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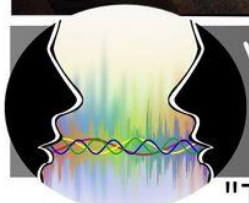
Mellon Centre for Migration Studies, at the Ulster American Folk Park



Abstracts



"How We Made a New Art on Old Ground" Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Language, Migration and Identity



*"múin Béarla
do na leanbháin"*

"Teach the Children English"

website: <http://research.ncl.ac.uk/NI-language-migration>

How We Made a New Art on Old Ground is the title of a poem by Eavan Boland (2001)



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**“Towns, farms, fields – all of them at that very moment
moulding the speech of whoever lived there”:
place, identity and language in Northern Irish migratory contexts**

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The extract in our title from Eavan Boland’s 2001 poem ‘Emigrant Letters’ captures the relationship between different types of geographical spaces and their impact on linguistic behaviour (Britain 2010). It discusses the critical importance of language and, indeed, letters to the Irish emigrant. The poem also comments on the effect that long-term migration can have on one’s original regional variety by which time “vowels, half sounds and syllables from somewhere else” have “nearly smoothed out a way of speaking you could tell a region by, much less an origin.” Our presentation addresses all of these issues by mining two different data sets: (i) collections of historical letters written by Irish emigrants and (ii) contemporary interviews with newcomer young people attending primary and post-primary schools in three divergent locations across Northern Ireland (Armagh, Belfast and Donaghmore). Both corpora are mined so as to gain a better understanding of a migrant’s sense of place in their new surroundings and the degree to which they might, nevertheless, remain attached to their origins. Of interest too, particularly in the case of the recent interviews with new speakers of Northern Irish English, is the extent to which they have or have not had their speech “smoothed out” in the manner Boland describes and what, if any, impact this may have had on their identity construction (Britain and Trudgill 1999).

Voices, letters, places: exploring Ulster migration through language

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The aim of this introductory session is to demonstrate the rich research perspectives offered by examining, as a case study, the important role of migration in the history and development of Ulster. Taking a holistic approach incorporating multidirectional aspects of migration (i.e. immigration, emigration, internal migration and return migration), the presenters will describe the variety of types and formats of evidence available (objects, maps, letters, interviews) and how these resources and related methodologies of investigation can be combined to yield new and important insights about local history and language.

To begin, Brian Lambkin will introduce the theme of language and migration with reference to the site of the Ulster American Folk Park. Paddy Fitzgerald will then explore examples of emigrant letters from the Irish Emigration Database for clues about the impact of migration on the written language of correspondence. To conclude, Johanne Devlin Trew will provide a few aural examples of the speech of Ulster migrants from the *Voices of Migration and Return* collection in order to consider the role of migration in shaping speech patterns. Our discussion will feature resources available on *DIPPAM* (*Documenting Ireland: Parliament, People and Migration*), an online resource funded by the AHRC: www.dippam.ac.uk

Home stories: migration, identity and language in contemporary Ireland

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Research on migration and identity in Ireland has been dominated by sociologists, with a particular focus on national communities and on vulnerable migrants coming from outside of the EU. As a consequence, topics such as demographics and legal barriers to integration are privileged over the discussion of newcomers’ everyday concerns. Taking a longitudinal (2008-2010) and interdisciplinary (geography and sociolinguistics) perspective, this paper explores various facets of the lived experiences of a socially and nationally diverse set of newcomers to (the Republic of) Ireland in order to understand how they negotiate their everyday lives. Analysis of various aspects of migrant lives – for example, experiences of and attitudes to Irish English, experiences with work and with people in Ireland, and interactions with state services – finds that newcomers from a range of backgrounds have very similar perceptions of and ‘problems’ with Ireland, and also engage similar strategies and tactics to cope with them. Yet, despite these similarities, there does not appear to be a common ‘immigrant’ or ‘newcomer’ identity in Ireland, as people’s association with Ireland varies across time. In this paper, we focus in particular on a common discursive tactic used by newcomers as a way of asserting identity: their conceptualization of ‘home’. Our focus on ‘home’ allows us to show, first, the relationship between identity and place for migrants and, second, the complexity of migrant identities and the factors that shape them. Our paper thus draws from sociolinguistics and geography in order to examine the broader relationship between identity, migration and language, and concludes with a reflection on the contributions and challenges of interdisciplinary research on this topic.

Dynamics in the linguistic landscape of the eastern border region

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The two political jurisdictions created by the partition of Ireland in 1921–22 have historically had very different policies towards the Irish language. Policy in the Irish Free State was quick to designate Irish as an official language, while the 1937 Constitution which provides the legal framework for the Republic of Ireland designates Irish as the 'first official language', and English as 'a second official language', or, in Irish, simply 'mar theanga oifigiúil eile' ['as another official language']. Language policy in Northern Ireland has for the most part taken English for granted as the language of official functions, though allowances have been made from time to time for the use of Irish in Education. Since the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998, however, the governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland have agreed to 'recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to ... the Irish language, Ulster-Scots, and the languages of the various ethnic communities'. Concomitantly, some local governments and public bodies in Northern Ireland have, in recent years, increased their use of Irish for a range of purposes.

It should not be surprising that differences in policy, no less than differences within the population as to the level of Irish-language usage, should be reflected in what has come to be called the 'Linguistic Landscape' in Ireland. Linguistic Landscape (LL) studies (as in Shohamy and Gorter 2009; Jaworski and Thurlow 2010; Shohamy, Ben-Rafael, and Barni 2010; and Hélot, Barni, Janssens, and Bagna 2012) are concerned with the visual use of language in public spaces – whether in the official domain of street signs and public order notices or the private domains of local shops signs, notice boards, leaflets, and graffiti. The study of the LL raises many questions for language and society, focusing especially on the LL as both a reflection of language ideology and community usage and as a force which shapes perceptions, values, and practice with regard to specific languages.

Differences in policy on each side of the Border in Ireland are immediately reflected in both public and private signage: official signposting in the Republic is consistently bilingual, while practice in Northern Ireland is much more subject to local variation and decision-making. Even so, the LL is not a stable entity, and changes can be observed in the distribution of languages within the last decade. This study builds on research in the linguistic landscape of six urban areas in the eastern Border region – Newry, Armagh, Warrenpoint, Carrickmacross, Monaghan, and Dundalk – including material from 2005, 2012, and 2014. The examination of change and continuity in the LL over these years is thus designed to contribute to an understanding of the competing pressures of state policy and community language ideology in this region.

Migration and new social media: language practices as indicators of participation and alienation

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The last ten years has seen an explosion in digital connectivity. New media applications, including those available on mobile phones, digital television and voice-over-IP telephony, enables migrants in a world always on the move to maintain a transnational 'presence'. They can listen to news, watch sports, hold video conversations with family, conduct *Facebook* exchanges of social events and gossip with friends, watch weddings and funerals via webcam. It seems almost as good as being home, even when being away. Migrants can create a “bubble” for themselves, isolated from their local physical surroundings (emotionally, at least) while maintaining a digital or virtual membership in a community of friends and relations.

But is this true? Do new media really maintain connections with the world that migrants left behind? Language may be both a cause and a useful measure of such a process. Language, like culture and social practices, changes over time, both in the host and home societies in which migrants exist. In the case of changes in the home society, do emigrants follow and participate in these changes? This is not evident, given the process by which languages change. As new terms, or old terms used in new ways, emerge, they diffuse through a speech community. These take place in a social context - the context in which they are heard and where speakers try them out. For migrants, much communication is a passive monitoring of events that take place by looking at Facebook pages, listening to national radio, watching national TV or sports, reading newspapers online. It is in this context of passive monitoring that new terms, or old terms in new contexts, make their first appearance. In natural speech communication, this is situated in a complex social web that enables the listener to learn the meaning and appropriate context for new terms as s/he tests the terms in this social web - with the bus conductor, the newsagent, or the friend in the pub. But, in the world of social media, active communication takes place within the smaller sphere of close friend and family. Is this sufficient to enable the emigrant abroad to add these new speech features to their repertoire? And, if not, will there be a growing sense of alienation as the content of this rich social media is a content that the emigrant no longer understands. The old phrase of America and England being separated by a common language may also apply to emigrants and native speakers.

If lack of participation in language change in one's home country increases isolation, this same process of participation in language change also makes the emigrant feel more at home in the host society. One of the new changes in progress in which migrant Poles in Ireland participate is the ubiquitous '*like*'. In general they are participating in the overall, rapidly evolving, use of *like* in Ireland today; but, as individuals, they are also picking and choosing bits, emphasizing some and not others from their linguistic repertoires according to the identity they're constructing for themselves in their new life. So their rates of use may be very different from one another, despite similar overall patterns. This shows clearly in quantitative analysis of their speech. Some participate enthusiastically in this incoming discourse pragmatic change and use it at 'traditional' Irish rates; some have reasons for avoiding participation in this current variability in Irish English. If the use of '*like*' by migrants in Ireland makes them identify more with Irish society and community - even while their inability to appropriately use and understand new features in their home society language isolates and alienates them - then language practices, such as use of '*like*' may be a useful means of measuring processes of integration and alienation.

Acquiring linguistic variation in the New and the Old World: the difference that place makes

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Since the foundation of sociolinguistics, place has been construed as a powerful determinant of language variation, along with social factors such as age, gender, social class and ethnicity (e.g. Labov 1972). While place has garnered considerable academic attention in sociolinguistic research on language variation and change (Chambers 2000; Beal 2006), there has been correspondingly less work on the role of place in first language/dialect acquisition. Prevailing frameworks of linguistic analysis tend to perpetuate the notion that children acquire an idealized, relatively uniform variety of their first language, and pay scant attention to the role of regional or local norms in the acquisition process. The stock response to the presence of locally-based variants in children’s speech is to treat them as speech errors, or dismiss them as developmental features that children will discard as they acquire adult-like norms.

Drawing on the framework of variationist sociolinguistics (Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001), I adduce evidence from a number of complementary data sources to argue that locally-based variation, inextricably associated with place, plays a key role in the acquisition process. I exemplify with a number of grammatical variables, including relativization strategies (1-2), strong verb morphology (3-4), and *was/were* variation (5-6) (see Levey 2006, 2007).

- (1) there was this man *who* rang up
- (2) it’s you the one *what* wants to fight
- (3) they *done* the Ouija board again
- (4) I *seen* the first one
- (5) *was* they crucified?
- (6) my brother *was* saying it *weren’t* his fault

I show that the acquisition of each grammatical variable is conditioned by powerful community-based norms that children internalize as part of the process of acquiring competence in their native vernacular.

A key component of this study is its comparative axis: I contrast children’s acquisition of the target grammatical variables in an urban variety of Canadian English with their acquisition of the same variables in London English, U.K. Systematic comparison of children’s speech with a commensurate adult control variety in each locale enables children’s usage to be situated with respect to community-based norms. The results of this comparative exercise reveal that non-standard usage is far more prevalent in the child data from London in contrast with the comparatively more standard linguistic behaviour of the Canadian children. In both locations, however, children align their usage with community linguistic norms, confirming the intrinsic role of place in shaping the acquisition process.

I conclude by briefly considering some of the questions raised by this research about divergent patterns of linguistic variation in New and Old World locations, and explore why an adequate understanding of these patterns cannot be achieved without situating them in their social and historical context.

Co-curating place: community-led research into historical migration and contemporary identity in the North East of England

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Traditional approaches to migrant groups within the heritage sector have tended to adopt an ‘outreach’ model of community participation, whereby community groups are ‘invited in’ to the museum or archive to contribute to an exhibition or project determined by the organisation. The stated outcome of such initiatives is often that participation in the project will enable migrant groups to feel ‘included’ within the story of a place and thus gain a greater sense of belonging. However, such approaches have been criticised for re-affirming a hierarchical relationship between those at the ‘core’ and the ‘margins’ by failing to address questions of who is doing the including and under what terms? What happens then, if this process is reversed, from ‘outreach’ to ‘inreach’ (Corsane 2006), whereby heritage organisations, having adopted ‘ecomuseological’-like guidelines and documentation and research approaches, act as facilitators for community-led research, rather than as gatekeepers? How can heritage organisations serve the needs of migrant communities who want to use historical and contemporary material to explore questions of identity, belonging and a sense of place on their own terms? And how might this research contribute to a wider understanding of complexities of place and what it means to ‘belong’?

This paper considers these questions in relation to the Co-Curate North East project, funded under the AHRC scheme for Digital Transformation in Community Research Co-Production. The project responds to demands from schools and community groups within the North East of England to access and enhance knowledge from a broad range of ‘official’ museums and archives and ‘un-official’ co-created community-based collections of tangible and intangible heritage resources. It aims to co-produce and co-curate digital heritage resources and archives through innovative collaborative approaches using social media and open data. The primary output of the project is an online portal (<http://co-curate.ncl.ac.uk>), which provides a single-access point for museum, library, archive and community-held collections relating to the North East. It allows users to easily search collections; contribute to existing collections by uploading their own photos, films, documents and stories; and share their knowledge and experiences with others through the creation of online learning resources. In doing so, the site aims to not only reflect the diverse communities and heritage of the North East but allow users to explore their own research interests and sense of place.

This paper analyses issues of identity, belonging and place that arose within the Co-Curate project during community-led research undertaken by a group of young people from migrant backgrounds in the West End of Newcastle. The group aimed to uncover and share stories of migration in the North East and challenge negative attitudes towards migrants, especially those from religious minority groups. Using university researchers as mediators, the group worked with museum and community-held collections to examine the impact of historical migration on place and identified experiences of religious minorities that resonated with their own contemporary experiences. This paper will explore the challenges faced by the young people in gaining access to relevant material in traditional heritage organisations and considers the implications of this for both the Co-Curate project and for the heritage sector more broadly.

Immigrant communities and systems of language rights in Europe: a failed response to a multilingual continent?

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In the past two decades there has been a growing focus on ‘linguistic rights’ within the field of international law. This has been especially true in the European context where the Council of Europe (CoE), Europe’s major human rights organisation, has drafted a number of legislative documents which have relevance for speakers of minority languages. This paper focuses on the European Charter for Regional and Minority languages (ECRML) and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCPNM), both of which have had relevance for speakers of minority languages in a region like Northern Ireland. However, within these documents it is clear that the rights of speakers of ‘indigenous’ communities take precedence while speakers of immigrant languages have often been openly excluded from the debates on linguistic rights. This current approach creates a hierarchical system in minority language protection and ignores the global realities of mass migration patterns which have added to the linguistic diversity of contemporary societies like Northern Ireland. This paper discusses the hurdles faced when trying to overcome this position and provides some possible pathways for a wider inclusion of immigrant languages within the current international frameworks thus potentially improving policy provision at regional level.

The preservation of the Irish language in the Ottawa Valley during the late nineteenth century: evidence from the 1901 Canadian Census

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This paper is based on an analysis of the 1901 Census returns with a view to establishing the extent to which the Irish language was spoken and passed down from generation to generation in late nineteenth-century Ontario. A preliminary investigation of the data has found that Irish-language speakers were located primarily along the Ottawa Valley, with some also settled in neighbouring Quebec. Those who identified themselves as mother tongue Irish-language speakers were mainly of ethnic Irish background but some identified themselves as either ethnic French or Scottish. This paper will focus on data from the Ottawa Valley and will examine issues such as ethnicity, county of birth, religion, profession and literacy levels. It will discuss a number of patterns that have emerged which appear to have determined whether the language would be passed on to the next generation such as the mother tongue of both parents, whether there was a tendency for Irish-language speakers to cluster together in settlements and whether the dominant language spoken in any given area was a determining factor in the preservation of the Irish language.

Learning to sound Bri[?]ish: immigrant teenagers’ acquisition of T-glottalling as a stylistic resource

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Non-standard accent features have been recognised as an important stylistic resource for multilingual individuals (Queen 2006; Sharma and Sankaran 2011), who use these features in the construction of styles, when expressing particular identities. However, these features are not immediately available to those recent immigrants who are in the process of acquiring the local variety. This study traces the developmental stages in the acquisition of T-glottalling (e.g. saying *wa’er* instead of *water*) in the speech of teenage migrants in London. Data analysis is based on conversations from 21 Polish and 24 locally-born teenagers, which I use as a benchmark for establishing the norms of variation the Polish teenagers have the most frequent exposure to. Among native Londoners, the occurrence of T-glottalling follows probabilistic rules. Its occurrence is affected by the constraints of preceding and following segment, grammatical category, lexical frequency and, notably, style.

This talk pursues three questions. First, are these constraints acquired by non-native speakers, and if so when? Second, at what point are non-native speakers able to use T-glottalling as a stylistic resource? Third, does alignment with the local culture (and hence identity construction) influence the use of variable features? Teenagers’ acquisition progress is analysed by length of time spent in London. Results indicate that the Polish teenagers do not replicate native constraints all at once but one by one. The stylistic and alignment analysis is guided by two different concepts of style: Labov’s notion of style as attention paid to speech (Labov 1972) and a more recent, constructivist notion of style (e.g. Schilling-Estes 2002). The quantitative analysis suggests that style as attention paid to speech is not acquired until after teenagers have spent at least three years in England, and it finds no correlation between attitude to England and use of vernacular features.

However, the qualitative analysis shows that T-glottalling is used for stylistic work much earlier, and it also sheds light on the use of T-glottalling and alignment with local culture. There is no direct correlation between use of T-glottalling and alignment because variation in (t) relates to a variety of different styles, stances and identities. Once an emotional bond with the UK has been established, linguistic variation is used to express a variety of Polish-English/London/UK identities. Different orientations result in different styles and stances and different amounts of T-glottalling. Alignment is indicative of variation in (t) only among those individuals who clearly disalign with England: these rarely ever use T-glottalling. Thus, migrants must acquire not only (1) relative frequencies and (2) constraints, but they must also learn about (3) the stylistic and ideological embeddedness of variable features and how speakers’ identities are implicated in ideological systems.

Child bilingualism and migrant languages

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Migrant languages, regardless of their status, prestige, and worldwide diffusion, provide opportunities for raising children bilingual and give them a range of linguistic and cognitive benefits. Equally, child bilingualism is essential to the inter-generational transmission of these languages, and in some cases to their very prospect of survival. However, there are many widespread misconceptions about what it means for a child to grow up with two languages: for example, too many people still think that bilingualism makes children confused and puts them at a disadvantage at school. Research, in contrast, shows that where there are differences between monolingual and bilingual children, these are almost invariably in favour of bilinguals: bilingual children tend to have enhanced metalinguistic skills and language learning abilities, a better understanding of other people’s points of view, and more mental flexibility in dealing with complex situations. I will first illustrate the main facts and benefits of early bilingualism and then show the importance of disseminating correct information on bilingualism in migrant language communities.