

# **Authority and innovation in language variation: Teenagers' perceptions of variation in spoken Irish**

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## **THE THREE CATEGORIES OF CONTEMPORARY SPOKEN IRISH**

The 77,000 daily speakers of Irish reported in the 2011 Census are dispersed throughout Ireland (Central Statistics Office 2012: 40–42). This figure excludes Northern Ireland, for which figures are gathered by productive and passive language skills rather than frequency of usage. Less than one third of the daily speakers of Irish reside in areas officially designated by the state as Gaeltacht areas (see map in Ó hIfearnáin and Ó Murchadha 2011: 98), where Irish is one of the community languages. Significantly, most speakers now live in the post-Gaeltacht where English is the main vernacular of the community. Considerable linguistic variation exists within what McCubbin (2011: 461) calls the ethnoculture of habitual Irish-speakers. For members of this group, speaking Irish is fundamental to their negotiation and management of identity in late modern society, rather than serving the merely symbolic function the language serves for the majority of the Irish population (Mac Gréil and Rattigan 2009: 86; Watson 2008: 71).

The variation within this group of habitual Irish-speakers involves not only the regional differences in the traditional speech of the Gaeltacht areas, but also the wide variation that is evident among younger speakers in the Gaeltacht, as well as the emergence and proliferation of alternative spoken norms within the post-Gaeltacht<sup>1</sup> revivalist speech community. The variation in contemporary spoken Irish is described on a continuum from conservative local speech varie-

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'post-Gaeltacht' is used here to denote areas on the island of Ireland outside the official Gaeltacht areas identified by the state for the specific purpose of language planning. Irish was historically spoken as the dominant community vernacular in these areas, however, English now dominates following an historic language shift from Irish to English as main vernacular. This term encompasses areas which were, for a time, included in the Gaeltacht but that since been excluded, as well as areas that were never officially recognised by the state as Gaeltacht areas.

ties firmly linked to specific Gaeltacht areas, to newly emergent supra-regional speech associated with post-Gaeltacht speakers and with Irish-medium education outside the Gaeltacht (Ó hIfearnáin and Ó Murchadha 2011: 102; Ó Murchadha 2011: 227). Some of the characteristic linguistic features of traditional Gaeltacht speech, Gaeltacht youth speech and post-Gaeltacht speech are expounded in this contribution because they make up the linguistic backdrop to the experimental investigations into young people's perceptions and evaluations of Irish varieties that are presented later in the chapter. Established hierarchical perceptions of each of the above varieties are presented and these perceptions are subsequently questioned in light of data collected in the Gaeltacht areas of the southern province of Munster.

Participants' subjective responses to stimulus voices in a speaker evaluation experiment indicate that although traditional Gaeltacht varieties are readily identified as target spoken varieties by the participating teenaged cohort in openly-offered evaluations, Gaeltacht youth speech and post-Gaeltacht speech are both upgraded in actual evaluations of speech varieties. Therefore, in the indexical order for spoken Irish, non-traditional varieties that 'deviate' from traditional Gaeltacht models are more closely linked with desirable personality traits than are the overtly acknowledged target models for language excellence. The more favourable responses to Gaeltacht youth speech and to post-Gaeltacht speech, in particular, are consistent with the well documented shift away from the traditional speech of the Gaeltacht in terms of language change in formal features of spoken Irish overall. These linguistic changes are therefore supported in participants' subjective responses to the varieties of Irish with which they were presented. The results suggest an intimate link between language change and socio-psychological factors and indicate that the use of experimental methods will be central in elucidating this link.

## **TRADITIONAL GAELTACHT SPEECH**

It is believed that Irish was a relatively uniform language throughout the period of Old Irish from 600 to 900 AD and Middle Irish from 900 to 1200 AD (Breatnach 1994: 227–228; Ó hUiginn 2008: 8), but regional variation became evident in spoken Irish from the twelfth century onwards and diversification continued throughout the period of Early Modern Irish, 1200 to c.1700 AD (Ó hUiginn 2008: 7; Ó Murchadha 2011; Williams 1994: 447–448). This is the period dur-

ing which the highly prescriptive literary koine of Classical Irish flourished across Ireland and Scotland. Rigid adherence to this norm by many conservative writers in fact masks much of the variation which was coming to the fore at the time (Breatnach 1994: Ó hUiginn 2008: 7; Williams 1994: 447). However, evidence of this variation can be gleaned by looking at some manuscripts, particularly religious materials, which were written in accordance with spoken norms of the time (Williams 1994: 447). Essentially, the language forms found in these texts divide the language into the three main regional dialects of Irish found in present day Gaeltacht speech – Munster, Connacht and Ulster (Ó Dochartaigh 1992: 15).

Traditional Gaeltacht speech is described as conservative local dialectal speech, showing little influence from English in phonology, syntax and vocabulary and is especially prevalent among speakers born before 1960 (Ó hIfearnáin and Ó Murchadha 2011: 102). While all of the traditional Gaeltacht dialects share a common core (Ó Murchú 1969; Ó Siadhail 1989), regional variation is a key feature of Gaeltacht speech so that we can speak of Munster Irish in the south, Connacht Irish in the west and Ulster Irish in the northwest, each in turn displaying some internal variation. Distinctions between regions are noted to different extents in phonology, lexical stress, lexical items, syntax, and intonation. We can consider some differences in the stress pattern and the pronunciation of consonants and vowels as examples.

The lexical stress pattern and stress shift are prominent features of regional variation (Ó Sé 1989: 149). The primary stress pattern in lexis for Modern Irish involves placing the primary stress on the first syllable (Ó Sé 1989: 148; Ó Siadhail 1989: 26). There are, however, exceptions to this rule and, because these exceptions vary from region to region, the Gaeltacht speech of Munster, Connacht and Ulster are quite easily identifiable by their stress patterns. The stress pattern in Munster Irish has been described among its most striking characteristics (Ó Sé 2000). It involves the primary stress shifting to the second syllable of two-syllable words where the second vowel is long, and to the third syllable of three-syllable words where the third vowel is long and the preceding two are short (Ó Sé 2009: 1, 2000: 46–48; Ó Siadhail 1989: 29–30; Ua Súilleabháin 1994: 481). Lexical stress in Ulster Irish falls consistently on the first syllable and is closely linked to the length of vowels in unstressed syllables so that those vowels are shortened significantly (Hughes 1994: 625). Unstressed vowels are not shortened in this manner in Connacht. A “tendency towards forward stress”, perhaps under influence from Munster, has been detected in the case of Con-

nacht, but it is argued that it was “too weak ever to gain much ground, and the natural preference for initial stressing inevitably reasserted itself” (Blankenhorn 1981: 241). The stress pattern thus distinguishes the regional varieties of Irish.

As regards pronunciation, we can look at the vowel represented orthographically by the letters <ao> which is produced as a long front vowel [i:] in Ulster and Connacht Irish, but as a long front vowel [e:] in Munster Irish. The rendering of some consonants and clusters can likewise be used to distinguish between the dialect areas. In Munster, for instance, the word for ‘hill’ in Irish *cnoc* is likely to be produced as [knuk] and the word for ‘women’ *mná* as [mna:], while [kruk] and [mra:] are most likely to be produced in Ulster (Ó Siadhail 1989: 95). Both northern and southern forms are attested in the area of Conamara, in Connacht. The linguistic forms described here provide an insight into some of the characteristic linguistic features of Munster Irish in the south, Connacht Irish in the west and Ulster Irish in the north. These features provide some of the basis for the traditional distinction between the three main dialects of Irish in the Gaeltacht.

## **GAELTACHT YOUTH SPEECH**

Gaeltacht youth speech, likewise, varies by area and maintains features of the traditional local varieties, including some of the most distinctly local features (Ó Murchadha 2011). Research in the Gaeltacht education system at all levels reveals the presence of a diverse blend of linguistic backgrounds among pupils (Harris 2008; Hickey 2007, 2001; Mac Donnacha et al. 2005; Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007). The young Gaeltacht population has been described, referring to Dorian’s (1981: 189) classification, as consisting of good proficient speakers with accuracy in local speech and mastery of the standard written variety, as well as speakers who have little Irish (Ó hIfearnáin 2006: 25). The Irish of young Gaeltacht speakers, however traditional their linguistic background, is now moving very rapidly away from the local variety (Ó hIfearnáin and Ó Murchadha 2011: 102). Regional features are becoming less marked (Ó Curnáin 2007; Ó Sé 2000) so that a levelled variety of spoken Irish is developing among younger speakers. The sociolinguistic profile of younger speakers and their linguistic competence in Irish and in English inevitably affects the choice of language for in-group communication (Hickey 2001: 461; Mac Donnacha et al. 2005; Ó Giollagáin et

al. 2007: 11), but it also affects the form of Irish practised, the result being that both traditional and non-traditional forms of Irish have currency.

Nontraditional peer groups tend to exert an influence of lowest common denominator on the members so that the most extreme instances of reduction become prominent; in contrast with norm reinforcement within traditional vernacular...in some cases there will be an increase in nontraditional, regionalised or standardised input and interaction. (Ó Curnáin 2007: 59)

The traditional local variety, therefore, no longer functions as the sole model for language use in the Gaeltacht due to the limited access to the “intensive input required to master complex, localized linguistic structures which lack the support of institutional models” (Milroy 2002: 566). Within the contours of late modern society, there are opportunities for increasing access to alternative linguistic models through schooling, through increased social and geographical mobility and through interaction with the broadcast media. Changes are found at many levels of the language.

As previously mentioned, the rules governing stress shift in Munster Irish involve the primary stress falling on a long vowel in three-syllable words where the preceding vowels are short. A further innovative pattern has been reported among younger speakers in Corca Dhuibhne in west Munster. This pattern involves stressing non-initial syllables in words with three syllables where there is a long vowel in a non-initial position, even though they are preceded by a long vowel in a previous syllable. According to the rules outlined earlier one would expect the plural noun *cúraimí*, translated as ‘duties’ or ‘responsibilities’ in English, to be pronounced /'ku:rəmi:/ with initial stress due to the long vowel in the first syllable. An alternative pronunciation with stress falling on the final syllable, which is long, is noted among younger speakers and *cúraimí* might also be pronounced /ku:rəm'i:/ and likewise with similar words (Ó Sé 1989: 151, 2000; Ua Súilleabháin 1994: 481). This is possibly due to analogy and/or hypercorrection, and is linked to the perception of Munster Irish as a dialect with non-initial stress.

Changes appear in the phonemic system where English phonemes are used in cases where Irish consonants and clusters differ from those in English (Ó Curnáin 2007: 204, 228; Ó hÍfearnáin and Ó Murchadha 2011: 101; Ó Murchadha 2011: 225–226). This is common in other languages sharing a diglossic relationship with a more dominant language (see Jones 1998: 302–304; Montoya-Abat 2009: 223; Ó hÍfearnáin 2011: 95). We therefore find one single phoneme in

English replacing a system of multiple phonemes in traditional Irish so that the distinction between so-called broad and slender consonants, corresponding approximately to palatalised and non-palatalised consonants, may not be clear. Subtle differences between singular and plural forms of nouns with weak plurals might not be apparent in such cases, and so it is not unusual to hear *rothar* ‘bicycle’ and *rothair* ‘bicycles’ both produced as /ɹɔhəɹ/ with alveolar approximants whereas traditionally /rohər/ and /rohər’/ are heard with the broad alveolar in the singular form and the slender alveolar in the plural form marking the distinction between the forms (Ó Murchadha 2011: 226).

Grammatical initial mutation is common in Irish and its presence through lenition or nasalisation of the initial consonant in the word, or indeed its absence, indicates grammatical relations. It is inconsistently applied by younger speakers in the Gaeltacht, however (Hughes 1994; Mac Mathúna 2008: 88; Ó Curnáin 2007). It is frequently absent in cases where it might be expected and may also be applied in cases where it is not traditionally found. Initial mutation no longer necessarily denotes gender in the nominal and genitive cases as the pattern of lenition does not always conform to traditional and standard conventions which discriminate between masculine and feminine nouns (Ó Curnáin 2007: 1840–1841). In the dative case, eclipsis (the nasalisation of some initial consonants) may or may not be applied according to traditional spoken and standard written norms and it may also be applied in cases where it would not be expected (Ó Curnáin 2007: 1840–1841).

Lexical and syntactic transference from English (Hickey 2009; Hughes 1994; Ó hUiginn 1994; O’Malley-Madec 2007; Ua Súilleabháin 1994) is quite common in everyday speech (Ua Súilleabháin 1994: 536). The public perception of such transference confirms that the avoidance of forms marked by the influence of the dominant language is a key feature of formal style in a minority language (Deuchar 2005: 615; McEwan-Fujita 2008: 85).

## **POST-GAELTACHT SPEECH**

The post-Gaeltacht refers to areas throughout the island of Ireland in which Irish used to be the main vernacular, but where English now dominates and Irish no longer functions as a community language for the majority population. The importance of the Irish spoken in the post-Gaeltacht is noted by Ó Dónaill (1951) in his seminal essay on Irish revitalisation and it is noteworthy that today, ac-

ording to census data on the use of Irish outside the educational context, there are more than twice as many daily speakers of Irish residing outside the officially designated Gaeltacht areas than there are within the Gaeltacht (Central Statistics Office 2012: 40–42). It is not possible to profile these speakers from the census data, but it is likely that many of them first encountered Irish through Irish-medium education and may in some cases elect to expand its usage by choosing Irish as the language of the home and for interaction with other post-Gaeltacht speakers. Some may also be Irish language professionals who use Irish in their work. Post-Gaeltacht speakers form part of the core ethnocultural group of active Irish speakers.

Most Irish speakers who live outside the Gaeltacht have in the past tended to gravitate towards one of the regional dialects as a target speech variety, either because of direct association with one of the Gaeltacht regions or because of experience through school of one such variety (Ó hIfearnáin and Ó Murchadha 2011: 100). This model permeated the education system at all levels and the local and regional dialects of the Gaeltacht have been highly valorised (Ó Baoill 2000: 131; Mac Mathúna 2008: 87). Several areal koines subsequently emerged as speakers in the post-Gaeltacht attempted to align their speech with the core features of one of the three main Gaeltacht dialects, although few speakers achieved Gaeltacht-like speech (Ó Dochartaigh 2000: 22). The efficacy of the Gaeltacht model for post-Gaeltacht speakers of Irish is now in question in light of the alternative models that appear to be proliferating in the post-Gaeltacht due to the rapid expansion in the number of people who chose to use Irish on a regular basis (Mac Mathúna 2008: 87). This expansion provides increased opportunities for interaction with other post-Gaeltacht speakers.

It is by now generally accepted that a post-Gaeltacht variety of Irish has emerged which operates independently of Gaeltacht norms (Mac Mathúna 2008: 87; Nic Pháidín 2003; Ó hIfearnáin and Ó Murchadha 2011) as most speakers of Irish outside the Gaeltacht tend to have little contact with the Gaeltacht community and, instead, converse with other post-Gaeltacht speakers for the most part (Mac Mathúna 2008: 87). The emergence of post-Gaeltacht speech, to an extent, challenges the established position of the Gaeltacht as the target model for language use and suggests that one can speak Irish well without aligning themselves to a particular type of Gaeltacht speech. Post-Gaeltacht speech shares many of its defining features with Gaeltacht youth speech described above.

Commenting on the spoken Irish of the post-Gaeltacht Shaw's Road community in Belfast, Maguire (1991: 199) states that the role of the English phonolog-

ical system in relation to Irish is a role of substratum rather than of intrusive influence. It is reasonable to argue that the same applies to post-Gaeltacht speakers elsewhere as well. Therefore, in the absence of a traditional phonological system for Irish, phonemes from the English system are produced by post-Gaeltacht speakers, most notably in cases where Irish consonants and clusters differ from those in English. Hence, in post-Gaeltacht speech, one single phoneme is found in contrast to a dual system of palatalised and non-palatalised phonemes in Gaeltacht speech in the case of /f/ and one single phoneme is found in contrast to four different phonemes in Gaeltacht speech in the case of /l/ in some dialects (Maguire 1991: 199). This occurs in many other cases, one of the outcomes being the blurring of the distinction between singular and plural forms of nouns with weak plurals as discussed above in the case of *rothar* and *rothair* in Gaeltacht youth speech. This tendency towards neutralisation is strong, but rarely results in ambiguity, given the opportunities to clarify the distinction in its context (Maguire 1991: 200). Frequent absence of initial mutation (Maguire 1991: 203; Ó Duibhir 2008: chapter 5), especially lenition, may negate the need for velar fricatives and so further phonemes become redundant (Maguire 1991: 203).

Including the substantive verb *bí* ‘be’, there are eleven irregular verbs outlined in standard Irish and the grammatical structure of these verbs requires that the verb stem is altered depending on the tense. The standard third person singular form of the verb *téigh* ‘go’ appears as *chuaigh* in the independent form of the past tense, *(ní) dheachaigh* in the dependent form of the past tense, *théadh* in the imperfect tense, *téann* in the present tense, *rachaidh* in the future tense *rachadh* in the conditional tense. Further forms and rules not included in the standard are also present in the various regional dialects. Maguire (1991: 206–207) observes an overgeneralisation of the future tense stem of irregular verbs and its use as a stem in other tenses, so that *rachann* at times replaces *téann* as a present tense form. This practice has also been noted in Gaeltacht youth speech (Ó Curnáin 2007: 1147, 1227).

Focus attribution in Irish often involves the use of the copula and the adjustment of the word order so as to emphasise a particular lexical item within the sentence, and may also involve the use of an emphatic suffix. This structure may be present in the speech of post-Gaeltacht speakers, but the use of intonational stress to emphasise a particular lexical item within a sentence, as done in English, has been observed (Maguire 1991: 217). ‘That’s **my** book’, where the word ‘my’ is stressed in English, is reported as *Sin é **mo** leabhar*, where intonational

stress is used in order to attribute focus to the word *mo* ‘my’. This is in contrast to the traditional structure *Sin é mo leabharsa*, where focus is signalled with the use of the suffix *-sa* with the noun. Occasions where young post-Gaeltacht speakers map English syntax onto Irish are also reported, as is the use of English lexical items in Irish structures (Maguire 1991: 196–199; Ó Duibhir 2008: 74; Nic Pháidín: 123–126).

Of course, the linguistic developments that have been described here result from the universal propensity to cast off superfluous items that are deemed informationally redundant and to replace them with a system in which the traditional role of the remaining features is extended so that a number of high-coverage items are stretched to meet the communicative needs of the interlocutors in various contexts (Maguire: 1991: 211). The described situation makes up the linguistic backdrop to the experimental investigations into young people’s perception and evaluations of Irish varieties which will be presented in the remaining part of this chapter.

## THE EXPERIMENTS

### *Established perceptions of spoken varieties of Irish*

Traditional Gaeltacht speech, in its various regional forms, has been identified as a prestige spoken variety since its selection as a model of language excellence during the Revival period at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, ahead of Classical Irish, the literary language of Early Modern Irish. Even though it is not a uniform variety, traditional Gaeltacht speech is acknowledged as the variety of Irish on which *An Caighdeán Oifigiúil*, the official unitary standard written variety, is based (see Ó hIfearnáin and Ó Murchadha 2011 on the development of the standard written variety). The decision in favour of the speech of the people during the Revival has meant that the colloquial speech of the natives of the Irish-speaking communities in Waterford, Cork, Kerry, Clare, Galway, Mayo and Donegal has been the benchmark against which spoken Irish is evaluated, and that those with mastery and knowledge of the dialects are the language experts, not the scholars in Trinity College or in the National Library (Ó Conchubhair 2009: 208).

This still holds true today, as all varieties of spoken Irish are measured against traditional Gaeltacht speech, and varieties that do not conform to this

norm are described as ‘deviating’ from the ideal norm. The valorisation of Gaeltacht speech has resulted in a divide between traditional Gaeltacht speech and forms of late modern Irish, which encompass Gaeltacht youth speech and post-Gaeltacht speech. Ó Béarra (2007: 262) accordingly discusses some of the extreme cases of ‘deviation’ in late modern Irish and, in an ideologically loaded statement on semantic transference, contends that “the new expression stinks of Anglicism and corrodes the linguistic integrity of the traditional language”. Gaeltacht youth speech is charged with detraditionalising local dialectal speech. It straddles both extremes of the continuum mentioned earlier because it contains both traditional and non-traditional features. Younger speakers in the Gaeltacht thus share features with traditional local speakers and share other features with post-Gaeltacht speakers. Post-Gaeltacht speech, on the other hand, has no inherent link to any one Gaeltacht area and is somewhat marginalised given the prestige of Gaeltacht speech in the public psyche and the state’s Gaeltacht-oriented language planning initiatives. The schism between Gaeltacht speakers (traditional and youth) and post-Gaeltacht speakers is well documented (Kabel 2000; Ó Broin 2010; Ó hIfearnáin and Ó Murchadha 2011; O’Rourke 2011; O’Rourke and Ramallo 2011) and centres on issues of legitimacy, authenticity and language ownership.

It is therefore to be expected that traditional local varieties would be evaluated most favourably in consciously-offered responses to speech varieties and that varieties not corresponding to these traditional spoken models (i.e. Gaeltacht youth speech and post-Gaeltacht speech) would be evaluated less favourably. Furthermore, an element of ‘local patriotism’ is also to be expected in such evaluations, given the valorisation of the local speech of each Gaeltacht area and the familiarity of speakers with their own local variety. This established hierarchical organisation of spoken varieties of Irish is found in teenagers’ consciously-offered evaluations of the speakers’ use of language, but it is challenged in evaluations offered when the nature of the experiment is less salient. Teenagers’ responses to a label-ranking task and to stimulus voices are investigated in order to uncover the overt and covert ideology around language variation in spoken Irish, but also in an attempt to explicate the role of subjective and socio-psychological factors in the process of language change in the Gaeltacht.

### ***Design and data collection procedure***

Following previous work in this area (e.g. Kristiansen 2009, 2003; Grondelaers and van Hout 2010; Grondelaers, van Hout and Steegs 2010), a speaker evaluation experiment was conducted with 262 senior-cycle second-level pupils at five schools serving the Gaeltacht areas of Munster, the southern province of Ireland. Participants were 15–19 years old at the time the data were gathered in 2010. Eleven fifteen-second audio recordings representing traditional Gaeltacht speech, Gaeltacht youth speech and post-Gaeltacht speech were selected from the interviewee sections of Irish-medium radio interviews. Ten of the samples were taken from RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta, the Irish-medium radio station of the state broadcaster, which includes segments from all Gaeltacht areas and serves Irish-speakers in and beyond the officially-recognised Gaeltacht areas. A traditional speaker and a youth speaker were selected to represent the contemporary spoken Irish of Na Déise, Múscraí and Corca Dhuibhne in Munster, as well as the Irish of Connacht and Ulster further north. The remaining sample was provided by Raidió na Life, the independent, urban, Irish-medium radio station targeting the Irish-speaking community of Dublin and the surrounding area. This recording was an example of what is described above as post-Gaeltacht speech, or non-Gaeltacht speech as it is referred to in Ó hIfearnáin and Ó Murchadha (2011), which is particularly common among younger speakers in the post-Gaeltacht. In order to control for gender effects, only female speakers were included. Each of the speakers spoke on a different topic, but the nature of the selected segments was such that, for the listener, the subject of the interviews was not easily discernible.

Audio samples were selected in accordance with the linguistic description of the varieties of spoken Irish already discussed so that differences in phonology, lexical stress, intonation and lexical items represented the variation between each of the categories. The guises representing Munster speech, traditional as well as youth varieties, contained numerous examples of Munster's characteristic stress shift and so the primary lexical stress falls on the second or third syllable in cases where it is attracted to those syllables by a long vowel. The same pattern of lexical stress was not evident in the guises chosen for the traditional Gaeltacht speech and Gaeltacht youth speech of Connacht or Ulster. Instead, the stress in these samples falls primarily on the first syllable. The shortening of vowels in unstressed syllables in Ulster also serves to distinguish between this and other varieties. The pronunciation of vowels and consonants was likewise used to demarcate regional varieties of Gaeltacht speech. In a certain class of words with only one syllable which finish on a nasal or liquid consonant, the

word *ann* ‘there’, for instance, a diphthong is produced in the Munster guises, while a long vowel is found in the Connacht guises and a short vowel is found in the Ulster guises. The pronunciation of consonants, for instance the [knuk], [kruk] and [mna:], [mra:] distinctions already outlined, reinforce the regional differences that link the Gaeltacht speakers to the specific linguistic features characteristic of each Gaeltacht region.

The production of English phonemes in place of those found in traditional Gaeltacht speech was prominent in the samples selected to represent Gaeltacht youth speech, especially where consonants and clusters in traditional Gaeltacht speech do not correspond directly to those found in English. This was particularly apparent in the presence of the alveolar approximant, found in English, in positions where broad and slender alveolar consonants are found in traditional Gaeltacht speech. Furthermore, the innovative stress shift common in non-traditional Munster speech was observable in the guises representing the youth speech of the Munster Gaeltacht areas and differentiates between the traditional and youth speech of Munster.

The guise selected for post-Gaeltacht speech was characterised by the absence of a traditional Gaeltacht phonological system and by the use of the English phonological system in cases where phonemes in Gaeltacht speech are different to those found in English. This was most evident in the production of a voiceless velar plosive in positions where a voiceless velar fricative is found in Gaeltacht speech. Similar to Gaeltacht youth speech, the presence of the alveolar approximant, found in English, in positions where broad and slender alveolar consonants are found in traditional Gaeltacht speech, was also prominent in the guise chosen for post-Gaeltacht speech.

Given that linguistic features are commonly used in the evaluation of non-linguistic attributes of people and of groups through processes of enregisterment (Agha 2003, 2007) and iconisation (Gal and Irvine 1995; Irvine and Gal 2000), it was anticipated that the linguistic differences evident in the various guises would allow access to the established indexical order in which linguistic production is linked with particular social values and images. It is argued that participants’ responses to the various guises therefore reveal the semiotic connection between linguistic forms and social meanings, rather than revealing values associated with any of the individual speakers. This follows previous findings in this regard that suggest that, where recognised, the language variety spoken is the major attitude determinant in the experimental design (Elwell, Brown and Rutter

1984; Giles and Farrar 1979; Grondelaers and van Hout 2010; Grondelaers, van Hout and Steegs 2010).

The listener-judges were informed that they were to participate in a study about which they would later learn more, but the aim and the nature of the study were not disclosed. Although the order in which the speakers were presented remained constant, the audio samples were arranged to serve different experimental functions. In the first instance, the speakers were separated by a one-second tone preceded and followed by a half-second mute pause. The teenagers listened to this recording once from start to finish having been instructed to listen carefully to the audio. This recording was used for the purpose of illustration and for familiarisation with the structure of the experiment.

Booklets were distributed prior to playing the second arrangement of the audio where the speech segments were separated by fifteen-second pauses which were in turn preceded and followed by a one-second tone. The booklets were presented in two different forms so that in all cases participants completed a version different to that of their neighbour. The booklets featured eight seven-point adjective scales for each speaker with opposing adjectives at either end of the scales, similar to a semantic differential scale, but where the points on the scale were numbered 1 to 7. In an adaptation of the scales used by Kristiansen (2003) in the Danish context, the following adjective scales, referring to the personality traits of the speakers, were included in order to suit the bilingual format of the response materials: enthusiastic – uninspired; trustworthy – untrustworthy; adventurous – shy; interesting – boring; self-assured – insecure; intelligent – stupid; nice – repulsive; fashionable – unfashionable. The final page of the booklet asked participants to state what they thought the experiment was about, why they thought that and also allowed them an opportunity to comment further on the experiment if they so wished. All materials were presented in Irish and in English. Participants were free to answer in Irish or in English with most (87.4%) choosing to answer in Irish or using a combination of Irish and English.

Importantly, the nature of the study was not revealed to participants until all the booklets relating to this second phase of the experiment had been collected. They were then informed that the experiment was about their perception of variation in spoken Irish and that they should consider this for the next phase of the study. A second set of booklets was distributed in which participants responded to the same samples, and in the same order, on seven-point Lickert scales to statements relating to the standardness of the speakers, how strong their accents were, how good their spoken Irish was and whether they liked the way they

spoke. Participants were also asked to state where they thought the speaker might be from and what they thought they might look like. At the back of the booklet appeared a label-ranking task where the pupils were asked to “Number each of the following varieties, using each number only once, in order to indicate the best and worst varieties (1=best, 6=worst): *An Caighdeán Oifigiúil*, Irish from a Gaelscoil (post-Gaeltacht speech), local Irish, Connacht Irish, Ulster Irish, Irish from other Gaeltacht areas in Munster”. Having completed this task, participants also completed a background questionnaire.

## Results

Following the conventional hierarchy which is manifest in public discourse on the issue, teenagers unsurprisingly reproduce the established and accepted pecking order for the varieties of Irish listed in the label-ranking task. The results of the label-ranking task are illustrated in Table 1 where local speech is most positively evaluated followed by varieties from other Gaeltacht areas in Munster, the standard written variety, Connacht Irish, Irish acquired in a Gaelscoil outside the Gaeltacht (referred to here as post-Gaeltacht speech) and finally Ulster speech.

**Table 1:** Overt ranking of ‘language labels’ (1=best, 6=worst)

Variety	Mean
Local Speech	1.89
Other areas in Munster	2.55
Standard Written Variety	3.71
Connacht	3.86
Gaelscoil (post Gaeltacht)	4.20
Ulster	4.36

Table 2 shows a similar pattern when openly-offered responses to the speaker stimuli representing traditional local speech, local youth speech and post-Gaeltacht speech are isolated. Each of the varieties is evaluated towards the positive end of the scale, but the order in which they are ranked is pertinent to the present study. Traditional local speech is more positively evaluated than the other two varieties, followed by local youth speech and then post-Gaeltacht speech.

**Table 2:** Overt ranking of speech stimuli

This Person speaks ‘good Irish’ (Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Disagree)

Variety	Mean
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Traditional local speech	2.35
Local youth speech	2.40
Post-Gaeltacht speech	3.01

Therefore, when the nature of the study is outlined for participants, as in the label-ranking task and during the phase of the evaluation that refers specifically to the form of language, responses conform to the traditional hierarchisation of spoken Irish described earlier.

This overt hierarchisation, however, does not converge with evaluations elicited in the speaker evaluation design, in which the experimental goal was not revealed. The data from this phase of the experiment are shown in Table 3. The established order is turned on its head for the scales enthusiastic – uninspired, self-secure – insecure, adventurous – shy, interesting – boring and fashionable – unfashionable, so that post-Gaeltacht speech is ranked most positively for these personality traits, followed by local youth speech and then traditional local speech. For each of the scales where this order does not apply, trustworthy – untrustworthy, intelligent – stupid and nice – repulsive, local youth speech is evaluated most favourably, followed by post-Gaeltacht speech and then traditional local speech.

**Table 3:** Covert ranking of speech stimuli on eight personality traits (7-point scales)

Variety	Mean	Variety	Mean
<u>Enthusiastic – Uninspired</u>		<u>Self -secure – Insecure</u>	
Post-Gaeltacht	2.22	Post-Gaeltacht	2.57
Local Youth	2.83	Local Youth	2.94
Traditional Local	4.52	Traditional Local	3.57
<u>Trustworthy – Untrustworthy</u>		<u>Intelligent – Stupid</u>	
Local Youth	3.03	Local Youth	2.85
Post-Gaeltacht	3.36	Post-Gaeltacht	3.02
Traditional Local	3.40	Traditional Local	3.76
<u>Adventurous – Shy</u>		<u>Nice – Repulsive</u>	
Post-Gaeltacht	2.73	Local Youth	2.83
Local Youth	3.22	Post-Gaeltacht	2.84
Traditional Local	4.38	Traditional Local	3.53
<u>Interesting – Boring</u>		<u>Fashionable – Unfashionable</u>	
Post-Gaeltacht	3.05	Post-Gaeltacht	3.16
Local Youth	3.31	Local Youth	3.37
Traditional Local	4.51	Traditional Local	4.75

This is in stark contrast to the traditional hierarchisation of spoken Irish detailed above where traditional local speech is most positively evaluated and where traditional speech is a point of reference when evaluating all other varieties. It is important to note that the evaluations using adjective scales refer specifically to the social attributes indexically linked with the speech forms presented in the experiment and not necessarily to the speech forms themselves. Local youth speech and especially post-Gaeltacht speech are upgraded in comparison with traditional local speech, in terms of desirable personality traits, no matter what adjectives are used.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

In response to both the label-ranking task and to the portion of the speaker evaluation experiment in which the listener judges evaluated the guises in terms of ‘good Irish’, the dominant ideology around linguistic variation in Irish is reproduced by participants. This expected result in the label-ranking task can be interpreted in terms of the status associated locally, and the familiarity of the participants, with each of the varieties listed. Local speech is considered a ‘best language’ variety for the local Gaeltacht communities. It is overtly acknowledged as a model variety for spoken Irish within each of the Gaeltacht communities and it is the spoken variety with which the pupils in the study are likely to be most familiar. The Gaeltacht areas of Munster contain some internal variation, but also share linguistic traits that are common across all Gaeltacht areas in Munster, as discussed above. Because of these shared linguistic characteristics, the Irish varieties of other areas in Munster are considered by the teenagers in the study as relatively familiar, and are therefore acknowledged as such in their evaluations.

The standard written variety is often considered as a distinct variety which is not representative of local dialectal speech (Ó hIfearnáin and Ó Murchadha 2011). It is nonetheless familiar to school-going teenagers in the Gaeltacht by virtue of its prominence in publishing and in pedagogy where it is granted status as a prestige variety. The spoken Irish of Connacht is in its own right a model spoken variety for the Gaeltacht speech community in Connacht. It is familiar to

participants mostly through its role in the broadcast media, and although it is recognised as a legitimate language model, it does not share the same currency as the more familiar categories already discussed.

The less favourable position of post-Gaeltacht speech mirrors its description in public discourse as a synthetic and inauthentic form of speech. Its role in the broadcast media, particularly television programmes targeting a teenage audience, makes it familiar to teenagers and perhaps makes more salient the stigmatised features frequently associated with it. Even though Ulster speech is considered a model spoken form for many speakers, it appears to be dismissed by those involved in the current study. This rejection is attributable to the manner in which the communities of Munster and Ulster are geographically isolated from one another, and to the resultant infrequent opportunities for interaction. This is further compounded by the marginal role of Ulster speech in broadcast media shows targeting teenagers.

The responses of the participants on the scale referring to ‘good Irish’ presents a situation familiar to researchers who investigate subjective responses to linguistic variation, because it is the overt ideology on ‘best language’ varieties that generally prevails in experimental studies that focus on consciously-offered evaluations of linguistic variation (Labov 2001: 222–223). Therefore, it is again unsurprising that traditional local speech beats all other varieties, and that post-Gaeltacht speech is judged least favourably when the participants provide subjective responses on scales that openly refer to the type of language used by the speakers. In such experimental designs participants merely reproduce the dominant ideology common in public discourse on ‘best language’. These results point to a fundamental mismatch between ideology and practice in the Gaeltacht. The valorisation of traditional Gaeltacht speech in openly-offered evaluations of linguistic variation is far removed from the direction of language change in the Gaeltacht, where a rapid shift away from traditional speech forms is reported. As Coupland and Kristiansen (2011: 23) have noted, there is often a mismatch within Haugen’s traditional model of language standardisation between the ‘best language’ models accepted by the public, as articulated in openly-offered evaluations of language variation, and the target language models that are implicit in the patterns of language use and diffusion within the community.

In the current investigation, the mismatch between acceptance and diffusion was only evident in the listener-judges’ openly-offered responses, which involved the use of instruments that specifically referred to the type of speech with which they were presented. When the nature of the experiment was less salient

and when the instruments used referred, not to the speech variety, but to the attributes of the speakers, the dominant ideology on linguistic variation did not come to the fore. The dominant ideology is by-passed, and in its place we find the emergence of a hierarchical organisation of the varieties of spoken Irish that contrasts strongly with the overt hierarchisation that emerges in overt evaluations of ‘best language’ varieties. When the research tool refers to the characteristics of the speaker and when the nature of the experiment is less salient, late modern speech varieties, Gaeltacht youth speech and especially post-Gaeltacht speech, are upgraded in comparison with their positions in assessments of ‘best language’ and in comparison with the position of traditional Gaeltacht speech in evaluations of the characteristics of the speakers. Social meaning is attached to language varieties through processes of enregisterment and iconisation. Through these processes post-Gaeltacht speech and, to a lesser extent, Gaeltacht youth speech, have been indexically linked with desirable personality attributes and social meanings.

The indexicality of post-Gaeltacht speech and of Gaeltacht youth speech might be explained by recourse to: (a) the mixture of linguistic competence in the Gaeltacht, which means that traditional and non-traditional forms of Irish have currency (Ó Curnáin 2007; Ó hIfearnain and Ó Murchadha 2011); (b) the expansion of Irish beyond the confines of the Gaeltacht communities, which has resulted in the emergence of a variety that operates independently of Gaeltacht norms (Mac Mathúna 2008; Nic Pháidín 2003); and (c) the packaging of varieties of Irish in the broadcast media and speakers’ experience of linguistic variation in the home, in the peer group and in the education system. These factors combined may contribute to the manner in which varieties of Irish are perceived and to the social meanings that are attached to them.

Whatever their origin, the indexical links that connect language forms with social meanings in the Gaeltacht do not readily emerge in the participants’ openly-offered assessments of ‘best language’ varieties, due to the pervasiveness of dominant language ideologies in that context. However, and like experiments by Kristiansen (2003, 2009) in Denmark, this dominant ideology is side-stepped in the current research design, when the focus of the experiment is placed on the association of speech varieties with social meanings and when the nature of the experiment is not revealed to participants. Thus, there is a dichotomy within participants’ subjective responses to linguistic variation, so that we may speak of two contrasting forms of ideology. On the one hand, the overt ideology that dominates public discourse on linguistic variation is reproduced by participants

in judgements of ‘best language’ varieties. Such openly-offered ideology points to a mismatch between ideology and patterns of language use and it is therefore contended that overt ideology plays, at most, a peripheral role in influencing the diffusion of linguistic forms and features in the community. On the other hand, there are ideological judgements that are unavailable in overt appraisals of ‘best language’ varieties, because participants are unwilling or unable to articulate them in openly-offered responses to questions that centre on ‘language excellence’. These judgements are accessed through indirect methods that focus on the association of social meanings with speech varieties and in which the nature of the experiment is not revealed to participants. Importantly, this covert ideology appears to be intimately linked with patterns of language use. Speech varieties that are proliferating in the community beat the models for ‘language excellence’ in assessments of the social and personal characteristics of the speakers, so that post-Gaeltacht speakers and Gaeltacht youth speakers are considered more enthusiastic, trustworthy, adventurous, interesting, self-assured, intelligent, nice and fashionable than their traditional speaker counterparts.

The direction of linguistic change in contemporary spoken Irish, and the manner in which the speakers of the different speech varieties are perceived socially, appear inherently linked. The results of the current investigation support Labov’s (1972: 117) contention that speech forms are in some way linked to values associated with them at a deeper level of consciousness. In that sense, linguistic behaviour among younger speakers in the Gaeltacht is synonymous with the covert ideology that was uncovered in the experimental design. Ideology and attitudes towards linguistic variation can be can be inferred from linguistic practice or behaviour (Milroy and Milroy 1985: 19), and not merely from hegemonic ideologies that are expressed in openly-offered responses to questions about ‘language excellence’. Following research in third-wave variation studies (Campbell-Kibler 2011; Eckert 2008), where it is argued that language functions as a semiotic device to signal stances, alignments, and other modes of self-presentation, it appears that the covert ideology revealed in the current experiment is implicit in patterns of language use and in the diffusion of linguistic varieties and features in the community. Differences in feature use can be seen as signals of attitudes and desired social membership (Kammacher, Stæhr and Jørgensen. 2011: 89). To this end, linguistic production is used as a means of supporting and enhancing a positive self-image by positioning oneself in the web of intergroup relationships (Kristiansen, Garrett and Coupland. 2005: 12–13).

It remains unclear whether the proliferation of the linguistic changes described at the beginning of this chapter is a direct result of favourable attitudes towards the innovative forms and the social meanings that they evoke, or whether their expansion influences the manner in which they are perceived. It may well be the case that subjective factors are the driving force behind language change, as postulated by Kristiansen (2003, 2009) for the Danish context – an argument that is strengthened by his successful prediction of the direction of language change in Danish (see the discussion in Kammacher, Stæhr and Jørgensen 2011). The results from the Gaeltacht study, however, are not sufficient to definitively posit socio-psychological factors as the driving force behind language change in the Gaeltacht. The data cannot be used to dismiss the influence of the proliferation of language varieties on subjective reactions to those same varieties, nor can they be used to discount the possible symbiotic relationship proposed by Blommaert (2009: 562) whereby the language-ideological load guides the process of language change, but where it is also one of its results.

Linguistic behaviour in the Gaeltacht and the perception of linguistic varieties and their indexical social meanings share an intimate link. This covert ideology is implicit in linguistic behaviour, but it can also be accessed through covert, indirect methods. These methods and instruments will be pivotal in elucidating the nexus between linguistic behaviour and subjective and ideological factors, and in establishing the role of socio-psychological factors in the process of language change.

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