

○ LINGUISTIC BARRIERS AMONG INTERNATIONALLY EDUCATED TEACHERS IN IRELAND AND CANADA: A CRITICAL COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Drawing on qualitative interview and focus group data collected from Internationally Educated Teachers (IETs) in the context of two different research studies conducted in Ireland and Manitoba, Canada, this article critically examines how national/regional linguistic requirements and expectations of a hidden curriculum are experienced as barriers to employment and as status inhibitors. While the two sites contrast starkly in terms of size, migration frameworks, and population demographics, some IETs are faced with comparable barriers in terms of securing work in their field in both countries. We make two main arguments on the basis of our findings: 1) language proficiency requirements for IETs should be accompanied by appropriate language supports, and 2) education systems must move beyond viewing language within a monolingual framework to avoid devaluing the rich linguistic repertoires of IETs who are multilingual. Analysis draws on the concept of plurilingualism to advocate for a more complex and inclusive approach to defining linguistic competence for teachers. Further, the theoretical lens of language ecology usefully emphasises the wider linguistic context that should be taken into account when designing and implementing policy and programming for IETs. Implications of this research illuminate the ways power and linguistic identity intersect in international education systems.

KEY WORDS: internationally educated teachers, language barriers, plurilingualism, language ecology, linguistic identity

INTRODUCTION

Ireland and Canada, despite their different sizes, migration histories, and employment contexts for teachers generally, are comparable in the fact that immigration has radically altered the ethnic diversity of the student populations in both countries. For example, in the Irish primary school population, multi-ethnicity is now a fixed characteristic. Data from 2007 indicate that 6% of post-primary and 10% of the primary pupil cohort come from immigrant backgrounds (Smyth, Darmody, McGinnity, & Byrne, 2009). Given that 24% of total births in Ireland in 2012 were to mothers who were born outside of Ireland (Economic and Social Research Institute, 2013), it is projected that this percentage will rise over the next five years.

Likewise, Canada generally and the province of Manitoba specifically have experienced considerable growth in the ethnic diversity of their student populations. Most of Manitoba's 13,000-16,000 newcomers arriving annually (with India, the Philippines, and China as top source countries) are between 0-24 years of age. English as an Additional Language (EAL) populations have been growing in all school divisions, including those in rural areas (Schmidt, 2014). This increased level of diversity in both contexts creates part of the rationale for diversifying the teaching force in both Ireland and Canada; yet, as the findings from the current studies indicate, in both contexts Internationally Educated Teachers (IETs) face linguistic barriers (among others) in resuming their careers.

We proceed to situate the contexts of IETs in Ireland and Canada respectively before outlining our theoretical frameworks and shared methodology. We then analyse themes from our findings and conclude with some program and policy implications regarding the language demands faced by plurilingual teachers in the two contexts.

THE CONTEXT OF IRELAND

Ireland, historically the site of outward migration and a concomitant low level of ethnic diversity, has experienced significant inward migration since the mid-1990s. Yet, the elementary teacher workforce remains stubbornly mono-ethnic, even in the context of having experienced a significant shortfall in available qualified teachers in the early 2000s. The degree of teacher shortage was a matter of considerable debate, with claims of shortfalls ranging from the Ministry of Education's estimate of 981 (Coolahan, 2003), up to 2000 (Breakwell, Quigley, & McManus, 2005). A range of initiatives were implemented at the government level to address this shortfall. These included the recognition of a private, predominantly online, teacher training course, the recognition of certain Montessori teachers to work as substitute teachers in mainstream primary schools and the provisional recognition of IETs to teach in these schools for up to five years 'pending attainment of the necessary competence in Irish' (Dempsey, 2002). Both certain Montessori teachers and IETs were deemed fully qualified to teach in certain categories of special schools (Dempsey, 2002). The focused recruitment of IETs was not undertaken, in stark contrast to other areas of the public sector workforce (see McDaid & Walsh, forthcoming).

Irish primary schools have historically been charged with the resuscitation and sustention of the Irish language (see Kelly, 2002). Compulsory in primary schools, all primary school mainstream class teachers are required to teach Irish. Registration with the Irish Teaching Council (TC) is a requirement in order to be paid to work as a teacher in a publicly funded school in Ireland. For those who train in Ireland, the teaching of the language, through the language, is a core component of their undergraduate or post-graduate program and is necessary to meet the full requirements to register with the TC. When an applicant is deemed not to have fulfilled all of the TCs registration requirements they are generally awarded

conditional registration. This is the experience of the vast majority of teachers who undergo their initial teacher education outside of the jurisdiction. This paper is concerned with *migrant* Internationally Educated Teachers (IETs). This is an important clarification in the Irish context, as the vast majority of teachers with conditional registration are majority ethnic Irish teachers who have trained in the United Kingdom.

Those with conditional registration are informed of the shortfall, advised of the measures required to address the shortfall, and the timeframe within which they must be met. For IETs and those Irish teachers who have undertaken their training in another jurisdiction, an Irish Language Requirement (ILR) condition normally applies to their registration. In order to address this, teachers must undertake a series of aptitude examinations, the *Scrúdú le hAghaidh Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge* (SCG) or complete an adaptation period *Oiriúnú le hAghaidh Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge* (OCG) 'which confirms the applicant's competence to teach the Irish language as well as a range of primary school curricular subjects through the medium of Irish' (Department of Education and Skills [DES], 2000). The period for successful completion of these examinations has been reduced from five to three years (European Directive 2005/36/EC). Apart from a targeted exam preparation course, no publicly funded, formalised tuition is provided, though supports exist in the form of textbooks and past examination papers, provided through a national office, the *Oifig na gCáilíochtaí Gaeilge*. In the absence of formal specific tuition, candidates source classes, and/or tutors, themselves. By way of indication as to the popularity of this route into teaching in Ireland, in the examination for April 2007, 728 applicants, the vast majority non-migrant IETs, attempted at least one component of these examinations. There are 3,286 publicly funded primary schools and 32,828 publicly funded primary school teaching positions in Ireland (DES, 2014). Teachers with conditional registration may work for up to three years while they address their shortfall. These teachers may also be employed as fully recognised teachers in special education roles in special schools or special education posts in mainstream schools.

THE CONTEXT OF CANADA

Canada has been an immigration destination from the country's inception, albeit relatively ethnically homogeneous until the 1970s when source countries began to vary more substantively (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). Canada relies on large-scale immigration to counteract its declining birthrate and boost its economy, with up to 285,000 newcomers targeted for 2015 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014). Immigration policies have shifted drastically in the last decade from a focus on family reunification to a focus on skilled labour. Unlike nurses and engineers, kindergarten to grade 12 (K-12) teachers have not been a priority occupation targeted for recruitment since the early 2000s on account of the oversupply in many urban centres. Nevertheless, teachers with internationally obtained qualifications continue to arrive, often as the spouses of principal applicants.

Teachers who arrive in Canada with qualifications and teaching experience from international contexts must first have their qualifications assessed by the appropriate certification body in the jurisdiction of the application. It is relevant to note that teaching is a provincial rather than federal jurisdiction in Canada so these certification requirements may vary across contexts; however, the implementation in the past five years of the Labour Mobility Chapter of the Agreement on Internal Trade means that certification attained in one jurisdiction is transferable to other jurisdictions across Canada (Grimmett, Young, & Lessard, 2012). The assessment involves weighing the requirements for teacher certification in the applicant's prior context against the requirements for certification in the new jurisdiction, and if deemed appropriate, identifying a shortfall of university coursework (this could be education coursework and/or courses in teachable subject areas) and/or practice teaching requirements and/or completion of a high stakes language test such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). The terms "practice teaching", "student teaching", and "practicum" are used interchangeably in this paper; all refer to the period of supervised, evaluated teaching that candidates require to meet certification requirements.

At this point in the process, assuming additional requirements need to be satisfied, IETs will typically enroll in university coursework, whether this relates to education courses or coursework in teachable subject areas such as math or language, and a practicum if needed. Once these requirements have been satisfied, the applicant is eligible to apply to the regional certification branch. It is at this stage that a high-stakes language test, if required, would be taken. Currently, Ontario and British Columbia require language tests for IETs educated in non-English or French contexts, though there is an initiative underway to attempt to require language testing in all jurisdictions (Council of Ministers of Education of Canada and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2013).

In Canada, the province of Manitoba has a long history of immigration though previously the numbers and source countries of newcomers were relatively limited. However, primarily on account of changes to immigration legislation, numbers peaked in 2011 with nearly 16,000 newcomers, mostly skilled workers, arriving that year alone (Office of the Manitoba Fairness Commissioner [OMFC], 2014). Of the internationally educated professionals seeking to make Manitoba home, IETs ranked #2 with 1039 arriving between 2009-2012 (OMFC, 2014).

From the early 2000s onwards, programs were launched in various regions of the country to support the certification of immigrant teachers, primarily due to anticipated labour shortages (Grimmett, Young, & Lessard, 2012; Schmidt, 2010) that ultimately did not manifest. However, these initiatives have not, for the most part, been implemented as permanent pathways to certification, with many programs (for example, the ones in Ontario and Manitoba) discontinued. The reasons stem from a lack of funding and political will to support IETs in a labour market that in more recent years has been largely characterised by an oversupply of teachers. Ontario alone has recently experienced in excess of 30,000

unemployed teachers (Ontario College of Teachers, 2013) and the most recent *Transition to Teaching* data confirms that unemployment numbers for IETs are still very high, with 75% unable to find even substitute teaching work (Ontario College of Teachers, 2015).

Though the teaching employment context is difficult in many parts of Canada, IETs in Manitoba – at least those who participated in formalised programming to support their integration between 2006-2011 – have fared notably better. Data collected with program graduates from the University of Manitoba's IET Program reveal that as of 2014, close to 90% were employed teaching full-time. However, not all of these positions were permanent, and some IETs were working full-time as substitute teachers in a range of schools when ideally they sought regular employment in one school. Thus, for IETs seeking employment, challenges remain salient.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: PLURILINGUALISM AND LANGUAGE ECOLOGY

Our analysis draws on two main frameworks: plurilingualism and language ecology. 2001 marked a major shift in the way language education was conceptualised in Europe, with the introduction of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Bernaus, Andrade, Kervran, Murkowska, & Saez, 2007). No longer was the primary focus of language education achieving mastery of the target language in isolation; instead the priority became 'developing proficiency (of varying degrees) in several languages and experience of several cultures' (Bernaus et al., 2007, p. 7). Plurilingual and pluricultural approaches to language education have also been enthusiastically endorsed by many Canadian language education scholars (e.g., Lotherington, 2013; Marshall & Moore, 2013; Piccardo, 2013; Taylor & Snodden, 2013). As Marshall and Moore (2013) elaborate,

plurilingualism challenges traditional definitions of bilingualism and multilingualism that conceptualize the use of more than one language in terms of full and balanced competence in discrete languages...[Rather,] the plurilingual speaker is understood as a social actor who develops a repertoire made up of various languages and varieties of languages and different forms of knowledge. (p. 474)

In considering the linguistic repertoires of teachers of English language learners in the Australian context, Ellis (2013) has noted that 'to heed recent calls to recognise learners' plurilingualism and to incorporate learners' languages in the ESL classroom, teachers' plurilingualism must be acknowledged and valued' (p. 446). The possibilities for linguistic competence to be framed in such multiple and fluid ways runs in stark contrast to the ways IETs' linguistic competence in Irish and English tend to be viewed in the educational contexts of Ireland and Canada, and has important implications for the ways IETs and the wider education system construct IETs' personal and professional identities.

A second, complementary framework utilised in our analysis is language ecology. In a seminal article, Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1996) discussed ecology-of-language as a viable and preferable language policy alternative to the narrowly monolingual, corporate-driven diffusion-of-English paradigm that predominates globally. The former ‘build[s] on linguistic diversity worldwide, promot[es] multilingualism and foreign language learning, and grant[s] linguistic human rights to speakers of all languages’ (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996, p. 429). In their study of a linguistically diverse environment in rural Japan, Kubota and McKay (2009) support the notion that the local linguistic ecology of a particular setting has profound implications for the teaching and learning of language. In the context of our studies, we argue that the need to consider the wider linguistic environment similarly applies in Ireland and Canada with respect to the minority languages Irish and French. The explicit policies and implicit hierarchies that narrowly define the language proficiency of IETs can be problematic when issues of feasibility and support are taken into account.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This paper considers some of the linguistic barriers to the teaching profession for IETs in Canada and Ireland, focusing on ‘what people do, how people interact with the world and with others, what people mean and what they value, and the discourses in which people understand and interpret their world’ (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 565). Purposive, intensity sampling and snowball sampling were employed in the recruitment of research participants for the Irish study (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews (Denscombe, 2010) with ten IETs. Eight of the IETs were employed in mainstream primary schools in Ireland. Two were employed in special schools. Seven came from English speaking backgrounds; three spoke a language other than English as their first language. All three of these IETs were fluent in English and all interviews took place in English. Interviews lasted between 40 minutes and 3 hours 20 minutes and were conducted in a higher education institute or the schools or homes of the participants. In the Canadian study, participants included 20 immigrant teachers who participated in a 30 credit-hour academic and professional bridging program (including coursework, practicum, and language support), known as the IET Program, at the University of Manitoba between 2005-2011. Employment statistics were collected from program graduates, and focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews ranging in length from 30 minutes to 3 hours were conducted with those same participants.

Table 1. Comparative aspects of the research context in Ireland and Manitoba

Research Site	Number of participants	Countries of origin	Key features of participants	Data sources
Ireland	10	Range of countries and regions including EU 27, Australia and North America*	Employed in schools in Ireland	Semi-structured interviews
Manitoba	20	India, Philippines, Egypt, Ukraine	Graduates of an academic and professional bridging program for IETs	Semi-structured interviews and focus groups

*Countries are unspecified to protect the anonymity of participants given the small population of migrant IETs in the Irish context.

All interviews were transcribed. Open coding at the sentence level was initially employed. Codes were subsequently categorised according to common themes which were rooted in the researchers’ interpretations of patterns in the text (Wolcott, 2001). Emergent patterns were identified and expounded.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In a joint analysis of the emergent patterns, two significant areas of congruence emerged: language supports for IETs and eschewing plurilingualism.

In the Irish context, all but one of the research participants attempted to address the IRL shortfall on their registration. Three of these were successful and the evidence from these respondents elucidates the significant effort required on the part of those individuals to overcome this systematic barrier to their registration. All of the participants understood the necessity of mainstream teachers being fully qualified to teach Irish. The main initial barrier encountered was the quality of Irish language courses available; one very clear exception to this observation is detailed below. As outlined earlier, there are no state funded, Irish–SCG/OCG specific courses, outside of a preparatory course for the examinations. Thus, IETs had to pay to attend privately run courses. These were generally generic courses provided by various Irish language interest bodies, and were experienced as unfit for purpose by the IETs. According to one teacher:

it is very hard to find good classes for beginners in Irish anywhere. I went to the [named organisation], I did the beginners three times...it was a terrible class, they started teaching us beginners so we were talking about ‘*lios* means ring fort,’...How is this helping me speak Irish? And after four or five sessions of this, I remember the

teacher said, 'so what would you like to learn in Irish?' And [a student] said, 'hello, please and thank you.' So that was the state of those classes, they were not good."

Another teacher, reflecting on an experience studying Irish through a different organisation, concurred:

But we were learning careers and I don't really believe in thematically teaching English or any language, but anyway we were learning about careers and we got down to stenographer and I am learning the word for stenographer in Irish. I think there were 45 different careers and I couldn't even say, 'my name is...' I just was going, "I will never learn Irish like this", and I knew it.

In the Manitoba context, the impetus to learn French as an additional language was somewhat different because it was not mandated, but rather encouraged. English language support was provided through the academic and professional bridging program participants completed; however, when seeking employment, the issue of developing French as an additional language arose in conversation with administrators responsible for hiring. Numerous IETs reported being advised that proficiency in French would make them more employable. As one participant describes:

I went there [to meet with a superintendent] and we had a kind of formal and informal meeting together and she asked me for the French...So yes, of course, I am thinking about the French this coming summer. A friend sent me information about French so I will definitely go to school. If I do basic French, I will include this into my resume then things will work for me.

Other IETs reported similar experiences when seeking the advice of hiring personnel. Rarely was plurilingualism cited as a strength; in most cases, the message was unequivocal: "You have to learn French". Such advice raises questions of appropriateness and support. Are multilingual teachers whose pathways to employment in the Canadian context have already been extended by the need to complete numerous requirements for certification really likely to have the time and resources to study French as well? If French has never been part of their linguistic repertoires, what are the chances IETs will progress sufficiently to be able to teach through this medium?

Highlighting the tremendous investment of time and personal resources to acquire an additional language as part of teacher certification processes, another Irish participant, living in a rural part of Ireland, reflected on the large distances which she had to travel in order to attend a class. She also spoke about the significant economic challenge, in addition to the impact on her family, husband and children:

So we came here and I knew there was going to be a problem so we started to look for Irish courses and I was travelling up to a grinds college in [named city] that was supposed

to be for beginners [only] to realise that really they were Irish people who had needed to up-skill their Irish so it was way above any little bit that I had. And the cost of doing that was enormous at the time. We had two small kids at home at the time and had no work because we couldn't get... [it] was a big task to spend two or three hours in a room with people far more proficient than me so I was learning nothing from it.

Quite quickly, this teacher stopped going to Irish classes and resigned herself to trying to find a teaching post which would not require the SCG/OCG. This strategic decision to withdraw from the process was something shared by other participants and significantly reduced their possibilities of maintaining their positions, or of moving between schools. The absence of targeted, rigorous classes, coupled with material and affective considerations, meant that the migrant IETs were kept or forced out of the system. This resonates clearly with Schmidt's (2010) argument that neo-liberal discourses place responsibility for failure on the *failing individual* because they have not worked hard enough. Yet, the level of work required is not generally understood. One of the teachers who successfully completed the process recalls:

I wanted to have really good Irish. But in the end I remember thinking, "I have been so foolish, I should have left teaching and gone back and become a doctor". I remember very clearly thinking that, that the effort that I had to put in in getting the Irish, I could have retrained in something else. Or I certainly could have done a PhD or something with the time and money it took me to learn the Irish.

The availability of high quality classes was key to the success of one of the participants. Having initially experienced a very poor class, this teacher was very complimentary of one course in which an inspirational teacher knitted content and the language seamlessly. This IET now provides Irish language classes for parents. Yet, this positive experience of breaking into the system would appear to be the exception rather than the rule.

In the Manitoba data, in addition to challenges for IETs acquiring French, IETs also faced the devaluing of their heritage languages in the public school system, at least in the hiring process where the plurilingual attributes of IETs were overlooked. It seemed only in instances where IETs had secured permanent employment that expanding their linguistic repertoires could be exercised in ways that made sense for them. As one IET noted:

Right now I'm teaching permanently in School Division A as a grade 4/5 teacher. I completed my post-baccalaureate diploma along with some of the other IETs, and right now I'm trying to learn Cree. For me it's so important to know another language. I can bridge my being a Filipino to another culture, because I have students who are also Aboriginal, and some of the parents are Aboriginal, so I think that's a good way to bridge myself, being an immigrant and a new teacher to the Canadian culture, and then to another culture.

Comparing and contrasting the experiences of IETs in Ireland and Manitoba, cross-cutting insights emerge around identity and language learning, suggesting that the ecology of language paradigm first espoused by Philippon and Skutnabb-Kangas (1996) is still far from being realised. In both cases, IETs are assumed for the most part to be deficient within the specific confines of systems that exclude them, and then must grapple with and attempt to overcome the inferior positions that have been assigned to them within the systemic hierarchy. As Lin (2008) articulates:

The history of the development and uses of the notions of “identity” has not been an innocent one, if we are alert to the observation that it is usually the powerful who are entitled to and have both more and the right kinds of capital and resources for constructing themselves advantageous identities. Although people who find themselves in subordinate positions can attempt to construct positive identities for themselves in their struggles to gain recognition, it is often the dominant regimes of the powerful that dictate the identity game to them on the basis of a rigid and stacked text. Very often the subordinated peoples’ need to affirm an identity, and thereby construct a hegemonic essentialized structure for *oneself* to fit into (in dichotic opposition to an essentialized *Other*), in a specific symbolic and political struggle is somewhat like what postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak calls the need for “strategic essentialism”. (p. 1)

CONCLUSION

IET participants in Ireland and Manitoba struggled with the explicit and hidden expectations of acquiring Irish and French, when developing proficiency in those languages was not well-supported systemically or in some cases realistic given the IETs’ circumstances. Clearly, mechanisms are needed for acquiring the languages of the jurisdiction, mechanisms that take into account the need for professional language development (rather than conversational classes or classes developed for other purposes) and the time, personal, and financial constraints of the teachers. An analysis drawing on concepts of plurilingualism and language ecology illuminates valuable considerations moving forward about the nature of systemic barriers for IETs and the impact of those barriers on the personal and professional identities of plurilingual teachers. The result is a call to multilingual education systems to reconsider the use of language standards as a means to exclude the very teachers culturally and linguistically diverse schools need most.

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