don't think I'm doing the Irish language much benefit.**

Nastja: Why not?

Níall: (pensive) Because what benefits would I be doing by speaking Irish with them? **People around us would hear us speaking Irish, but that would be it.** I don't see other benefits to it.

Also in this case, the logic underpinning Níall's argument is that the Irish language is an object – something that you promote, but don't use otherwise. Moreover, he seems to perceive that using Irish is a performance meant to others. For him, the only benefit of speaking Irish with his friends is that *people around them* would hear them speaking Irish. He is not concerned about whether he, his friends and other Irish language speakers are able or willing to use it in their daily interactions. Rather, he thinks about the image they would project by speaking Irish.

Níall sincerely wanted to "save" the Irish language, but did not realise that it needed to remain the language of the community (and not be limited to only some institutions, like the school) in order to achieve this. Taking the present-day diglossic situation in the community as normal, Níall was not aware of the long-term effects of his current linguistic practices. This became apparent when I decided to respond to his remark on the benefits of speaking Irish with his peers. I suggested him to imagine that "in 40 years, maybe, the older generation won't be around anymore and you will be just speaking with your friends in English". Upon hearing that, Níall told me that he "had never thought about this in that way". Later, at the end of our conversation, he commented that my questions had made him reflect on his relationship with the Irish language in a way that he had never done before.

It would be wrong to think that Níall is superficial, hypocritical or not interested in the Irish language and its situation in the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht. Simply, his beliefs and practices reflect the general discourses surrounding the Irish language. Níall was used to hearing that the Irish language was something to be "saved", otherwise it would "die". He had learned that it was the language of all Irish people, a heritage to be proud of. He found it difficult to reconcile this idea with the "weird" reality of language shift, which he was experiencing in his community but was not able to make sense of. When he left Corca Dhuibhne to go to college, he discovered that proficiency in Irish is a useful skill not many people possess. No one had told him that while people might care about the Irish language, without adopting appropriate linguistic practices they might inadvertently undermine their own aims.

In this sense, Níall's case points to the need to develop a greater sociolinguistic awareness among young Gaeltacht Irish language speakers. Without a deep reflection on one's own linguistic condition, the promotion of a minority language can risk being limited to achieving only a superficial allegiance to the values represented by the language without being translated into conscious linguistic behaviours by its speakers.

9.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen how an ideology of the Irish language as something one "has", common outside the Gaeltacht, is increasingly present also among Gaeltacht Irish speakers, in particular among the younger generation. On the one hand, the idea that Irish is a desirable skill to *possess* in order to increase one's cultural capital represents a positive turn for the Gaeltacht people and can hopefully motivate (younger) speakers to develop a greater appreciation for their language. On the other hand, however, the reduction of Irish from being a community language (this is, a language habitually spoken among people in a community) to a language that is – at most – passed as an object to the next generations, or performed in certain contexts (like the school), but not primarily used for talking, indicates the worrying reality of advanced language shift which young people experience.

The use of Irish in the primary home is one of the factors that determine a young person's ability and attitudes towards the Irish language. However, today it is not *sufficient* (as well as, probably, not necessary) for a person to come from an Irish-speaking area to be a committed speaker with "good Irish". This is someone you become during the years by virtue of the decisions you make and by taking conscious actions for using and developing your language in a wide variety of contexts. It entails going one step further from simply feeling proud of your own linguistic identity to enacting it in your daily life – or to "fighting" for it, like my interlocutors said (in chapter 8). The young people I spoke with in Corca Dhuibhne have a positive attitude towards the Irish language and feel privileged to be native speakers from the Gaeltacht. They should be helped to develop an understanding of their own situation, of the dynamics of language shift in the Gaeltacht and the patterns of thought and behaviours that accompany them, and to counteract them by making a conscious decision for the Irish language.

"Tá beatha teanga í a labhairt," is a saying that Stiofán, one of the oldest research participants, told me: the life of a language is to speak it.

10. CONCLUSION

Throughout this thesis, I have written about the intricate interplay of different language ideologies that have shaped the experiences of Gaeltacht Irish language speakers and the development of the Irish language in general. In particular, language ideologies inform and are informed by wider political, social and economic processes over which Gaeltacht Irish speakers have had little impact. As "a linguistic minority under the protection of its own ethnic state", to borrow a description by Michie Akutagawa (1987), Gaeltacht Irish speakers find themselves in a complex enmeshment in which their linguistic attitudes and practices, as well as their own positionings or identities, are often conditioned by the opinions, prejudices and interests of other actors.

Historically, two main linguistic ideologies have affected the Irish language. Firstly, during colonial times, the language shift to English has been accompanied by an ideological evaluation of the Irish language and its speakers as inferior, poor, and backward. Secondly, since the end of the 19th century, Irish has been summoned into the Irish nation-building project, and since the independence from British rule, one hundred years ago, the state has implemented a series of policies seeking its maintenance in the Gaeltachts (defined as Irish-speaking areas) and its revival elsewhere. For Gaeltacht Irish speakers, the ideology of Irish as a national language has been a double-edged sword. On one hand, it is a resource on which Irish language speakers can base their claims, and which has (despite its several shortcomings) in any case contributed to the maintenance of the Irish language. On the other hand, it has brought about a limitation of the agency of the native speakers of Irish and an overshadowing of their points of view with discourses developed by and aimed mostly at non-speakers. Besides that, the older linguistic ideology appears to have persisted to some degree, and language shift in the Gaeltacht continues. As a consequence of the combination of various ideological layers, Irish has been heavily loaded with different and even contradictory meanings, which also affect Gaeltacht Irish speakers' linguistic practices.

In the Irish language, to say that someone can speak a language, a structure which can be translated as "to have" is used. For example, to express that someone speaks Irish, one could say "*Tá Gaeilge aige/aici*" – "He/she has Irish." In the variety of English spoken in Ireland, the verb "to have" is still commonly used to indicate that someone speaks a language. What does it mean or entail to *have* Irish in Corca Dhuibhne today?

For Gaeltacht Irish speakers, to *have* Irish is more than to simply (be able to) speak it. Irish is a beloved language, a lived everyday reality, an intimate commitment, a strong link to family and locality, a conscious decision, a source of concern and discomfort, a continuous sense of struggle, and something that makes them different. I would like to foreground the personally felt and experiential dimension Irish has for Gaeltacht Irish speakers, as opposed to the merely *imagined* national language which it predominantly represents for the majority of the population in Ireland, as well as for the Irish state. The latter "wear Irish as a weird badge" of identity (to quote an expression used by Colm), meaning that they *have* it only as a token, a symbol for/of the Irish nation.

It ought to be remembered that, also for many people in the Gaeltacht, Irish is *solely* something they have, in the sense that they have some knowledge of it, but do not speak it, and are not particularly attached to it – if not even hostile. My ethnographic research has focused on committed, habitual Irish speakers who are part of the Irish-speaking network *back west* – a minority within the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht. Additional research would be necessary to describe what having or not having Irish entails for semi-speakers and non-speakers in the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht.

Dhá dheireadh seachtaine i mí Iúil (two weekends in July)

There are different aspects and nuances of Irish as it is felt and experienced by Irish speakers in Corca Dhuibhne. For example, I could tell you about a group of speakers, friends and families of different ages, who improvised a barbecue at a small pier in the creek from which, local legend has it, *Naomh Breandán*, Saint Brandon the Navigator sailed across the Atlantic in the remote 6th century. That Sunday afternoon, there was Irish spoken all around, and laughter and warmth, in a relaxed atmosphere of conviviality. After eating, musical instruments started to appear: a fiddle, a whistle and different accordions. The musicians played a few polkas, which I was told were from the Corca Dhuibhne region, and to my great delight, there was even some dancing. This is what the people were telling me when they said the language was intimately tied to this place and its people, I thought while listening to the music. That Sunday at the pier, one could feel the genuine sense of community, the joy of sharing culture and living the Irish language. It was an occasion where people could speak *Gaelainn* lightly and freely, enjoy hearing its rich forms, but also mix in an English word now and then. It flowed naturally and spontaneously. No one was judging how they were speaking and they did not have to feel like they should have been speaking English instead. They were among friends, and they were friends because they cherished speaking Irish.

However, if I tell you about that, I have to tell you also about another weekend, which I spent at Áine's house. She was one of the local people who had generously agreed to take me under their roofs. During the weekdays, Áine was busy working at a demanding job, related to the Irish language, but during the weekends she liked to bake. I had the impression that this was for her a way to relax after a tiring week of work. Yet, I was there, sitting at her kitchen table, spreading butter on a freshly baked scone and, almost inevitably, bringing the conversation to the uneasy subject of the Irish language and the Gaeltacht.

"The problem is people's attitude, you know," Áine told me, "it's difficult to change that." What does she mean, I asked. People don't realise that the Irish language is a part of Irish identity, and, what's worse – said Áine – people who grew up here sometimes felt that the Irish language was "useless". "The state should have invested in the local farmers and fishermen, they were the ones who had the language," but no, the state does not really care, she continued. "They don't understand the value of the language —"

"But I shouldn't be talking about this, not during the weekend. It's *too personal… too emotional!*" Áine interrupted herself. Suddenly I realised how heated our conversation had become. We were strangely excited because the topic we were talking about was one we intensively felt about. But our excitement was unpleasant and tiring, and Áine seemed upset and agitated. For her, Irish was more than just a language she habitually spoke or had to deal with as part of her job. It was both a passion and a concern – the sort of issue you care about so much that it can start to hurt, and you are unable to talk about it in a calm and detached way.

When I write that Irish is a feeling and experience I do not mean it solely in the sense I have tried to illustrate by mentioning the barbecue at a small pier somewhere *back west*. The Irish language intimately and emotionally connects its native speakers with their family, locality and cultural heritage. It is also a language they simply use in their daily lives as a habitual and preferred means of communication – a language of "living, breathing human beings", to quote an expression used in chapter 6 by Síle. She, like other research participants, lamented that non-speakers could not grasp how Irish can be a "real", "natural", everyday language. Despite the many rumours about its "death", Irish is the *lived* language of Gaeltacht Irish speakers.

Yet, **the felt and experiential dimension of having Irish is also heavily influenced by its condition as a minority language of a dwindling group of people in the Gaeltacht**. For Áine, speaking about the Irish language could be too overwhelming and upsetting. When writing about concepts such as language policy, language maintenance or language shift, one

tends to forget that there is something very personal at stake for minority language speakers. By telling about Áine, I have tried to illustrate how, for Gaeltacht Irish speakers, Irish language issues can be intensively emotional. The language's uncertain future weights on the shoulders of those committed speakers who chose to (try to) live through Irish as much as possible. Many research participants felt that one has to continuously "fight" for Irish, for example, to use it in communication with the state. Generally, "fighting" is necessary to maintain Irish as a community language in the Gaeltacht. In the last fifty years, Corca Dhuibhne has experienced significant changes. In the present situation of advanced language shift, cultivating the "richness" of the language, finding opportunities to use it, and transmitting it to the next generations all demand significant efforts. In this sense, speaking Irish can by itself feel like a struggle. Furthermore, it requires a conscious decision.

Another salient feeling connected to having Irish in Corca Dhuibhne is that of being different, which emerges from Gaeltacht Irish speakers' encounters with others. In the first instance, there is the historical conflict between the traditionally Irish-speaking villagers *back west* and the English-speaking town of Dingle/Daingean Uí Chúis. In many cases, being different is something negative and unfavourable. It is accompanied by a feeling of being misunderstood, misrepresented, contested and disregarded by the monolingual majority language speakers, as well as by the state. The linguistic ideologies and social dynamics that perpetuate the subordination of Irish to English – and thus also contribute to language shift – affect the research participants' everyday experiences as Gaeltacht Irish speakers and the way they feel about/when speaking Irish. For example, they sometimes experience discomfort when speaking Irish in public. Despite their pride in being native Irish speakers from the Gaeltacht, the research participants also felt that, in certain contexts, using Irish can be unpleasant, difficult and problematic, and might unfavourably situate them. This shows that the ideology of Irish as a national language has not made the use of Irish any more normalised or unmarked. It has merely *masked* the fact that Irish language speakers are minoritised.

The fact that Gaeltacht Irish speakers are a minority is mostly revealed through their feelings and experiences, rather than being articulated at the level of discourse. When they talked about the Irish language, the research participants often described it as a central element of Irish national identity and as a part of the cultural heritage of the Irish nation (as well as of the Gaeltacht), and they wished that more of their compatriots would appreciate it. In this sense, it could be said that the Gaeltacht Irish speakers have adopted the ideology of Irish as the national language. The idea that the (Gaeltacht) Irish speakers form a

distinct (minority) group than the rest of the Irish population has seldom been explicitly expressed, as it has been overshadowed by the dominant discourses about Irish as a national language. In any case, the deployment of these discourses cannot be surprising given that the fate of the Irish language and the Gaeltacht has come to be very much dependent on its status as the national language and on the general support that the Irish population shows towards the state policies for its promotion and protection. Today, the majority of Irish speakers are learners and new speakers living outside the traditional Gaeltacht communities, and the future of the Irish language appears very much connected to developments at the wider state-level.

Yet, it could be said that, in a way, Gaeltacht Irish speakers are a minority even in the significance the idea of Irish as the national language has for them. For instance, because the language serves chiefly a symbolic role for the Irish state, Gaeltacht Irish speakers often perceive it as paying lip service to those communities who strive to *speak* it. Similarly, they have to confront those English-speaking Irish people who question the value or utility of "their own" language. Thus, Gaeltacht Irish speakers might perceive – or, at least, discursively articulate – the Irish language as constituting a more important element of Irish national identity than other Irish people perceive it to constitute. However, national identity is *not* the reason why Gaeltacht Irish speakers speak Irish in the first place. For example, I would like to quote Colm, who said that:

> "I don't do it as part of a national identity or anything like that. Irish for me is probably more personal. Yeah, it's far more personal and that's why I speak it…"

Here, we come again to the intensely and intimately felt and experienced dimension of being a Gaeltacht Irish speaker.

To conclude, I would like to add *reflection* as a third element besides feeling and experience. The term here has a double meaning. Firstly, it can indicate how Gaeltacht Irish speaker's feelings and experiences – as well as discourses – are often a reflection of wider linguistic ideologies and social processes. Secondly, and foremostly, Gaeltacht Irish speakers – like all minority language speakers – need reflection, in the sense of careful thought and sociolinguistic awareness, to overcome those feelings that hinder them in using their language, and to enact their *grá* for it by taking conscious actions for it in their daily lives.

To *have* Irish in Corca Dhuibhne is a feeling and an experience, as well as an intimate commitment to *live* (through) Irish.

11. POVZETEK

Pričujoče magistrsko delo temelji na sedemtedenskem etnografskem raziskovanju v *Gaeltachtu*, irsko govoreči skupnosti na polotoku Corca Dhuibhne na jugo-zahodu Irske, kjer sem leta 2018 opravila 25 polstrukturiranih intervjujev z maternimi oz. naravnimi govorci irščine različnih starosti. Delo osvetljuje irščino kot obenem simbolni, »*zamišljeni*« jezik »zamišljene skupnosti« (Anderson 1983) – irskega naroda – in manjšinski jezik, ki ga vsakodnevno »živi« oz. uporablja le okrog 2% irskega prebivalstva (CSO 2017).

Kompleksni položaj govorcev irščine v Corca Dhuibhnu kot govorcev »narodnega« in manjšinskega jezika lahko razumemo z analizo jezikovnih ideologij. Jezikovne ideologije lahko poenostavljeno opišemo kot različne vrste prepričanj, ki jih ljudje imajo o jezikih, načinih njihove rabe in njihovih govorcih (glej npr. Kroskrity 2004). Pomen raziskovanja jezikovnih ideologij je predvsem v tem, da izpostavlja povezave med širšim makrokontekstom družbenih, političnih in ekonomskih procesov in odnosov moči ter mikrokontekstom individualnih prepričanj in praks (Woolard 1998), pri čemer se pojem jezikovne prakse nanaša na načine, kako ljudje uporabljajo jezik(e) v svojem vsakodnevnem življenju.

Manjšinskega jezika ne opredeljuje le to, da ga na nekem območju govori manjše število prebivalstva kot pa drugi, večinski jezik, temveč predvsem to, da je manjšinski jezik podrejen večinskemu jeziku. Gre torej za nesorazmerje moči med manjšinskim in večinskim jezikom ter med njunimi govorci.

Irska je bila do 20. let prejšnjega stoletja pod britansko oblastjo. V stoletjih angleške nadvlade, ki se je pričela v 12. stoletju, utrdila pa od 16. stoletja dalje, je irščino, keltski jezik, ki ga je govorilo domače prebivalstvo, postopoma izpodrinila angleščina (glej npr. Crowley 2005). Proces jezikovne zamenjave oz. asimilacije je bil posebno hiter v 19. stoletju, ob koncu katerega so irščino govorili le še v nekaterih najbolj odročnih, revnih in marginaliziranih skupnostih na zahodni obali otoka. Jezikovno asimilacijo je spremljala jezikovna ideologija, po kateri je bila angleščina ugleden jezik napredka in družbeno-ekonomske mobilnosti – navsezadnje je bila jezik oblasti, ekonomije, izobraženstva in višjih slojev –, irščina pa ničvreden jezik neotesanih in revnih kmetov. Vendar so ob koncu 19. stoletja, pod vplivom romantike, irske angleško govoreče elite, ki so se zavzemale za neodvisnost od Velike Britanije, začele na irščino gledati kot na pristen jezik irskega ljudstva. Irščina je postala eden izmed bistvenih elementov pri oblikovanju zavesti o irski narodni

pripadnosti in pri razlikovanju od Angležev. Ko so Irci dosegli politično neodvisnost od slednjih, je novonastala država uvedla vrsto jezikovnih politik, s katerimi je poskušala ohraniti irščino tam, kjer je še bila glavni sporazumevalni jezik (vsaj) dela prebivalstva, ter jo ponovno oživiti drugod po državi (glej Ó Riagáin 1997). Tako je v irski ustavi meddrugim zapisano, da je irščina narodni in prvi uradni jezik Republike Irske, angleščina pa drugi uradni jezik. Vendar irska država v praksi deluje v angleščini, medtem ko je vloga irščine v njej le simbolna. Irščina se pojavlja na smerokazih, v dvojezičnih imenih krajev in v nazivih nekaterih državnih institucij (prvi minister se, na primer, imenuje *An Taoiseach*, policija pa *An Garda Síochána*), toda večina ljudi pozna le *cúpla focal* (par besed), ki si jih je morala naučiti v šoli.

Gaeltachti, irsko govoreča območja, so že vse od nastanka irske države predmet posebnih jezikovnih politik, ki stremijo k ohranjanju irščine (ta je npr. učni jezik šol v Gaeltachtu), vendar se proces jezikovne asimilacije kljub temu nadaljuje. V nacionalni jezikovni ideologiji so Gaeltachti dolgo igrali vlogo zakladnice pristne irske kulturne in jezikovne dediščine, dejansko pa so ostali marginalizirani in imeli le malo vpliva na same jezikovne politike.

Čeprav je država Gaeltachte definirala kot »irsko govoreča območja«, je med prebivalstvom na polotoku Corca Dhuibhne opazna velika razlika v jezikovnih kompetencah, pogostosti uporabe in naklonjenosti do irščine. Vasi na skranjem zahodu polotoka, ki jih prebivalci navadno označujejo z izrazom »*back west*« (»zadaj na zahodu«) – in od koder so bili vsi moji sogovorniki –, predstavljajo jedro irsko govoreče skupnosti. Njim nasproti stoji glavno naselje na polotoku, Dingle/Daingean Uí Chúis, ki je "od vedno bilo angleško govoreče" in se je "posmehovalo primitivcem" iz okoliških vasi. Tu se stara dihotomija med urbanim naseljem in podeželjem spaja z ločevanjem na podlagi jezika ter služi za oblikovanje občutka lokalnosti ("locality", glej Silverstein 1998) in identitete irsko govoreče skupnosti. Za njene pripadnike sestavljajo "pravi Gaeltacht" le vasi *back westa*, medtem ko dojemajo vključitev Dingla v uradno območje Gaeltachta kot oportunistično (saj lahko tako tamkajšnji podjetniki pridobivajo sredstva, ki jih država namenja razvoju ekonomije v Gaeltachtih).

Za intervjuvance predstavlja irščina jezik intimnosti, pristnosti in domačnosti. Zaskrbljeni so zaradi izgube »bogastva« irščine, ki je v njihovem vsakdanjem govoru vse bolj »onesnažena« z angleščino (pogoste so interference, kodno preklapljanje in kodno mešanje). Njihova skrb in vrednotenje ljudi glede na to, ali »imajo dobro irščino«, je odsev sprememb, do katerih je v skupnosti *back west* prišlo v zadnjih desetletjih zaradi vse večje prisotnosti

angleščine v vsakdanjem življenju, preseljevanja iz angleško govorečih območij in procesa jezikovne zamenjave med domačini, ki so znanje angleščine dojemali kot nujno za socialno mobilnost (tudi v dobesednem smislu – z izseljevanjem). Nasploh se je življenje na polotoku Corca Dhuibhnu, ki šteje nekaj manj kot 7000 prebivalcev (CSO 2017), v zadnjih petdesetih letih zelo spremenilo. Nekdaj odmaknjeno, ruralno in nerazvito območje, od koder so se ljudje množično izseljevali, je danes pomembna turistična destinacija. Tako tudi med naravnimi govorci »imeti dobro irščino« ni več samoumevno kot nekoč, temveč zahteva zavesten trud za gojenje jezika.

Ob svoji »*grá*« (ljubezni) do irščine kot jezika, ki predstavlja intimno vez z domom in domačo skupnostjo, se govorci irščine v Corca Dhuibhnu soočajo tudi z ideologijo irščine kot jezikom irske nacije. Ker je država irščino že monopolizirala kot element v procesu oblikovanja irske narodne identitete, je njeni govorci v Gaeltachtu niso mobilizirali za oblikovanje jasnejše skupinske identitete, kar bi bila osnova za formulacijo njihovih zahtev in interesov v odnosu do države in tistih, ki irščine ne govorijo. Sogovorniki v Corca Dhuibhnu irščino opisujejo kot jezik, ki pripada vsem Ircem, in kot bistven element narodne identitete. Zato je soočenje s tistimi sonarodnjaki, ki nasprotujejo državnim jezikovnim politikam, dvomijo v »koristnost« irščine ali jo opisujejo kot »mrtev« jezik, zanje lahko še posebej težko. Sogovorniki poudarjajo, da večina Ircev, ki se je svojega »narodnega jezika« učila le kot šolski predmet, ne more dojeti, kako je ta lahko enostavno naravni, vsakodnevni jezik »živih, dihajočih človeških bitij«.

Irščina velja za »jezik vseh Ircev«, vendar se njeni govorci razlikujejo od ostalih po tem, da jo dejansko *govorijo*. Čeprav je veliko sogovornikov izjavilo, da so ponosni na to, da so materni govorci irščine iz Gaeltachta, je govoriti irsko zanje lahko »vir nelagodja«. Kljub nacionalnim ideologijam ostaja uporaba irščine v javnosti zaznamovana (»marked«, glej Woolard 2004), medtem ko angleščina predstavlja normo. Večina govorcev irščine v Corca Dhuibhnu govori irsko le s tistimi, za katere ve, da so sami materni govorci irščine, in se le redko odloči, da v irščini nagovori pol-govorce (to so npr. tisti, ki so se šolali v irskih šolah v Gaeltachtu, a irščine navadno ne uporabljajo) ter vse tiste, katerih jezikovnih preferenc ne pozna. Nekateri sogovorniki so mi pripovedovali o sramu in zadregi, ki so ju čutili, ko so morali kdaj govoriti po irsko pred angleško govorečimi (ne)znanci, kar razkriva trdovratnost starejšega (post)kolonialnega negativnega vrednotenja irščine in njenih govorcev.

Presenetljivo je to, da so ideologija irščine kot nacionalnega jezika in spremljajoče jezikovne politike posredno prispevale celo k oblikovanju novih predsodkov do tistih, ki govorijo irščino. Sogovornike je tako pogosto skrbelo, da ne bi med intervjuji izpadli kot

»nacionalisti«, »fanatiki«, »teroristi« in celo »elitneži«. Zadnji stereotip izhaja iz tega, da so jezikovne politike privedle do porasta števila govorcev irščine kot drugega jezika predvsem med pripadniki višjega srednjega sloja v večjih mestih, kot je prestolnica Dublin.

Večina intervjuvancev je izrazila nezadovoljstvo nad hinavskim obnašanjem države, ki z besedami sicer podpira irščino in Gaeltacht, vendar so njeni dejanski ukrepi nezadostni in neuspešni. Predvsem se jim zdi, da država ne upošteva dovolj potreb irsko govoreče skupnosti in da irščino predstavlja zgolj kot vrednoto, pozablja pa na tiste, ki jo dejansko govorijo (glej tudi Ó hIfearnáin 2014). Primer tega so številne težave, s katerimi se govorci v Gaeltachtu soočajo pri uporabi irščine v odnosu z javno upravo, kar je pravica, ki jim jo (šele) od leta 2003 daje zakon. Sogovorniki zato pogosto čutijo, da se je treba za irščino »boriti na vsakem koraku«.

Med pripadniki mlajše generacije (18–30 let) v Corca Dhuibhnu so opazne razlike v uporabi irščine in odnosu do nje v primerjavi s starejšimi. Za mlajše govorce predstavlja irščina vse bolj veščino, ki jo človek »ima«, manj pa jezik vsakodnevnega sporazumevanja. Medtem ko so starejše generacije doživljale, da je irski jezik »brez praktične vrednosti«, postaja danes irščina kulturni kapital (Bourdieu 1991), ki odpira različne zaposlitvene možnosti. Mladi naravni govorci irščine se imajo za »srečne«, ker od malih nog obvladajo irščino, na to vrednotenje pa pomembno vpliva srečevanje z navdušenimi novimi govorci irščine izven Gaeltachta, ki so morali v učenje irščine vložiti precejšen trud. Po drugi strani pa je prevladujoči jezik socializacije med mladimi v Corca Dhuibhnu angleščina.

V pogledih, občutkih, izkušnjah, praksah in diskurzih govorcev irščine v Corca Dhuibhnu se kaže preplet različnih jezikovnih ideologij, na katerega irsko govoreče skupnosti v Gaeltachtih skorajda niso imele vpliva. Pri tem se dejstvo, da govorci irščine predstavljajo manjšino, razkriva pretežno preko izkušenj in občutkov sogovornikov, ne pa na ravni diskurza. Tako so na primer sogovorniki o irščini govorili kot o »narodni dediščini, ki pripada vsem Ircem«, kar sicer ni presenetljivo, glede na to, da je obstoj irščine vezan na državno jezikovno politiko in splošno naklonjenost prebivalstva do nje. Obenem pa so pri opisovanju odnosov z državo in tistimi, ki irščine ne govorijo, razkrili, da se počutijo drugačne ter pogosto nerazumljene in neupoštevane. Poleg tega je med govorci v Gaeltachtu značilen občutek, da govorjenje irščine zahteva dodaten napor in »nenehen boj«. Tudi tisti, za katere je irščina prvi, vsakodnevni in domači jezik, se morajo vedno znova odločati za to, da jo bodo (še naprej) uporabljali in uveljavljali na vseh področjih življenja. Razlogi za predanost

govorcev v Gaeltachtu do irščine so veliko globlji in bolj osebni od nacionalne jezikovne ideologije ali narodne pripadnosti.

»Imeti« irščino (to je znati govoriti irščino – struktura z glagolom »imeti« izvira iz irščine in se na Irskem pogosto uporablja v angleščini) v Corca Dhuibhnu pomeni več kot le govoriti ta jezik. Za govorce irščine iz Gaeltachta predstavlja irščina ljubljeni jezik, ki ga vsakodnevno »živijo«, vez z družino in skupnostjo, zavestno odločitev, vir nelogodja in skrbi, nenehen trud ter tisto, kar jih razlikuje od ostalih.

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13. APPENDIX: MAP OF IRELAND

Source: <https://www.ezilon.com/maps/europe/ireland-physical-maps.html>, retrieved 18. 3. 2019.

Izjava o lektoriranju

Spodaj podpisana Nastja Slavec izjavljam, da je magistrsko delo jezikovno brezhibno in prevzemam odgovornost za opravljen jezikovni pregled.

Datum: 2. 9. 2019

Podpis: