Educators’ Target Language Varieties for Language Learners: Orientation Toward ‘Native’ and ‘Nonnative’ Norms in a Minority Language Context

NOEL Ó MURCHADHA[1] and COLIN J. FLYNN[2]
[1]*Trinity College Dublin, School of Education, Arts Building, Dublin, D2, Ireland Email: noel.omurchadha@tcd.ie*
[2]*Dublin City University, Fiontar agus Scoil na Gaeilge, All Hallows Campus, DCU, Dublin, D9, Ireland*
Email: colin.flynn@dcu.ie

Target varieties for language learning are contentious in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics. Debates centre on the nature and utility of alternative norms. Approximation to ‘native speaker’ practices is the hallmark of language education. Thus, policy and pedagogy frequently orient toward achieving native-like production. While many language learning stakeholders are committed to this model, it is also contested. Opponents point to the ideological assumptions about ‘native’ and ‘nonnative’ speech inherent in the model, and to the unrealistic aims it presents to teachers and learners. While much research focuses on learner preferences, little work exists on teacher attitudes. This article aims to address this dearth in the target variety debate. By focusing on Irish as a minority language, the article supplements the literature on classroom targets for English and other major languages. A thematic analysis of interviews with Irish language pedagogues is presented and reveals their engagement with target varieties for the language.

Keywords: language teachers; Irish language; native speech; nonnative speech; target language variety

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THE ‘NATIVE SPEAKER’[1] HOLDS A privileged position in various branches of linguistics (Ó Murchadha et al., 2018). Sociolinguistics has ‘the vernacular’ and ‘the standard.’ Chomsky (1965) has his ideal speaker–listener in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly. Each in their own way reify the concept of the native speaker. Subsequently, native speech is often seen as the only true source of language data (Ferguson, 1983). Within applied linguistics, native speech has been the benchmark against which language proficiency is measured (García & Wei, 2014; Subtirelu, 2013). It is often taken for granted in language curricula and by many language professionals that approximation to native speaker norms represents best practice for students seeking to develop proficiency in a language (Cook, 1999, 2016; Jenkins, 2016). Curriculum policy and agents engaged in language teaching and learning are committed to the native-speech- as-target-variety model. Students engaged in language learning have likewise been demonstrated to covet native norms (Butler, 2007; Flynn, 2014; McKenzie, 2008; Subtirelu, 2013). This paradigm does not go uncontested, how- ever. The literature is replete with criticisms of the native speaker ideal. Among the criticisms, it is pointed out that the concept is an ideological construct (Eckert, 2003), a myth (Ferguson, 1983), whose status results more from sociopolitical arrangements than from linguistic facts (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017; Kramsch, 1997; Piller, 2001). In a practical sense, the merit of native

The Modern Language Journal, 102, 4, (2018)
DOI: 10.1111/modl.12514
0026-7902/18/797–813 $1.50/0
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speech as a target for all language learners is also challenged (Cook, 1999, 2016; Piller, 2001).

This article reviews the debate on target language varieties for language teaching and learning and presents new data on teacher attitudes to target models in a minority language. The origins of the native speaker model in language teaching education are outlined, as are applications and criticisms of the model. Research on target varieties for minority languages, and on the role of educators in establishing targets for learners, is reviewed. In the second half of the article we present results from an interview-based inquiry into these issues, carried out with student teachers of the Irish language. The teachers' engagement with variation in Irish and the perceived classroom applications of different speech models are discussed.

ON THE ORIGINS OF THE NATIVE SPEAKER MODEL

The prestige of the native speaker model for language learning emanates in part from an ideological belief in the existence of correct, standard forms of language (Ó Murchadha, 2016). By virtue of their linguistic profile and experiences, native speakers (particularly those practising prestige 'standard' varieties) are considered purveyors of proper language usage. Expertise in language is defined and dominated by native speakers (Canagarajah, 1999) and native speech is often regarded by learners as a model to emulate (Flynn, 2014; Timmis, 2002).

Because languages, and also particular varieties of languages, are seen as unique cultural vehicles of distinct peoples (Ó Murchadha & Ó hIfearnáin, 2018), 'going native' is seen as a means to fully participate in the social, cultural, political, and economic realities of native speaker populations. This is perhaps especially salient in powerful global languages where economic benefits abound for native-like language users (Bijvoet & Fraurud, 2016). Even in smaller languages, though, native speech varieties can be attractive to learners as they are seen to represent a unique way of being (Ó Murchadha et al., 2018). For language learning stakeholders, therefore, the pursuit of native-like language production is not often called into question, no matter the language involved (Cook, 1999; Kramsch, 1997).

The alignment of language teachers with native norms is therefore underpinned by a motivation to equip learners with the type of linguistic proficiency that will allow them to successfully participate in the social, cultural, and economic markets of the target language. The native speaker approach outlines the terms of engagement for learners. It illustrates to learners that, rightly or wrongly, some language varieties carry a certain cachet and that orienting toward more prestigious varieties may be advantageous to language users. It can be argued that the approach is designed to allow learners to negotiate the social reality of their 'new' language, rather than to equip them to debunk that reality. Because learners often pine for native speech models, they may also expect that their language learning experiences will expose them to 'authentic' native forms of language. As language becomes increasingly commodified in late modern society (Brennan, 2017; Heller, 2010), the demands of consumers (in this case learners) hold sway. Of course, the target variety ambitions of learners also matter from the language learning motivation perspective (Ushioda, 2013; cf. Flynn, 2013; Flynn & Harris, 2016; Murphy & Flynn, 2013). The prominence of the native speaker approach thus, in many ways, stems more from pragmatic considerations than from sinister attempts to perpetuate the myth and prestige of the native speaker. Nevertheless, the model is not unproblematic.

CRITICISMS OF THE NATIVE SPEAKER MODEL

Critics of the native speaker concept have described it as a myth, an ideological construct, and a socially reified entity (e.g., Davies, 2003; Eckert, 2003; Graddol, 1999; Rajagopalan, 1997). Although the native speaker has been characterised using a number of criteria (age of acquisition, intuitions about standard and ideolectal grammar, ability to produce fluent spontaneous discourse, ability to use language creatively, and to interpret and translate into L1), most of these characteristics are, in principle, attainable by language users who are not considered native speakers (Cook, 2002; Davies, 2004). Childhood acquisition is the only criterion that cannot be attained by those who were not raised with a language. On this view, it is essentially a nonscientific, linguistically unsound categorisation (Mesthrie, 2000) that is based on ideological assumptions about language and identity. Certain cohorts of users are assumed to possess expertise in a language by virtue of their birth and upbringing. Other users of the same language are assumed to lack language expertise based on the same criteria. Rampton (1990), therefore, highlights that much of what is assumed about native speech (and by extension nonnative speech) spuriously

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emphasises the biological ahead of the social and the linguistic, conflating language as an instrument for communication on the one hand with language as a symbol of social identification on the other. Piller (2001), likewise, questions the native speaker target and asks to what extent the native speaker's early acquisition leads to (a) privileged access to the language, (b) a fundamentally different type of linguistic competence from that of nonnative speakers, and (c) the development of a less 'error'-prone form of language than that of nonnative users. Even if early acquisition does achieve the above, Piller (2001) questions whether this makes native speakers the sole arbiters of correct language usage.

In sociocultural terms, the model designates that assimilation to the norms of native speakers is necessary to achieve expert language status (Kramsch, 2002). It encourages L2 users of all profiles to imitate social actors who are likely to have very different sociolinguistic identities, and who operate in spheres that may lie beyond the socioeconomic needs and interests of learners. Yet, this achievement is still insufficient to become recognised as a native speaker owing to the ideological underpinnings of the model.

From a pragmatic and educational perspective, the native speaker model presents learners with an impractically nebulous ideal (Canagarajah, 2014). As native speakers display wide variation in their language usage, in line with regional, generational, occupational, and class-related correlates, the notion of the single native speaker ideal is rendered artificial (Kramsch, 1997). In reality, learners encounter a fluid and potentially infinitely variable target variety. Even if the native target were a unitary norm, the extent to which it is an attainable and a realistic pedagogical norm would remain questionable, especially in contexts where access to communities who routinely use the target language may be limited (as is the case for many language learners, especially learners of minority languages). Furthermore, the extent to which the native target aligns with learners' interests and communicative needs has been challenged (e.g., Firth & Wagner, 1997). Native speech forms may be of little use to learners and L2 users who have no significant engagement with native speakers and who do not intend to participate in markets where native speech has currency.

In light of these shortcomings, many researchers in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics call for more objective criteria against which to measure language proficiency. Descriptions and norms that are based on linguistic expertise (Leung, Lewkowicz, & Jenkins, 2009; Rampton, 1990), and on the linguistic multicompetence (Cook & Wei, 2016) developed through language learning, are suggested. This competence-based approach is accompanied by new terminology that researchers contend is preferable to ideologically laden, linguistically nondescript terms. The most common of these new terms being used in the Irish context as well as that of other minority languages is 'new speaker' (O'Rourke & Ramallo, 2013; O'Rourke & Walsh, 2015; Robert, 2009; Smith–Christmas et al., 2018). O'Rourke, Pujolar, and Ramallo (2015) define new speakers as "individuals with little or no home or community exposure to a minority language but who instead acquire it through immersion or bilingual educational programs, revitalization projects or as adult language learners" (p.1). They argue that the notion of 'new speakerness' is an explicit attempt to move beyond older labels which compare second language users to native speakers and measure their language competency against the native-speaker benchmark. By using this new label, it is argued that we take into account "the new communicative order of the modern era which is characterized by new types of speakers, new forms of language and new modes of communication" (p. 2). In Ireland there are now more habitual speakers of Irish outside the Gaeltacht (i.e., the traditional heartland of the language located primarily along the western and southern coasts) than there are within these areas (O'Rourke & Walsh, 2015). According to the definition provided above, many of these users of the language are new speakers of Irish.

In line with criticisms of the native speaker model outlined above, measures of proficiency such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages are based on competence criteria. It is argued that by conceptualising social actors who have proficiency in more than one language in this way, frameworks move beyond a model that presents nonnative speakers as deficient forms of native users. In doing so, the linguistic multicompetence that is not within the purview of monolinguals is more fully acknowledged and researchers can avoid reinforcing the comparative fallacy (Bley–Vroman, 1983). Despite these ideological and terminological shifts, however, questions remain in relation to the pedagogical norms with which to present learners. Teachers have a key role here, especially in minority language contexts.

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EDUCATORS AS LINGUISTIC ROLE MODELS

It is well documented that formal language learning, either through subject only or immersion education, does not on its own lead to widespread active bilingualism (e.g., Edwards, 2017). However, much of the literature on bilingualism in linguistics, sociology, psychology, and education identifies formal language learning as a transformative experience that can trigger lifelong active use of a second or additional language (e.g., Woolard, 2011). This phenomenon is documented in the case of minority and majority languages alike (Ó Murchadha & Migge, 2017). In outlining the trajectories of Catalan users who develop proficiency outside the home, Pujolar and Puidgevall (2015) describe education as a linguistically transformative life juncture that opens avenues for social actors to become competent and active multilingual subjects. The influence of education and educators on the linguistic pathways of bilinguals who develop competence in a language outside the home is similarly described in other minority languages (Aguilera & Lecompte, 2007; Carty, 2014; Cenoz, 2008; Vila i Moreno, 2008), including Irish (Harris, 2008; Walsh, O'Rourke, & Rowland, 2015). However, educators are also purveyors of linguistic models. Because genuine opportunities to interact in the target language outside the classroom can be rare for many language learners (especially learners of minority languages), educators may represent learners' only meaningful source of contact with the language. As a result, the type of language that pedagogues espouse in the classroom can influence learners' targets and ambitions. Nevertheless, although a body of literature exists on the role of education and pedagogues in promoting bilingualism, the academic literature on educators as linguistic agents who embody and prescribe target varieties for language learners is not as extensive. Assessing language regard among pedagogues is important in establishing how target language varieties are negotiated in education.

REGARD FOR LINGUISTIC VARIATION

A vast body of literature is available on social actors' regard for linguistic variation in various fields of language research. Part of that literature is comprised of experimental work on the perception of variation in minority languages (Flynn, 2014; Hoare, 2001; Jones, 1998; Ó Murchadha, 2013). From its origins in studies on the social psychology of language (Lambert et al., 1960) and in sociolinguistics (Labov, 1966), the study of how people perceive language variation has been viewed through different theoretical lenses in related research areas, including the ethnography of language; language anthropology; and, indeed, applied linguistics. A significant amount of work has been carried out on how attitudes to variation reveal broader sociocultural dynamics (Bishop, Coupland, & Garrett, 2005; Niedzielski, 1999) and on the link between regard for language varieties and language variation and change (Kristiansen, 2014; Labov, 1966). Researchers in applied linguistics who are interested in attitudes to variation are primarily concerned with implications for language educational policy and practice. Specifically, attention focuses on the target variety debate and the pedagogical applications of so-called native and nonnative speaker models (Cook, 2002; Davies, 2004; Jenkins, 2007).

In addition to language ideological debates relating to alternative norms, researchers in applied linguistics have empirically assessed perceptions of variation in order to inform the target variety debate. Much of the applied linguistics research on regard for language variation focuses on varieties of English (e.g., Butler, 2007; McKenzie, 2015; Subtirelu, 2013). The findings from these studies, albeit far from straightforward, are important for two reasons in the context of the present article. First, they provide empirical data which demonstrate a generally positive orientation toward native speaker models among English language learners. Second, they provide comparative data for other language contexts which have not received such attention in the research literature, for example, regional and national minority languages. In relation to the first point, it has been shown that in many cases second language learners evaluate speakers of native/standard varieties of the target language more positively than speakers of nonnative/nonstandard ones on traits pertaining to status and social attractiveness (e.g., Dalton–Puffer, Kaltenboeck, & Smit 1997; Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006; McKenzie, 2008).

However, McKenzie (2008) also uncovered a multidimensional aspect to L2 learners'/speakers' attitudes toward target language varieties. Learners in that study rated mainstream U.S. varieties of English highest in terms of status, followed by regional UK varieties. 'Accented' L2 speech models were rated lowest on this dimension. Conversely, accented L2 speech was rated highest in terms of social attractiveness (i.e., solidarity), followed by regional UK varieties and U.S. varieties were rated lowest

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on this dimension. The implication here is that while L2 learners/speakers perpetuate established norms in relation to the status of speakers of (standard) native speaker varieties, their perceptions of those varieties differ in relation to how socially attractive they find them. On this second dimension, they perhaps find parallels with their own speech endearing enough to rate the nonnative varieties more positively. This stands partially in contrast to findings from a more recent study by the same author (McKenzie, 2015), which found that native speakers of English in a UK university rated varieties of their native language spoken in the north of the UK higher on measures of prestige *and* social attractiveness than forms of English spoken in Asia.

In relation to the second point raised above, much of the attitudinal work on minority languages has a sociolinguistic bent (e.g., Ó Murchadha & Ó hIfearnáin, 2018; Robert, 2009). Furthermore, the work which has been done on attitudes toward linguistic variation in minority language contexts has focused on perceptions of such variation among speakers and learners (e.g., Flynn, 2014). There has been little consideration of the position of language teachers on these issues. Given their status as influential stakeholders in language development, it is surprising that language pedagogues have not been the focus of more sustained attention in the research on subjective assessments of language variation. In an attempt to address this gap, the empirical work for the present article builds on the small body of work that has been done with language teachers in English language contexts (e.g., Coupland, Williams, & Garrett, 1994; Garrett, Coupland, & Williams, 1995; Williams, Garrett, & Coupland, 1996). The theoretical importance of this work should not be underestimated. With many minority languages depending heavily on educational systems to produce competent speakers and provide (additional) domains of use for these speakers, teachers and their attitudes toward variation in and out the classroom are of great importance. To date, however, very little research has considered their views on these matters. There is therefore a clear gap in the literatures on minority language teaching, learning, and revitalization. Furthermore, to the extent that these issues have been researched, it cannot be assumed that findings from English language research will apply to lesser-used language contexts.

VARIATION IN MINORITY LANGUAGES (ESPECIALLY IRISH)

Irish is officially the first national language of Ireland, yet it is spoken as a first language by only a small number of people. It is, however, a compulsory school subject at both primary and secondary levels. As a result there are large numbers of people throughout the country who have varying degrees of proficiency in Irish as a second or additional language. Patterns of linguistic variation and change in minority languages tend to follow similar trajectories (Stanford & Preston, 2009). While traditional regional and/or societal variation may be present prior to language contact, it is widely documented that post-traditional variation emerges as a matter of course during language shift (Dorian, 2010) and when new populations of speakers develop proficiency through institutional structures outwith the traditional communities. This is attested in the Irish context (e.g., Hickey, 2009; Ó Sé, 2000; Pétervary et al., 2014) and in other minority language contexts (e.g., Jones, 1998; Nance, 2015; Ó Murchadha & Ó hIfearnáin, 2018).

Recent discourse on the subject divides modern spoken Irish into three categories: (a) the traditional dialectal varieties spoken mainly by older speakers in the Gaeltacht, (b) the post-traditional varieties of younger Gaeltacht speakers, and (c) the post-traditional 'new speaker' variety/varieties of Irish practised by speakers outside the Gaeltacht who often develop proficiency through schooling (Ó Curnáin, 2012; Ó hIfearnáin & Ó Murchadha, 2011). There is a large literature documenting the traditional Gaeltacht varieties of Irish spoken in Ulster, Connacht, and Munster (e.g., Ó Baoill, 1996; Ó Murchú, 1998; Ó Sé, 2000). Variation is evident across these varieties in terms of syntax, phonology, stress patterns, and lexical items. To give but one example of the latter, the lexical items corresponding to the English word 'mackerel' are *murlas* (Ulster), *ronnach* (Connacht), and *maicréal* (Munster). Varieties in both of the post-traditional forms are seen as departing more or less from the norms of the traditional varieties at phonological and morphosyntactical levels. For example, Ó Curnáin (2012), who describes the speech of Gaeltacht speakers born before 1960 as 'traditional,' and speech of those born after as 'post-traditional,' cites a number of forms which mark the post-traditional varieties. These include, for example, the use of analytic forms such as

thar mé [past me] in place of the more traditional synthetic prepositional pronouns, that is, *tharam* [past me] (Ó Curnáin, 2012, p. 103). Other well attested markers of post-traditional speech is the realization of 'r' as an alveolar approximant [ɹ] rather than an alveolar tap [ɾ] and the realization 'ch' as [k] in place of [x], or [h] as is the norm in northern Gaeltacht areas. A fuller account of the core features of nonnative Irish as spoken outside the Gaeltacht is provided by Hickey (2011, p. 377ff).

Various aspects of language policy and lay perceptions of variation reveal that the three traditional dialectal varieties of the Gaeltacht (Munster, Connacht, and Ulster) are overtly attributed a prestige status in a nondifferentiated manner (e.g., Ó Murchadha, 2016; Ó Murchadha & Ó hIfearnáin, 2018). In the educational system, however, language variation has not been dealt with in a consistent way. There is an official written standard for Irish, which was devised by the Government's Translation Section in the middle of the last century (Rannóg an Aistriúcháin, 1958). However, efforts to promote a national spoken standard have been largely unsuccessful (Ó Baoill, 1988). As a result, Ó Baoill (1999) claims that teachers may tend to base their teaching on the core features of one of the three traditional dialects. It has been observed by Ó hIfearnáin and Ó Murchadha (2011), however, that half a century of using the standard as the dominant variety in school textbooks and elsewhere has led to perceived 'oralization' of this written variety among learners and professional users of the language.

In light of the forgoing, it is clear that a selection of potential models are available as possible pedagogical norms for Irish. As with many minority languages, however, the traditional native varieties of Irish have been recognised targets for language excellence since the turn of the twentieth century. Varieties that do not conform to this ideal have been denigrated (Ó Murchadha, 2016). Received wisdom aside, assessing how teachers of Irish regard variation in the spoken language with reference to the classroom is important for developing a fuller understanding of the target variety debate, both in the Irish context and more broadly.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to explore the issues outlined in the previous section among student teachers of Irish, our study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1. Are the participants familiar with traditional regional varieties and post-traditional new speaker varieties of spoken Irish?

RQ2. What are their attitudes toward different varieties of spoken Irish?

RQ3. To what extent do they feel it would be appropriate for them to promote particular varieties of Irish in the classroom?

RQ4. Do they feel it is appropriate and/or useful for their students to model their own Irish on any of these models? If so, which model(s) is most appropriate?

METHOD

Participants

Twenty-three student teachers of Irish were recruited for participation in this study through purposive sampling in an Irish university offering initial teacher education for second level teachers. The research targeted students enrolled in a Professional Master of Education degree (postgraduate initial teacher education) who had been raised outside the Gaeltacht. Table 1 provides a summary of participants' self-reported sociolinguistic and language education backgrounds, and future teaching goals. It is notable that all of the student teachers of Irish in the targeted programme were raised outside the Gaeltacht. It was felt that the sociolinguistic backgrounds of such individuals would provide them with a unique perspective on classroom target varieties for Irish. Prior to taking their places on the course, all participants had completed an undergraduate degree that included Irish. This involved studying Irish language and literature to degree level, in line with Teaching Council registration requirements for teachers of Irish.[2] In addition to requirements in relation to undergraduate qualifications in Irish, the Teaching Council specified, at the time of the study, that registered teachers of Irish must have certified competence in Irish at Level B2.2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.[3] The participants had a level of proficiency across the four language skills that allowed them to function in Irish in a professional and academic environment. This was further evident in their capacity to engage with the monolingual language background questionnaire (in Irish only) and in their ability to discuss complex educational and linguistic topics in Irish during the interviews. The research instruments therefore performed a gate-keeping function for the fieldwork alongside the agreed

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TABLE 1
Summary of Participants' Self-Reported Linguistic Background and Teaching Goals

Aspect	No. of Participants by Response	Percentage
Learned Irish at school	23	100%
Developed proficiency in Irish at school	20	87.0%
Other contexts where Irish was learned	Home: 4	17.4%
	Language group: 4	17.4%
	Work in the Gaeltacht: 2	8.7%
People who influenced participants' Irish	Teacher(s)/lecturer(s): 21	91.3%
	Parent(s): 12	52.2%
	People in the Gaeltacht: 6	26.1%
	Friends: 4	17.4%
Use of Irish beyond teaching profession	Currently: 22	95.7%
	In future: 23	100%
Future teaching aspirations	Irish immersion school: 19	82.6%
	Gaeltacht school: 12	52.2%

inclusion criteria (see Appendices for translations of the instruments.)

Sixty-five percent of participants were women and 35% were men. This ratio is consistent with the 7:3 ratio of female to male teachers in secondary schools in Ireland (Central Statistics Office, 2016). Participants were aged between 20 and 53 years of age, but all apart from one participant were in their early 20s. Having taken part in the interview, participants completed a background questionnaire which included open-ended items related to their own sociolinguistic profile and future linguistic and professional aspirations (see Table 1 for details on responses). Most participants (87%) reported that they obtained proficiency in Irish through the education system, sometimes in combination with other domains (e.g., the home [13%], Irish language groups [13%], and work [9%]). Three participants attributed their proficiency in Irish solely to domains other than education: the home (4%), the home and Irish language groups (4%), and work in the Gaeltacht (4%). None of the participants reported being raised primarily through Irish. Nearly all (96%) reported that they use Irish outside of their academic and professional lives. Of these, all reported using the language at least weekly outside of school and college, including daily (57%), every other day (4%), a couple of times a week (22%), or weekly (13%). Meanwhile, all participants aspire to using Irish outside of school if and when they are teaching Irish in the future. Most participants (83%) would be interested in teaching in an Irish-medium school outside the Gaeltacht. Interestingly, fewer participants (52%) would be interested in teaching in the Gaeltacht in the future.

Procedure

Participants were asked to read the information sheet and complete the consent form before individual interviews began. The interviews were conducted in Irish by the authors (see Appendix A for a translation of the schedule). Participants were aware that the authors were university lecturers and may have perceived them as being in a position of authority. Both authors speak regional varieties of Irish associated with two particular Gaeltacht areas; however, accommodation and convergence were identified as strategies to facilitate a fluid interview. Most interviews lasted between 35–45 minutes, with some interviews lasting up to 52 minutes. The interviews consisted of two phases. During the first phase, participants were asked to describe and discuss the type of Irish that they themselves use, the linguistic models they aspire to, their comprehension of speakers from other areas in Ireland, and the target language varieties that they (would like to) promote in their classrooms.

The second phase of the interview elicited participants' reactions to speech samples in a speech evaluation exercise (SEE), an adaptation of the matched guise technique (Lambert et al., 1960), in which they listened to 30-second audio recordings of four speakers: three representing the traditional regional varieties of Irish (Ulster, Connacht, and Munster) and one the so-called new speaker variety described above. Speech samples were selected from *RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta* (the national Irish language radio station) based on linguistic descriptions of the traditional Gaeltacht varieties and the post-traditional new speaker variety. The samples were analysed by both authors and their alignment with linguistic descriptions of

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the varieties in the literature was confirmed. Having listened to each of the recordings, participants were asked to identify the speaker's origin, to evaluate the type of Irish heard, and to say whether use of that variety into the future was important. Participants were also asked to discuss potential classroom applications of each variety.

Data Analysis

The data generated were independently transcribed and checked by both authors for accuracy. The transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis. A sample of 20% of the corpus was randomly selected and a coding framework was developed for those data. This framework was reviewed and its applicability to the rest of the corpus was confirmed before coding the remainder of the data. The coding was then cross-checked for accuracy. Results presented below are responses from sections of the interviews in which participants describe the models that they promote as classroom targets for learners as well as from the speaker evaluation experiment where participants responded to the traditional (Gaeltacht) and post-traditional (new speaker) speech samples in terms of whether they would like their students to be familiar with the varieties presented, the appropriateness and/or usefulness for students to approximate the speech in the samples, and the teachers' ability and/or willingness to promote the varieties presented as classroom targets. Interview excerpts have been translated (by the authors) into English from the original Irish.

RESULTS

The analysis of the data from the interviews and the SEE resulted in the following themes: *accuracy as a classroom target*, *familiarity with spoken variation*, *modelling traditional speech*, *utility*, and *implementing speech models*. These emanate from, and are indicative of, the duality noted in this article and elsewhere of the perceived prestige of native speaker norms and the communicative functionality of new speaker varieties which, for many non-Gaeltacht speakers, is also in alignment with their sociolinguistic identity.

Accuracy as a Classroom Target

Accuracy (encompassing grammar, structure, correctness, standardness, and vocabulary) emerges as a dominant theme in participants' responses to questions relating to classroom targets. For most participants (75%), alignment with the forms and structures of the language perceived as correct is a primary concern for the Irish language classroom:

> In my opinion, you have to develop the vocabulary and the grammar and everything like that before you engage with things, like, with features of speech itself. (P11)

This focus on structure and form is mainly rooted in the goal of achieving communicative functionality, however:

> [my aim is] that they would be able to have a conversation and to say and write those simple things, those basic things, correctly. (P16)

Communicative ability should be the ultimate goal for learners, according to the participants, and the ability to negotiate the structure and grammar of Irish during discourse is seen as a fundamental aspect of achieving productive fluency in the language. Interestingly, in light of traditional discourse on target varieties for minority language users and learners, the importance attributed to form and structure does not extend beyond grammatical aspects of language to include accent or alignment with the traditional native-speaker dialectal norms of the Gaeltacht:

> You know, if they can use Irish, for me, at the moment, I wouldn't be looking to pressure them into learning a particular dialect at the moment. I'd just like to have them speak in Irish and not worry about the dialect. (P19)

Only a minority of participants (35%) cite the traditional Gaeltacht varieties when addressing classroom targets for learners of Irish. References to the Gaeltacht relate to learners' receptive skills (i.e., ability to comprehend Gaeltacht speakers) and to familiarising learners with varieties of Irish spoken in the Gaeltacht:

> Well, normally I'm speaking, but I also play speech segments so that they will be able to identify different dialects. I've told them that there are different types of Irish in every Gaeltacht in the country. (P13)

In terms of students aligning their speech practices with Gaeltacht norms, the teachers saw this as an optional decorative extra for those who have already developed high levels of proficiency in the language:

> In my opinion, you have to learn the basic language first and then the other ornamentation. (P16)

For the most part, participants felt that learners should aim to learn or speak their own Irish, one which is basic, simple, but communicative.

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Beyond that, it is suggested that it is not within the remit of Irish language educators to guide learners toward emulating the traditional speech practices of native Gaeltacht speakers. Rather, implicit and explicit arguments for developing learners' 'own Irish' emerge in the data:

> Like, I don't tell them "you should use phrases from Connemara." I want that they will be able to speak and develop their own Irish. (P13)

Furthermore, participants explicitly speak to the legitimacy of non-Gaeltacht varieties:

> They have a Dublin dialect, and for me personally, some people might disagree with me, I think that that's fine. They speak Irish in Dublin. (P8)

It is noteworthy that in these data participants orient toward (a perhaps ill-defined notion of) accuracy when identifying classroom norms for Irish. In addition, they argue for the legitimacy of post-traditional varieties of Irish. This contrasts with a model in which Gaeltacht norms have prominence and that might have been expected given the public discourse on the topic and official language policy for Irish, both of which attribute prestige to Gaeltacht practices. However, this is a trend that emerges again in the data from the SEE, as will be shown below.

Familiarity With Spoken Variation

Thematic analysis of the SEE data revealed broad consistency across the evaluation of the Gaeltacht speech varieties. As a result, participant responses to the Gaeltacht samples have been combined to allow a comparison of responses to Gaeltacht versus new speaker speech. As expected, participants agreed that it was important for learners of Irish to have knowledge of traditional Gaeltacht dialects. All participants (100%) thought this to be important across all traditional varieties presented. The underlying motivations for this stance, as expounded by participants, were primarily instrumental. These teachers reported that knowledge of Gaeltacht varieties presented was important so that learners of Irish could comprehend speakers who practised traditional speech:

> I suppose you have to present students with different dialects because it's clear that people across the country have different dialects and you have to be able to understand people. (P1)

Comprehension of dialects was further reported as important for formal school assessments in Irish where listening comprehension tests are a feature:

> I think it's important that people have knowledge of all of the accents … they just have to understand them because, for example for the exams, the listening comprehension. (P4)

It was furthermore thought that learners may like to align their speech with a traditional dialect and that it was important to expose them to the gamut of varieties for that reason. On the other hand, at a symbolic level, it was highlighted that it is important for Irish to be seen to be like other languages and that having and understanding variation was part of what constituted a language, according to subjects:

> If you compare to England, everyone from England can understand someone from London or from Liverpool and they don't speak the same way. It's the same in Ireland. We have to be able to understand people. (P11)

Somewhat more noteworthy, perhaps, is that most participants (83%) indicated that it was also important for learners to have knowledge of the post-traditional variety of Irish in the SEE. The main justification for this position was somewhat different, however, and is rooted in the perceived legitimacy and authority of post-traditional speech. Participants reported that the post-traditional variety is also part of the mosaic of modern spoken Irish and that learners should therefore know about it and be able to comprehend it:

> Yeah, I'd like to because I'd like that they would know and understand every dialect and that dialect is just as important as every other dialect. If that dialect is there, my students must understand it. (P11)

It was also pointed out by informants that the post-traditional variety carried symbolic value and can subtly show learners that you don't have to be from the Gaeltacht or speak a traditional dialect in order to be a proficient user of Irish:

> Yeah well especially when you're teaching in Dublin. I think that it would be important to say that you don't have to be from a Gaeltacht to speak in Irish and there's a Dublin accent. That's an accent as well even if there isn't a proper Gaeltacht in Dublin. (P18)

Modelling Learners' Speech on Samples

As for learners modelling their speech on the types of speakers in the recordings, the data again reveal a dichotomy. Participants present diverging

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beliefs depending on whether the samples represented Gaeltacht or post-traditional speech. Although a majority of participants (65%) said that they would like it if their students spoke like the Gaeltacht samples, an overwhelming majority of participants (91%) either disagreed or qualified their answers in ways that suggest that this is not a priority, either for teachers or learners:

> It's not that I wouldn't like for them to speak like that, but it's not that important to me. (P11)

At a pragmatic level, participants reported that it is unrealistic to promote a traditional dialectal norm that they do not themselves practise and to which learners have only limited access:

> It would be nice. But again, to be realistic, will I imitate that dialect for them to learn or will I compel students to imitate it as well? I won't. (P16)

Importantly, from a language learning motivation perspective, it was felt that learners are not interested in acquiring traditional dialectal varieties of Irish:

> Yeah, I don't know is that realistic. They're not interested in that kind of Irish. (P9)

> The accent that they have in English is very very different to that accent … they're very sort of, how do I say, opposed to the culchie [a pejorative term for country people] accent, you know? (P4)

Recognising the inherent link between language and identity, the student teachers further felt it would be strange for learners who are not from the Gaeltacht to appropriate traditional dialectal norms associated with regions other than their own. Instead, participants report that it is important for learners to develop their own Irish, instead of trying to emulate native speech:

> Well, again, it depends on the place they are, I think. It's odd, it would be odd if they were from one place and speaking like a person from another county. (P22)

> If they were born and raised in Dublin it's not worth imitating others. (P14)

In this respect, perceived accuracy, correctness, and fluency were revealed as vehicles through which to achieve learners' own Irish:

> The only thing that I'd have with my own students is that they would learn correct, accurate Irish. I don't care what dialect they pick. (P8)

In contrast, participants were very positive in relation to their students modelling their speech on that of the post-traditional speaker presented in the SEE. Most participants (78%) expressed that they were in favour of this variety as a model for learners of Irish, and, unlike the Gaeltacht samples this stance was not widely qualified by caveats:

> He has fluent Irish and it would be lovely if my students had fluent Irish in the future. And I suppose that that's the main aim. (P7)

The utility of the post-traditional variety was an important consideration. Subjects opined that the nonnative variety is clear and would facilitate fluid communication with interlocutors with diverse linguistic profiles:

> Well, if they were able to speak like that they could communicate with anyone because it's intelligible, that dialect. Like, I don't think that people from Connemara or Kerry would have any difficulty with that dialect. (P11)

For learners outside the Gaeltacht, it was proposed that the post-traditional variety aligns with the type of Irish that emerging bilingual students practise, anyway, and that it represents the same sociolinguistic identity as the variety of English used by non-Gaeltacht speakers:

> Yeah, I would like [for them to speak like that] because that's how the students in my class speak when they are speaking Irish. That's how they speak Irish. (P17)

> As I said like, maybe they would be joking about other accents, but if they're speaking with that accent anyway in English, then it doesn't matter, really. (P18)

The potential functionality of the variety was also salient to participants as it was felt that this is the type of Irish that learners are most likely to encounter in their immediate environments:

> I suppose it would be [useful] because it would be, if they're living in Dublin, more useful to get to know the Irish language community in Dublin. (P19)

The utility of the Gaeltacht versus the post-traditional was a theme that participants addressed in some detail, as is shown in the next section.

Utility

Participants who spoke to the utility of the traditional varieties in the SEE (91%) were in agreement that these varieties would be useful for learners. Again, however, this stance was qualified by the greater number of participants (52%). It was suggested that the usefulness of Gaeltacht speech

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is limited to trips to the Gaeltacht and oral and listening comprehension tests that students take as part of their formal education:

> I suppose if they go to Kerry [it would be useful], but in Dublin, as I said, whatever Irish they have I'll be happy provided they can speak it. (P13)

> For the listening comprehension, yeah, but other than that, well, it wouldn't make any difference, really. (P21).

Participants expressed that although Gaeltacht speech might be useful in some contexts, it is by no means necessary to align speech with traditional models and they put forward the view that these speech varieties would be too challenging for Irish language learners:

> It would be too difficult to use in the class. (P10)

For participants, the communicative exigencies of learners are that they should be able to function in the Irish language environment that is closest to them. To this end, alignment with traditional dialects is not necessary, nor entirely useful:

> Because they don't [go to the Gaeltacht], well, some of them go to the Gaeltacht during the summer, but for the most part they speak Irish to one another. So, it's far more important that they understand each other. That's the most important thing. (P19)

> It would be nice [if they spoke a Gaeltacht variety]. It would be interesting, yeah. It would be nice, natural, Irish-native to be able to speak like that, but it's not that useful. (P16)

On the other hand, all participants (100%) who addressed the usefulness of the post-traditional variety presented in the SEE were in agreement that this model was most relevant to learners of Irish. It was seen by respondents as an accurate, correct, and comprehensible variety that is more closely aligned with the written variety of the language:

> Sure, yeah, because they can communicate with everybody. It's clear, it's correct, but … so it's useful for them to have that type of Irish. (P9)

> When they speak Irish like that it's easier to write it, I think, because it sounds the way you write it. (P20)

Concerning the communicative needs of Irish language learners, participants asserted that the post-traditional variety presented in the SEE was representative of the kind of Irish that learners were likely to encounter in their own environs, should they choose to engage with Irish language communities:

> I suppose students are familiar with that kind of Irish and that's the kind of Irish that is used in Irish-medium schools in Dublin, I think. But, that's the Irish that's, em, coming, em. That's the type of dialect that's in Dublin, I think, maybe. (P1)

Implementing Classroom Targets

When the implementation of traditional and post-traditional varieties as classroom targets was discussed, responses again diverged when participants reacted to Gaeltacht versus non-Gaeltacht samples. While a majority (61%) felt that it would be easy to promote Gaeltacht varieties of Irish in their classrooms, this was very much contingent upon having access to resources highlighting the characteristics of the traditional varieties, upon their studying the linguistic characteristics of the traditional varieties in detail and/or altering their own practices to align with the particular traditional speech model in question:

> I'd have to do a lot of work on my own Irish because my dialect isn't like that. I'd be able to use speech clips and the like, but as regards myself, I wouldn't say that I'd be able to speak like that. (P13)

Although promoting traditional native speech was possible, an overwhelming majority of participants (91%) saw significant obstacles to the realization of this goal: The question also remained as to whether this goal was desirable at all:

> Again, in an English language class, would you put on a northern accent in your speech in English? You wouldn't. So, it's not worth it in my opinion. (P14)

> I'd like to, you know, introduce them to it and to promote it, but I'm not sure that the students would accept it … I don't think they'd accept it. (P9)

> I'd have to change a lot. I'd have to do something very different and I don't think it would be real language for me then. (P1)

In contrast, almost all participants (96%) felt that it would be easy for them to promote post-Gaeltacht speech as a classroom target. This is primarily because participants were of the view that the type of Irish that they themselves practise (as new speakers of Irish) is the same as, or similar to, the variety presented in the post-traditional speech sample in the SEE. It was further stated that it would be easier to facilitate learners to acquire this variety of Irish because they may be accustomed to it already from experiences of Irish in school and beyond:

> I'd say so, because that's the sort of Irish I have, so it would be easy enough to promote that, especially

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> in English-medium schools. That's the Irish that's around the students. That's the Irish that they deal with, and they hear that Irish so it would be easier to promote that type of Irish more so than the others. (P9)

DISCUSSION

What emerges from this study is that these teachers are of the view that at least a passive knowledge of traditional Gaeltacht varieties is necessary. They recognise the importance placed on these varieties in the curriculum and among Irish language speakers more generally. As a result, they know that students will encounter these varieties in their school work and beyond. Therefore, if and when they choose to use the language for communicative purposes they should be familiar with variation in general terms. To an extent, the educators display an ideological commitment to the prestige native norm by identifying Gaeltacht speech as the paragon for highly proficient language users. In this fashion, their views are consistent with mainstream perceptions of linguistic variation documented in empirical work on language regard in minority and majority languages and that illustrate the prestige status of native and standard varieties (Hoare, 2001; Niedzielski, 1999; Robert, 2009). They are also, notably, consistent with the positive orientation toward native speaker models revealed in studies of target-variety perceptions in the English language learning context (e.g., Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006; Timmis, 2002). They furthermore align with many language educational policy provisions that tend to privilege (standard) native practices and that overtly identify these practices as targets for learners (Rampton, 2006). Nonetheless, a nuanced, layered view of native and nonnative models is found in the data.

As for their teaching, most of the participant-teachers don't actively encourage traditional varieties as learner targets. They feel that alignment with traditional/Gaeltacht native-speaker norms is something that advanced students should aim for (as they put it: 'ornamentation'). Learners more broadly, in their view, should be concerned with developing a communicative repertoire which is based on grammatically accurate forms, that makes use of appropriate vocabulary and idioms, and that approaches native-like fluency. However, this need not necessarily adhere to all the phonological or morphosyntactic norms of any one traditional dialect. For the educators involved in this study, it is important to enable learners to acquire functional proficiency in a language variety that (a) aligns with the models to which they feel learners aspire, (b) will be useful to learners in the new speaker scenarios that they are likely to encounter in their everyday lives, (c) aligns with learners' identities as new speaker of the language, and (d) is close to the variety of the language that educators practise.

By suggesting that familiarity with and comprehension of native speaker norms is sufficient to achieve the above goals, participants abdicate whatever perceived responsibility they have for guiding learners toward native speaker norms. It is important to note, however, that the participants were not against learners adopting any of the traditional varieties presented to them. In instances where learners are drawn to a particular variety, they felt they should be free to do so and should receive (indirect) support. Nevertheless, they gave two main reasons for not actively promoting the traditional speech models in their teaching. First, they were not speakers of traditional varieties themselves and would therefore have trouble promoting or reproducing some or any of the Gaeltacht varieties. Second, they felt that learners (at least those they had taught to date) did not yet have a level of proficiency in Irish that would allow them to acquire features of traditional Gaeltacht varieties. By acknowledging the existence and legitimacy of nonnative language practices, the participants again, at least implicitly, challenge the ideology supporting the native speaker norm as the sole benchmark for language learner proficiency. Similar to models that have been proposed in the literature on classroom targets for language learners (e.g., Cook, 2016, Kramsch, 2002), the participants in this research propose that alternative, expertise-based language models might be more useful and appropriate as targets for language learners.

Nearly all of the teachers identified the post-traditional, new speaker variety presented in the recordings as a target variety for students, especially for students in urban schools, such as Dublin. But even in settings where a traditional dialect would be appropriate, for example, schools in rural areas close to Gaeltacht areas, they felt that a passive knowledge of the post-traditional variety would be important as a large number of speakers in fact practise that variety. They also felt that it would be easy or easier to promote the post-traditional variety as a target variety since it aligns with the variety of Irish used by participants (educators), and with the variety of Irish learners tend to have. It is also similar to the type of Irish that learners are likely to

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encounter around them, inside the classroom and outside.

In sum, there is agreement among most participants that prestige and utility is attached to traditional Gaeltacht varieties. However, these teachers felt that this is the destination for prestige language status. In terms of target varieties for the classroom, the application and promotion of traditional Gaeltacht speech was called into question. There would, therefore, appear to be a misalignment between participants' reported classroom aims and received wisdom regarding traditional Gaeltacht varieties as the preferred models, at least in the teaching of Irish to school-aged learners, and particularly in urban settings. This state of affairs leaves a vacuum in terms of the spoken target that learners can be aligned with, since Irish lacks a clearly defined, widely accepted competence/expertise-based spoken norm in educational contexts. Subsequently, native spoken norms and the standard written variety function as reference points.

CONCLUSION

Teachers are important language learning stakeholders and they are also (potential) language engineers. They can be particularly influential in terms of the varieties of language that learners value; aspire to; and, ultimately, practise. For language learning contexts in which learners have limited access to native speaker populations, the way that educators negotiate and manage language variation in pedagogical settings is important. For minority languages like Irish, that owe degrees of their sociolinguistic vitality to formal schooling, this is especially important. Varieties of minority languages that have a presence in schooling or that are actively promoted by educators can shape the forms that are valued and practised into the future. Despite the importance of teachers in establishing target varieties for language learners in both majority and minority languages, it is notable that the teacher perspective receives little academic attention in the research on perceptions of language variation and on target language varieties within various branches of linguistics. There is especially a lack of perceptual research with teachers of minority languages, where issues of target language varieties are arguably more sensitive than in other contexts. If linguists of different hues seek to fully appreciate the nuance of perceptions of linguistic variation and of target language variety issues, it seems that far more attention could be paid to how teachers perceive linguistic variation and package it in the classroom. This is a fundamental aspect of language (education) policy and of the language revitalisation enterprise.

As we have shown, the most recent research on the subject, the present study included, reveals that the native speaker model still has a presence in language learning. It still holds currency today, even though the profile of language users and the nature of linguistic production are in flux and are still subject to rapid change. The sociolinguistic landscape of Irish has changed drastically over the last 50 years and the question of target variety legitimacy is still very much a central theme of debate. It is perhaps worth mentioning that the context of Irish, and minority languages more generally, is not dissimilar to the context of outer circle varieties of English. In both cases, 'new' language varieties do not possess the same level of overt prestige, but are still targets for learners. After a significant period of institutionalisation of the Irish language, there are firm beliefs and ideologies which have placed native speakers and their language varieties at the heart of language revitalisation efforts. Although the participants in this study overtly attribute prestige status to traditional native speaker norms in the same way as has been found in other attitudinal work on the Irish language (e.g., Nic Fhlannchadha & Hickey 2016; Ó Murchadha, 2013; Ó Murchadha & Ó hIfearnáin, 2018), it seems that their standards for language excellence do not necessarily have a guiding influence on their pedagogical practices. It is suggested that while native speaker norms are prestigious, language can be used efficiently without recourse to the native speaker ideal. Therefore, though traditional ideologies endure among many language learners and teachers, the data presented in this study are suggestive of an ideological shift away from native speakers as the sole arbiters of correct, legitimate language usage within the conditions of late modernity.

Ultimately, language teachers' orientations toward target language varieties have implications for language learner motivation, for language development, and for the standing of new speakers who develop language proficiency through schooling. Issues such as how teacher ideologies and target varieties interact with officially designated models, with learner ambitions and with broader ideologies on variation, are important to fully understand the dynamics underlying the successes and failures of language education provisions. Misalignments in target language varieties can be detrimental to the language learning experience and, in minority language contexts, this can ultimately adversely impact the vitality of the

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language. Developing successful models for linguistic multicompetence through education thus requires further attention to what teachers think about variation.

NOTES

This research was funded by An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG). The views of the authors are not necessarily those of COGG.

[1]Native speaker is placed in inverted commas as the authors identify it as an ideological construct. To avoid being cumbersome, this is not continued throughout.

[2]The Teaching Council is the professional standards body for the teaching profession in Ireland.

[3]This requirement was revised to level B2 in 2017, but did not impact the participants in this study.

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APPENDIX A: Interview Schedule

(Translation of the original)

A. Questions about the type of Irish you use
   1. How would you describe the type of Irish you speak?
   2. Do you have any goals in relation to the type of Irish you speak?
   3. Is grammatical accuracy important to you when you speak Irish?
   4. Do you make use of particular idioms or vocabulary in Irish? If so, how did you learn them? Is it important to you to use those idioms and/or vocabulary?
   5. Would you say that you are easily able to understand speakers of Irish from other parts of the country when they speak in Irish?
   6. Is it easy for you to understand speakers of Irish from the Gaeltacht when they speak in Irish?
   7. Is it your intention to change the type of Irish you use in any way? If yes, how so?
   8. Would you like to sound like speakers of Irish from a particular region?
   9. Are there particular speakers of Irish you would like to sound like in the future?
   10. What are the linguistic models you promote among pupils when you are teaching Irish?

B. Questions regarding your views on different types of Irish as language learning models (Questions in this section are to be asked each time the participant has heard one of the speech samples.)
   1. Where is the speaker in this recording from?
   2. How would you describe the type of Irish he speaks?
   3. Do you like the type of Irish the speaker uses in the recording?
   4. In your opinion, is that type of Irish ‘correct’ or authoritative?
   5. Do you think it is important that that type of Irish be spoken by people into the future?
   6. Would you like to speak Irish like that person?
   7. Would you like the pupils in your classes to know and understand that type of Irish?
   8. Would you like the pupils in your classes to speak like that speaker?
   9. Would it be useful to school children if they spoke like that speaker?
   10. Would it be easy for you to promote (teach or use) that kind of Irish in the classroom?

APPENDIX B: Biographical Questionnaire

(Translation of the original)
Participant’s ID number:

1. Where did you learn Irish? (You may mention more than one person/location.)
2. Who are the individuals who influenced you in terms of learning the language? (You may mention more than one person.)
3. Do you use Irish outside of teaching practice and Professional Master in Education lectures?
   3a. If yes, where or with whom?
   3b. If yes, how often do you use it?
4. If you are involved in any Irish language networks/groups, please list them below. If not, leave blank.
5. If you secure a job teaching Irish in the future, would you like to use Irish outside the classroom?
6. Would you like to teach in an Irish immersion secondary school?
   6a. Why would you or why would you not like to do that?
7. Would you like to teach in a Gaeltacht secondary school?
   7a. Why would you or why would you not like to do that?

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