

Introduction

Aim of the book

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Structure of the book

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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