

Motivation and the adult Irish language learner

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What motivates adult language learners in the city of Belfast to enrol and remain in an Irish class in the first years of the twenty-first century is the subject of the research study reported here. The research is placed within the context of the long history of interest in Irish revival in the city as far back as the eighteenth century and is related to relevant literature on motivation and language learning. The paper provides results from quantitative data collected by means of questionnaires issued to learners throughout the city. An overwhelming interest in culture is what primarily motivates these learners to enrol in an Irish class. Learners are also motivated by a strong sense of identity and by a felt obligation to help preserve the language. The paper illuminates issues of language restoration and the links between identity and language preservation. The research reported here contributes to the literatures on motivation, on adult learning and on language survival.

Keywords: *Irish language; Motivation: Language restoration; Culture; Identity; Adult learners*

Introduction

In past decades, interest in the Irish language has continued to grow. Comparative Census figures from 1991 and 2001 show an increase—from 9.45% in 1991 (DHSS/RGNI, 1992) to 10.35% in 2001 (NISRA, 2002)—in the percentage of the Northern Ireland population self-reporting, in answer to a Census item, as being able to speak, read or write Irish. This is in interesting contrast to the situation in Scotland, where the 2001 Census revealed that the overall number of Scottish Gaelic speakers is in (albeit slow) decline (Scott & Ni Bhaoill, 2003, p. 11).

Apart from a few studies that were carried out in the last decades of the twentieth century (Ó hAdhmaill, 1985; Maguire, 1991; O'Reilly, 1999) (though it is important to state that O'Reilly's research was undertaken some five years before publication), not enough is known about what is motivating that interest generally among adult Irish language learners. This paper reports and discusses the findings of a small-scale research study that sought to illuminate factors contributing to the uptake of Irish among adult learners. In so doing, it will present a profile of adult Irish language

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learners in the city of Belfast in the early years of the twenty-first century. It is reasonable to argue that such a profile could afford information vital to teachers and course providers regarding the motivation of those embarking on courses involved and, as a consequence, indicate something of their learning needs and how these might be effectively addressed. It is now recognized that student needs analysis has a role to play in sustaining motivation among second language learners (Yalden, 1987; Riddell, 1991).

Background to the study: Irish language movements and the place of Irish

The belief that adult or community education is a twentieth- and twenty-first century phenomenon can be regarded as a misguided one. Ó Buachalla (1968) documents the interest in the Irish language revival in Belfast in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and reproduces (1968, p. 30) the following advertisement, which appeared in the *Northern Star* in April 1795, encouraging the citizens of Belfast to enrol in an Irish class:

Irish Language

An attempt to revive the grammatical and critical knowledge of the Irish language in this town is generously made by Mr Lynch: he teaches publicly in the Academy and privately in several families.

The language recommends itself to us, by the advantages it affords to the students of Irish and Eastern Antiquities, especially to those who wish to acquire the knowledge of Druidical Theology and worship, as sketched by Caesar and Tacitus.

It is particularly interesting to all who wish for the improvement and Union of this neglected and divided Kingdom. By our understanding and speaking it we could more easily and effectually communicate our sentiments and instructions to all our Countrymen, and thus mutually improve and conciliate each other's affections.

The merchant and artist would reap great benefit from the knowledge of it. They would then be qualified for carrying on Trade and Manufactures in every part of their native country.

This advertisement is of interest on several counts. Firstly, it reveals that an interest in Irish language restoration in Belfast can be traced back as far as the late seventeen and early eighteen hundreds. Secondly, in the context of motivation, the advertisement is interesting in the various motivational factors that it mentions, including linguistic, academic, religious, political and economic factors. Thirdly, the mention of the notion of revival is of continuing interest. This is an issue addressed by Ó hAilín (1969), who would contend that the term 'revival' is misleading, in that it implies that the language has been dead or moribund. Ó hAilín (1969, p. 91) points out that:

No language that has ceased to be spoken has once more become the medium of social intercourse . . . The Irish language, however, has never ceased to be spoken, has never died, and in its case the correct term is restoration rather than revival.

The above clarification is helpful in contextualizing the Irish language restoration movements that continued throughout the nineteenth century and whose efforts were 'carried out principally by middle-class Presbyterians' (Maguire, 1991, p. 23). When Northern Ireland was founded in 1921, however, the new Unionist government was 'hostile to the use of the language in the education system' (Steele, 2003, p. 38), placing restrictions on the teaching of Irish in primary schools and refusing to support the training of teachers. In spite of the lack of government support, the language community continued to organize adult language classes and summer courses for learners in the 'Gaeltacht' (Irish-speaking) areas of Donegal (Steele, 2003, p. 38).

Perhaps the most significant twentieth-century Irish language development took place in Belfast in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Although Belfast is an urban English-speaking area, the city was a landmark in efforts to restore the language through the formation of the first ever urban 'Gaeltacht' (or Irish-speaking area) in those years. The initiative (documented by Maguire, 1991, ch. 5) involved the establishment of an Irish-speaking community in the west of the city. A cooperative was formed and houses were built for 11 families who wished to live together as a community speaking Irish. A school had to be set up to cater for the needs of the children of these families for education through the medium of Irish. Belfast thus saw the establishment of its first ever all-Irish-medium primary school, Bunscoil Phobal Feirste, in 1971 (Maguire, 1991). The accomplishments of this group of parents may be viewed as being considerable, particularly when account is taken of the official state view which continued to be held at that time of the Irish language: 'Official policy reflected the attitude that Irish was a foreign language with no place in Northern Ireland' (O'Reilly, 1999, p. 20).

The first real sign of official acceptance of Irish-medium education in Northern Ireland came with the funding of an Irish-medium unit in an English-medium Derry school in 1983 (Scott & Ní Bhaoill, 2003, p. 9). The same authors report (p. 9) that the biggest changes in government policy on Irish-medium education followed upon the Belfast Agreement of 1998. This Agreement placed a statutory duty on the Northern Ireland Department of Education to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education and resulted, in 2000, in the Department of Education funding two new voluntary bodies to cater for Irish-medium education: Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (Council for Irish-medium schools) and Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta (Irish-medium Education Trust). Currently, in Belfast alone, there are eight all-Irish-medium primary schools, funded by the Northern Ireland Department of Education, plus two unfunded schools and one Irish-medium secondary school (communication from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta).

The teaching of Irish as part of the curriculum in English-medium schools is also very relevant as background to the study reported here. In what is frequently referred to as Northern Ireland's 'dual system' of Roman Catholic schools and state (broadly, Protestant) schools (Maguire, 1991, p. 46), the teaching of the Irish language has tended historically to be developed in the former and almost completely excluded from the curriculum in the latter. Indeed, Maguire (1991, p. 44) quotes Ó Snodaigh's (1973, p. 25) reference to the Irish language as the

'hidden heritage', obscured from the Ulster Protestant by short-sighted educational policies. Some of these policies are traced by Farren (1991), who also points out (p. 54) that more recent decades in Northern Ireland have seen the Irish language emerging from the 'ghetto-like circumstances' in which it had earlier found itself and being regarded as a subject which can contribute to the understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage in Northern Ireland. It is important to state that, currently, in terms of school curriculum provision in Northern Ireland, Irish is taught both as a modern language—in predominantly Catholic English-medium schools and in some integrated schools—and in a bilingual context in Irish-medium schools.

Motivation in education and in language learning

Since the study reported in this paper sought to establish what is motivating an interest in the Irish language among adult learners, it seems appropriate to devote some attention to the concept of motivation itself. Defining the notion is not a simple task. There are numerous theoretical perspectives on the subject, coming from the various fields of psychology, education or social science.

Two concepts in motivational theory relevant to the present purpose are those of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, with intrinsic motivation referring to motivation to engage in an activity for its own sake and extrinsic motivation being motivation to engage in an activity as a means to an end (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996, pp. 257–80). The small-scale study which informs this paper sought to discover whether adult learners of Irish are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated or, indeed, whether they are motivated by a combination of both.

In illuminating these issues, it is important to differentiate between motivation and orientation: although a student may be orientated towards a particular goal, it is motivation that reflects the power to attain that goal (Gardner, 1985). In the field of motivation and second language learning, Gardner and Lambert (1972) identify two orientations that they refer to as an *integrative* and an *instrumental* orientation respectively. Integrative orientation involves a desire to be integrated into the target language group, to interact with and even to become a member of that group or community. Instrumental orientation directs a learner towards learning a target language to gain a qualification for qualifications' sake, to get a job or, perhaps, earn a better salary.

The fundamental importance, within motivation research and language learning, of Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model cannot be ignored and influenced the design of the research instrument used in the study reported here. Within Gardner's model, four different variables are given consideration:

1. *social milieu*: this concerns the views of significant others towards language learning;
2. *individual differences*: this concerns the learner specifically in terms of the differences within the learner which can directly influence achievement, namely intelligence, language aptitude, motivation and situational anxiety;

3. *language acquisition contexts*: this concerns the learning situations the learner can be in, either formal (classroom) or informal (listening to radio, watching television, reading newspapers and magazines;
4. *learning outcomes*: i.e. both linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes—the former referring to the learner's proficiency in the language in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar, and the latter being concerned with the attitudes and values the learner has formed through the language learning experience.

Of particular interest to the study was Dornyei's (1990) examination of motivation in foreign language learning, namely the motivation of adult learners of English in Hungary. In that study, 'instrumentality' emerged as the most important factor influencing motivation. 'Instrumentality' is defined by Dornyei (1990, p. 10) as 'interest in the pragmatic, professional utility of English'. However, Dornyei also found an important role accorded by students to non-instrumental language use, as well as a significant intrinsic motivation factor in the learners, namely their need for achievement. With regard to the correlation between motivation and learning, Dornyei's (1990, p.9) findings were that: 'Instrumental motives and need for achievement especially, energise learning up to the intermediate level, but in order to get beyond this point, that is, to "really learn" the language, one has to be integratively motivated.' While the study reported in this paper was chiefly concerned with the initial motivation of learners to enrol in a class, it will none the less be interesting to see whether that motivation is instrumental or integrative in orientation or whether both elements are present.

Important contextual considerations

It is important at this point to emphasize the care that must be exercised in using literature based on either second or foreign language learning within the context of the Irish language learner. Gardner's research on motivation and *second* language learning was carried out in language learning environments that afford learners the opportunity to become exposed to the target language, such as in French-speaking Canada. The nearest target language equivalent for the speaker of Irish in English-speaking Northern Ireland would be the Gaeltacht areas of Donegal in the Republic of Ireland. Equally, Dornyei's research concerns itself with motivation and *foreign* language learning. The question must be asked: how appropriate is the word 'foreign' (defined variously by the current Collins Dictionary as: 'located in or coming from another country or people', 'not familiar, strange', 'in an abnormal place or position') in the context of the Irish language learner in Belfast? Irish language learners in the study which informs this paper were invited to state whether they considered themselves to be learning a first, second, foreign, modern or dead language. It might be argued that no single one of these terms, in the way in which they are conventionally used, applies strictly in the case of the Irish language learner in Belfast.

The question of language learning and nationalism comes into focus here. Kloss (1967) examined the complex issues of nationalism and bilingualism and the relationship between both in terms of language use. Fellman (1973) also considered

nationalism and linguistic preference when discussing use of language in the Middle East. Fellman argues that linguistic identity can only be secured when national identity has been established. The link between national and linguistic identity was an issue of interest to the research underlying this paper. Is there a relationship between national identity and the learners' motivation to learn Irish? Might a proportion of the adult Irish language learners in Belfast have, as a motivation factor, the desire to secure national identity by electing to learn and use the Irish language in their daily lives? If so, does this suggest the possibility of a reversal of Fellman's (1973) theory—that is, if national identity is not totally established, can it be established in terms of the language a person chooses to use?

Previous studies of the adult Irish language learner

The adult Irish language learner has already prompted some research interest. Ó hAdhmaill's (1985) study sought to identify why so many adults were interested in learning Irish in West Belfast in the mid-1980s. Whereas Ó hAdhmaill's research proved valuable to the study that is the subject of this paper, there are some difficulties with it. The publication relating to the research project is very short, providing only a sketchy outline of the research. Details of design of study and methodology are incomplete and render it difficult to make reliable and valid inferences about the findings. None the less, some findings appear clear—namely, that, at the time, more men (60%) than women (40%) were learning Irish in Belfast and that 75% of the learners were in the 17–35 age group. When respondents were invited to draw up their own list of factors that encouraged the people of West Belfast to learn Irish, it emerged that the issues of identity and the political situation appear to have been most influential, with the top three factors being: Irish identity (38%), Sinn Féin Republican Movement (33%) and British army/RUC (police) presence/oppression (25%). These responses require to be contextualized by a reminder that the early 1980s represented a highly significant period in recent political history in Northern Ireland, in that the deaths had just been witnessed of 10 Republican prisoners who had died on hunger strike while interned in Long Kesh prison.

While Maguire's (1991) study was essentially devoted to a tracing of the 'urban Gaeltacht' initiative detailed above and, as such, did not specifically concern itself with adult motivation to learn the Irish language, she did, nevertheless, conduct interviews with adults regarding their motivation in seeking to have their children educated in an Irish-medium primary school. Issues of identity and culture are revealed in the findings (Maguire, 1991, pp. 98–9), with the three foremost advantages which parents perceived in such a step being: quality of education (73.5%), Irish identity (71.0%) and cultural awareness (48%).

More recent research (O'Reilly, 1999) examined the relationship between Irish language learning and the politics of culture and identity. O'Reilly (1999) identified three 'discourses' or 'ideologies' that she felt were evident in the rhetoric of the Irish speakers and learners with whom she was involved. These were: decolonizing discourse, cultural discourse and rights discourse. The first of these, decolonizing discourse, incorporates a view of the Irish language as a weapon against the forces of

colonization. On the other hand, cultural discourse cannot reconcile itself with decolonizing discourse, since it incorporates a belief that language and politics should not be mixed. Those in whom this discourse is dominant are likely to have an interest in the language as an element of cultural heritage. Rights discourse moves away from a political versus apolitical view into a view of the language as a basic human right. The research forming the basis of this paper will reveal whether any of these discourses remains identifiable among the Irish language learners involved in the study.

Methodology

Aims of the study

The study reported in this paper aimed to investigate the motivation of adult Irish language learners in the city of Belfast in the early years of the twenty-first century. The specific objectives were as follows:

- to determine whether learners are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated, or whether they appear motivated by a mixture of both;
- to examine respondents' attitudes towards the Irish language;
- to ascertain the place that Irish occupies in the respondents' every-day lives;
- to explore the diverse elements influencing respondents' motivation to learn Irish, and respondents' perceptions of the relative strength of those influences;
- to seek to uncover whether, two decades and an IRA ceasefire after Ó hAdhmaill's (1985) study, the same issues of identity and the political situation remain as prime motivating factors for learning Irish.

The sample

Recognized educational institutes run many of the Irish for adult learners classes that run throughout the year in Belfast, with the largest provider being the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education. Social and community groups also play an important role in the provision of Irish language classes in the city. From the seven different centres offering language classes for adults in the city in the year 2001/02, roughly one-third of the total number of classes running were sampled. The questionnaire was administered to 140 learners and was returned by a total of 104, representing a 74% return rate. Learners from a range of levels—from Beginners' through to Advanced and Diploma levels—were consulted.

The research instrument

The study on which this paper is based entailed use of a questionnaire specifically designed for use in the research. The questionnaire first sought biographical data on respondents (gender, age, religious background, previous language learning experience) and, thereafter, solicited responses on, *inter alia*, their attitudes towards

the Irish language, the place that Irish occupies in their every-day lives and their perceptions of their own motivation for learning Irish. A variety of styles were used in the questioning. Extensive use was made of closed questions, inclusive of dichotomous, multiple choice and rating scales. These were interspersed with open questions allowing respondents to engage more deeply with the issues and to comment further on the answers they had given.

Findings and discussion

Profile of respondents

Of the 104 respondents, 56 were male and 48 were female. The most common age range for females was the 50–65 age range (44%), while for males it was the 36–49 age range (36%). The (optional) questionnaire item on religious background of respondents revealed that, of the 98 who gave information, 81 came from a Catholic background. Of the remaining 17 respondents, seven stated themselves to be of Presbyterian, five Church of Ireland and five Protestant backgrounds respectively.

Results revealed that 73% of all respondents, both male and female, had experience of learning a language other than Irish, with by far the most common language being French. A majority of respondents (81%) had already learned some Irish prior to enrolling in the class. A follow-up question on attitudes towards previous learning experience of Irish revealed more positive than negative responses. Of particular interest to the study was exploration of the extent to which this previous experience might have influenced respondents' current enrolment. Five categories of response were offered: 'To a great extent', 'To some extent', 'Not sure', 'Perhaps a little' and 'Not at all'. Just under half of respondents (47%) placed a tick under 'To a great extent' or 'To some extent', while 20% ticked 'Not at all'.

Attitudes towards the Irish language

One item in the questionnaire sought to ascertain learners' attitude towards the language itself, that is the status they would attach to it, whether they considered Irish to be their first or second language, a foreign, a modern or a dead language. Table 1 presents the views of respondents in these respects, in numbers and percentages of respondents out of the total of 104.

Table 1 reveals that male and female respondents are broadly in agreement. Only one respondent considered Irish to be a foreign language, with a large majority considering it to be the language of their country, indicating a close relationship between the language and their national identity. Responses to the statements on Irish as the learners' first or second language would suggest that some form of bilingualism is a reality for over half of these respondents. No one considered Irish to be a dead language, though almost half of respondents believe that it is in danger of dying out. The influence of this particular belief on respondents' motivation to learn the language will be seen when results from the motivation section of the questionnaire are presented (Table 3).

Irish as an element of respondents' every-day lives

This section of the questionnaire concentrated on how much use respondents make of the Irish acquired in the classroom. Results show that only 10% (11 respondents) stated that they never use Irish outside of the classroom, with 84% (88 respondents) claiming to make some use of the Irish they have acquired. Table 2 illustrates the most common uses made of Irish in the respondents' daily lives.

As may be seen from Table 2, male and female respondents are broadly in agreement regarding the occasions where they make use of Irish in their lives. The most common opportunities to use the language would appear to be offered by media sources, friends and family networks.

Table 1. Attitudes towards the Irish language

Statement	No. of males	No. of females	Total no.	% res
c) I consider Irish to be the language of my country	44	40	84	80
e) I consider Irish to be a modern language	33	23	56	54
f) I consider Irish to be a language in danger of dying out	26	19	45	43
b) I consider Irish to be my second language	25	17	42	40
a) I consider Irish to be my first language	9	5	14	13
d) I consider Irish to be a foreign language	1	0	1	1
g) I consider Irish to be a dead language	0	0	0	0

Table 2. Irish as an element of respondents' every-day lives

Statement	Total no.	% res	M no.	F no.
I listen to radio and television broadcasts in Irish	74	71	41	33
I speak Irish to friends	63	60	36	27
I speak Irish to family members.	52	50	28	24
I read Irish language newspapers/articles	37	35	20	17
I speak Irish at cultural events	31	30	15	16
I speak Irish when on holiday	30	29	15	15
I speak Irish on the telephone	28	27	16	12
I read literature in Irish	21	20	11	10
I speak Irish at work	20	19	12	8
I surf Irish language websites on the Internet	20	19	11	9
I hear Irish at work	17	16	7	10
I speak Irish when collecting the children from school	15	14	7	8
I write text messages and emails in Irish	14	13	6	8
I write letters in Irish	10	9	6	4
I read Irish documents in my workplace	6	6	2	4

Motivation and learning Irish

This section of the questionnaire offered respondents 23 statements, based on the previous research relating to motivation and the Irish language and on the literature relating to motivation and language learning which have been discussed above. The degree to which different factors had influenced learners' motivation could be registered in terms of: 'To a great extent', 'To some extent', 'Not sure', 'Perhaps a little' and 'Not at all'.

Table 3 presents results from this questionnaire section. Results for males and females have been combined in order to give an overall view of all the learners taking part in the study. The categories of 'To a great extent' and 'To some extent' have also been combined and the 'Not at all' category results presented in relation to these to mark any strong contrasts or similarities. It is clear from these results that respondents are more intrinsically than extrinsically motivated. The statement placed last in order

Table 3. Motivation and learning Irish

Place	Statement	'To a great extent' 'To some extent'		'Not at all'	
		%res	No.	%res	No.
1	Interest in culture: music, songs, place names	93	97	2	2
2	It is part of my identity	82	85	5	5
3	I think I should help preserve the language	79	82	6	6
4	Interest in the history of the country	71	74	5	5
5	I like the sound of the language	64	67	5	5
6	For fun	58	60	9	9
7	Having known/met someone who inspired me	47	49	16	17
8	Visiting the Gaeltacht	47	49	17	18
9	Previous study of Irish	47	49	20	21
10	For the social contact	46	48	9	9
11	Having family members who speak Irish	46	48	28	29
12	Having friends who speak Irish	45	47	16	17
13	Having a knowledge of old myths and legends	45	47	17	18
14	Media exposure: watching/hearing Irish language broadcasts	38	40	21	22
15	I think I could do well at it	34	35	12	13
16	Previous study of other languages	27	28	34	35
17	To access the literature	26	27	23	24
18	The course was reasonably priced	25	26	34	35
19	For nationalist/political reasons	22	23	33	34
20	To gain a qualification	18	19	37	39
21	To improve job prospects	11	12	45	47
22	Irish is fashionable	11	12	36	38
23	The course was required by workplace/ funded by workplace	4	4	59	61
	Other comments made	10	11		

of importance is that relating to needing Irish for work purposes. Further testimony to this point is the positioning of the statement 'To improve job prospects' in 21st place. Similarly, the gaining of a qualification figures relatively low on the list of motivating factors. An element of caution is required when interpreting these results.

Consideration has to be given to the job opportunities that exist in Belfast in which Irish is a requirement. The availability of such jobs is still relatively restricted, though current employment growth areas for the Irish language would include: teaching (in the nursery, primary and secondary Irish-medium sectors), media, arts and leisure, tourism, small businesses and community work. The relatively low percentage of respondents motivated to learn Irish because of job prospects might seem a little surprising in light of these growth areas. This could suggest that either there are not enough of these jobs available to encourage the adult learners taking part in this study to be extrinsically motivated or, considering the age of respondents, they are most probably in employment and have no immediate desire for a career change. Whether this is likely to change may be the subject of conjecture. At present, however, it is clear that motivation to make a commitment to learn Irish in adult life is much more deeply rooted than any employment advancement or financial gain.

What emerges most clearly from Table 3 is a desire among these learners of Irish to identify with a language which they feel will enhance their understanding of themselves, their culture and history and, for many, foster a sense of Irish identity within. The strength of this motivation is not new, having been highlighted by both Maguire (1991, p. 99) and Ó hAdhmaill (1985, p. 2). What is interesting is that, in sharp contrast to Ó hAdhmaill's (1985) respondents, learners in the study reported here would appear to be parting from the more politically motivated reasons for learning Irish. A third of respondents are adamant that 'Nationalist and political reasons' did not motivate them at all, with just over one-fifth stating that these reasons motivated them to some or to a great extent. The positioning in first and second place of the statements relating to interest in Irish culture and Irish being part of respondents' identity would seem to indicate that it is a cultural rather than a political identity that respondents have in mind. In this context, one female respondent (religious background not specified) adds an interesting written comment: 'It seems [the language] to have healthy baggage in relation to me. I'm no longer constrained ... The sentiment is culture, nothing else.'

In the absence of further insights that might have emerged from follow-up interviews, the fuller complexity of the links between language and national and political identity (Fellman, 1973), or indeed between these and cultural identity, must remain unexplored, though strongly suggested, from the study reported in this paper. An interesting link does emerge, however, with the findings of a study carried out in Scotland on identity and attitudes to Scottish Gaelic among Gaelic speakers there. In that study (MacKinnon, 2001, pp. 173–6), a strong link was found between language and identity. Indeed, the connection between language and national identity is well known as being one that is very strong, even inseparable (Fishman, 1985).

What also emerges clearly from Table 3 is that the majority of adult learners of Irish in Belfast have both empathy and sympathy for the language. They experience empathy in terms of their interest in Irish culture, Irish history and in their liking for

the sound of the language. Many experience sympathy for the language in terms of their concern for the plight of a language that they view to be in danger of dying out. The links between Table 1, which revealed that close on half of respondents believed Irish to be in danger of dying out, and Table 3, where over three-quarters claim to be motivated by the need to help preserve the language, are very clear indeed.

Further study of Table 3 indicates that aesthetic interest in the language would appear, for many, to take precedence over a purely linguistic competence interest. Nearly two-thirds of respondents claim to be motivated by 'the sound of the language'. An interesting written comment is made, in this context, by one Protestant female learner:

I have thoroughly enjoyed learning the totally different sound from my native South London speech—the musicality is beautiful.

The intrinsic nature of respondents' motivation reappears, with over half claiming to be motivated by 'fun' (58%). None the less, just under half state themselves to be motivated by 'social contact' (46%), 'family members' (46%) and 'friends' (45%). Although these last three responses do not figure at the very top of the list, it is clear that the social aspect of learning Irish remains an influential motivating factor, which might be viewed as being extrinsic rather than intrinsic, though integrative rather than instrumental in orientation. A revealing written comment is made by one Protestant female respondent, however, who indicates that family members had not influenced her motivation to learn Irish:

They'll be turning in their graves if they knew I'm learning it.

This comment calls to mind Ó Snodaigh's (1973, p. 25) reference to the Irish language as the 'hidden heritage', obscured from the Ulster Protestant. McCoy's (1997) study sheds further light on Protestants and the Irish language in Northern Ireland.

On the whole, results from both Tables 2 and 3 point to the conclusion that an integrative orientation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) may be motivating many of the adult Irish learners in Belfast. More specifically, the ability to speak Irish opens up another world to these learners. They can make use of it when visiting 'Gaeltacht' areas, can become integrated into Irish-speaking circles and can avail themselves of Irish language services on radio and television or in the local cultural centre.

This said, the overwhelming interest in culture as a decisive motivating factor in respondents' choice to learn Irish remains the most significant finding, and may be linked with the 'cultural discourse' identified by O'Reilly (1999) among the Irish speakers whom she interviewed.

Conclusion

It is evident that adult motivation to study the Irish language in Belfast is a much more complex matter than simply learning another language for the sake of it. For the

majority of respondents in the study discussed in this paper, a desire to reaffirm a sense of Irish identity and a strong interest in culture are the key reasons why they have enrolled in an Irish class. They are also learning Irish to help preserve it. This is the third most popular motivational statement made by respondents.

It is clear that respondents are rather more integratively than instrumentally orientated, appearing to enjoy the social aspects of language learning. They are not overly concerned about qualifications and employment in the Irish-medium sector. They are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated, wanting to have 'fun' and enjoying the sound of the language, but clearly interested in using Irish in their daily lives.

Despite the absence of any overriding motivation for gainful employment, there *is*, nevertheless, a prize: fluency, membership of a community and, more importantly, an Irish identity. There is no doubt that motivation and language learning can be a complex subject because of the 'multifaceted nature' of language that Dornyei (1998, p. 118) has identified. He defines language as:

- (a) a communication coding system;
- (b) an integral part of an individual's identity;
- (c) an important channel of social organization deeply rooted in the culture of the community who use it.

Language is not just a collection of words familiar to a country or people enabling them to communicate with each other. It is much more than that. Language is a powerful tool. It is a marker of an identity and a key to a culture expressed through that language. Friel (1981, p. 66) gives perhaps the best expression to the deep relationship between language, culture and identity that is confirmed in the findings of the study reported in this paper:

It is not the literal past, the 'facts' of history that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language . . . We must never cease renewing those images, because if we do, we fossilise.

This paper, in short, highlights the importance of language as a factor in cultural and national identity and draws attention to the need for ongoing research into these key aspects of language restoration and language survival. It would be useful, in any future study, to incorporate a more qualitative dimension and to seek to explore further, through interviews with respondents, any complex links that might again emerge between language and national, political and cultural identity. On a wider scale, the research findings reported here might usefully inform ongoing policy-making on Irish language provision in Northern Ireland, in the continuing aftermath of the Belfast Agreement.

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