

The Irish language and everyday life in Derry

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Abstract

This thesis explores the use of the Irish language in everyday life in Derry city. I argue that representations of the Irish language in media, politics and academic research have tended to over-identify it with social division and antagonistic cultures or identities, and have drawn too heavily on political rhetoric and *a priori* assumptions about language, culture and groups in Northern Ireland. I suggest that if we instead look at the mundane and the everyday moments of individual lives, and listen to the voices of those who are rarely heard in political or media debate, a different story of the Irish language emerges. Drawing on eighteen months of ethnographic research, together with document analysis and investigation of historical statistics and other secondary data sources, I argue that learning, speaking, using, experiencing and relating to the Irish language is both emotional and habitual. It is intertwined with understandings of family, memory, history and community that cannot be reduced to simple narratives of political difference and constitutional aspirations, or of identity as emerging from conflict. The Irish language is bound up in everyday experiences of fun, interest, achievement, and the quotidian ebbs and flows of daily life, of getting the kids to school, going to work, having a social life and simply making it through the day. While political and cultural concerns are important, the Irish language has an emotional significance and everyday resonance; to echo Jenkins' (2007) study of the Danish flag, for many who use or relate to the Irish Language, it is something that just is, is *there*, and something that is natural, that simply 'feels right', something that is 'simply part of the background, just there, something which one just does. Something one doesn't generally think about. Something one *feels*' (Jenkins 2007, p. 129).

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1. Introduction

One of the challenges of any sociological research is dealing with the disjuncture between the speed of change in everyday life and the speed of academic production in writing about everyday life. In my own research, the speed of change and speed of events in Northern Ireland proved hard to keep up with following my withdrawal from the field. The political situation, and particularly the political debate around language, culture and identity, in Northern Ireland has changed during the course of my research, and continues to change as I write.

When I arrived in Sheffield in September 2012 to start my research, Northern Ireland was experiencing a state of comparative political stability in which rapprochement around cultural issues seemed to be developing well. Three months later the flag protests had erupted, and culture was back in the centre of political debate. The failure of the Hass talks to reach resolution on the issues of 'flags, parading and dealing with the past' highlighted the extent to which culture, identity and the past were still contentious and controversial subjects (Nolan 2013, p. 9; 2014 p. 10). Four years later, when I came to leave the field and analyse my data, headlines of 'Stormont in Crisis' continued to dominate the news, and disputes around culture and identity, political structures and the Irish language, continued to be at the centre of debate in the media and in politics. In many ways, a situation of 'political crisis' and the threat of impending direct rule has been the norm rather than the exception at Stormont since its inception. Indeed, in 2003, Gilligan described the Northern Ireland peace process as a state of 'constant crisis/permanent process', arguing that 'as long as cynicism, retreat and uncertainty are the main features of the political landscape in Northern Ireland, [...] the peace process will continue to be characterised by recurrent crisis' (Gilligan 2003, p. 34). Ten years later, Mitchell was making the same argument:

'from the outset this political arrangement has been fraught with tension and prone to intermittent crises.... Northern Ireland PLC is in an almost permanent state of

crisis, as sectarian animosities are continually inflamed over flags, parades and sharp differences over how to deal with the past. Consequently, rather than watching the slow decay of sectarianism over the past year we have witnessed its resurgence. The political structures in place in the North have not only proven consistently incapable of challenging it: they are part of the problem, and there is widespread exasperation among ordinary people at the lack of progress in moving forward.’ (Mitchell 2014, pp. 28-9)

Many media commentators, politicians and individuals in everyday life in Northern Ireland echo Mitchell’s argument that the power-sharing institutions established by the Good Friday Agreement (Northern Ireland Office 1998) are inherently fragile and prone to collapse. The d’Hondt system in many ways institutionalised community difference, and the use of the cross-community veto system of the ‘petition of concern’ for party political, rather than equality and community relations, issues has been criticised and has caused tension between the main parties (Gordon 2013). The system of a shared-power executive has forced parties with quite different political philosophies and social, economic and cultural policies into a single government, resulting in a series of deadlocks not only over socio-economic policies¹, but also cultural and conflict legacy issues including flags, parading, historical crimes, disarmament and, crucially for this thesis, the Irish language².

The Good Friday Agreement, and the many negotiations since which have sought to reach resolution on the difficult topics that most frequently prevent the effective running of

¹ Particularly in recent years gay marriage and LGBT rights, education policy (especially school funding and selection policy), welfare reform, austerity and Brexit.

² For reviews of key issues and differences see Nolan 2013, 2014, Wilson 2016.

³ The name of the city is the subject of contention in contemporary politics and media; it has been called Londonderry, Derry, Doire, Derry-Londonderry and other names over the years. I have written about this issue in previous work (O’Neill 2013), in which I argue that the name of the city employed need not necessarily be seen as a political statement or stance, but is also about everyday habit and common use. Both before and during my fieldwork, Derry was the name by which I and those around me tended to refer to the city, and the name that comes most naturally to me, and it is this name

² For reviews of key issues and differences see Nolan 2013, 2014, Wilson 2016. Ireland is likewise

government, have tended only to reach semi-resolution, with agreements being reached on process, rather than on policy and practice itself. The complexities of how culture and equality should be managed in practice, and what equality and a 'shared future' actually could and should look like, remain vaguely articulated in policy, and contentious in political debate (Nolan 2014, p. 11, Wilson 2016, pp. 117-141). In this system of shared power, the use of the petition of concern, the threat of refusing to enter or form a government, or withdrawing from government during session, has resulted in ongoing episodes of political stalemate and crisis and a lack of lasting resolution on particularly thorny issues, as well as long periods in which the executive is suspended, absent, or inactive.

The Irish language is one of the issues at the heart of this debate and the deadlock in attempts to form a functioning devolved government in Northern Ireland. While, on the ground, the Irish language has gone from strength to strength in terms of the growth of child and adult education and the development of Irish medium business, media and tourism, at Stormont and governmental level disagreements about Irish language rights and law have been on-going since 1998. At the time of writing, they continue to be a major stumbling block to the formation of an Executive. However, this thesis argues that, in seeking to understand and explain the Irish language in everyday life in Northern Ireland, it is easy to get distracted by the political grand narrative and the drama that unfolds at Stormont, and to over-identify the Irish language with the debates taking place in the media and in formal politics at an elite level. It argues that it is important not to overlook the role of the Irish language in broader everyday life and everyday social interactions, and how it is experienced, perceived and made meaningful in this sphere. While of course everyday practices, experiences and social interactions are informed by and intertwined with that of politics and media, looking to the everyday reveals that there are wider, more complex and more nuanced stories to tell about how Irish is used and experienced. This thesis is an attempt to step away from the dominance of the political narrative in understanding the

Irish language, and to shine a light on the everyday world of Irish and how it permeates and intertwines with everyday life in Northern Ireland. It aims to give a voice to those for whom the Irish language is part of everyday life, and provide a platform for those whose voices are not normally heard. It is an attempt to explore the mundane, the intangible, the unsaid, the obvious and the emotional, that which is less easily captured and those elements of life that cannot be converted into headlines and sound bites.

It is of course impossible to ignore the wider political context; this is part of the everyday, and likewise, understanding the political debate is crucial to understanding why the Irish language remains contentious and why it matters in everyday life and in politics in Northern Ireland; the contemporary and historical context of the development of the Irish language will accordingly be discussed in chapters three and four. However, this is not a thesis about the grand narrative of Irish language politics or history, but is about the Irish language in everyday life in Derry.³ Drawing on interview data, eighteen months of ethnographic research, and documentary and visual material collected during the fieldwork period, it seeks to paint a picture of how the Irish language emerges in everyday life, and how it is understood and experienced by individuals in this everyday setting. While acknowledging that the Irish language has been an important part of historical and contemporary political debate and struggle in Northern Ireland and Derry, and has consequently become bound up

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with divided cultural repertoires and conceptions of national and cultural identity and ethnicity, this thesis seeks to argue that the Irish language cannot be reduced to, or solely or best understood through the prism of, politics, identity, culture, ethnicity or nationalism. It argues that the Irish language should not be understood only in terms of how it is represented by dominant elites in politics and the media, but that it must also be understood in terms of how it is experienced, how it is lived, and how it permeates individuals' lives on an everyday, mundane level. While politics and understandings of culture, identity and national identity are important, this is never the whole, or indeed, the main, story. Understandings of family and belonging are all important, as is the emotional resonance of the language, whether for the *craic*, or for the feelings of affinity, pride and joy it inspires in those who speak, hear or use it. There is a sense that the Irish language has always been, and just is, *there*: something that is natural, that simply 'feels right'. To echo Jenkins' (2007) study of the Danish flag, it is something that is 'simply part of the background, just there, something which one just does. Something one doesn't generally think about. Something one *feels*', yet something that is 'anything but banal in an emotional sense' (Jenkins 2007, p. 129).

As far as possible, this thesis seeks to approach the language from the point of view of the everyday. While necessarily framed by theoretical frameworks and abstract concepts, everyday words, observations, participation and material and documentary culture are the starting points of my analysis. The first half of the thesis explores how language can be understood in the everyday, more generally and more specifically within the context of contemporary Northern Ireland. Chapter two considers how language, groups and boundaries can be approached and understood, and chapters three and four look more specifically the situation in Northern Ireland as regards popular perceptions and politics of groups, division, culture and the Irish language. Chapter three explores the historical development of group division and the Irish language in Northern Ireland and how the Irish

language has become intertwined with politics and social division, whereas chapter four considers recent history, developments and the contemporary situation. These chapters argue that perceptions about social division, boundaries around groups, languages and cultures, and the alignments between groups and activities or cultures are not static or fixed or natural, but must be understood as the product of socio-historical trajectories that continue to change and develop. Chapter five outlines the rationale for the research project undertaken in this thesis, reviewing the existing literature which investigates the Irish language in Northern Ireland, as well as that which takes the city of Derry as a field site, and arguing for the necessity of undertaking a study which forefronts the everyday in understanding the Irish language. Chapter six discusses the methods used in the research project and the challenges faced, and solutions found, in undertaking the research and analysis.

The second half of the thesis explores the Irish language in everyday life in historical and contemporary Derry. Chapter seven explores the history of the Irish language in Derry, and Chapter eight focuses on individual narratives of the Irish language amongst research participants in Derry and the emotional importance of the language, Chapter nine considers how Irish is, and is not used, in everyday social interactions and linguistic environments in the city, and Chapter ten considers how the Irish language figures in the material and linguistic environments of contemporary Derry. Across these final four chapters I argue that, while the Irish language is, of course, bound up with issues around culture, and understandings of identity and culture, the Irish language, and why it is important to people, why it is used, and how it is perceived, is as much bound up with the everyday, the emotional, and the habitual. To reduce it simply to politics is to do violence to its complex lived realities.

2. Language and everyday life

While writing this thesis, I had to constantly remind myself that it was not simply about language, as some kind of cultural phenomenon 'in itself', but about the place of language in everyday life, in this case in the city of Derry. This important conceptual nuance is, in many ways, reflective of the challenges that arise in discussions about the place of the Irish language in contemporary Northern Ireland. Encountering the world of Irish language development in Derry and its associated political discussions, as a participant, an ethnographer, and a post-fieldwork PhD student, I found that the narrative and arguments are easily drawn towards a focus on the language as a bounded entity which may simply be picked up, put down, learnt, forgotten, or imposed, and as something with a character, content and existence which is prior to, and independent of, everyday experience and local and personal contexts.

The Irish language does, of course, have boundaries; it has a vocabulary and grammar that is codified in books, and it is, of course, something which is acquired, learned and developed, whether as a first or subsequent language, often with reference to the 'correct' versions of the language promoted within educational environments. However, to see 'speaking Irish' or 'using Irish' or 'the Irish-language world' as about the language alone is to miss what is arguably the most fundamental aspect of language: that is, that language is used and found in the everyday, as a form of communication, whether written, spoken or read, or used as a symbol or image. As a communication device, language is thus always, and at its very heart, relational. It exists between people, whether in primary, face-to-face interaction, or in a more removed sense between producer and consumer, as in the case of books, maps, signs or other material or literary representations. As a relational interaction and as a form of communication, language can only artificially be separated from the circumstances and

context of production and reception. It cannot be properly studied or understood by starting from the point of seeing it as a bounded 'something' with a life, trajectory and meaning of its own that exists independent of context. Understanding 'language' cannot be reduced simply to tracing 'the language' and how 'it' is used, or 'its' history and trajectory of development. As something that always must emerge in an ongoing relationship between people, and their social and material environment and context, it must, rather, be approached from the starting point of everyday life in which it is used, experienced, learnt, and developed (Duranti 1994).

The idea of a language and ideas about a language are, of course, equally important to study in their own right. Such ideas, understandings and feelings are, like language itself, not *a priori*, bounded or separate properties of an abstract or separate realm, but are experienced, developed, made meaningful, learned and changed as part of everyday lives. The mode of learning or acquiring these ideas may be more or less active, more or less explicit and thought-out, but, whether developed through everyday habit and environmental interaction, or through dedicated study and consideration, the ideas that people encounter and experience, and how they make sense of them, all depend on context and everyday experience.

Understanding the Irish language, its place in people's lives, why it is or is not used, how it is experienced, what it does, what it means, how it develops, and so on, is thus not a case of understanding or studying the language in itself and for itself, or of starting from particular claims or assumptions about what 'it' does, or means, or how 'it' is used, or what is and is not the 'Irish language'. Rather, it is a matter of understanding everyday life and the everyday processes of communication and interaction in which 'Irish' is, as a relation, and as idea, made and called into being.

This thesis is, therefore, an attempt to understand the 'Irish language' through the lens of the everyday, to look at everyday experiences, challenges and processes. It argues that to understand Irish solely in terms of 'identity construction', 'culture', 'ethnicity' or 'performance', or in terms of politics, contest or conflict (whether 'ethnic', 'cultural' or constitutional), as is frequently the case in political debate and social science studies, is an approach that rests on an artificial, and problematic, idea of language as a bounded, static entity which is separate from people's lives and so can simply be picked up and put down again, abstracted from everyday life and understood through abstract concepts.

2.1 Approaching language: the problem of meaning and boundaries

This thesis rests on a particular approach and conception of language in society, and a particular approach to how social interactions, individual experiences in social worlds, and words and meanings can be studied and understood. All discussions of language in society, the politics of language or its identification and management, are built - explicitly or implicitly - on particular epistemological and ontological approaches to 'language' and its role in social interaction. This is not a technicality, nor is it a straightforward issue; it is a theoretical choice that determines the direction of what can be said, and how the data, social world and social interactions within a study are conceived and understood. By virtue of the relationship between language, communication and social interaction, this theoretical choice also relies upon, and constructs, particular approaches to groups/groupness, the individual and the self, and processes of meaning making and social change.

At its most basic, 'language' may be understood as a form of communication and interaction which can be verbal and written, but is also physical and embodied, as in the case of 'body language', gestures or communication systems such as semaphore or sign language. The success of communication and its effects on subsequent interactions and events relies on a degree of shared understanding; this does not require total agreement as to 'meaning', nor is a direct line between intention-signification-understanding guaranteed. 'Meaning' and use

of a sign or symbol is learned and developed over time, constructed in moments of interaction and exchange with reference to context (Duranti 1993; Vološinov 1972; Bakhtin 1981; Kopytoff 1986). As with all sign and symbol systems, individual elements do not exist in a vacuum, but operate in relation to each other and in the wider context of social interaction and use. In spoken language, particularly, although also with other forms (such as written or visual forms), metalinguistic features - tone, facial expression, gestures, wider context, location, and so on - form a major part of how any sign or symbol is interpreted. Language patterns are also indexical, although what they 'index', that is what additional meanings or signs or context they indicate, is an emergent property of ongoing relations, interactions and context. These indexical features of language include accent, word use, grammatical constructions, register and so on, or in the case of visual or written forms, form, presentation and structure, handwriting, a particular choice of font and so on. With these indexical features and metalinguistic features we construct particular images and understandings around any communication or use of language, for example, about gender, age, education level, emotional state, the context, expectations, what spirit to take the words in and so on (Duranti 1997, 2008; Duranti and Goodwin 1992; Ochs 2016; Shankar and Cavanaugh 2012).

Everyday life is full of examples of the instability of signs or symbols and the importance of context, interaction and personal interpretation in the construction of meaning. It must also be remembered that language is, in the process of everyday communication, highly relational; meaning is, as has been highlighted in ethnographies of speaking and conversation analysis, usually a mutual effort, a co-construction influenced by the interlocutors themselves, the context, their interpretation of one another, their expectations of the exchange and the situation, and so on (Grice 1975; Gumperz 1977 1982, 1992; Hymes 1966; Labov 1972). For example, how I interpret, or intend, the meaning of raising the palm of my hand to shoulder height, depends on my understanding and

interpretation of the social context, how I understand the intentions and expectations of partner/s, and how I make meaning around features such as facial expression, other bodily gestures, the location of the exchange and so on. How I form these understandings depends on my own personal background and how I have learnt to interpret not only the sign or symbol in question but also all of the wider contextual features - the who, what, where and so on. In the course of the exchange, there may or may not be a smooth linear transition of meaning between partners; I might, faced with the raised hand, stop and wait, go in for a high five, or adopt a comfortable seat and begin a yogic breathing meditation. I might go in for a handshake, only to realise at the last moment that I have missed the intention of the gesture. What choice I make in the split second of exchange is not just about the sign or symbol itself but depends on my interpretation of an others' intentions and expectations in the context, and indeed may also be influenced by my own perception of myself or who I want to be seen as: maybe I believe myself too old and too serious for a high five and will ignore the gesture completely, maybe I will seek to turn it into a handshake, maybe my understanding of the situation is that my partner in this exchange will whip their hand out of the way at the last minute and I want to beat them at their own game and so on. The gesture ultimately has no exact meaning outside of its particular context; it is something that is relational and unfixed.

Exactly the same considerations apply to spoken, written or visual forms of communication, even within a context of mutual intelligibility and shared systems. If a man walks into a room and announces 'Any crack?', the interlocutors must use all of their understanding of the context, and interpretations of the man himself and what they understand of him, to make sense of the query. It might be that, in the context of an office and the fact that the man has an Irish accent, that the interlocutors understand him to be asking 'Any *craic*?', and proceed to talk about their day. They may understand and recognise that this is the intended meaning, but be unsure what the appropriate answer is. They may answer the

question politely while silently forming a particular opinion of the man based on his use of vocabulary and phraseology. It may be that the query is understood, based on a particular context and interaction, as a request about the availability of drugs, or indeed, the structural stability of a wall. It may be that the multiple potential meanings are being exploited for comic effect. It may be that it is the reply of the interlocutor that 'fixes' one meaning from the many multiple meanings available. It may be that, in the wider context of the relationship between two individuals, the use of the question is taken to be a symbol or cue to begin a particular type of interaction, or ritual of exchange, for example, as in my research, a friendly social interaction that initiates not a conversation as to recent activities but the process of handing over mail and messages at the reception desk.

If meaning and significance are not fixed, and if successful communication is not bound up in intended meaning or a linear relationship between intention and response, to approach language as a pure, internally meaningful system of signs and symbols, that is, as a bounded 'thing' as found in the pages of a dictionary and grammar book, makes little sense. Language use during social interaction is messier and more unstable than suggested by the artificial representations in grammar books or school textbooks (Duranti 1994, pp. 4-7).

Further, while we may sensibly talk of 'the English language' or 'the Irish language', and 'language contact' between the two, or competition or assimilation or language conflict, the boundaries between these 'languages' are fuzzy. Within a group of 'Irish speakers' or 'English speakers', there may be highly variable uses of language, or ability to understand others. Within any 'language' there is the potential for high levels of internal heterogeneity and for a lack of communicative success or mutual intelligibility amongst individuals 'speaking the same language'. This is most obvious in the case of accents and dialects, but is also common in social interactions between individuals with close and connected linguistic repertoires, because of minor vocabulary differences, misunderstanding of context, or

different interpretations of the wider/additional significance or meaning of a word or phrase (Grabe, Kochanski and Coleman 2005; Haugen 1966; Dolan 1998; Trudgill 2000). During my own research for example, while 'speaking English', there were various moments of miscommunication or lack of understanding between myself and local residents during day-to-day social interactions: for example, the use of 'Yes' as a salutation, or 'Go on' as a friendly precursor to a request. These words were not 'foreign', but I had to learn the meaning, significance, and appropriate response expected in those particular exchanges and contexts as I would a new word. Similarly, my use of expressions such 'Do you fancy a brew?', a phrase generally recognised in Derry although rarely used, on at least one occasion was misunderstood as an offer of beer.

More significantly, which language people understand themselves to be speaking is likewise variable in all languages; words can be understood as 'part' of a language, as 'loan words', as 'pidgin', or as 'code switching', depending on perspective (Auer 1999; Baptista 2005; Heath 1984; Jourdan 1991; Kouwenberg and Singler 2009; Sayahi 2014). For example, the words '*craic*', '*galore*', '*smitheens*' '*dander*', '*geansi*', '*prati*' and so on, common in English and/or 'Hiberno-English' could be categorised as Irish, as English, as code-switching, or as loan words, and their etymologies can be questioned, negotiated and renegotiated.

'*Craic*', for example, is, on the one hand an 'Irish' word in that it is part of the Irish language, and commonly used when speaking Irish; for example during my fieldwork my day almost always began by someone asking me '*Craic ar bith?*' ('Any *craic?*'). It is also part of Hiberno-Irish, the patchwork quilt of dialects of English spoken in Ireland, used in such phrases as 'What's the *craic?*' 'The *craic* is 90', and so on, again expressions I encountered on a daily basis during my fieldwork. In some parts of Northern Ireland, among some groups or individuals it may be spelt - even if only mentally - '*crack*', and explained with a different etymology as resolutely not from Irish but from elsewhere (Beattie 2005). '*Craic*' is also part

of the dialects of some parts, or communities, in northern England and Scotland, and can be readily heard in various contexts across the country (Kallen 2013, p. 149; Beal 2010, p. 60). In other parts of the UK it may not be commonly used, but may be understood. In other parts still it may be neither understood nor used. All of these features, and the tendency to use the word, may also vary according to features such as age, gender, background, social context and so on. What then should we make of the word '*craic*'? Does 'Everybody speak Irish Everyday', as a Department of Arts, Culture and Leisure Irish language promotion campaign of 2014-5 put it?⁴ Are we all code-switching? Is '*craic*' an 'Irish loan word' in the English language? Are we speaking English? Is it simply a peculiarity of a regional dialect? The word appears in the Oxford English Dictionary, where it is stated to be 'an Irish borrowing, combined with an English element' (OED 2016). But, similarly, it is part of the Irish language, and used with largely the same grammatical construction, and used far more commonly in Irish than in English as spoken in England. Furthermore, to some the word is an 'English/Scottish dialect word' that 'most likely entered Ireland through Scottish settlers in the north of the country' and 'was Gaelicized into *craic*' in the 1960s (Gratham 2009, p. 151).

'*Geansaí*' or 'gansey' - meaning a jumper or sweater - is another interesting case in point. During my fieldwork a number of respondents told me that this was a common feature of the Donegal/Derry dialect of English, and explained that it was a word borrowed from the Irish word for jumper *geansaí*. For some people however, 'gansy' was used with no awareness or understanding that it might be Irish, but rather as part of the everyday local dialect of English, and were surprised when presented with the idea that gansy might be a borrowing from Irish. The OED identifies the word as a variation of 'Guernsey', listing uses in England from the 19th century onwards, but also, in its 'gansy' form, in occasional Irish and

⁴ This DCAL campaign was launched in early 2014 as part of the Liofa campaign, which aimed to encourage more people to learn Irish. It took the form of newspaper articles, posters, billboards and radio and TV advertisements which proclaimed 'Everybody speaks Irish Everyday', using the examples of *craic*, *smidirini* and *brog* (fun, smithereens and shoes).

or Scots dialects (OED 2016). Dolan's Hiberno-English dictionary (Dolan 1998, p. 110) notes the use of the word in English phrases across Ireland, as an Irish borrowing. Allsopp has highlighted its use in Barbados and Jamaica (Allsopp, J. and Allsopp, R. 2003, p. 250). What then do we make of this word? Is it simply an Irish word for jumper, or is it, in the English context, derived from 'Guernsey', a thick knitted jumper worn by seamen, as defined by the OED and Allsopp. Is it an Irish word? Is it from Irish? Is it an English loan word used in Irish? Does its presence in Jamaica and the Caribbean reflect the Irish influence on Caribbean language, dialect or accent or is it 'from' somewhere else? When my participants in Derry used the word '*geansaí*' were they code switching? Where they speaking Irish? Or English? Should the word be treated as different and distinct in each context?

As explained earlier, the purpose of this thesis is not to study language *per se*, and it is not a contribution to the field of sociolinguistics. However, since language is necessarily at the heart of this thesis, the above discussion is intended to clarify my approach to language: that the boundaries between languages are fuzzy, complex and unfixed, as are the characteristics and identifications associated with them. While interesting and illuminating, grammatical and linguistic discussions of language etymology, and narratives of interaction between languages, or of derivations and origins of words, as defined or uncovered through investigations of how a language is preserved in texts and recordings, do not however necessarily tell us the whole story about language use, development and impact, or about its meaning and associations in the contemporary everyday. Indeed, while in general terms etymologists can talk about a word being 'from' a particular origin or social interaction historically, this does not necessarily explain or reflect when and how an individual comes to start using a word, and how they use it. Furthermore, as regards etymology and understandings of language development, especially when considering more distant historical developments, it must be remembered that, as with all aspects of history and records of history, the texts, records and other sources available for study, largely represent

with usage and development among a particular class (and often gender) of society writing for various different purposes, and do not necessarily reflect everyday social interactional usage or diversity or complexity in use. This has been highlighted in critical approaches to history and heritage studies by a whole range of authors (Hayes and Urquart 2001; Longmore and Umansky 2001; Offen, Pierson and Rendall 1991; Smith and Waterton 2009, 2010; Thompson 1963). It does not necessarily reflect or reveal how a word might have existed in social life 'on the street' or in different regions. The use of the word 'gansy', for example, is for many speakers in the UK and Ireland not necessarily 'from' Irish, or 'from' the Caribbean or 'from' English, but is, rather, 'from' whatever context in which it was learnt. If I were to use the word, it would be 'from Irish' in one sense, in that I first encountered and learnt the word in Irish classes, but, as a word that could be used in English-speaking contexts it was 'from' my experience with the Derry dialect. In the context of Derry, my use of the word could be classed as intentional code switching or intentional dialect adoption; however, over time, it became habitual and unthought, just the word that rolls off my tongue. This identification, that is, how the word and my use of it might be categorised, narrated and responded to by any particular individual, and the meaning and understandings attached to it, is however not fixed or unitary but a matter of on-going social interaction and experience and constant reconstruction (Bakhtin 1981; Vološinov 1983).

Understanding and approaching language is thus not a straightforward matter, but requires attention to ongoing change, and complexity, and examination of identification and categorisation as processes, rather than in terms of fixed *a priori* characteristics. Jenkins' model of social identity, applied to language, provides a useful means for drawing together and conceptualising these various complex features and arguments around language.

Identification, in Jenkins' model, is always an ongoing process that emerges in the interactions and events of everyday life, a product of the social world in which an individual lives. It is a dialectical process in which internal and external, identification and

categorisation of self and others, and identification and categorisation by others, together shape how the process of identification unfolds. Group identification and categorisation, that is, the internal and external aspects of identification respectively, are inseparable in everyday life, and productive of each other. Jenkins argues that distinctions between nominal and virtual identifications, that is the differences and divergences between the name, the label, the symbol, and the experience, meaning, or understanding, must be examined and considered; for example the members of a group may all identify as Irish, but what this means to each may differ considerably, and what it means over time may change. The identification as Irish however, on the level of the nominal, may not (Jenkins 2008b, pp. 108-111). Jenkins' model stresses the importance of categorisation, external identifications by others, in the process of identification, a feature often overlooked in theories of identity. In stressing process and dialectic relationships between different processes, this is a model that starts from the position of rejecting the reification of groups and categories as primordial or 'natural' entities in the world:

'Rather than reify groups and categories – as 'things' – we should think instead about identities as constituted in the dialectic of collective identification, in the interplay of group identification and categorisation'. (Jenkins 2008a, p. 108)

While avoiding the reification of the 'reality' of groups and categories and identities as fixed or *a priori* 'things', Jenkins' model emphasises how these collectivities are realised, and take on an everyday reality through social interaction, accordingly becoming powerful factors in shaping social interaction, experiences, opportunities and the distribution of resources and power:

'... groups are real if people think they are: they then behave in ways that assume that groups are real and, in so doing, construct that reality. They **realise** it. That

groups are social constructions doesn't mean that they are illusions'. (Jenkins 2008a, p. 12, original emphasis)

Social imagining of groups and categories thus makes them a presence and an influence in the world and everyday life experiences that is far from imaginary. In this interplay between group identification and categorisation, categorisation is particularly important in that:

'... categorisation makes a powerful contribution to the everyday reality – the realisation, if you will – of groups. Attributions of group membership feature routinely in how we categorise others, and the categorisation of out-groups is intrinsic to in-group identification. Who we think we are is intimately related to who we think others are, and vice versa. Categorisation also makes an important contribution to the distribution of resources and penalties, and is central to both conflict and conflict avoidance strategies: part of the experience of being a group member is categorisation by others and its attendant consequences. It is very real.'

(Jenkins 2008a, p. 12)

In stressing the internal-external dialectic and the role of social interaction in the realisation of groups in the processes of group identification and external categorisation, Jenkins' model situates the processes of identification at the boundaries. In focusing on the boundaries of imagined - but not imaginary - groups, communities and categories, rather than their 'content' or characteristics, this model highlights how categorisation and the realisation of groups and social distinctions and difference is achieved through symbolic constructions as much as, if not more than, through *a priori*, 'primordial' differences:

'identity is constructed in transactions at and across the boundary. During these transactions a balance is struck between (internal) group identification and (external) categorisation by others.' (Jenkins 2008a, p. 44).

Drawing on Barth's (1969) model of ethnicity and Cohen's (1985) model of the symbolic construction of community, Jenkins' model also highlights the importance of distinguishing between the imagining of difference and boundaries, and everyday experiences and activities; simply put, everyday life is a complex, ever-changing continuum of interaction, actions and experiences. As regards language, linguistic use and communication is not neat, uniform and bounded, and does not conform to the representations contained in grammar books and dictionaries, but is ever changing; as outlined above, the boundaries as regards 'which language' a particular usage belongs to are very fuzzy and always open to negotiation and contestation. This distinction Jenkins describes in terms of '*nominal identity* and *virtual identity*: between the *name* and the *experience* of an identity':

'It is possible for individuals to share the same nominal identity, and for that to mean very different things to them in practice, to have different consequences for their lives, for them to 'do' or 'be' it differently... The nominal–virtual distinction is important. The name can stay the same – X – while what it means in everyday life to be an X can change dramatically. Similarly, the experience may stay relatively stable while the name changes. Both can change.' (Jenkins 2008a, p. 44).

Boundaries, in this model, while often nominally stable, are always 'permeable, persisting despite the flow of personnel across them' (*ibid.*, p. 44). The stability and continued social realisation of these boundaries, and particularly the nominal aspects of identity, is influenced by everyday interactions and experiences, and the processes of symbolic construction which emerge during these everyday processes; these are also bound up with processes of power, of which the power to categorise, or resist categorisation, is paramount. Categorisation 'is a generic interactional process' and 'a routine and necessary contribution to how we make sense of, and impute predictability to, a complex human world of which our knowledge is always limited, and in which our knowledge of other humans is often

particularly limited' (*ibid.*, p. 105). Categorisation however always 'has consequences, even if only trivial or immanent ones' and 'is always *potentially* an intervention... and often more' in people's lives (*ibid.*, pp. 108-109). This is particularly clear when looking at issues as regards the categorisation of people and the distribution of resources by institutions of power such as governments, social and educational services, employers and, of course, social scientists, historians, the media and others engaged in the business of knowledge production and promotion. How an individual is categorised, whether in term of age, gender, ethnicity, mental capacity or whatever, determines, for example, what rights, benefits and services they can access, how they are expected to behave, how they are treated, and what opportunities are available to them.

Lefebvre's model of 'the production of space' similarly presents a sociological framework of understanding based around considering everyday experience, representation and individual perception as dialectical processes. Lefebvre argues that the social production of space emerges in dialectic between *spatial practice* - material and physical social interaction and activities - *the representation of space* - how space is defined in discourse, maps and visual representations such as signs – and *in spaces of representation* - how spaces and aspects of space are used to represent or symbolise something else. Lefebvre's model also includes a parallel dialectic between how space is lived, perceived and imagined by individuals. Drawing on these models and research into urban space, Lefebvre argues that the production of space is a constantly ongoing process that is both productive of, and produced by, the social interactions within a space as well as the wider social interactions which produce experience, knowledge, use and understandings of the social world and particular spaces. Thus Lefebvre argues 'the production and the product are inseparable sides of one process...space is permeated with social relations: it is not only supported by social relations, but is also productive of and produced by social relations' (Lefebvre 2009, p. 186). As such the production of space is key to the exercise of power; '(Social) space is a

(social) product... the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control' (Lefebvre 1991, p. 26).

The framework, models and arguments developed by Lefebvre and Jenkins can be usefully applied to the experience, identification and categorisation of languages. How and where boundaries and relationships are drawn between and around languages, how linguistic features are grouped and categorised, and how these boundaries, groups and categories have power and effect in everyday experiences of linguistic practices, everyday life and resource allocation and individual opportunity, can be understood by looking at the interplay between identification and categorisation, in the course of social interaction. As in Jenkins' model of identity, the distinction between nominal and virtual is crucial; the everyday practice of language and the nominal identifications of language do not neatly align - what it is to speak English to one person is not the same as to another, what it is to say '*craic*' by one person's reckoning is not necessarily what it is to another, and nominal identifications of language have frequently, across history, been produced, reproduced, suppressed, and developed with, or sometimes without, major consequences for everyday experience and virtual identifications of language use. The process of categorisation - whether as 'languages' or 'dialects', 'romance' languages or 'Celtic languages' - what is counted as 'good' and 'bad' language, what counts as speaking one language, and what counts as speaking another, is incredibly powerful in determining how the use of these linguistic features are treated, what rights are accorded are or are not accorded to them and so on.

As in Lefebvre's model, the production of linguistic groupings, categories and the social world of linguistic usage is a process which involves *everyday experiences and social interactions* around usage and categorisation, how languages are *represented* through

discourse and through documentation, textbooks, dictionaries and so on, and how languages are *perceived or imagined*, that is, all the ideas attached to linguistic categories⁵, as belonging to a particular group or reflecting certain personal characteristics or tendencies and so on. These processes are inseparable and productive of each other; representations of language produce perceptions and imaginings of language, and these imaginings and perceptions come to bear on everyday practice or behaviours, which in turn may, in the course of social interactions, challenge or produce perceptions of language, and in doing so, provide the basis for alternative representations of language, and so on. For example, activists and educators frequently lamented during my fieldwork that educational resources and media representations of Irish were dominated by rather dry natural and social histories, by images of rural country life, farming, the Catholic church, and by traditional music and dancing. This, it was felt, fed the idea that Irish was ‘uncool’, ‘old-fashioned’ or ‘irrelevant’ and discouraged young people in particular, even those with fluency, from learning more or wanting to use it in their everyday lives. Media attempts to change this are well underway; both TG4, the main Irish language TV production company, and BBC Gaeilge have been seeking to create more mainstream TV shows such as serial dramas, soaps, or game shows, and programmes set in more Urban environments such as Dublin and Belfast. Responding to the problem of the lack of pop and contemporary Irish-language music, and a strong association of Irish language with traditional music, Coláiste Lurgan has been producing Irish-language versions of pop songs, such as ‘Riptide’ by Vance Joy, *as gaeilge [in Irish]*.

This representational shift is, not however simply a matter of producing new narratives and images, but reflects changes in everyday practice, particularly the growth of urban *Gaeltacht* areas and growing networks of Irish speakers and Irish-language businesses and

⁵ Or ‘linguistic ideologies’, as this aspect of language might be termed in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology.

opportunities. For example, *Scúip*, a series drama about an Irish-language newspaper, is a fictional representation of one segment of everyday life in west Belfast, where the success of *Gaeltacht* development has led to a growing Irish-language commercial and social community. These representations have important consequences in shaping the possibilities for social use and practice of the Irish language. For young people attending Irish-medium schools for example, they not only provide a vision of a present and future in which Irish is relevant and economically viable and useful, but their production also creates employment opportunities for Irish-speakers.

However, the power to categorise language, as with the power to categorise groups, is not equally distributed in society; while the nominal may never be totally divorced from the virtual, and categorisations, narratives and representations are always intertwined with everyday experience and behaviour, institutions and organisations of power have disproportionate power to make identifications 'stick' due to their ability to allocate and control resources (both material and ideological) (Jenkins 2008, p. 198). The process of categorisation and identification of language is particularly powerful due to the extent with which it has become intertwined with the production of identifications and categorisations of groupness and culture, and as such, language categorisation is a process with potential to influence and impact upon everyday life and experiences and act as a tool of control and power. To paraphrase Lefebvre, language boundaries, categories and imaginings are social products, and 'thus produced also serve [...] as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production [they are] also a means of control' (Lefebvre 1991, p. 26).

2.2 Language boundaries and groups

Notwithstanding the complexity of language use and of ideas about language in social interaction, the instability of boundaries between languages or dialects, and the role of categorisation in the realisation and maintenance of perceived boundaries, a basic level of

mutual intelligibility is important in order to enable successful communication in a social interaction. What's more, a degree of common mutual intelligibility is an important basis for feelings and identification of belonging, relatedness or 'groupness'. And since language is indexical, linguistic patterns, similarities and differences - whether of vocabulary, accent, grammar, or so on - are a key way in which we identify ourselves and others. Perhaps even more important is that language, and communication more generally, is one of the most fundamental and inescapable aspects of everyday life and is thus part of what Jenkins terms 'the everyday contexts of "culture"-in-common' (Jenkins 2008b, p. 170). As Jenkins argues, 'even in the context of categorisation, the criteria of identification have to possess at least some social relevance: they have to be differences which make a difference to someone. There are local limits to how arbitrary the social construction of identity can be' (Jenkins 2008b, p. 172). Language, and linguistic use, whether in terms of communicative sense and linguistic similarities, or in cases in which mutual intelligibility is very low, is a very pronounced and obvious marker of similarity and difference, and one that is often very relevant in the processes of everyday interaction and primary socialisation and thus 'may be of greater affective and personal consequence than others' (Jenkins 2008b, p. 172). As such, while 'in principle, it is possible to mobilise around any marker of differentiation', language, as part of the 'everyday realities', is a symbol which 'may be more emotable than others' and is thus very often key in the 'everyday constitution of ethnicity' (Jenkins 2008b, p. 172).

It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that in everyday life and in politics, the media and global movements, language has become bound up with ideas about groups and social difference. This intertwining of ideas about language and groups has become so pervasive and taken for granted that it is often conceived as an important, or even necessary, aspect of 'culture' and 'identity' and marker of ethnic and national and cultural difference. Barth's (1969) critical discussion of the idea of 'ethnic groups' highlighted that, whether explicitly or

implicitly, social theory had assumed that linguistic differences, understood in terms of bounded, discrete languages, were key markers of cultural and ethnic group boundaries:

‘This ideal type definition is not so far removed in content from the traditional proposition that a race = a culture = a language and that a society = a unit which rejects or discriminates against others ... we are led to imagine each group developing its cultural and social form in relative isolation ... a world of separate peoples, each with their culture and each organized in a society which can legitimately be isolated for description as an island to itself’. (Barth 1969, p. 11)

During the modern era, the idea of fixed, bounded, separate ‘languages’ correlating to bounded ‘cultures’, ‘ethnicities’, identities and individual and group rights, freedoms and liberties became increasingly accepted and seemingly irrefutable in the context of a growing concern with, and valuation of, ‘identity’ and ‘culture’ rights and issues in both politics and society and in social science (Bondi 1993; Bernstein 2005; Clifford 2000; Jenkins 2008a, pp. 28-35; Kaldor 2002; Weller 2004). The post-war development of human rights legislation and discourses concerned with the rights of the individual to culture and identity, the concerns and interests which emerged from civil rights and national independence movements since the 60s, and concerns about globalisation and loss of diversity during the last 30 years, have all contributed to a growing discourse about ‘linguistic rights’ and ‘language rights’ (Maffi 2002, 2005; Paulston 1997).

The 1990s in particular saw the development of academic interest in, and national and international legislation about, the idea of ‘language communities’ and language rights, in which language was presented as a natural and irrefutable basis for independent group-ness (Grin 2005; Kontra 1999; Skutnabb-Kangas 2006). The United Nations (UN) *Universal Declaration on Linguistic Rights* is one clear example of the pervasive and powerful nature of

such approaches and understandings. The Declaration in 1996 sought to address the issue of how:

‘Language communities are currently threatened by a lack of self-government, a limited population or one that is partially or wholly dispersed, a fragile economy, an unmodified language, or a cultural model opposed to the dominant one, which make it impossible for many languages to survive and develop unless the following basic goals are taken into account.’ (United Nations 1996, p. 3).

This approach to the relationship between language and groups is based on an assumption of linguistic boundedness, of the existence of bounded groups separated by ‘cultural’ and historical differences, of which language is an essential aspect. The Charter for example defines a ‘language community’ as ‘any human society established historically in a particular territorial space, whether this space be recognized or not, which identifies itself as a people and has developed a common language as a natural means of communication and cultural cohesion among its members’. It defines ‘a language group’ as ‘any group of persons sharing the same language which is established in the territorial space of another language community but which does not possess historical antecedents equivalent to those of that community. Examples of such groups are immigrants, refugees, deported persons and members of diasporas’ (United Nations 1996, p. 4).

This framework is built on the idea of fixed, unitary languages as one of the properties of groups and reflective of their ‘cultures’, such that linguistic rights are:

‘inalienable personal rights which may be exercised in any situation: the right to be recognized as a member of a language community; the right to the use of one’s own language both in private and in public; the right to the use of one’s own name; the right to interrelate and associate with other members of one’s language community of origin; the right to maintain and develop one’s own culture; and all the other

rights related to language which are recognized in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 16 December 1966 and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the same date.’ (United Nations 1996, p. 5).

The idea of language underlying the declaration is one that is linked to a bounded, specific ‘identity’ and way of experiencing and perceiving the world:

‘All languages are the expression of a collective identity and of a distinct way of perceiving and describing reality and must therefore be able to enjoy the conditions required for their development in all functions.’ (United Nations, 1996 p. 6).

Thus language is seen as the basis for major social differences and there is an assumption of social separation and difference between ‘language groups’, with language rights defined with a view to addressing potential conflicts and competition with the ‘dominant’ ‘language group’:

‘The aforementioned rights of persons and language groups must in no way hinder the interrelation of such persons or groups with the host language community or their integration into that community. Nor must they restrict the rights of the host community or its members to the full public use of the community’s own language throughout its territorial space.’ (United Nations 1996, p. 5).

The UN Declaration highlights how the assumption and expectation of (and desire for) bounded and discrete ‘languages’, and the invocation of groups and group difference on the basis of these bounded linguistic practices and differences, has become so commonplace as to be seen as a taken-for-granted ‘natural’ state of being that can be defined as a universal human right.

However, as outlined above, this approach to language does not consider how and where language boundaries are drawn, which ideas are promoted about languages, and which

ideas about the relationship between language and group identity, and particularly ethnicity, gain significance. However, aligning group, culture and language as 'natural', and a universal right, masks the fact that the idea of homogenous, bounded, linguistic groups, and the use of these groups as the basis for the identification, categorisation and management of people, groups and territories, is relatively recent. Homogeneity within languages, the perception of clear boundaries around language, and the relationship between language, culture, group and nation-state, is neither 'natural' nor automatic but has been constructed; it represents a development of ideas which reflect particular political, social and economic contexts, desires and historical trajectories (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998; Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Errington 1998; Gal and Irvine 1995, 2009; Kroskrity 2000, 2004; Silverstein 1996).

In the British context, although linguistic diversity is now reduced to a number of regionally-defined languages - Irish, Welsh, Scots Gaelic, Scots, Manx and Cornish (although recognition of the latter two is more contested) – the situation prior to the last century was much more complex. Indeed, the language of the ruling elite and language of government was, until recent years, both multilingual and not English. Henry V, in the early 15th century, was the first king to use 'English' in his correspondence and make English the language of government, but the use of versions of French, Latin and German, depending on the wider political environment, were languages of both diplomacy and government well into the 19th century and even beyond (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2016). Edward VII, for example, was brought up bilingually, in German and English (Ridley 2012). Outside the elite classes of society, diversity within 'English', across both class and region (setting aside for the moment the distinction between dialect and language), was extremely high, particularly before the growth of mass education and media, which have led to the erosion of much local dialect, vocabulary and linguistic difference (Milroy 2000; Wright 2000).

To look at the issue from a different perspective, the existence of similarity and mutual intelligibility does not necessarily amount to a shared or national identity. This can be clearly seen on a very basic level with the case of English, a global first language, which does not necessarily confer a particular national or group identity (Jenkins 2014, p. 87; Kachru, Kachru and Nelson 2009; Pennycook 2006). A more complex case, which highlights the multiple possibilities for defining 'language', 'dialect' and their relationships with national and group identity, can be seen in the case of Scandinavian languages. Mutual understanding between the Scandinavian languages is high, due to both lexical and phonetic differences, such that Norwegians can understand between 80 and 90 per cent of spoken Swedish and Danish (Gooskens 2007). There are also, of course, differences within the three states, and studies suggest that these regional differences influence levels of mutual intelligibility between the national languages (Gooskens 2007; Riad 1998). How these differences and similarities are managed has major impacts on where linguistic boundaries are drawn and how they are understood. Norway, for example, has had three different 'official' languages in the past century or so. Until the end of the Danish empire in 1814, Danish was the language of the elite in Norway, but following independence Norwegian politicians sought to carve out a new, and distinct, 'Norwegian' national identity, a process that included both importing a new monarchy and seeking to distance the spoken language of the country from Danish. 'Bokmål', the main dominant version of 'Norwegian', was seen in some political quarters as problematically similar to Danish, and led to the construction and promotion of 'Nynorsk', a linguistic form derived from western rural Norwegian dialects, as the official language. This process of linguistic bounding was thus predominately shaped by the politics of the day and debates around nation and national identity and internal political struggles, rather than by the requirements of mutual intelligibility or a significant shift in everyday linguistic practice (Bucken-Knapp 2012; Gooskens 2007).

The Scandinavian case highlights how the identification of language matters. How a language is categorised, as language, dialect, pidgin, or so on, is important in the construction of ideas about social and group differentiation. It also highlights that such categorisations are as much derived from social and political developments and contexts as from everyday language practices and possibilities in communication. Gooskens' study of contemporary mutual intelligibility in Scandinavia demonstrates that linguistic use and mutual intelligibility across Scandinavia is not reflective of the neat boundaries of national borders, nor of the neat bounded grammatical representations of separate languages, but in everyday practice linguistic use and mutual intelligibility are part of an on-going continuum which does not conform neatly to national boundaries or internal homogeneity. Where the boundaries of 'dialect' and 'language' fall in Scandinavia thus could have been, and continue to be, drawn differently, the current forms reflecting specific socio-historical events and trajectories and needs.

The Scandinavian case also highlights the power of linguistic description to articulate and produce ideas about groups, race, nation, ethnicity, identity and culture. This has been noted in a range of contexts, particularly by scholars working on what Errington calls 'colonial linguistics', the study of how 'the work of linguistic description done under the aegis of various colonial regimes needs to be considered with an eye to conditions that enabled it and social interests inscribed in it' (Errington 2001, pp. 19-20). Nineteenth century East Sumatra provides a particularly clear example of the extent to which linguistic categorisation can have radical effects on a sense of group and sense of difference. In the Dutch empire of this time, Protestant missionaries working in east Sumatra sought to codify the local languages, converting the everyday linguistic practices into printed forms. Their studies produced two separate languages, 'Karo' and 'Toba', which despite being undistinguished from each other prior to this codification, rapidly came to inform boundaries of ethnic difference which persist into the present (Kipp 1990; Steedly 1996).

The process of 'dialect selection, codification, elaboration, and dissemination' has thus in such ways called into being particular national boundaries and identifications of 'cultures' and 'groups' (Haugen 1966).

In the context of Britain and Ireland, the complexity of the identification of linguistic practices and the location of linguistic boundaries, and their importance in constructing ideas about group and identity and the allocation of social, economic and political resources, can be seen in how Hiberno-Irish, Scots, Ulster Scots, Manx, Scots-Gaelic, Gaelic, Welsh and regional dialects or languages are represented and managed⁶. Put briefly, the situation is one of language contact and variability in which different group and ethnic boundaries and political events, and the influence of national or regional boundaries, have led to the solidification of particular boundaries around linguistic variation into different 'dialects' and 'languages'. How these boundaries are drawn and their contents categorised has had major implications for resource allocation and has at various points been the subject of intense debate and disagreement (Kirk and Ó Baoill 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002).

In Ireland, the local version of spoken English has been termed 'Hiberno-English', highlighting its differences from 'standard' English. However, this 'Hiberno-English' dialect varies greatly across the island, these differences being attributed to various influences, including Norse, Anglo-Norman, Scots-Gaelic, Scots and English settlement, as well as socio-economic factors (Dolan 2006). In Northern Ireland, however, the significant social and political support and resources that has been lent to 'Ulster Scots' as a linguistic, ethnic and identity category in recent has led to the categorisations of the variety of English spoken not as a form of 'Hiberno- English' but as a distinct dialect and linguistic group of 'Ulster Scots' (Dolan 2006).

⁶ The UK recognises seven languages under the European Charter for the Protection of Minority or Regional Languages: Welsh, Scots, Scots-Gaelic, Manx, Irish, Ulster Scots (all ratified in May 2001) and Cornish (November 2002).

While studies of dialect and language use in Ireland, and of ‘Hiberno-English’ and ‘Ulster-English’, are a long established academic field and literary interest, and, in the case of Hiberno-English, an object of cultural nationalism (Adams 1948; Conde-Parilla 2013; Corrigan 1990; Milesi 2003), the idea of the ‘Ulster-Scots’ language, and the emergence of an Ulster-Scots culture and heritage movement, is a very recent development in Northern Ireland (Dowling 2007; Nic Craith 2001; Wilson and Stapleton 2004). Although there has been awareness of and interest in Scottish influences on the linguistic patterns of the north of Ireland for a significant period, earlier studies of linguistic influence and variation have used a variety of labels, such as Scotto-Hibernic (Carleton 1830, quoted in McCafferty 2008)⁷, Scotch-Irish (Gregg 1958, 1964, 1972), ‘Northern Hiberno-Irish’ (Adams, Barry and Tilling 1973; Barry 1981). These all placed the dialect firmly in relation to, and as part of, Hiberno- or Irish dialect patterns. Studies of ‘Ulster dialect’ (Adams 1948; Wright 1905)⁸, ‘Ulster English’ (Marshall 1905; Staples 1895), and ‘Ulster brogue’ (MacDonagh 1899), explored the particular linguistic features of the north of Ireland, but explained linguistic variation not only in terms of ‘Scots’ influence but as the result of a variety of influences and relationships, including old, middle, medieval and early modern English, Northern English, Southern Hiberno-Irish, Gaelic and beyond⁹; see Corrigan 1990, for a full review.

During the mid-1990s, however, the label ‘Ulster-Scots’ emerged as the dominant categorisation of local variation in English speaking in the north of Ireland, and rapidly

⁷ Carleton’s literary writings of the 1830s attempted to capture the dialect and linguistic features of ‘Irish English’. Carleton expressed immense distaste for the ‘intolerable Scotto-Hibernic jargon’ of his local area (quoted by McCafferty 2008, p. 172).

⁸ Wright distinguished between ‘Ulster’ and ‘North Irish’ dialect, describing ‘Ulster’ as having ‘much in common with the Sc. Dialects’ and accordingly categorising it with descriptions of Scottish language (Wright 1905, p. 4).

⁹ ‘The Ulster speech partakes something of the nature of broad Yorkshire, but it is more Scottish than anything else... although it has also in some degree the softness of the Southern brogue’ (MacDonagh 1899, p. 294). Marshall (1904) notes early English, Scottish and Gaelic influences. Braidwood (1964) is particularly interested in comparing Ulster English with middle and early modern English through comparison with literary sources, such as Shakespeare.

gained prominence in both political and everyday contexts. ‘Ulster-Scots’ has subsequently achieved a level of official recognition, and legitimacy in both local and international law, which has given it a large degree of legal protection and placed the state under certain obligations to support its use¹⁰. Ulster-Scots language has increasingly become a material reality and powerful imagining in Northern Ireland: trilingual street and road signs and official documentation using Irish, English and Ulster-Scots have become increasingly commonplace; Ulster-Scots is the subject of various TV and radio programmes, popular books and newspaper columns and articles; a substantial policy architecture has been created to protect and support its use; Ulster-Scots appeared for the first time in the Northern Ireland census in 2011 (NISRA 2013) and has been regularly featured in other large-scale surveys such as the Northern Ireland Life and Times survey (NILT) since 1999 (NILT 1998-2016). There is a growing organisational infrastructure concerned with the promotion and protection of Ulster-Scots language and culture, both in government and in the community sector¹¹, and includes Ulster-Scots cultural centres, festivals, education programmes, publications, media and so on.

While it is important to recognise that for many of those involved in the Ulster-Scots culture and heritage movement the language is of personal and emotional importance and resonance (McCall 2002), it is social and political circumstances that have achieved the current level of recognition and political support for Ulster-Scots (Stapleton and Wilson

¹⁰ Ulster-Scots is recognised, and supported, by the British, Irish and Northern Irish governments under the Good Friday Agreement, and by the European Charter for the Protection of Minority languages. Ulster-Scots was recognised as a minority language in the UK in January 2000 when it was entered into the Council of Europe Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. The Charter states: ‘The Parties undertake to promote, by appropriate measures, mutual understanding between all the linguistic groups of the country and in particular the inclusion of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to the Ulster-Scots language among the objectives of education and training provided within its country and encouragement of the mass media to pursue the same objective (Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission 2010, Council of Europe 1992).

¹¹ This includes, for example, the Bready Ulster-Scots centre in County Strabane (opened 2004), the Belfast Ulster-Scots festival (began 1999) and the Discover Ulster Scots centre in Belfast (opened 2014).

2004; Dowling 2007). The simultaneous development of the term 'Ulster-Scots language', to refer to a systematic, codified and bounded linguistic category associated with a particular imagined group – the 'Ulster Scots' - and a particular set of 'traditions' and historical narratives, emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s as part of the peace process and the shifting emphasis of politics to cultural and identity issues that occurred at that same time (Nic Craith 2001; Dowling 2007¹²). 'Ulster-Scots' as a linguistic category was developed in the context of the Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985) peace process, which saw a growing recognition amongst Unionists of the need for a coherent and resilient 'Unionist' cultural identity, and a wider political and social process of attempting to move the conflict in Northern Ireland from violence on the streets to political struggles on the grounds of culture, identity and constitution (Dowling 2007; McCall 2002; Radford 2001). More broadly, identity and culture were increasingly coming to be seen across Britain and Europe as inalienable rights to be protected by law, and as an important vehicle for promoting social change and economic development. With a resilient, unified and ever-growing 'Irish' cultural package within Nationalist and Republican politics, state recognition of the Irish language and development of Irish language infrastructure, Ulster-Scots was identified by both cultural nationalist wings of loyalism and Unionism as a potential collective identity for the disparate Protestant/Unionist population. The previously minor academic interest in 'Ulster-Scots' history, culture and language thus began to be sponsored and mobilised on a large scale by Unionist political groups and by governmental bodies and agencies involved in negotiating the peace process, and began to be presented a cultural foil to Irish language and the Irish cultural package associated with nationalist politics. For example, the Unionist-dominated Ards Borough Council in 1996 began to use Ulster-Scots language signage, and the Democratic Unionist Party used Ulster-Scots in the 'say no' anti-Good Friday agreement referendum campaign. These developments laid the groundwork for the recognition of

¹² The Ulster Scots Heritage Council was established in 1992.

'Ulster-Scots' in the Good Friday Agreement which, operating on a 'two communities' model, sought to codify 'parity of esteem' and 'mutual respect rather than division' between the 'two communities', and gave Ulster-Scots legal recognition and status akin to that granted to the Irish language (Dowling 2007; McCall 2002; Nic Craith 2007; Radford 2001).

However, while the category thus acquired solidity in law and cultural management, and has subsequently received significant support in promotion and development, the idea of 'Ulster-Scots' is still in the process of being realised as an accepted and explicit presence in everyday life in Northern Ireland. On an individual level, the Ulster-Scots Language Society estimated in 1999 that more than 100,000 people speak Ulster-Scots in the North of Ireland (about 5-6 per cent of the Northern Ireland population¹³), but survey results suggest that self-identification as speaking Ulster-Scots is far lower than this external categorisation suggests. In the same year, for example, the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT 1998-2016) survey included questions about Ulster-Scots, in which only two per cent of respondents self-reported as speaking Ulster-Scots, only six per cent reported that they knew someone who spoke Ulster-Scots, and twelve per cent of respondents reported that they had never heard of Ulster-Scots. Results from the 2011 census (NISRA 2013) showed that about 8 per cent of the population (92,040) reported some combination of skills in Ulster-Scots, but well over half of this group (5.3 per cent of the population, or 66 per cent of those claiming some Ulster-Scots skills) reported that they could only understand Ulster-Scots, and could not read, write or speak it. Only two per cent of the population (35,404) reported that they could speak Ulster-Scots, and 0.94 per cent of the population (16,373) reported that they could read, write, speak and understand Ulster-Scots. The Continuous Household Survey (CHS) has included questions relating to Ulster-Scots and Irish culture over

¹³ The estimate of 100,000 included potential speakers in Donegal and the border areas, who were not included in the Northern Ireland census, thus the percentage represented by 100,000 is an estimate only.

the past 6 years: results show an overall increase in support for and participation in ‘Ulster-Scots culture and traditions’, thus suggesting that ‘Ulster-Scots culture’ is being increasingly realised ‘on the ground’ as part of everyday imaginings and identifications (Department for Communities 2018). However, the percentage reporting participation in language classes or literature classes has been placed at 0 per cent since 2010¹⁴ (Department for Communities 2018).

The number of people in the NILT survey who had not heard of Ulster-Scots, and the discrepancies between the estimates of the Ulster-Scots Language Society, the numbers reporting that they understand Ulster-Scots, and the numbers identifying as Ulster-Scots speakers in the 2011 Census and CHS, highlight the uncertainties and tensions around the status and existence of ‘Ulster-Scots’ and the differences between external categorisation of linguistic features and self-identification of language use. While activist groups such as the Ulster-Scots Language Society have sought to categorise particular features of language and speech as ‘Ulster-Scots’, and distinguish between ‘authentic’ and ‘non authentic’ versions and forms (Stapleton and Wilson 2004, Robinson 1998), the number of people on the ground who see their linguistic patterns as ‘speaking Ulster-Scots’ is much smaller. For many in Northern Ireland, Ulster-Scots is not considered a ‘language’, or sometimes not even a ‘dialect’, but rather is seen as just the local accent or way of speaking (McCall 2002; Stapleton and Wilson 2004). For many, regardless of their own point of view on the status of the language, it is possible to understand Ulster-Scots, but, as census data highlight, far fewer tend to identify as using it. In my own fieldwork, very few people identified themselves as speakers of Ulster-Scots, but the category was frequently invoked to refer to rural and regional linguistic features and ways of speaking, often when talking about elderly relatives, and often with an awareness that ‘Ulster-Scots’ would not be the individual’s own

¹⁴ In this survey figures placed at 0% represent figures that are less than 0.5 per cent.

way of categorising their speech: as one participant noted in passing comment ‘they used a lot of local dialect, I suppose it would be counted as kinda like Ulster-Scots’, for example. People also often commented on the impact of the recognition of ‘Ulster-Scots’ on the legitimacy and categorisation of their own speech patterns, describing how when at school such local accent and dialect had been perceived simply as ‘bad English’ and beaten out of them, but that they now understood that they would now have been categorised as speaking Ulster-Scots dialect.

The emergence and promotion of ‘Ulster-Scots’ as a defined, bounded linguistic category has been developed within and coloured by the perception of two separate, bounded communities with separate and bounded cultures in Northern Ireland. This perception continues to shape everyday experiences, politics and cultural management, and continued existence of division, in Northern Ireland. The use of the expression ‘Ulster-Scots’, and its associated cultural and historical narratives, represents a conceptual difference from the use of Hiberno-English, or Ulster-English, in that it identifies the language as a subsection of ‘Scots’ language, and masks the similarities with either Hiberno-Irish or English. In drawing on the narrative of the ‘Ulster Scots’, that is, of the Scottish settlers who arrived during the Plantations of the 17th century, the Ulster-Scots movement as a whole ‘aims to raise awareness of the Ulster Scots legacy in contemporary NI/Ulster society’ (Stapleton and Wilson 2004, p. 565). The conceptual difference ‘Ulster-Scots’ brings to linguistic understandings, amplified by how Ulster-Scots has been understood in politics, with its inference of the narrative of Planter and Gael, has in many ways entrenched a narrative of history, community and culture in which simplifies history, normalises social division and reifies a two-community model of Northern Irish society (Dowling 2007).

There have been various attempts to place Ulster-Scots in a broader linguistic context and to highlight its relationship to Hiberno-English and to Gaelic (Dolan 1999), as well as calls for

greater partnership between the Irish language and Ulster-Scots language sectors on the common ground of minority language rights (Dowling 2007). However, the development of the Ulster-Scots category by Unionist and Loyalist groups, its association with the narrative of Planter-Gael division, and the cultural division and separation between Irish and Ulster-Scots recognised by the Good Friday agreement, has further encouraged a perception of opposition, conflict and contest between Ulster-Scots and Irish. This happened not simply because of the use of 'Ulster-Scots' as the name of this linguistic category, but because of its management and promotion as the property of one segment of the community in opposition to 'Irish'. As Alliance MLA Anna Lo, put it, the issue of languages has, in the context of political debate and cultural management in Northern Ireland, taken on the appearance of 'tribal discussions around Irish and Ulster Scots' (They Work For You 2010a). This is manifest in arguments about equality of funding and the production of Ulster-Scots heritage murals in Loyalist/Unionist areas of Belfast, and the fact that Ulster-Scots is the only linguistic element of the cultural policies of the mainstream Unionist parties (Dowling 2007; Nic Craith 2001; O'Reilly 2003; Rolston 2003a, 2004). To characterise the issue as 'tribal' risks overlooking the good work and intentions of groups and cultural activists from all backgrounds, the complexities on the ground, and the impact of cynical political opportunism and manoeuvring, but nonetheless does accurately reflect how understandings and management of culture have developed in Northern Ireland. The issue remains a sticking point of contemporary linguistic politics; the Irish Language Act dispute, which has been a major point of disruption in Stormont in recent years and continues to be a major stumbling block to executive functioning, has in recent months come to include debate around the status of Ulster-Scots. Unionists opposed to an Irish Language Act have contended that such an Act constitutes 'cultural supremacy' or 'culture war', arguing that only a wider cultural act that would include Ulster-Scots, and would give Ulster-Scots and

Irish equal status and rights, would represent a fair solution and only such a general act could be conceded (MacDonald 2017).

Thus the categorisation of Hiberno-Irish/Ulster-Scots/Ulster English in Northern Ireland illustrates the power of categorisation whereby everyday speech patterns are transformed into a bounded language or dialect, with one element in the continuum of linguistic forms across Ireland becoming realised as discrete and separate, and being associated with a particular notion of national or cultural differences. The process whereby Hiberno-English has, in Northern Ireland, become 'Ulster-Scots', reflects political and social developments as much as boundaries in everyday speech and linguistic patterns. 'On the ground', support for, recognition of, or awareness of 'Ulster-Scots', has, even amongst those who are categorised as speaking it, been more limited, and the linguistic elements of 'Ulster-Scots' cultural forms has failed to emerge as a movement comparable to the Irish language movement. In many ways, the biggest impact of Ulster-Scots recognition in Northern Ireland society has been in the debates of politicians rather than in the everyday life of those who might be identified as speakers of the language. These categorisations do however have implications for resource allocation and language management and thus have potential for major effects on the development of linguistic patterns in Northern Ireland. Notably, the recognition of Ulster-Scots provides support for the preservation of this linguistic form that is not afforded to wider Hiberno-English. The codification and bounding of 'authentic' Ulster-Scots in grammars, books, and bodies of work, and the promotion of this particular version of English by governmental and community organisations, is a process which favours some elements of the vernacular only, and has implications for future language development. The association of such linguistic uses with particular historical and cultural narratives of ethnicity and identity not only has potential to impact the construction of boundaries and perceived difference between imagined communities or groups, but also has the potential to realise

and effect such boundaries in everyday practice as such associations have the power to influence who might learn, use or access such linguistic features (Urciuoli 1995; Dolan 1999).

In making this argument I am not criticising the spirit of the idea that there is a universal right to language, or neglecting the importance of protecting linguistic diversity and language freedom as a desirable human right. I am, rather, arguing for the importance of recognising that linguistic practices, differences and similarities, and the alignment of language with group or cultural differences or boundaries, are not fixed or given; rather, they are socially and politically produced categorisations which have major implications for the categorisation and management of people, groups and the distribution of resources. It is thus important not to start from the point of studying a language as a primordial facet of culture or of national identity or groupness, but to consider how, if and why 'language became a powerful and enduring metaphor for the representation of national [or group] culture' in particular contexts and circumstances (Benes 2008, p. 4). Furthermore, we need to recognise the specific conjunction of intellectual, political, social and economic developments whereby 'the naturalness and desirability of nations understood as organic and culturally and linguistically homogenous units' (Heller 2006, p. 157) has become a dominant idea.

It is important not to assume that, on the ground, language will be understood or aligned to culture or national identity. The ethno-linguistic model of culture, group and nation, particularly associated with Herder (1772), Fichte (1808) and Von Humboldt (1836), was developed and gained popularity in the context of 19th-century romanticism in central Europe. It emerged in very specific social, intellectual and political circumstances, gaining popularity in the context of attempts by various social movements to obtain greater freedoms, in the pragmatics of the development of the nation state and in governmental processes of developing the institutions, bureaucratic needs and structures of such states

(Wright 2000). Although it can be argued that 'language must be understood as cultural practice' (Duranti 2008, p. 24), in the sense that it involves everyday interaction operating within a system of shared understanding and ideas, an over-reliance on the concept of 'culture' as an explanatory device is however dangerous; as Ingold argues, 'culture' is an abstract concept which reflects contemporary intellectual and social contexts rather than any tangible 'reality' on the ground:

'... scholars have adapted their notions of culture to suit the dominant concerns of the day and they will no doubt continue to do so. Little is to be gained, therefore, from attempts to legislate on the proper meaning of the term the concept of culture entails a very high level of abstraction. In other words, culture is not something that we can ever expect to encounter 'on the ground'.' (Ingold 1994, pp. 329-330).

The same problems apply to the invocation of 'identity' as a casual or explanatory device:

'Just because much contemporary political, and other, rhetoric seems to set a supreme price on identity...//...doesn't mean that we should. As critical social scientists we, in fact, are obliged not to. Even where individual or collective 'identity politics' appears to be intense, the extent to which collective or individual interests are subordinated to the categorical imperatives of 'identity' should be a matter for empirical discovery, rather than a priori theoretical presumption.' (Jenkins 2008a, p. 8).

However, although it is important to avoid building models, explanations and analysis based on implicit or unquestioned assumptions about what 'culture', and the other associated abstract concepts of identity or ethnicity mean, it is also important to recognise that 'culture' and 'identity' are, as concepts, and as ideas, things that matter and have effects in everyday life as we find 'on the ground'. To paraphrase Jenkins' arguments about ethnicity,

while culture itself may, as Ingold argues, never literally be found 'on the ground', the concept has a 'lively presence at large in the human world' and thus 'is emphatically not imaginary; locally that imagining may be very powerful'; as such, 'consigning it to the bin is not an option' (Jenkins 2008b, pp. 14, 80).

Understanding language as a living, everyday social interaction, but also as a category that serves as a powerful social imagining and has the potential to influence wider understandings of group, of difference, and to impact allocations of, and access to, resources and power thus requires a careful conceptual balancing act. On the one hand it is essential to consider the constructed nature of language, its boundaries and associations, and to recognise that such boundaries and associations could be other than they are, yet equally it is important to understand that social imaginings have very real, everyday and tangible effects and inform everyday experience and lived realities.

2.3 Politics, nationalism and language

A similar argument applies to understanding nationalism and the relationship between language and national identity and nationalist movements. A similar careful tightrope must be walked between avoiding between making a priori assumptions about, or over relying on, concepts such as 'nationalism' and national identity as explanatory devices, and failing to recognise that language has been, and is still, intertwined tightly with nationalist movements and narratives of national identity in everyday life. In recognising that nations, ideas about national group, and particularly common ideas regarding the relationship of language to nation and group, are social constructions and the results of ongoing socio-historical processes, it is important to look to both active political projects and social movements around identity, nation and language and also to recognise the banal, everyday, and imperceptibly pervasive processes through which such powerful social imaginings arise and have effect. Whether conceived in terms of 'formal' versus 'informal' nationalisms (Erikson 1993), 'nationness' (Borneman 1992), 'banal nationalism' (Billig 1995), Brubaker's

'everyday ethnicity' and 'nationalism from below' (Brubaker 2006), 'everyday nationalism' (Jenkins 2001 p. 87) and so on, academic studies of nationalism have highlighted the many various ways in which 'there is more to nationalism than organised, ideological, political projects' (*ibid.*, p. 99). Just as power relations and systems of control are not simply a function of overt institutions or mechanisms of power or active and overt structures of control, but pervade everyday life and are produced and reproduced within everyday life, and just as Politics, in its official, 'capital P' sense is shaped by, as well as shaping, social life in a very everyday sense, so too is nationalism, and the processes of nationalism, rooted in, reproduced in, and shaped by, everyday life and moments. While discussions of 'everyday nationalism' can arguably, at their barest extent, be reduced to such questions of power and control, structure and agency and so on, the framework of 'everyday nationalism' provides a useful lens through which ideas about and representations of nationalism may be critically examined and those elements of everyday life which intertwine with the production of such ideas about nation, national identity and nationalism can be explored. These discussions stress that, as Jenkins summarises, 'nationalism without some sense of the everyday is impossible' (2001 p. 88). While ideologies of nation, of group, of ethnicity may be the subject of political and ideological projects, and institutions of power may have particular power to categorise and define and represent in this regard, all narratives are experienced and made meaningful in local contexts and everyday social interactions and daily habits and routines habits. It is everyday habits and routines that the idea of nation, and its symbols and contents and associations, gain and retain its legitimacy, its perceived naturalness, its emotional force and importance.

Billig's discussion of 'banal' nationalism, and his distinction between 'banal' and 'hot' nationalism, argues that both academic and popular representations and perceptions of 'nationalism' have tended to overlook such everyday processes of nationalism and have relied to heavily on static or individualist notions of identity. There is a tendency, argues

Billig, for representations of nationalism to focus on what he terms 'hot' nationalism, that is 'extreme' nationalist movements, on extreme right-wing politics, on political and violent struggles for independent or new nationhood, to focus on a nationalism 'on the periphery' full of 'dangerous and powerful passions', something that is not part of everyday life or normal activities of the state, but something that emerges in crisis, as a disrupting force, or on special occasions (Billig 1995, p. 5). Billig argues that to view nationalism exclusively in these terms is to misunderstand how nationalism arises and has power: 'hot' nationalism - i.e. the capacity for 'hot' nationalism to arise, as might occur on certain occasions throughout the year or in certain activities or events, and the capacity for individuals and groups to conceive of the 'nation' and invest it with an emotional importance sufficient to deem it worthy of defending when it seems threatened - 'depends on existing ideological foundations' (Billig 1995, p. 5). These foundations, Billig argues, are made in everyday moments and processes that are less obviously and less dramatically part of the production and reproduction of ideologies of nation and national identity.

Thus Billig argues that very existence of national states is built on 'banal nationalism', the processes whereby nations and national identity are maintained through the 'daily reproduction' of 'a whole complex of beliefs, reproductions, habits, representations and practices... in a banally mundane way, for the world of nations is the everyday world, the familiar terrain of contemporary times' (Billig 1995, p. 6). Billig argues that this 'banal nationalism' works in and through that which is not sociologically obvious, that which unnoticed, inconspicuous and unobvious in everyday life, that which is forgotten, un-minded, unnoted and unsignalled, and through the collective amnesia which masks the complexity, the recency, the heterogeneity of the nation and its associations. In looking to the everyday processes of production and reproduction, Billig also breaks with a reliance on a concept of identity as something which can be located within individuals as a bounded thing carried around, and seen as an explanatory device for nationalism and identification

with the nation, arguing instead that 'national identities are forms of social life rather than internal psychological states; as such, they are ideological creations, caught up in the historical processes of nationhood' (Billig 1995, p. 24).

Billig's model thus suggests that we look to 'unwaved' as much as 'waved' flags, to media, to sport, and the host of everyday ways in which the existence of the nation is naturalized and identification with the nation and a concept of national group is produced and reproduced, ways that may be as banal and subtle as the reporting of the weather. Billig argues that the imagined existence of *national* language represents one of the primary examples of the pervasive power of 'banal' nationalism, and similarly that the perceived naturalness of the identification of languages as bounded entities, associated with particular bounded social groups 'is an ideological notion, which...illustrates just how deeply nationalist conceptions have seeped into common sense' (Billig 1995, p. 10). On the specific issue of language, Billig's discussion of banal nationalism makes the further crucial point that part of the processes of banal nationalism is the dominance of the 'common sense' assumption found in politics, media and academic writings that language is related to national identity or bounded groups and 'that it is natural that speakers of the same language should seek their own political identity' (Billig 1995, p. 13).

Billig's argument speaks to many of the complexities and challenges of culture and language in Northern Ireland and the dominance of, and acceptance of, the perception that it is natural and obvious that there should exist separate bounded groups defined by national identity, national aspirations, particular cultural forms, separate languages and separate cultural identities. The assumption that language use is, and should be, related to political identity and political aspirations has entered the realm of common-sense understanding and is often unchallenged in the political, popular and media representations of the Irish language. As will be discussed extensively in the following chapters, such identifications and

representations, are, to borrow from Billig's framework steeped in common sense in ways which mask the complexity and recency of such alignments and boundaries, for when viewed historically such alignments are both complex and relatively recent, and the situation has, and continues, to be ever-changing.

The dominant acceptance in politics, media, popular discussion and indeed some academic discussions of Northern Ireland, of such ideological notions of distinct groups and national identities in Northern Ireland, and that different groups should be aligned with different cultural and linguistic usage, and indeed that users or participations in different cultural activities or languets belong to distinct political identities, highlights the importance of looking at the banal processes which sustain and reproduce these notions as common sense or as 'natural'. While in Northern Ireland 'hot' nationalism is very much a 'hot' issue in political and media debate, at the heart of political crisis and social conflict and division, and bound up with active political and social ideologies and movements, it is in the everyday settings that the underlying perceptions and structures of identity and emotions are sustained and which make these issues so 'hot'. Moreover, in recognising that it is the processes of nationalism, both hot and banal, that produce and sustain the ideological notions that naturalise such divisions and alignments, it is also important not to assume *a priori* where or how boundaries and alignments lie or the meanings of particular activities or cultural products. Billig's argument that the notion that those sharing of the same language should share and seek a separate political or national identity is an ideological notion produced by processes of nationalism rather than 'natural', highlights the importance of looking to how, where and if particular activities and cultural performances are related to national or political identities or aspirations, and the processes whereby these alignments are produced, rather than accepting such alignments as starting points for analysis.

As regards language issues in Northern Ireland, and particularly the Irish language, there is often, as has already been discussed and will be further explored in subsequent chapters, an assumption that to speak Irish is to be part of, or associated with, an Irish nationalist project, and that speakers of Irish will, or should be, part of an Irish nationalist political movement. As will be explored in the subsequent chapters, such alignments and perceptions have developed over the course of history, and indeed in the processes of contemporary politics and contemporary life, and sustained and reproduced by processes that may be understood as the processes of both 'banal' and 'hot' nationalism. However, as Billig's argument highlights, the common-sense and dominant ideological notions of nationalism, which mask complexity, change and the recency of such alignments, should not be taken as a starting point for analysis, and the assumption of an equivalence between language movements, language use and political identities should not be taken for granted. While there is some utility in approaching such issues in terms of nationalism and national identity, because this is an unavoidable feature of the experience and practice of the Irish language in Northern Ireland, in recognising that this is an ideological construct we are also called to look at the complexities and wider processes which are taking place.

It is these wider processes and everyday meanings and experiences of Irish which, I argue, are often overlooked in media, political and academic explorations of the issue. While an important feature of the Irish language in Northern Ireland, it is not the only element, nor necessarily the element worthy of most attention. Jenkins' study of 'Dannebrog', the Danish flag, and everyday nationalism is particularly illuminating in this regard. While arguing that the use, experience and perception of 'Dannebrog' should be understood in terms of the processes of nationalism, both in the everyday and 'hot' sense, in the sense of politics both with and without a capital P, Jenkins also explores the additional and wider complexities of what the flag means and does in everyday life in Denmark. On the one hand, Jenkins

recognises that while flags are 'about' nationalism and national identity, their use may not be about the nation or national identity as such:

'national and official flag days are certainly sponsored by the state, and self-consciously invoke patriotism and national or local identity. In this they are different from the ways in which the flag is flown and used by ordinary citizens. While it is clearly sensible to describe vernacular flagways as 'everyday nationalism', it must be emphasised that as expressions of 'nation-ness or belonging' they don't necessarily have much to do with the grand narratives and designs of the nation state.

Distinctions between official and vernacular flagways are not always clear-cut, however. In Skive, for example, the flag often lies over the town hall for reasons that have nothing to do with the official flag calendar; to celebrate a resident's hundredth birthday, or at half-mast to mark the death of a municipal employee.'

(Jenkins 2011, p. 135)

Jenkins' highlights that the flag is not only 'about' the nation or national identity but is also 'to do with celebration and joy and community and family', a ubiquitous site at weddings, birthdays, weddings and anniversaries, both in the use of flags as flags, and in the frequent appearance of the image of the flag on cards, wrapping paper and wider material culture associated with such occasions. As Jenkins argues the emotional importance of the flag and its power to move cannot be explained solely in terms of identity, nationalism or politics:

'for most Danes, Dannebrog is....an important part of their 'inarticulate speech of the heart' ...hooked into an emotional register that knows few words because it doesn't need them...long before language...this simple, visually arresting symbol is experienced in powerful association with good times, good company, pleasure and rewards. That visceral association, wordlessness and unvoicedness, is reiterated and reinforced every time there is something to celebrate' (Jenkins 2011, p. 138)

Thus, Jenkins' argues that the flag *is* about national identity, the nation, and everyday nationalism, but *also* to do with family, community and emotion. Drawing on Cohen's arguments regarding the 'symbolic construction of community', Jenkins' study of the flag highlights how such symbols and practices are powerful because they permit a wide range of identifications, meanings and associations, which may be very different or even contradictory or paradoxical, within a single symbol, image or practice. The Danish flag reflects both national identity and identification with family and local community – 'It is a symbol of community and fellowship, from the modest but tangible intimacy of family life to the grand historical abstraction of the nation' and permits a paradoxical and contradictory relationship with nationalism, for it allows them to 'be able to have their cake and eat it: to espouse egalitarian social democracy while adoring their monarch, to disavow nationalism while using Dannebrog at every opportunity, and simultaneously to worship and profane their most sacred symbols' (*ibid.*, pp. 137, 145). As with many other practices associated with nation, group or identity, the power and ability to inspire emotional response and action is because, as 'in the manner of the most powerful collective symbols, they are under- rather than over-specified' (*ibid.*, p. 144) and 'not rule governed....although 'everyone' might have some idea of how they 'should be done', there is considerable room for manoeuvre with respect to how they are realised in practice' (*ibid.*, p. 137).

Politics, nationalism, culture and identity are all loaded words in the Northern Ireland context, strongly over-identified with social division and conflict, both past and present. Likewise in social theory, the terms have become ubiquitous explanatory devices, which while, of course, useful concepts, risk replacing explorations of the complexities of everyday life and social interaction with abstract concepts. While politics, nationalism, culture and identity are of course important parts of everyday life, talked about and acted upon, and useful concepts for explaining processes, they are not the only element worthy of focus and nor should they be taken for granted as explanations or as the primary or only process

taking place. Following Jenkins' line of argument, 'culture', 'identity', 'tradition', 'ethnicity' should not be taken for granted as explanations for behaviour, but rather should be understood in terms of if and how they appear 'empirically' on the ground and 'how they are realised in practice', that is, looking at how and when they are invoked, how practices are identified, how the processes whereby these identifications and invocations arise and gain legitimacy, and their wider social consequences. As regards language, it is thus a case of not assuming the existence or location of linguistic boundaries, or what different languages relate to in terms of identity, culture, ethnicity, groups or meaning, or explaining language as 'cultural' or 'about identity' or 'tradition' or 'nationalism', but looking, as argued by Wright (2000), at how ideas about, and identifications of, language arose, and how they come to be bound up with other concepts and ideas, how these processes of identification work, and what their effects are. It is these considerations that will inform the methods and analysis used in both the exploration of the Irish language in Derry throughout the thesis, and also the understanding of social division and groups in Northern Ireland, which will be the subject of the next chapter.

3. The Irish language, politics and division in Ireland: historical context

One of the questions I was most frequently asked by friends and colleagues in England when I explained my research and the political debate about the Irish language was: 'But why does it matter?', or 'But what's the problem?'. To those unfamiliar with the social world of Northern Ireland, the idea that a language might be so politically controversial, and indeed contentious to the point that, as at the time of writing, it might prevent the formation of government, seems rather strange. Comparing with the state of Welsh or Scots Gaelic, people often asked why a language might be so politically contentious for any reason beyond the financial or practical. As outlined in the previous chapter, the answer lies in understanding how languages can relate to, or be perceived as related to, group identification, politics and division, the historical processes whereby such associations have arisen, and how these perceptions and experiences of divisions and group identification impact upon everyday life and the experiences and opportunities of both individuals and groups.

In the case of Northern Ireland over the course of history, social division, the perception of society as composed of clearly-bounded and oppositional groups, and the over-identification of language with these bounded groups and social division, has come to dominate social life and the political agenda in Northern Ireland and continues in many ways to dominate contemporary everyday life, despite significant progress in reducing social division and conflict. The structuring constraints placed by the past on the present, maintained and perpetuated by centuries of imagined difference and the lived experience of violence and division, have resulted in a social world pervaded by social division and boundaries. While the 'two community' model of Northern Ireland is in many senses a classic case of 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1983), local communal differences, imagined though they may be, are not at all imaginary (Jenkins 2008a, 2008b). Although group difference is often a socially-

constructed perception, an imagining which masks similarity, inter-group heterogeneity, and fluidity, the boundaries and experiences of social difference resulting from these imaginings are very real, most clearly so in the case of the peace walls and barriers that separate parts of Belfast and Derry, or in everyday life patterns of activities and social interactions.

However, two points, already made the last chapter with respect to language, groups, and cultural practices, are particularly important, since they underlie my argument throughout this thesis. Firstly, in understanding groups, identity and cultural practices, internal heterogeneity and variation should not be overlooked and secondly, in considering boundaries, differences and distinctions between and within cultural practices and groups, the existence of particular groups and their alignment with particular cultural practices and concepts of ethnicity and identity are the result of on-going social and historical processes. We should thus seek to consider the complexity of everyday practices and social boundaries, and to examine the processes whereby perceptions and identifications of boundaries, associations, of meaning, are produced, and indeed the processes whereby such perceptions and identifications are challenged, rather than take them for granted as *a priori*, 'natural' facts, to be accepted without scrutiny.

The same argument can be made as regards language. As the current stalemate over the Irish Language Act in Northern Ireland demonstrates, the Irish language is clearly and undeniably bound up with politics, and in political debate, the media and academia the Irish language is frequently represented through narratives of divided cultures, conflicting identities and social division. Even when told in the framework of human rights and language rights, as has increasingly been the case in recent years, the narrative is bound up with both the political situation in Northern Ireland and the wider politics of culture, language and human rights in an international context. Although the Irish language is clearly deeply intertwined with politics, and is often perceived and experienced as aligned with

social and communal divides, or as in opposition or conflict with other 'cultures', this is neither 'natural', nor immutable nor a function of the language itself. This situation has emerged within a wider historical context and a developing tendency towards division and conflict, into which a variety of cultural practices have become interwoven. While Irish may seem intractably associated with particular political stances when viewed from the 'snapshot' point of view of contemporary politics, looking to both long-term historical developments and ongoing social change and contemporary social complexity highlights that this is both a relatively recent development historically and not a total representation of the contemporary situation. The Irish language has only been bound up with calls for Irish independence and statehood since the late eighteenth century and although the narrative of Irish as political and sectarian is still dominant, there has been significant change on the ground in recent years, as the rapid growth of Linda Ervine's east Belfast initiative for example.

This chapter will explore the complexities of social division in Ireland, and examine the historical development of the Irish language, its relationship with social division and politics, and the complexities of everyday use. Drawing on both secondary historical narratives and analysis and, in the second half of the chapter, also on my own analysis of census data, political documents and ethnographic and interview data, this chapter argues that while of course language has become bound up with politics and social division in Northern Ireland, the alignment and association with politics and social division is not the whole story, the only story, or necessarily the most important story to be told about the Irish language. To understand the Irish language purely in terms of identity, language, ethnicity, culture, or the politics of the same, or to assume an automatic or 'natural' relationship between a language and a particular social group, would be to omit much of the complexity of its historical development and lived reality of how the Irish language is experienced in the everyday.

3.1 Social division and everyday life in Northern Ireland

Great strides have been made in the peace process and violence on the streets is largely over, yet division, segregation and separation, the legacy of 600 years of conflict and division, remain central to day-to-day lived experience; a situation of 'benign apartheid' continues to shape the possibilities for, and experience of, everyday social interaction. A model of society as consisting of two opposed 'communities' or ethnic groups - 'Catholic/Nationalist/Republican/Irish' and 'Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist/British' and the assumption of segregation, division and divergent identities continues to be a structuring norm in policy, politics and resource allocation and the identification of individuals.

This situation of extreme division is the result of a historical trajectory in which religion has become the key symbolic marker of social difference in Northern Ireland and the nominal category of identification. Over the course of several centuries, religion has become aligned with, and subsumed within, more complex and changing identities, including ethnic, political and cultural identifications and aspirations. This divide is paradoxical, on the one hand taking in centuries of shared history, co-existence and mutual endeavour, and on the other centuries of conflict, opposition and separation. In many ways, social differences shrink in comparison to the great number of similarities in everyday concerns and challenges, and indeed the overwhelming similarities in 'culture' understood in terms of food, popular cultural consumption through media, music etc., clothes, use of language, and so on.

Residential, educational and social segregation, however, exemplifies the extent to which the legacy of separation and conflict continues to shape everyday life in Northern Ireland: in 2014, 93.5 per cent of children attended schools segregated along community lines, in either Catholic or de-facto Protestant schools (Nolan 2014), and the most recent (2011) census (NISRA 2013) revealed that almost half the population of Northern Ireland (45 per cent) lived in areas that would be classed as 'single community', that is, areas composed of more than 80 per cent one community, while two-thirds of the population lived in areas composed of

more than 70 per cent one community (Nolan 2014). Since the official 'end' of the conflict in 1998, residential segregation has reduced and equality legislation has led to more mixed workplaces, yet the integrated school sector has remained very small, despite broad popular support and over-subscription. As might be expected, considering these continued levels of social and educational segregation, levels of cross-community social interaction remain low, although of course variable according to various factors such as geography and age. In 2011 and 2012 about two-thirds of respondents in the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT 1998-2016) reported that all or most of their friends were from the same background as themselves, a figure which has shown no signs of decreasing over the last 30 years, and indeed has increased among some age groups. As might be expected, considering that relationships and marriages frequently arise from local and friendship-based networks, family connections and marriage patterns in Northern Ireland have also remained consistently segregated during the last 30 years. While levels of 'mixed marriage' may be under-reported to a certain degree, and there is of course limited data regarding non-married relationships, evidence suggests that the norm remains overwhelmingly towards marriage and relationships within the same group (Jenkins 2008b, p. 117). The NILT shows that the percentage of individuals reporting that all or most of their family are from the same religious backgrounds as themselves has remained above eighty per cent since 1998 (NILT 1998-2016).

These divisions in the organisation of everyday life and social interaction are mirrored by significant divergences in ideological and political matters, and in participation in, and perceptions of, different cultural activities and practices. As noted above, similarities in practices of everyday life and cultural consumption far outweigh the differences and reflect national and regional trends and tendencies: watching *I'm a Celebrity* on a Saturday night, eating the same foods, shopping at mainstream supermarkets and high-street stores such as Tesco or Primark, following the same English football teams in the Premiership, going on

similar holidays abroad, and so on. Indeed, this is a paradox for the outside visitor or ethnographer in Northern Ireland; on the one hand, everything is totally familiar, yet, on the other, markers of division and conflict and a repertoire of cultural practices that are quite different from those found in the UK dominate the social and material landscape¹⁵. Thus divisions can be seen across a whole range of cultural activities, 'traditions', events, commemorations and symbols including flags, parades, language, sports, symbols, historical narratives, national and political identity¹⁶ and lived space (Bryan and Stevenson 2009, Bryan *et al.* 2010; Burton 1978; Jarman 1998a, 1998b, 2008; Rolston 1991, 1992, 1998; 2003b; Sluka 1995). In both politics and everyday life, cultural practices and organisations remain both the source of, and target of, contestation and violence, in the forms of vandalism of symbolic properties such as Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) clubs or Orange halls, violence and counter demonstrations at marches, events or commemorations¹⁷, political or everyday discrimination and opposition to particular practices, and opposition and resistance to particular activities or planned developments (Nolan 2013, 2014; Wilson 2015).

Such alignments and divisions are frequently taken for granted in the media, political debate, social policy and academic studies, as 'natural' or inevitable products of the pre-existence of two very different 'ethnic' or 'cultural groups', and treated as starting points for analysis rather than situations to unravel and explain. Discussions of issues of 'culture',

¹⁵ The marks of division and difference are at their most visible in the presence of peace-walls, murals, kerb painting, flags, political graffiti, and Irish language street signs, Ulster-Scots events and signs, Irish traditional music, loyal orders and marching bands marches during marching season, the bonfires of 11th night, Gaelic football and a whole range of other events and commemorations such as of the Easter rising or the Somme. These marks make it very clear that Northern Ireland is a place apart from Britain or Ireland.

¹⁶ For example, census data and the NILT survey show that whereas Catholics tend to identify as Irish or Northern Irish, and a very few as 'British', the reverse is true for Protestants, the majority of whom identify as 'British'.

¹⁷ Orange marches have long been a source of contention particularly in the Ardoyne area of Belfast, but also in one-off events, for example the invitation of various 'Republican' speakers to the East Belfast Mission, or the violent protests and riots prompted by the presence of an anti-interment commemoration march in Belfast centre and a contentious Republican Volunteers parade in Castlederg in 2013.

'heritage' or 'tradition' are frequently understood, managed and represented in public debate and social policy through this framework of 'two communities' and 'two cultures', which should be approached as 'equal but separate' (STEP 2010). This model was enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement, which promised 'parity of esteem and of just and equal treatment for the identity, ethos, and aspirations of both communities' and equality in their 'civil, political, social and cultural rights' (Northern Ireland Office 1998). Academic studies of culture and social life Northern Ireland have likewise often been guilty of starting from a point of uncritical acceptance of the existence of two discrete uniform communities with uniform cultural alignments, repertoires and interests. O'Leary and McGarry (1993), for example, argue that from the plantations onwards, 'three [Scottish, English and Irish] ethnic communities confronted one another', each of which 'had its own distinctive material culture and customary norms' and each of which was divided from the other 'by their languages, dialects, religion and political status', which formed 'cleavages' which 'for most of the succeeding centuries...marked and maintained ethnic boundaries' (p. 60). Such narratives are often, however, somewhat circular, assuming that culture explains group divisions and that group divisions explain culture, thus overlooking the complexities of group and cultural identification and the fact that these alignments are not fixed or inevitable, but the result of ongoing historical processes.

While contemporary social divisions often dominate the political agenda and are sometimes represented as timeless, unchanging or 'natural', even a brief examination of both historical development and contemporary practices highlights how communal differences, and variations in practices, interests, and patterns of social interaction and cohesion in everyday life in Northern Ireland have developed historically and continue to change. Just a few examples from the wider context of culture illustrate the importance of looking to change, development and complexity: alignments and divisions of culture and 'groupness' that seem fixed and predetermined today are not immutable, but are relatively recent developments.

For example, Cúchulainn, one of the most famous characters in old Irish literature and Gaelic mythology, was adopted as a symbol by Loyalist paramilitary groups in the 1970s, on the basis of Cúchulainn's fame as 'defender of Ulster' (Rolston 1991 p. 35). However, the image of Cúchulainn also remains in use as a Republican symbol, similarly understood as a 'defender of Ulster' and seen on IRA volunteer memorials and murals, for example in the IRA memorial in Derry city cemetery (CAIN 2009). The annual siege of Derry commemorations, now organised in a codified form by the Apprentice Boys of Derry, a Protestant loyal order, and seen as an exclusively Protestant cultural practice, were not always religiously exclusive, at various points over history including key Catholic figures. These commemorations emerged in their present form as a result of a complex series of historical and social events and power plays between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries (McGovern 1994). The Irish tricolour, often presented as a Nationalist symbol and perceived or experienced as territorial or intimidating to Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist individuals and groups, did not become the flag of Nationalism until the Irish war of Independence. It originated in the eighteenth-century United Irishmen movement, as a flag which could represent Catholic, Protestant and the peace in-between (Gillespie 2013, p. 426). Examples such as these can be found across both historical and contemporary Northern Ireland, and highlight the importance of attending to the complexities of historical development and changes in understanding, and to how meanings can develop over time, and can be re-imagined and re-narrated according to developing contexts and need.

Likewise, it is important to consider ongoing processes of change in identification, renegotiation and re-identification in contemporary Northern Ireland. Derry's year as inaugural UK City of Culture was, for example, based on a programme of events and projects which seek to overcome divisions through culture and thus build a 'new narrative' of a 'shared past' through 'joyous celebration and purposeful inquiry' (Culture Company 2013). This endeavour has been particularly successful in creating a context in which taken-for-

granted identifications of cultural activities and perceptions of boundaries can be challenged. For example, as part of the City of Culture, Protestant flute bands participated in the 2013 'All Ireland Fleadh' and the in the 2014 Pan-Celtic festival, both festivals which have generally been perceived as exclusively 'Nationalist' or 'Irish' cultural events. In the context of the Walled City Tattoo 2013 and the Pan-Celtic Festival, joint programmes and performances between Irish Dancers and Highland Dancers and Protestant flute bands, Republican flute bands, and brass bands perceived to be Catholic, have sought to emphasise similarities rather than differences, exploring the shared aspects of culture and shared interests in dance and music.

This concern with exploring similarities, challenging dyadic and divisive interpretations of history, and renegotiating the meaning of commemorations and cultural practices and for whom they are relevant in contemporary Northern Ireland, while by no means the dominant narrative, has grown in prominence in media, politics and community programmes in recent years. This has included the renegotiation of narratives about World War One, with Sinn Féin making the important symbolic gesture of attending high-profile World War One commemorations for the first time. Carál Ní Chuilín's tenure as culture minister included considerable work towards renegotiating the narrative of Ulster Scots history, language and culture, in political debate and policy development and in the media. Since 2015, the 'marching season', and the 12th July in Belfast, events that have long been associated with violence and rioting for, has passed off peacefully. In politics there have been a number of important symbolic gestures and expressions of support; for example, Democratic Unionist Party leader Peter Robinson attended a GAA match in 2012, and Northern Ireland Sinn Féin leader Martin McGuinness has frequently sought to show public support for Protestant marching bands and culture through public statements, particularly on Twitter, stating, for example, that 'the Apprentice Boys of Derry play a positive role in the life of Derry' (Twitter 2013).

The contemporary situation of clear division and difference in patterns of participation is the result of a historical trajectory of continuity and linear development, but also of change, rupture and reformulation that render it erroneous to understand contemporary conflict and division as part of a single ongoing conflict between two single and unchanging groups or to make assumptions about how and where boundaries between groups and associations between practices and groups lie (Ruane and Todd 1993).

The Irish language is frequently understood and perceived within this context of cultural and social division and conflict discussed in the last chapter, and it is this context which gives rise to its contentious status in Northern Ireland. Participation and engagement in the Irish language tends to be socially divided: over 90 per cent of those reporting 'some ability' in the Irish language in the 2011 Census were from a Catholic community background, while the 2012 Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey (Carmichael 2012, p. 8) reported that 76 per cent of Catholics and only 21 per cent of Protestants said that they 'would like to see and hear more Irish being used'. In politics, Unionist political parties have tended to be very cautious about, or even outright opposed to, the Irish language, whereas Republican and Nationalist politicians have tended to be much more vocal in their support and use of Irish. The Democratic Unionist Party has been staunchly opposed to the introduction of legislation to support the Irish language, and has frequently dismissed or criticised the language. In contrast, Sinn Féin has for decades maintained a policy of active promotion of Irish and its use in both political debate and campaigning. Contemporary political debate in Stormont often casts the Irish language as something to do with 'culture', 'heritage' or 'ethnicity'; as for example, 'language is an essential element of our cultural heritage and is part of our sense of identity' (They Work for You 2000). The Democratic Unionist Party has included Irish within their wider narrative of 'culture war' or 'war on Unionist culture'; for example, Nelson McCausland of the Democratic Unionist Party claimed in February 2015 that 'for Sinn Féin the promotion of the Irish language is ultimately about promoting an Irish identity', that

the Irish language is being used to ‘convince Unionists that they are really Irish and Gaelic’ and that Sinn Féin is waging a ‘cultural war and the Irish language is the main weapon in the Republican armoury’ (Manley 2015). The Irish language questions, and the wider question of minority language policy, continues to stall any progress on Irish language legislation and remains a seemingly intractable point of debate between parties. The Democratic Unionist Party maintain a narrative of Irish language as a ‘cultural weapon’ and as culturally exclusive, dismissing attempts to introduce Irish language legislation as republican manoeuvring, whereas Sinn Féin, the Social Democratic and Labour Party and Irish language groups have represented the Irish language within a minority language rights-based framework and pushed for an Irish Language Act.

However, while the Irish language has arguably become over-identified with politics, social division, and narratives of culture and identity, in Northern Ireland, an examination of the historical development of the Irish language in Ireland highlights that this has not always been the case, and should not be seen as ‘natural’ or ‘taken for granted’. It is, as will be discussed in the remainder of this chapter, the result of a long series of developments and complexities from which the contemporary situation has emerged, just as the contemporary situation likewise is not static but continues to change.

3.2 Social division, the Irish language and politics: early history

3.2.1 The Ulster plantations and early roots of division

The Ulster plantations of the sixteenth century marked an important watershed in Ireland’s history and the beginnings of the social division that has shaped the last five hundred years of politics and everyday social life in the north of Ireland. The historical trajectory that has shaped contemporary Northern Ireland, and perceptions and experiences of culture and language within Northern Ireland, can be broadly summarised as a ‘developing system of relationships’ with a ‘tendency toward communal polarisation’ (Ruane and Todd 1996, p. 8, p. 36). The English crown’s attempts to conquer and colonise Ireland began in the twelfth

century, but it was not until the Tudor conquest of Ireland in the sixteenth century that the English obtained significant military power or social and political beyond Dublin and the Pale. Following the conquest, influence and control in the south and east of the island was relatively well established but the north remained volatile, rebellious, and a potential weak spot in the defence of the realm. The plantations were intended to solve this problem through a programme of native displacement and re-colonisation. English, Scottish and Welsh lords, private adventurers, servitors, the Church, the London Livery Companies, some 'deserving Irish' who had fought for the English cause, and the 'Old English' elite, now Anglo-Irish, who had arrived in Ireland in previous centuries, were granted land in the north as 'undertakers' of this scheme. They were expected to expel the existing population, of largely Gaelic-speaking and Catholic Irish and create new communities of loyal tenants imported from their own home regions. In practice such whole-scale population replacement proved unachievable, as most undertakers lacked the resources to either attract or retain sufficient settlers or eradicate the native population, particularly in the west. Social division and power inequalities between the new arrivals and the natives was maintained by a governmental and legal system in which the native population had very few rights, security or prospects, and faced fines and penalties for religious non-conformity (Bartlett 2012; Crawford 1975; Jackson 2014; Morgan 2014).

Linguistic and cultural differences, and the origins of different 'ethnic' or identity groups, frequently narrated in terms of 'Planters and Gaels', are often traced back to this period in political, popular and academic presentations. Planter and Gael identities continue to be invoked in modern political debate and representations of contemporary Northern Ireland and its future. For example, Sinn Féin MLA Catriona Ruane, speaking in Stormont in 2006, said 'let us be able to look back in 20 years' time and say that the end of 2006 and beginning of 2007 was the time when we took a qualitative step forward and made real change for the Planters and the Gael' (They Work For You 2006). Peter Robinson, MLA and then First

Minister for the Democratic Unionist Party, in the same year said 'I hope... that the sons and daughters of the Planters and the Gael have found a way to share the land of their birth and live together in peace'¹⁸. Martin McGuinness, Sinn Féin MLA and then Deputy First Minister, also speaking in 2006 said, 'as joint First Ministers, the new First Minister and I, as leaders of the Planters and the Gael, are charged with the responsibility to lead the way on behalf of the Executive' (Northern Ireland Assembly Archive 2008). In literature, the idea of the 'Planter and Gael' is perhaps most famously represented in the work of Montague and Hewitt and their 'Planter and Gael' tour of 1970, and later writings about this work (Montague 2005, pp. 162-8). Among examples in academic literature, Cairns and Mercer argue that 'the terms Gael-Planter and Celt-Anglo-Saxon represent the ethnic origins of the two sides involved in the present day conflict' (1984, p. 1096), and Hillyard (1997) describes how:

'Northern Ireland is a divided society in the traditional use of the term...it was born out of a colonial conflict which was exacerbated when in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the colonialists attempted to restore order through a system of plantation, creating a lasting conflict between the planter and the Gael, with the former wanting to maintain their loyalty to Britain and the later to reassert their independence. These different national aspirations, which were broadly mapped on to different religious affiliations, still run through the social order.' (Hillyard 1997, p. 164)

This divide is often characterised in cultural and linguistic terms. For example, O'Leary and McGarry explain Ireland's historical trajectory in terms of the 'distinctive material culture and customary norms' in which language 'marked and maintained' the 'ethnic boundaries'

¹⁸ In a speech in the United States 2006. Full text of speech available in Lynn, B (nd) on the CAIN database, repeated also during assembly debate of June 2008 (Northern Ireland Assembly Archive 2008).

between the 'Planters and Gaels' and ensured the perpetuation of two populations 'divided by their language, dialects and political status' (O'Leary and McGarry 1993 p. 60, p. 103).

These characterisations are, to a certain degree, an entirely valid broad-brush summation of the social changes effected by the Tudor conquest and subsequent plantations. They effected major social changes, brought new languages and practices to the region and to the systems of government, education, religion and politics, and established social systems and group divisions which, over subsequent centuries, took in aspects of culture and everyday practice and became increasingly bounded and oppositional. However, as argued by Foster, 'the oddly Anglo-centric view that stresses simple and continuous opposition of Norman and Irish, planter and Gael, landlord and tenant, appears less convincing than a perspective focusing on breaks, paradoxes, contradictions and ambiguities' (Foster 1989, p. v).

The social world in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century north of Ireland was not neatly divided and organised into conqueror and conquered or Planter and Gael, but was much more complex as regards divisions and alignments and culture, affiliation, allegiance, ethnicity and language. The Tudor conquest was not a conquest over a single 'united Ireland' in the sense of a single people, group or nation, but was rather a conquest, achieved with varying degrees of force, over a variety of different regions and localised power structures, which were to greater or lesser extents assimilated into, and associated with, the English crown and state structures. The 'Old-English', or 'Anglo-Irish', the descendants and associates of those who had settled in Ireland during the attempted conquests and colonisations of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, had to varying degrees established power bases and spheres of influence, which were in turn to varying degrees assimilated into Irish power structures, culture and lifestyles. This group tended to be Catholic in religion, and had, in some cases, integrated into Irish culture, language and customs, and in others, less so. While nominally supportive of the English crown, they had ambivalent loyalties to both

crown and to an identity as 'English'. The Gaelic elite, also Catholic, continued their wars for power within Ireland, and while some opted into the English crown power structures during the sixteenth century, depending on the pragmatics of warfare and conquest, their loyalties and allegiances were extremely tenuous. Regional division and differences amongst the mass of the native peasantry likewise reflected the different political structures and cultural influences in different regions (Mac Giola Chríost 2005, pp. 85-6; Bardon 1992, pp. 71-124; Ruane and Todd 1996, pp. 20-24).

While sharing the experience as newly arrived settlers and colonisers, and while also mostly Protestant, the settlers who arrived during the seventeenth century plantations were not a cohesive or homogenous group. The concept of 'British' identity was not yet formed, and the Planters came from varying geographic, social, linguistic and religious backgrounds. Ties of loyalty and allegiance were based more on personal and family networks and regional ties - reflecting how undertakers had populated their lands with tenants from their own estates and regions - rather than to the plantation project or some sense of 'settler' identity.

Historical studies have highlighted that the 'new English' were a 'factious and divided group', and although there are very few examples of major conflict developing between groups, historical analysis suggests that they were, in a large part, 'operating through multiple communities and networks' (Morgan 2014, p. 108).

Across Ireland, the religious division between settler and native was not total; there were some Catholic migrants from England during the early plantations and throughout the seventeenth century, particularly in Strabane, and in Counties Cavan and Monaghan. Many of the 'Old English' remained Catholic, although this group was largely located outside Ulster, in the other regions of Ireland (Edwards 2005, pp. 118-9). For the majority of new arrivals, while there was a nominal general commitment to Protestantism, this varied according to origin and, consequently, across the region. Whereas the north and east looked

towards Britain, and Scotland particularly, south and west Ulster looked more towards the south of Ireland and midland Britain, with patterns of migration and emigration reflecting these orientations over the coming centuries. In the north and east, more fertile land, the greater economic power of undertakers and high levels of ongoing inwards migration from Scotland in particular, resulted in a dense planter population with a strong Scottish and Presbyterian influence, and resulted in more industrial and infrastructural development than many other areas of Ireland. In the west however, plantation was quite different: levels of plantation and external in-migration were lower, there were fewer land grants, landowners and undertakers, and accordingly native displacement was lower; in contrast to the east, the majority of new arrivals tended to be from Wales, and the north and midlands of England. The result was a sparser population, more rural and undeveloped land, less industrial development, and a population composed of a mixture of Irish Catholics, Welsh and English Anglicans, and the 'Old-English' elite. Even within the west there was significant variation. In Donegal, plantation took on a specifically Welsh character, was Anglican (i.e. Church of Ireland) in religious orientation, and so sparse that the native Irish remained the overwhelming majority and retained much land. O'Cahan's County, later Coleraine County and then County Londonderry, was granted to the London companies for development, and accordingly took on more settlers from England and was strongly Anglican in religious affiliation. Further south, the plantations in Strabane, while nominally Church of Ireland, were led by George Hamilton who took in a large number of Catholic Scottish tenants. Mid-Ulster saw the highest concentration of English Planters, who tended to be Anglican (McCafferty 2003; Robinson 1984; Morgan 2014; Jackson 2014; Bartlett 2012).

Thus, while the plantations established a basic system of differences between settlers and natives based on social status and rights, and language, religion, cultural practices and political allegiance, neither 'the Planters' nor 'the Gaels' were homogenous groups with clear lines of cultural, religious or political affiliations at this stage. From the beginning of

the new colony the 'planters' did not form a single integrated community: 'such networks were not natural or an inevitable product of migration' but 'had to be created' (Morgan 2014 p. 108; see also Canny 2001; Gillespie 2006). The need to create a cohesive 'settler' community was indeed recognised by the orchestrators of the Plantations, who - unusually for the period (1611 onwards) - began to designate the settlers as 'British', rather than Scottish, English or Welsh, and introduced a variety of governmental measures designed to produce a single cohesive Planter community in 'what can only be described as a significant piece of social engineering' (Gillespie 2006 n.p.). However, neither the pre-plantation population nor the planter population formed single united groups: the 'Old English', whilst tending to be Catholic in religion, were separated from the wider Catholic population of Irish peasantry by political and economic interests and allegiance. The few Catholic planters and the small number of elite Irish Catholics and the Catholic Old-English elite initially supported and benefited from the plantations and the British crown cause, whereas the mass of peasantry, particularly in the north of Ireland, bore the brunt of the changes that the plantations imposed on status and opportunity. It was not until later in the century that religion became a powerful bonding force.

The development of the heterogeneous planter population into a more cohesive social group with a shared identity involved deliberate social engineering by the plantation authorities to create unity amongst the planters. This social engineering used both measures to develop internal homogeneity including law, church, education and the economy, and on the other hand measures that rendered difference and divisions with the native population more stark, including on-going systematic discrimination, exclusion and sectarian violence and warfare. The result was the emergence of two bitterly divided groups for which religion was the key identifier. Post-plantation Ireland saw growing discrimination along religious lines, and Catholics were increasingly excluded from government and various economic and social spheres. This led to rising hostility from those affected towards the planter-British

administration, this hostility fermenting along religious, rather than settler-native lines, with the alignment of Old-English, Catholic planter and Irish peasantry interests (Gillespie 2006; Edwards 2006). This resentment erupted into violent conflict in the form of the 1641 rebellion, which was quickly followed by further conflict as part of the 'War of the Three Kingdoms' (1639-1651), the English Civil War (1642-1651) and the Williamite wars (1685-1691), during which Ireland was an arena in the wider political struggle over the British crown and government. Although rooted in a complex and changing series of alliances and causes, which varied according to the complex pragmatics and aims of different groups, the ultimate result was polarisation between Catholics and Protestants, and, as a result of sectarian atrocities and violence during the various conflicts, an increasingly entrenched relationship of opposition and violence between these two increasingly divided groups (Bardon 1992, pp. 132-167).

3.2.2 Language and social division in post-plantation Ireland

Linguistically there was no simple divide between settler and native, planter and Gael, or Catholic and Protestant. The early history of Irish speaking is murky, as with all languages and as discussed in chapter two, narratives of language development are complex, but three important points can be made; firstly, the 'Irish' language was considerably influenced by a variety of other languages over centuries, including Norse, Latin, Welsh, Norman and English. Secondly, there were significant internal differences in language use across the island, often reflecting different levels of interaction with other languages. Thirdly, Gaelic or 'Irish' was not just influenced by external sources; in its turn, it also influenced other languages with which it came into contact, notably in Scotland, where it arrived in the fifth century, or so, and became the dominant language and the basis for Scots Gaelic. These three points remain true as regards Irish right up to the present day; it remains internally heterogeneous, continues to change and develop due to wider linguistic and social

influences and change, and has influence on non-Irish speaking linguistic patterns and usages.

The language and dialects of the newcomers in the conquests and plantations were not uniform, nor even confined to a simple divide, as in the case of 'Ulster-Scots' or 'English', as contemporary representations of linguistic divides in Northern Ireland often tend to assume. The new arrivals included a small minority of Welsh and Scots-Gaelic speakers, and differences also existed in the form of the different regional dialects and linguistic patterns reflecting the varying language use in settlers' places of origin: 'English', 'Scots' and 'Welsh' were not homogenous languages at this stage, exhibiting a greater level of regional variation than exists today. Amongst the native inhabitants of Ireland, linguistic change and language shift towards English had begun before the plantation, reflecting the changing status of the two languages that took place with the Anglo-Norman and subsequent Tudor conquest, in which Latin, French and, as time went on, English became the working languages of the government and administration. The varying linguistic patterns amongst the planters were not simply a question of two or three languages in competition; there was linguistic interaction and new regional and local variations and dialects of both Irish and English emerged, producing regional differences which remain in contemporary linguistic patterns in Ireland (see Dolan 1998; Mac Giolla Chríost 2005, pp. 61-84; McCafferty 2003). Language, while tending towards a native-settler division, was thus not a simple matter of Planter and Gael, Irish and English, and did not necessarily map neatly onto, or reflect, religious, cultural or political differences or national identity. The situation should, rather be understood as a much more complex, evolving linguistic ecology. The plantations did however accelerate the existing tendency towards the decline of Irish, and its devaluation by both settler and native, as the language of the past and poverty.

During the seventeenth century, the role of English as the language of bureaucracy, law and government led to its increasing dominance across Ireland. At the end of the century the Irish language remained the everyday vernacular of the majority of the population, although in large areas of the east and midlands language shift was beginning to occur and English had become the dominant language in small pockets, most of which were concentrated around the urban areas of Dublin, Belfast, Londonderry and Cork (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005, p. 95). Irish had however been completely displaced as the language of government, commerce and the high levels of society. Official documents and legal records ceased to be in Irish in almost all recorded cases, and the use of Irish in literature and written texts was found almost exclusively outside Ireland, in the Irish continental colleges at Bordeaux, Douai, Paris, Lisbon, Louvain, Rome, Rouen, Salamanca and Seville (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005, p. 93). Within Ireland support for the use of Irish, and the production of Irish language texts, increasingly became the preserve of evangelisation and conversion missions by various protestant groups. The Presbyterian Church, particularly, looked to the Irish language as a route to the conversion of the Catholic masses, producing several Irish-language Bibles and religious texts from 1567 onwards (Crowley 2005, pp. 109-122). Importantly, at this stage it was economics and social status rather than ethnic identities or cultures that were most important in shaping how the language was perceived: 'attitudes regarding a shift from the Irish language to English were largely determined by ideas of social status rather than sense of ethnicity or of national identity ... This mind-set was common at all levels of Irish society' (Mac Giolla Chríost 2004, p. 89).

3.2.3 Social division, language and politics in the eighteenth century

The victory of William of Orange over the Catholic James II in 1690 ended the conflicts of the seventeenth century and established a new political settlement, a settlement that had major implications for the development of social relations and divisions within Ireland and for the developing relationship between Ireland and Britain. These social relations and divisions laid

the foundations for the emergence of new cultural and political forms and identities, new social divisions, and crucially for the Irish language, for a resurgent interest in 'Irishness' and the Irish language.

The post-1690 political settlement established a new Irish parliament, which, contrary to William's promise of religious toleration for all, established a social order in which religious discrimination was the main tool for maintaining power and social order. The 'Penal Laws' were the primary means of achieving this aim, prohibiting Catholics from voting, buying or long-term leasing land, inheriting whole estates, becoming soldiers, lawyers or MPs, obtaining an education, or worshipping freely, among other proscriptions (Bardon 1992, pp. 174-80). Presbyterians and other non-conforming Protestant groups, also viewed by the ascendancy elite as a potential threat, likewise faced discrimination from the Penal Laws, although to a lesser degree, leading to large-scale emigration by Presbyterians disillusioned by the poor reward for their loyalty during the wars of the seventeenth century.

The extent to which the Penal Laws were felt and enforced varied considerably across Ireland, and in some regions, particularly the south, Catholics fared better and a Catholic middle class recovered and quickly re-emerged (McBride 2009). Pressure from the English government saw the enactment of the Toleration Act in 1719, which relieved the majority of restrictions on non-conforming Protestants, but the standard Test, and the reluctance to include Presbyterians and non-conformists in government or the military, lasted most of the century. It was not until the 1790s that all restrictions were removed. The result was the fortification of the existing tendency towards social division and separation established by the plantations; religious affiliation was aligned with social hierarchy and exclusion, and with the existing settler-native divide, rendering religion the major social fault line in social division and in social segregation which extended into economic interactions, education and everyday social interaction.

There were however complexities within this divide, including complexities of geography, religion and class. Anglicans, although stratified by class, were united by a common interest in maintaining the Anglican ascendancy, whereas Presbyterians, as the middle group between Catholics and Protestants, found common cause in their resentment of the Anglican ascendancy, and formed a cohesive and tightknit community by virtue of their concentration in the north-east of Ulster. Anglicans and Presbyterians additionally tended towards different social and cultural orientations and influences. Presbyterians looked more towards Scotland and the cultural and intellectual forms emanating from Scotland, notably in literature and in the influence of enlightenment philosophy. The Anglican ascendancy elite looked more towards the south of England as regards political and ideological influence and developed a repertoire of cultural forms and commemorations, such as the commemoration of the Battle of the Boyne, in which Presbyterians did not tend to participate (McBride 1989; Ruane and Todd 1996, pp. 31-34; Barnard 1991, p. 899). Catholics, as a group, 'mobilised around their Catholic Church to form a state within a state' (Foster 2004 p. 53), yet there were significant internal differences effected by class and geographical location, factors which had major impacts on life experience and opportunity and social interaction. The Catholic middle class, the legacy of the small Catholic gentry class descended from the old English and native Gaelic elite, was bolstered by the 'Catholic recovery' of the second half of the eighteenth century. The growing numbers of middle class Catholics, particularly concentrated in the South and especially Munster, had quite different life opportunities available to them compared to the Catholic peasantry; many were educated in continental colleges, successful in trade, and increasingly from the middle of the century, land holders and employers. This stood in sharp contrast to the Catholic peasantry, educated in hedge schools at best, occupying the lower levels of service and rural society, and engaged in cultural practices and forms rejected or forgotten by other segments of society, the most well documented example of which was the Irish language, which was

increasingly rejected by more affluent segments of society. In the north of the island the Plantations and land settlements meant that there was virtually no Catholic gentry or landowning class and Protestant domination remained firmly in place and largely unchallenged until the late eighteenth century (McBride 2009; Ruane and Todd 1996).

Thus although there was a tendency towards political, cultural and social division along the lines of religion, these were complex, and there was significant internal division and heterogeneity within religious categories. The Irish language, while increasingly the preserve of the predominately Catholic peasantry did not serve as an ethnicised boundary marker: disdain towards the Irish language and an aspiration to speak English characterised individuals from across all religious categories, particularly the lower classes eager to escape poverty and its associated cultural forms and practices. The Catholic Church, from the eighteenth century, increasingly rejected the Irish language; Irish ceased to be used in sermons from this period and was not included in the syllabus of the Maynooth Catholic seminary opened in 1796 (O'Brien 1989, pp. 163-4; Mac Giolla Chríost 2005, p. 91-100).

The movement to preserve and promote the Irish language meanwhile emanated not from ethnicised cultural-nationalism but from the socio-political struggles of the Anglican Ascendancy elite in the mid-eighteenth century. The context for new socio-political struggles in which a concept of Irishness gained new importance was the increasingly tetchy relationship between the ruling elite in Ireland and Westminster, arising from the imposition of the Declaratory Act (1720), which reduced Ireland to the status of a dependent territory, gave Westminster the power to overturn Irish parliamentary acts and resulted in increasing British influence in social, economic and trade policy in Ireland. Criticism of Britain's involvement in Irish affairs, and calls for greater Irish independence, gained popularity, and by the 1740s had become a large-scale political movement. By the 1750s the issue was dominating Irish parliamentary politics in Dublin, the campaign for change being led by

Henry Flood and the newly formed Irish Patriot Party (Hutchinson 1987, pp. 54-72; see also Bartlett 2010, pp. 157-60).

Conceptions of 'Irishness' and 'Irish culture', and an interest in reviving the Irish language, emerged within this context. Drawing on the investigations of a small group of academics, clergy, lawyers and country gentlemen who had, from the mid-eighteenth century, started to explore and record the Irish language, and practices and histories identified as 'Gaelic', new articulations of 'Irishness' gained popularity in struggles to renegotiate the political relationship with Britain. Antiquarian and academic investigations undertaken by scholars from largely elite and ascendancy backgrounds offered a new narrative of Ireland's past as not backwards and undeveloped but noble and heroic, with a distinct culture and history that should be recognised, valued and promoted. The emerging narrative did not articulate a bounded 'Irish identity' as something opposed to a 'British identity', or based on the Planter and Gael distinction, but stressed the unity and affinity between the 'sister islands' of Britain and Ireland, and used these narratives of Irishness within arguments that Ireland and Britain should be equal partners within the Empire (Hutchinson 1987, pp. 43-67; see also Mac Giolla Chríost 2005, p. 99). These narratives were not politically radical; they did not call for Irish independence or an independent Irish nation, or seek to 'revive' mainstream Irish culture in the sense of reinstating it into the present, but were romantic, concerned with recording and rehabilitating the past and dying traditions and concerned with renegotiating the power balance between Irish and British parliaments. The new visions of Ireland, however, laid the foundations for a vision of Ireland 'as a living, culturally distinctive, autonomous united community' (Hutchinson 1987, p. 57) in a way that spoke to, and was used by, contemporary political concerns with gaining more legislative power and equality with Britain and the search for 'a more authentic cultural attachment to Ireland...from a self-assured and confident Anglo-Irish elite' (Mac Giolla Chríost 2003, pp. 99; Bartlett 2010, pp. 157-58; Dworkin 2012, pp. xxxiii-xxv; Small 2002, pp. 43-47).

It was not until the very end of the eighteenth century, in the context of the United Irishmen movement, that preserving Irish culture and reviving the Irish language as an everyday vernacular began to be advocated. It was also in this movement that, for the first time, a concern with 'Irish culture' became fused with radical politics, and constitutional nationalist calls for an independent Irish identity and nation. The United Irishmen movement, established in 1791, emerged in the wake of the growth of social and political reform movements in the second half of the eighteenth century, including the rise of the Patriot party and its short-lived successor the Irish Whig party in organised party politics, the Volunteer movement and the Catholic Committee in popular politics, and various groups and clubs interested in radical intellectual and political thought. These groups, while varying in their specific interests and representing a spectrum of radical to conservative ideologies, had achieved significant political and social reform by the 1790s through their shifting alliances: land reforms in the 1860s, constitutional change, free trade and greater legislative independence in 1782 and 1783, and the repeal of the Penal laws between 1771 and 1793. However, after these initial successes, the failure to achieve further, more radical, social reform, and the repeal of the final Penal Laws led to more radical politics (Quinn 1998, Bardon 1992, pp. 210-241, Hutchinson 1987, pp. 61-66). Disappointment that full emancipation was, at the final hour, not passed through Parliament, and the desire for more radical social change, swelled the membership of the United Irishmen movement from 1795 onwards, with promises of a democratic, representative parliament, a land ownership revolution, and a society of equals not separated by creed, reaching its height in 1797 (Bardon 1995, pp. 221-5).

The emergence of the United Irishmen as a mass popular movement represented an important moment not only in the intertwining of Irish language and radical politics but also in that it brought narratives of 'Irishness' and 'Irish culture' to an audience beyond elite intellectuals for the first time. The *Northern Star* journal, published in Belfast, was

particularly important in propagating this fusion of ideas. From 1792 to 1797 the journal was 'the major radical organ in Ireland' (Hutchinson 1987, p. 68) and was active in the promotion not only of radical politics but also of the revival in old Irish music, poetry, mythology and language. The group also published an Irish language magazine from 1792, *Bolg an tSolair* (Hutchinson 1987, pp. 67-72; Penet 2007, p. 343).

The fusion of romantic nationalism with political nationalism was not supported completely across the United Irishmen movement however. Some members viewed the language and cultural revival with scepticism, considering that such attachment to past forms held back progress, and instead considered Irish identity as 'more a matter of geography' than something which aided progress. Some, such as Wolfe Tone, viewed it pragmatically, as a 'prerequisite for the achievement of their social-political programme' (Hutchinson 1987, p. 68). Likewise, this fusion of politics and cultural narratives was not yet the full blown cultural nationalism that would emerge a century later; while the cultural argument and narrative was important in the movement, the main uniting narrative for the movement was Irish exclusion from government and power, and difference from British society and identity, rather than identification with Irish culture or identity (Hutchinson 1987, pp. 65-79; Bardon 1995, pp. 220-223).

The brutal suppression of the United Irishmen movement from 1797, the failure of the attempted rising of the following summer, and the sectarian warfare and attacks which accompanied the attempted rebellion in some parts of the country resulted in a hardening of traditional sectarian rivalries and boundaries and across the country. The Acts of Union, passed in both Irish and British parliaments in summer 1800, promised Catholic Emancipation and greater equality for Ireland, and, combined with the declining appetite for rebellion and radical politics engendered by the violence of the 1797 rebellion and its suppression, put a temporary end to independence politics. As the social and political

landscape changed, interest in Irish culture and language, tainted by association with the failed rebellion, waned, and the Irish language continued to decline as the language of the everyday. It was not until almost half a century later that preservation or promotion once again emerged on the political agenda (Hutchinson 1987, pp. 67-71; Bardon 1995, pp. 220-239).

3.2.4 The Irish language in the nineteenth century: revolution and revival

By the late eighteenth century, Irish remained a majority language in the south and west of the country, but in the north and east of Ireland, it was rapidly disappearing as the language of the everyday. English had become the high-status language of commerce, education and social mobility, and Irish had ceased to be a language of governance, commerce, education and religion, and strongly associated with deprivation and poverty. Court evidence suggests that bilingualism, or at least a basic command of English, became the norm: magistrates' court documents suggest that by 1814 the use of interpreters had ceased to be necessary in the vast majority of legal cases (O'Brien 1989, pp. 168-9; Mac Giolla Chríost 2005, p. 91-7).¹⁹ The Ordnance Survey of 1828-1841 wrote the Irish language out of the land itself, re-naming and anglicising place names across the country.

Calls for the preservation and promotion of the Irish language were limited in the first half of the century. The resurgence of interest in Gaelic culture and history from the mid 1820s, centred around George Petrie and a series of small scholarly societies and journals, involved native Irish speakers and translated a vast array of Irish language texts and histories into English, but notably did not seek whole-scale Gaelicisation, but viewed the death of the Irish language as inevitable (Hutchinson 1987, pp. 87-94). Daniel O'Connell, whose campaigns for

¹⁹ It should be noted of course that while using such terms as 'Irish', 'English' and 'bilingualism' makes narrating a story of language shift and development far easier, it also masks a much more complex situation of language contact and interaction which produced speech patterns and linguistic repertoires which, 100 years later, continued to contain a great deal of mixing and interaction which can be conceived as code-switching, loan words or dialect, depending on the linguistic theory and perspective of the analysis.

Catholic emancipation and subsequently repeal of the Union were a massive political movement articulating new, highly ethnicised political visions which mobilised the Irish peasantry on a massive scale, likewise rejected the Irish language on pragmatic grounds, encouraging the Irish peasantry to learn and use English as a means to a more prosperous future.

Support for the use of Irish language re-emerged in the writings and campaigns of the Young Ireland movement, a splinter group from O'Connell's reform movement that emerged in the late 1830s²⁰. Heavily influenced by the writings and political thought emanating from the eighteenth-century Gaelic Revival movement and the United Irishmen, the Young Irelanders echoed the revival movement's aspirations for an Irish nation of equals, with harmony between creeds, and independent of Britain's values and culture. The group was active in promoting the revival of Ireland's traditional arts, music, language and literature. The Young Irelanders, however, were politically more radical than the revival scholars; they called both for wholesale social reform to limit the dominance of the Protestant governing elite and the established Church, a more equal land ownership system, greater equality in land ownership, production and government, and for the establishment of a new secular education system that would unite, rather than divide, different creeds. As with the United Irishmen, the movement called for rebellion to create this new Ireland.

These ideas were spread in the weekly journal *The Nation*, established in 1842; by 1843 its circulation was 10,000 with an estimated readership of 250,000 (Bardon 1995, pp. 298-9; Hutchinson, pp. 74-9). The revival of the Irish language featured heavily in these articles, predominately authored by Thomas Davis. Heavily influenced by the writings of Herder and Fichte, Davis argued that the English language was a barrier to Ireland's cultural and political

²⁰ The group eventually came into direct conflict with O'Connell in the 1840s over the relationship with the church, Young Irelanders arguing for a much more secular model of society, and on the issue of the use of military force in achieving reform, with O'Connell and his supporters vehemently opposing the use of military force to achieve change.

revival and independence, and alienated the Irish from their history, culture and independence of thought (Penet 2007, p. 438). The language programme advocated in these writings was nonetheless pragmatic, arguing more for bilingualism than whole-scale eradication of English, due to the requirements of trade.

The famine that struck Ireland in 1845, and subsequent crop failures until 1851, took the momentum from the Young Irelanders' movement. Their attempted armed rising in spring 1848 gained little support from a peasantry weakened by starvation, disease and eviction (Hutchinson 1987, pp. 95-110; Bardon 1995, pp. 280-300; Mac Giolla Chríost 2005, pp. 101-107). The famine also had massive implications for the everyday use of Irish. Almost one million people died, and another million emigrated in the famine, amounting to a total loss of a quarter of Ireland's population (Geber 2015). By 1851, 1.2 million had emigrated in 5 years (Bardon 1995, p. 308). This mass emigration and mass mortality disproportionately affected the south and west of the country, those areas where Irish was strongest and had continued to be the main language of everyday life. As these Irish-speaking communities disintegrated, the language declined as an everyday vernacular. Post-famine population movements resulted in the further depopulation of those areas where Irish language networks and communities had been strongest (Guinnane 1997; Doyle 2015, pp. 124-7; FitzGerald 2003). Many Irish speakers also moved to the towns within Ireland, rather than to Britain, America or Canada, and the language did not thrive in urban English-dominated environments. The sum result of these various factors was the breakdown of Irish-speaking communities in Ireland on a massive scale and a dramatic decline in the use of Irish (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005, p. 101). The famine and its aftermath had an impact too on the perception of the language; it 'confirmed a relationship between the Irish language and poverty, in all its meanings. The English language was a fateful necessity for progress in Ireland and in all likely destinations of emigration' (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005, pp. 100-1; see also Hindley 1991, pp. 14-18). By the end of the nineteenth century, Irish speakers

composed less than 20% of the population of Ireland, and Irish ceased to be the community language across most of Ireland, remaining as the majority language only in a few small pockets of the now sparsely-populated western seaboard (Mac Giolla Chríost 2005, pp. 107; Filluppa 2002, pp. 10-11) .

3.2.5 Home rule, independence and cultural nationalism: social division and language in the late nineteenth century

The famine took away the momentum from both revival and rebellion and largely ended the use of Irish as an everyday language, but the social agitation and desire for social and political reform in Ireland, and visions of a more independent Ireland and sense of cultural difference from Britain endured. The legacy of anger and hostility engendered by the British government's handling of the famine bolstered arguments that Britain was incapable of governing Ireland in the interests of its population. As everyday life in Ireland stabilised following the famine, radical social and political reform returned to the political agenda, and a mass movement towards Home Rule and Irish independence emerged in Ireland.

Revolutionary nationalism and attempted armed rebellion reemerged in Ireland, and also in the large Irish diasporas in Britain and North America, in the new forms of the Fenian movement, the Irish Republican Brotherhood and *Clan na Gael*. During the same period, with no political majority, Irish MPs, needed to form a majority, gained greater power and leverage in Westminster. The result of both this unrest and the need to appease Irish politicians was the introduction of various economic, social and political reforms in Ireland by the British government, including significant voting and land reform and the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland, moves which began to dismantle the control of the long dominant control Anglican ascendancy. In this context of social and political change calls for further radical social and political reform gained momentum and political nationalism emerged as a series of organised, influential and formidable political movements. The Home Government Association was officially formed in Dublin in May

1870, and returned its first Home Rule MP, a Donegal Protestant minister and ex-Conservative MP, in Limerick in 1871. A small coalition of Irish MPs formed around this first Home Rule MP and began to campaign for reform in Parliament. By 1874, the Home Rule movement returned fifty-nine MPs to Westminster. The movement was not religiously exclusive, including Anglicans and conservatives whose traditional allegiance to the British state had been undermined by the disestablishment of the Church, liberals seeking further land and voting reform, and nationalists of various persuasions, whether followers of O'Connell, Young Ireland or the Fenians (Bardon 1992, pp. 353-4; Hutchinson 1987, pp. 114-115).

The issue was nonetheless divisive, particularly in the protestant-dominated North, and as the Home Rule movement tended towards more radical politics in the face of failed social reforms in the 1870s and 1880s, there was a move towards social division and violence along the traditional fault lines of religion. The threat of separation from Britain's industrial powerhouse, and the prospect of a Catholic-dominated country, rendered Home Rule a deeply unsettling prospect for many Protestants, who rallied around the Orange Order and anti-home rule writers and politicians to defend the existing social order. As the Orange Order mobilised in large demonstrations and marches, Nationalist sentiment, largely supported by Catholics, also became increasingly popular and visible, and inter-communal tensions and sectarian violence increased, and were especially fierce in Derry and Belfast. More radical politics saw more polarisation along ethnic lines, with liberal Protestants starting to withdraw their support for the Liberal and Home Rule MPs behind the reform campaigns, voting instead for Conservatives, who were supported by, and increasingly intertwined with, the Orange Order. Catholics meanwhile started to draw away from the politics of the Liberals towards the more radical politics of the Home Rule party. Sectarian tensions were inflamed by demonstrations by the Orange Order and counter demonstrations by nationalists. In the 1885 election the Liberals, who for years had

attracted support from a variety of backgrounds, failed to win any seats in the north: Home Rule MPs, all Catholic, took seventeen seats and Conservatives, sponsored by the Orange Order and composed entirely of Protestant politicians, sixteen (Bardon 1992, pp. 352-372).

With another narrow margin between Conservatives and Liberals in Westminster, Irish MPs once again became the deciding factor in the crucial balance of power, the Conservatives allying themselves with anti-Home-Rule MPs and the Liberals with nationalist and Home Rule MPs. Home Rule was offered by the Liberals in return for the support of the Irish Parliamentary Party in 1886, the Conservatives mobilising to defeat this development, leaning on the Orange Order to rally support amongst Ulster Protestants and organising mass meetings in opposition to the reform. The Home Rule Bill was defeated in the face of last minute vacillation by some Liberals who feared that concessions in Ireland would be the start of a disintegration of the whole Empire. The response within Ireland was rioting and sectarian violence in Belfast, and as social division along religious lines became increasingly entrenched, protestant groups began to organise for military resistance (Bardon 1992, pp. 373-5).

The issue rumbled on throughout the 1880s and 1890s, as Westminster swung between conservative governments, who sought to subdue Ireland through concessions and reform, and Liberals offering Home Rule in return for Nationalist political support (Bardon 1992, pp. 400-413). Political nationalism began to lose momentum in light of these concessions and governmental vacillations, and began to face increasing problems with internal division along pro- and anti-Parnell, and radical and revolutionary, lines (Bardon 1992, pp. 422-443).

In this context of faltering political nationalism, Irish language and culture, thus far absent from the political agenda, acquired new significance. Still on the decline as an everyday vernacular, and still retaining connotations of poverty, interest in the Irish language had been limited in the later parts of the century, both in academic contexts and within political

nationalism and Irish independence movements. The scholarly 'Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language' was founded in 1876 but was only a small group; only with the establishment of the Gaelic League by Eoin MacNeill in 1893 did the revival movement began to grow beyond elite academic interest. Notably the Gaelic League, as indeed with the wider political movement and early Home Rule movement, took in a range of political and religious backgrounds and ideologies, united by a view that the rehabilitation of Irish identity, history and language could bring a new future to a troubled and divided Ireland.

The writings emanating from the Gaelic League for the first time placed the Irish language at the very heart of a vision of an independent Ireland. The League argued that the Irish language, at this point predominately spoken by the half a million peasants in the rural west, was a crucial element in building an autonomous Gaelic culture and nation clearly distinct from English values, culture and society. The Irish language was presented as the route to a revival of 'Gaelic' or 'Celtic' consciousness and recovering 'Gaelic' or 'Celtic' customs including sports, music, storytelling, crafts, dress and social and political life. MacNeill conceived of language in romantic terms as the roots of nation, arguing in his historical writings on the Celts that it was language and religion that had united disparate peoples and cultures into a single, cohesive nation during Ireland's early medieval Christian 'golden age'. This vision of past and future was built around a binary comparison of Ireland and Britain: spiritual versus secular, rural versus industrial, romantic versus utilitarian, small-scale versus mass production, and so on. It was echoed in the romantic and heroic writings of the Anglo-Irish literary movement, which sought to create Irish literature, arts and poetry fusing English language and styles with Irish idioms, localisms, and everyday life (Hutchinson 1987, pp. 117-123, Bardon 1992, pp. 419-23; Dolan 2015, pp. 177-193).

The United Irish League, founded in 1898 as a Nationalist party specifically focussing on land rights, was also influential in articulating new narratives of the Irish Language and Irish

language revival during this period. Founded in a period in which the Gaelic League and political nationalism were both facing internal divisions and ruptures, the League, in focussing on land issues, successfully attracted support from across the religious and political spectrum, in the North harnessing the resentments of Presbyterian farmers, and by 1902 the League had grown to 1230 branches (Bardon 1992, pp. 415-7; Bull 1988, 2003; Murray 1993). The league's journal, *The United Irishman*, established by Arthur Griffiths in 1898, placed language and literary revival movements and cultural nationalism at the heart of arguments for, and visions of, Irish independence. As in previous visions of Gaelic revival, this vision was built around a desire for Irish self-reliance and independence from Britain and British political, social and cultural influences, presenting cultural issues as central to the process of creating a new Ireland and reconciliation between creeds. Griffith played an increasingly central role in the Gaelic League, organising separatist campaigns to oppose actions and activities seen as hindering or opposing the development of Gaelic Ireland, with language issues being central; this included campaigning against education and local authority bodies that did not prioritise the Irish language or support Irish language in appointments (Hutchinson 1987, pp. 168-80).

While the Gaelic League, the Anglo-Irish literary movement and the United Irish League argued that loyalty to the nation, rather than birth or origin, was the key requisite of belonging within the nation, MacNeill and much of the language movement nonetheless included religious in their vision of Ireland's future. In their writings, early medieval Irish Christianity was seen as a golden era and they argued that religious revival must, as in previous centuries, be part of national revival (Hutchinson 1987, pp. 119-127, 130-7). The Catholic Church played a powerful role in the Gaelic League from the 1890s onwards and began to include Gaelic Studies and the Irish language in priest training, church-led education and academic journals. The establishment of a Catholic national university (NUI) in 1908 provided further opportunities for the promotion of the Irish language and key

leaders of the revival movement were appointed to chairs in Celtic Studies. The Irish language thus began to acquire greater prestige and social value and as Irish Studies thus became part of standard education for a generation of Catholic community leaders began to reach, both directly and indirectly, a far wider and more diverse audience than ever before.

However, although the involvement of the Catholic Church and the writings of influential figures such as D. P. Moran contributed towards the rising popularity of the Gaelic League and swelled both membership and participation in Irish language activities, this association 'gave an increasingly ethnocentric colouring to the revival' (Hutchinson 1987 p. 140; see also pp. 137-41). While there were differences of opinion within the Gaelic League on the issue of religion, and the Catholic Church did not support the League across the board, narratives that were not just separatist, but also explicitly Catholic became increasingly prominent in the movement from the turn of the century. Moran's journal *The Leader*, established in 1900, was popular and influential, swelling membership of the League, but in contrast to Griffiths' writings, explicitly anti-English and explicitly Catholic (Hutchinson 1987, pp. 174-87; see also Murray 1993). Whereas both Griffiths' newly established Nationalist party, Sinn Féin (established 1905), and the United Irish League explicitly promoted conciliation between creeds in their visions of Ireland and Irishness, Moran's writings were openly hostile towards Protestantism and anything seen to be associated with it (Hutchinson 1987, pp. 240-249; Dolan 2015, pp. 163-5). Increasingly there was less space for religious diversity within the movement. Plunkett, leader of the Irish Co-operative movement and a Protestant and a former Unionist MP, had been at the centre of Protestant support for the League and a vocal supporter of the Irish language revival, but was vociferously attacked by Moran and Griffiths and thus became alienated from the activities of the League in 1904 following his publication of *Ireland in the New Century*, a political manifesto, which, while resonating with many of the League's and Griffiths' ideas, was highly critical of the key institutions in society, including the Catholic Church. Plunkett and Douglas Hyde, Protestant leader of the League

until 1915, sought to distance the movement from the Catholic Church by linking its activities with the wider Celtic movements in Scotland, Wales and Europe. However, separatist and vehemently anti-British elements in the League blocked these attempts. Although various groups sought to establish more inclusive spaces within both political and cultural nationalism in the following years²¹, the trend towards separation continued as nationalism increasingly came to be seen to be as anti-Protestant and promoting Catholic ascendancy (Hutchinson 1987, pp. 168-80; Dolan 2015, pp. 206-9).

While this period saw language become increasingly perceived as associated with Catholicism, and ethnocentric nationalism, it also saw a massive growth in the popularity and prestige of the Irish language, and its use in a wider spectrum of domains in everyday life. Griffith's and Moran's journals and campaigns contributed to the rapid growth in membership of the Gaelic League, which grew from 120 branches in 1900 to 985 branches and an estimated 75,000 members in 1906, most of which were in towns and cities. The League effectively campaigned to embed Irish language education in schools and in economic and business life, from which the language had for several centuries been absent. By 1906, Irish language education had been introduced into the curriculum of 553 of the 8602 National Schools, and 36 schools had commenced a new bilingual education programme. During this period Irish gained prestige and status, making it popular in

²¹ In the north-east, and in Belfast especially, the spirit of non-sectarian politics remained important, and in 1905 the Dungannon Club was founded to provide a focus of radical but non-sectarian politics. The Club sought to revive radical Republican ideals and in 1907 allied itself with Sinn Féin, gaining the support of Clan na Gael in its plans to launch an armed revolution for Irish independence. The labour movement and socialist politics which emerged in the 1907 Belfast dock strike also provided an opportunity for non-sectarian solidarity and co-operation with solidarity between Catholic and Protestant workers, and between the British and Irish labour movements, with British unions coming to the aid of the Irish unions in the Dublin Lockout of 1913. However, the growth of the labour movement challenged existing hierarchies and power structures across the spectrum, and took away some momentum from the Gaelic League, the Catholic revival and the Nationalist and Unionist movements which were developing in the context of the Home Rule crisis. The Catholic Church, Moran, Griffith and others in the revival movement declared socialism to be part of creeping Anglicisation and the spread of English morality, and a danger to the liberating prospects of Irish industrialisation and independence. Following the collapse of the labour movement by 1914, the temporary period of unity dissolved and sectarian tensions returned (Bardon 1992 pp.424-37).

respected secondary and higher education establishments, and by 1910 Irish was being taught in 1613 National Schools (Ó Buachalla 1984, p. 84). In 1908 the League campaigned to make Irish a compulsory entrance qualification for the new National University, and in winning this campaign successfully defeated both the church hierarchy and the Irish Parliamentary Party. The League threw its support behind a variety of associated causes, including co-operative agricultural groups, and education and public reform campaigns that prioritised the Irish language and training for self-sufficiency. It was also heavily involved in the cultivation and institutionalisation of symbolic and cultural events, succeeding in making St Patrick's Day a national holiday in 1903 (Hutchinson 1987, pp. 168-80).

As Home Rule once again returned to the parliamentary agenda in 1909 and 1910, sectarian tensions increased, and political, cultural and social boundaries hardened. The Ancient Order of Hibernians, organised as a mirror body to the Orange Order, had sixty thousand members by 1909 and was especially strong in the north-east of the island. Sectarian tensions and rioting in the north, particularly in Belfast and Derry, grew increasingly intense, with clashes between organisations such as the Hibernians and the Orange order, as well as localised violence on the streets and at public events and sporting occasions. The Liberals returned to government in 1910 with a majority that relied heavily on the Irish Parliamentary Party, rendering Home Rule seemingly inevitable. These developments caused rising alarm amongst Protestants and preparations to resist Home Rule escalated. The Ulster Unionists prepared for armed resistance from 1910 onwards, secretly sourcing arms and beginning military training. Under the leadership of Carson and Craig, popular campaigns commenced to resist Home Rule through mass demonstrations and parliamentary agitation. The introduction of a new Home Rule Bill to parliament in April 1912 raised tensions even further, and in September 1912 Carson organised the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant, a mass demonstration against Home Rule, whereby those opposed - almost exclusively Protestant and largely residents of the north-east and Dublin - gathered to sign the

declaration which promised to use ‘all means necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule parliament in Ireland’ (Bardon 1992, p. 437). The Home Rule Bill progressed in parliament in the following months, and in January 1913 the Unionist Council officially founded the armed Ulster Volunteer Force to resist Home Rule. The Irish Citizen Army, initially established during the Dublin labour battles in 1913, was reformed as the Irish Volunteers, with the aim of defending Irish independence. The Gaelic League, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the Hibernians, some labour activists and Home Rule politicians and campaigners aligned themselves with the Irish Volunteers, thus increasingly rendering a divide within society in which culture, national aspirations, politic ideologies and social issues were organised in two oppositional groups (Dolan 2015, pp. 206-14; Bardon 1992, pp. 440-445).

3.3 Irish language in everyday life in the early twentieth century

This period saw increasing sectarian violence, and social and political division along religious lines, while the rhetorical organisation of Irish language campaigns and movements became highly politicized, polarised and ethnically exclusive. However, the census data for 1905 and 1911, which are available in their complete, rather than summarised, form and thus open to detailed statistical analysis, tell different, more complex, stories about Irish speaking as an everyday practice (National Archives of Ireland 2009). While the political rhetoric and writings found in the media, politics and social and cultural campaigns of the time suggest ‘the mass of Ulster Protestants’ were ‘repelled’ by the move towards reviving Irish-speaking and Gaelic culture (Bardon 1992, p. 422) and that Irish-speaking was an almost exclusively Catholic practice, analysis of the 1911 Census suggests that the ‘religious divide’ in Irish speaking was considerably more complex²².

²²The raw 1911 census data for Ireland are publically available from the National Archives of Ireland (National Archives of Ireland 2009) and reports are available from the Online Historical Population Reports archive (University of Essex 2007). The 1911 census data include the names, address, religion, marital status, number of children, literacy, occupation, illnesses and Irish language skills of the whole

These data are of course imperfect; in both 1905 and 1911 the census return form stated:

‘Write the word 'Irish' in this column opposite the name of each person who speaks Irish only, and the words 'Irish and English' opposite the names of those who can speak both languages.’(National Archives of Ireland 2009)

How this was interpreted by the enumerator or reporting individual of course is likely to have varied, and under-and over- reporting for political or social reasons or simply differing perceptions and categorisations seems likely. However, taken at face value, the 1911 census data suggest that the patterns of Irish speaking ability or use across the population of the north of Ireland were more complex than the political narrative suggests. Whereas the 2011 census data (NISRA 2013), shows that approximately 10.8 per cent of the Northern Irish population reported having Irish language skills, of whom 92.6 per cent identified as Catholic, in 1911 2.8 per cent of the population of the six counties reported Irish, of whom 32 per cent were Protestant.

Looking in more detail at the specifics of Irish language ability reported in the 1911 census highlights further complexities. As noted above, the census classified individuals as having ‘Irish only’ or ‘Irish and English’. Assuming the census forms were correctly filled in according to this principle, the total Irish-only speaking population amounted to 6,915 individuals out of a total of 35,243 individuals with Irish. Monoglot speakers thus account for 19.6 per cent of the total population reporting Irish language ability or use in 1911. Protestant speakers

Irish population. Data were collected by an enumerator for a particular area and are topographically divided into townlands/streets, District Electoral Divisions (DEDs) and counties. Data from the six counties which form modern Northern Ireland were downloaded and form the basis of the analysis in this thesis. The 1911 census data are available online transcribed from the original documents and as such there is an extensive degree of variation in the exact wording used by respondents in relation to religion, occupation and literacy, and it was necessary to reduce and re-categorise these data before they could be analysed. There was thus necessarily a degree of interpretation required and correspondingly a potential for error in the data. For example, a considerable number of individuals listed their religion as ‘Catholic’, which is assumed to represent ‘Roman Catholic’, but as the Church of Ireland at times describes itself as ‘Catholic’, there is a slim, if unlikely, potential for error in this respect. I amalgamated and analysed the data using Excel and the statistics programme SPSS.

are, however, significantly over-represented among monoglots, with Presbyterians forming 46.4 per cent of this category, Church of Ireland/Church of England 33 per cent, 'other Protestants' 15 per cent and Roman Catholics only 5.8 per cent. Correspondingly, among the population reported as bilingual, Catholics are over-represented, composing 82 per cent of the group (see Tables 3.1 and 3.2).

Level of Irish reported	Anglican/Church of Ireland	Other religion	Protestant (other than Presbyterian or Anglican)	Presbyterian	Catholic	Total
Speaks both Irish and English	1994	1	872	2235	23226	28328
Speaks Irish only	2248	0	1058	3206	403	6915
Total	4242	1	1930	5441	23629	35243

Table 3.1 Numbers reporting skills in Irish in the 6 counties in 1911 by religion

Irish speakers by religious group (%)	Anglican/Church of Ireland	Other religion	Protestant (other than Presbyterian or Anglican)	Presbyterian	Catholic
% of those reporting Irish only	32.5%	0.0%	15.3%	46.4%	5.8%
% of those reporting Irish and English	7.0%	0.0%	3.1%	7.9%	82.0%
% of total reporting Irish skills	12.0%	0.0%	5.5%	15.4%	67.0%

Table 3.2 Religious composition of Irish speakers

Breaking the data down by county highlights further complexities. Firstly, there are differences in the numbers reporting Irish skills across the six counties, with Antrim and Down having the largest numbers reporting Irish skills, accounting for 25.5% and 30% respectively of the total population reporting Irish language skills across the six counties. In terms of reported language patterns, whereas in Antrim and Fermanagh, no respondents report speaking Irish only, in Down over half those reporting Irish skills reported only speaking Irish, rather than English and Irish (see Table 3.3).

Language skills by county (total number)	Antrim	Armagh	Down	Fermanagh	Londonderry	Tyrone	TOTAL
Speaks both English and Irish	8982	2555	4735	1349	3737	6970	28328
Speaks Irish only	0	685	5849	0	214	167	6915
Speaks Irish (Irish or Irish and English)	8982	3240	10584	1349	3951	7137	35243
Language skills by county (as %)							
Speaks both English and Irish as % total English and Irish speakers	25.48%	9.02%	30.03%	3.82%	11.21%	20.25%	100%
Speaks Irish only as % total Irish speakers	0%	9.91%	84.58%	0%	3.095%	2.42%	100%
Speaks Irish (Irish or Irish and English) as % total Irish speakers)	25.49%	9.19%	30.03%	3.83%	11.21%	20.25%	100%

Table 3.3 Total numbers of Irish speakers by skills for each county as raw numbers and % of total

Breaking the data down further to include religion as well as county shows that there are more complexities still; as seen in Table 3.4, in with the exception of Down, the majority of the population reporting Irish language skills are Catholic, and in Fermanagh, Tyrone and Londonderry almost all are Catholic. However, in Antrim Protestants form almost a third of the Irish speaking population (31.6%), and in Down they constitute over two thirds of the Irish speaking population (69.2%).

Religious composition of Irish speakers by county	Antrim	Armagh	Down	Fermanagh	Londonderry	Tyrone
Protestant (all sects except Presbyterian) % of Irish speaking population in county	17.7%	10.6%	34%	2.6%	3.9%	2%
Roman Catholic % of Irish speaking population in county	68.5%	38.1%	30.8%	91%	90.8%	96.8%
Presbyterian % of Irish speaking population in county	13.9%	2.6%	35.2%	6.4%	5.3%	1.2%

Table 3.4 Religious proportions of those reporting skills in Irish in the 6 counties in 1911, as a percentage of the Irish speakers in each county

Examining the data further by county, religion and reported language skills highlights additional complexities in the composition of the total Irish speaking population of the region. Across all six counties, with the exception of Tyrone, Catholics form a minority of those reporting Irish-only language skills, and Armagh and Down Catholics account for less than ten per cent of those reporting Irish-only (Table 3.5).

It must of course be considered that these data might represent variation in reporting practices, but taken at face value they indicate that Irish-speaking in 1911 was much more

complex than a simple religious divide, with geographical differences, and differences between monoglot and bilingual speakers.

Religious composition of Irish only speakers by county	Antrim	Armagh	Down	Fermanagh	Londonderry	Tyrone	TOTAL
Protestant (all sects except Presbyterian) % of Irish only speaking population in county	0%	9.1%	4%	0%	21%	46%	5.8%
Roman Catholic % of Irish only speaking population in county	0%	15.8%	50.2%	0%	53.7%	28.1%	46.4%
Presbyterian % of Irish only speaking population in county	0%	75.2%	45.7%	0%	25.2%	25.9%	47.8%

Table 3.5 Religious composition of those reporting Irish only in the 6 counties in 1911, as a percentage of the county population

Anecdotal evidence in my own research supported the suggestion from the census data that significant numbers of Protestants had knowledge or experience of Irish during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with participants from Protestant backgrounds reporting that their grandparents had Irish to varying degrees, in some cases fluently or even in one case as their only language. In Derry, where in-migration from Donegal swelled the population throughout the nineteenth century, this is by no means necessarily surprising or unfeasible; the Ordnance Survey Memoir for Glencolmkille in 1835-6, an area where Irish remains the main community language today, stated that ‘all the inhabitants speak Irish. All the Protestants and some of the Roman Catholics speak the English language’, indicating

that, just a few generations before the 1911 Census was taken, Irish speaking amongst Protestants was the norm in some communities (Day and McWilliams 1997, p.64-5).

Thus both the census and anecdotal data suggest that the situation regarding the Irish language was considerably more complex than the perception created by the political rhetoric and campaigns of the same period. How Irish manifested in the everyday, what command of the language the population had, whether and how the language was used in everyday life, how the language was perceived on an everyday level and how the language was presented in political rhetoric, were not necessarily uniform. Indeed, the complexities of the relationship between politics and Irish should also not be overlooked; the slogan '*Erin Go Bragh*' (Ireland forever) was used by Unionist political groupings as late as 1892 (Walker 2004, p. 13). While the language clearly gained new prestige and roles in everyday life and government, and was increasingly represented in ethnicised terms in narratives of Irish and the Irish language revival movement (Doyle 2015, p. 215-272), the patterns in who used the Irish language in everyday life, and in what contexts, seems to have been more complex.

Anecdotal, documentary evidence and wider academic research likewise suggests that although this Gaelic revival saw the status of the language rise, and widened the contexts in which it was used, everyday perceptions and use of the language did not always match the changing political rhetoric or public representations of Irish. In my own fieldwork, participants reported that whatever esteem and privilege the Irish language gained at some levels, it retained connotations of poverty and social immobility for their grandparents and parents, with English remaining the priority in the world of work and commerce, and the Irish language accordingly remaining in a position of low prestige on an everyday level (Hindley 1991, pp. 15, 148; Crowley, 2005 p. 6). While political rhetoric and writings are perhaps the most visible and colourful narratives about and representations of the situation of the Irish language in this period, and are the resources often most frequently available to

those studying or narrating the past, they do not represent the whole story nor necessarily reflect the complexities and nuances of everyday practice, the potential for differences in experience and perception engendered by geographical, individual, class, age, gender, occupation and other differences in life experience, much of which is not recorded (Crowley 2004, p. 6; Mac Giolla Chríost 2002b, p. 285). The glimpses of everyday life recorded in oral and folk history and narratives, census data, and contemporary documentation all suggest the population of Irish-language speakers was more diverse than historical characterisations and dominant representations sometimes allow, and incorporated individuals from a range of religious and political backgrounds (Mac Giolla Chríost 2002, p. 434).

Nonetheless, by the early twentieth century the trajectory towards increasing social division involved politics, religion, and culture, and the relationship between the Irish language and political conflict and social division was becoming entrenched. As social division and movements towards radical social reform erupted into the rebellion and violent conflict that led to Partition in 1921, and again as violent conflict erupted within Northern Ireland in the late 1960s, these social divisions and alignments between politics, religion and culture continued to harden with major implications for participation in, and perceptions of, the Irish language. These developments and the contemporary situation as regards the Irish language in Northern Ireland are the subject of the next chapter.

4. The Irish language in Northern Ireland: contemporary developments

As the last chapter demonstrated, while entrenched social division, an alignment between social division, politics, culture and use of the Irish language, had emerged and begun to crystallise by the early twentieth century, the situation nonetheless remained complex and fluid. However, social, political and cultural division, well underway at the time of the 1911 census, accelerated rapidly during the subsequent two decades. The new states of Ireland and Northern Ireland pursued different cultural language agendas, contrasting political and social aims, and, to varying degrees, professed explicitly ethnic agendas and visions.

The political and economic structures instituted by the Northern Ireland state created the conditions for ever greater social division and inequality, which eventually erupted into the 40 years of violence known as 'the Troubles' in 1969. This period saw the hardening of both social divisions and of the alignments between cultural forms and social division, generally and with respect to the Irish language. The Irish language declined as an everyday language and a learnt language, and participation became increasingly polarised along ethnic lines. Revival in the later part of the twentieth century was strongly associated with the Republican movement and politics: there was a massive increase in participation and use of Irish, but also an entrenchment of the relationship between the language and ethno-cultural politics and social division.

There is, however, complexity even within this trajectory: the social divisions within the Irish language community have never been total, and participation in, and perceptions of, the Irish language continue to change and broaden. Over the course of the twentieth century there have been attempts, still ongoing, to separate the Irish language from politics. Using the Irish language, or learning the Irish language cannot, even for those involved in Republican politics, be understood as only about politics in the sense of party and

constitutional politics or the 'armed struggle'. It is important to look beyond political and media rhetoric when considering the complexities of the language's historical development, its recent and contemporary development, and its everyday uses. Although the Irish language has become strongly involved in oppositional politics, and continues to be a major issue within Northern Irish politics, this is not the whole story.

4.1 The Irish language in Northern Ireland from partition to peace process

Partition, first suggested in September 1913, was itself built on an explicitly ethnicised model of nationality, a 'two nation theory' which conceived the social division in Ireland as the natural product of Ireland of the population's separate origins as Celts and Saxons, naturally endowed with different values, religions and attributes. Faced with the unrest in Ireland, and with war brewing in Europe, the exclusion of Antrim, Down, Armagh and Londonderry from Home Rule emerged as the government's preferred solution (Bardon 1992, pp. 441-51). Nationalists vehemently opposed this solution, especially in the north where Catholics faced the prospect of becoming a minority in a Protestant and Unionist-dominated Ulster. In May 1914, the Home Rule Bill cleared the Commons and simply required royal approval to become law, but the outbreak of World War One changed the political situation drastically. Home Rule was suspended, and both Home Rule and anti-Home Rule campaigners saw the situation as an opportunity to advance their argument and both committed their volunteers to the British cause. The war effort brought considerable prosperity to the north, and, after several decades of agitation, a brief interlude of peace and good relations (Bardon 1992, pp. 448-56).

As the war dragged on however, radical revolutionary politics began to emerge, led by Nationalists wary of Britain's intentions and frustrated by the lack of progress. The attempted rising of Easter 1916 failed to achieve significant change, but the clear majority won by Nationalist MPs in the December 1918 elections encouraged more effective resistance, the Irish MPs declaring an Irish Free State. Bloody warfare ensued: the British

state and army, and in the north the returning Ulster Volunteer Force, attempted to regain control in Ireland as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) fought for Ireland's independence. The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 brought this war of independence to an end, with the partition of Ireland. The largely Protestant northern counties of Antrim, Down, Fermanagh, Tyrone, Armagh and Londonderry remained within the UK, with devolved government, and the twenty-six remaining counties became the Irish Free Irish (Bardon 1992, pp. 349-463; Ruane and Todd 1995, pp. 34-48). Partition brought civil war between pro- and anti-treaty forces in Ireland, but by 1923 the pro-treaty forces had largely won out, and by 1925 partition was completed.

Partition created two new states with oppositional cultural agendas and projects of identity creation. The new Northern Ireland was established as a Unionist, and explicitly protestant, dominated region; in the words of its first prime minister, the new Northern Ireland parliament was to be 'a Protestant government' which 'should carry on the administration according to Protestant ideals and Protestant desires' (Bardon 1992, pp. 538, 543). This new state was 'unambiguously and unashamedly sectarian' (Ruane and Todd 1996, p. 121), with institutionalised discrimination against Catholics in employment, housing allocation, social welfare, and economic development. The gerrymandering of election boundaries and the abolition of proportional representation increasingly eradicated nationalist or Catholic political representation and power in local, regional and national government (Bardon 1992, pp. 448-56; Hutchinson 1987, pp. 184-91; Dworkin 2012, p. 242). The new Irish Free State, meanwhile, began a process of identity production in which the Gaelic revival and the Catholic Church were central and the promotion, revival and reform of the Irish language placed at the heart of the state building project. Irish became the official first language of the state and a compulsory school subject. As the Irish Free State sought to rediscover a Gaelic past and reinstate Gaelic language and culture into the heart of society, the new Northern Ireland government actively distanced itself from, and excluded, those cultural

forms identified or associated with Irishness, nationalism, Catholicism or the new Irish state. Instead it actively promoted a new 'British' and Unionist Northern Ireland culture, with the twelfth of July and other loyal order marches becoming 'quasi-state' activities (Rolston 1992, p. ii).

The hostility from the Northern Ireland government towards cultural forms identified with Irishness included vehement opposition to the Irish language, and attempts were made to exclude the use of the language from public life, particularly in education. On taking over education in the region in February 1922, the new Ministry of Education undertook a full scale review of language policy, and put in place measures to limit the provision of bilingual schooling in Irish-speaking areas, provision of Irish as a school subject, and teacher education for Irish-language education. The Minister was clear that there was no place for Irish in the new state: 'there is no need for one Organiser of Irish Language Instruction. What do we want with the Irish language here? There is no need for it at all' (Arts and Humanities Data Project 2016a, pp. 520-1).

The ensuing political struggle for the preservation of the Irish language in education was fractured along traditional sectarian lines, reinforcing the existing associations of the Irish language with Catholicism and Nationalism. An alliance of the small number of Nationalist MPs, Irish language educators and supporters, and the Catholic church, financed by Dublin, began a non-recognition campaign against the Ministry of Education to protect the 'religious and cultural identity of Nationalists' and 'Irish language and Irish cultural identity' in the education system (Pritchard 1991, p. 90). Over eleven months, 700 teachers and a third of Catholic controlled primary schools were involved, boycotting examinations and relations with the education department. However, the campaign ended when political and financial support from Dublin was withdrawn and the campaigners were threatened with legal action. The resulting settlement included only limited gains for campaigners; the Irish language

could be taught in primary schools, as an alternative to history, and at secondary school as an optional subject, but with only very limited funding available (Pritchard 1991, p. 91).

The 1921-1961 records of Stormont debates reveal this hostility towards the Irish language at governmental level. It was presented as backward, irrelevant, nationalist, unworthy of the modern empire, foreign to Northern Ireland, and unimportant economically and socially. In the narratives of the earlier debates the relationship between the Irish language and the new southern state was seen as rendering the Irish language an unacceptable cultural form for the new Northern Ireland²³. Whilst Nationalist MPs made ongoing attempts to campaign for funding and support for the Irish language on the grounds of economic, historical and social value, including arguments around its utility in accessing employment in Ireland, its historical value the fact that place names were in Irish, and that Irish was used simply for the love of the language rather than political reasons²⁴, this was largely to no avail. There were however notable exceptions to the hostility shown by Unionist MPs; in 1932, McNeill, Independent Unionist for Queens University, made representations for the Irish language and its historical, social and cultural value to all communities. The response to McNeill's speech was, however, wholly negative, with claims that 'in this country the teaching of Irish has been largely a matter of political propaganda, and of disloyal propaganda at that' (Arts and Humanities Data Project 2016f, p. 913; 2016g, p. 165; 2016k, p. 466; 2016l, p. 780). The idea that the Irish language was totally unacceptable to the Unionist population, and to most people in Northern Ireland, was largely left unchallenged: 'If I was to go up the Shankill

²³ Arts and Humanities Data Project 2016b, p. 663; 2016c, pp. 773, 918, 959, 1076; 2016d, pp. 631, 694, 773-4; 2016e, p. 619; 2016f, p. 318; 2016g, p. 376, 2016h, pp. 450-2; 2016i, pp. 1603-6; 2016j, p. 1881

²⁴ Campbell, Nationalist MP for Belfast Central, was particularly vocal in support of the Irish language, annually asking about and campaigning for funded Irish education, and took exception repeatedly to Irish being classed as a 'foreign language' (an idea generally rejected by Unionists). He also was particularly active in comparing Irish, and its offensiveness and lack of provision, to the Welsh language and how it was managed in England. Conlan (1945 and 1946) made speeches for the inclusion of Irish within the debates, again highlighting Irish as the culture of all, part of the history of the land, worth preserving on antiquarian grounds and as part of the cultural wealth of all (Arts and Humanities Data Project 2016f, p318; 2016g, p376).

Road and said I was going to learn Irish I would be excommunicated. I would be chased. It would be looked upon as a terrible crime if I were to learn Irish. Yet this very loyal Government are against the wishes of the people, spending money, about 90 per cent, of the inhabitants of Northern Ireland are opposed to the Irish language' (Hendersen, Independent Unionist MP for Belfast Shankill. Arts and Humanities Data Project 2016c, p. 959). A narrative of the Irish language as dangerously nationalist, foreign, disloyal and irrelevant to Northern Ireland, and an aversion toward supporting, or even permitting, the use of the Irish language, continued the dominant standpoint from the Unionist dominated assembly in the assembly debates of the following decades.

The partition of Ireland thus created a new Northern Ireland in which perceptions of separate and divided cultures were assumed, normalised and entrenched at the level of political and media representation, and in policy and legislation. It is of course harder to assess the actual level of impact this had on the Irish language in everyday life during this period, particularly as the partition of Ireland in 1921 ended the practice of collecting data on the Irish language in Northern Ireland. Reports on Irish language education figures in Stormont debates highlight that a large number of schools continued to offer the Irish language and a few thousand children a year continued to study Irish up to a higher level; in 1933, 10,602 pupils across 140 public elementary schools were learning Irish, with 3732 pupils entering Irish as a subject for the secondary school certificate. In 1935 and 1936, figures remained largely similar, and in 1943, 12,021 students were learning Irish at public elementary schools with 30 secondary schools also offering the subject at secondary level (Arts and Humanities Data Project 2016d, p. 631; 2016e, p. 619; 2016k, pp. 335, 446; 2016l, p. 780; 2016m, p. 677). The political and ethnic composition of the population of those learning Irish, with Irish skills or using Irish, and perceptions of Irish on an everyday level, is harder to access.

The specific history of the Irish language in Derry in this period, including some of these points, is discussed in more detail in later chapter, but a few important points can be made about the wider story of Irish outside the political realm here. Firstly, the use of, and interest in, the language was in overall decline across the region, and the final few native speakers passed away during this period (An Carn, nd). Secondly, while there was vocal support for the Irish language from individuals from a Catholic backgrounds or associated in Republican politics, and conversely the language was largely represented in negative terms within Unionist politics, this division as regards support and participation was not total nor without nuance. There was no large-scale Republican or nationalist political movement in support of the Irish language, and the Catholic Church's relationship with Irish was variable. Some Protestants and Unionists, such as the MP MacNeil, quoted above, were supportive of the language. In Belfast, *Cumann Chluain Ard*, a branch of *Comhaltas Uladh* established in Belfast in 1938, was explicitly non-affiliated with the Church and attracted a broad cross-spectrum of individuals to its Irish language activities and events. While a minority, various individuals in this period, such as Cathal McCrystal, were vocal in their criticism of cultural and ethnic exclusivity as regards the Irish language and argued for new approaches to the Irish language which highlighted to Protestants that the language was part of a shared heritage. In 1953 the branch actively sought to distance itself from politics and religion and articulate this separatist stance (Mac Poilin, 2006, pp. 130-5). Recollections from participants in my own fieldwork, while recalling a tendency towards division, also highlighted that knowledge of, or interest in, the Irish language was not as ethnically clear cut as political debate represented it to be. Various participants from Protestant backgrounds talked about either their own or family members' interests in, and knowledge of, the Irish language during this period, and likewise individuals from Catholic and Republican backgrounds told stories of a lack of interest in, and negative perceptions of, the

Irish language within their own families, the Catholic education system and the Catholic church.

The new state created the conditions for increasing social division, with discrimination against Catholics in politics, housing and employment, as well as with respect to cultural issues, becoming institutionalised and systematic. These conditions encouraged increasing residential, educational and workplace segregation, and sectarian violence and rioting continued to be part of everyday urban life (Bell 1990, pp.82-84). The gerrymandering of political boundaries in order to maintain Unionist political dominance took place across the region, most obviously in Derry, where although sixty per cent of the population was Catholic, nationalist and Catholic political representation was minimal. House allocation practices also limited Catholic franchise, as well as compounding problems of over-crowding and poor living conditions in Catholic areas.²⁵

In the early 1960s a 'civil rights' movement emerged, to campaign against such practices, calling for reform in housing and voting rights, free speech, boundary reform, fair employment practices and the repeal of the Special Powers Act (Bardon 1992, pp. 638-656). This movement was presented as a dangerous Republican and communist campaign by Unionist politicians, fuelled by the vehement rhetoric of the Reverend Ian Paisley and claims by Unionist politician William Craig that the movement was 'in fact, a Republican front' associated 'with the IRA and communism', creating fear amongst the Protestant population and exacerbating inter-communal tensions (quoted in Bardon 1992, p. 655). As campaigns for reform gained momentum, so too did violent opposition sparked by 'a genuine and understandable fear of losing a relatively prosperous lifestyle' amongst those who benefited from this system (Jenkins 2008b, p. 101). In August 1968 and January 1969 Loyalist mobs

²⁵ The preference for allocating houses to protestants, and building new homes in protestant areas, suppressed the number of Catholic rate-payers, and thus the number of Catholics eligible to vote in local elections was disproportionate to the proportion of Catholics in the local population.

rallied to attack Civil Rights marches, and the almost exclusively Protestant police did little to prevent attack on unarmed Civil Rights marchers in Derry in October 1968, and the invasion of the Catholic Bogside area in Derry in January 1969. The twelfth of August 1969 marked a breaking point, as clashes between marchers and Bogside residents at the annual Apprentice Boys of Derry parade developed into two days of intense fighting between the police and residents in 'the battle of the Bogside'. The partisan and sectarian actions of the police and state prompted Catholics to riot across Northern Ireland in the following days, and Loyalist groups rallied in opposition. A Loyalist mob attacked the Catholic Lower Falls area in Belfast on the fourteenth of August, supported by the part-time B-specials police, destroying 400 homes and causing the death of six people. Inter-communal violence continued and by the end of August 1969, 10 people had died, 154 had been non-fatally shot, 745 injured and 300 affected by CS gas poisoning. By the end of September, 3500 families, mostly Catholic, had fled their homes (Bardon 1992, pp. 651-670; Ruane and Todd 1996, pp. 126-9). This period marks what is generally seen as the beginning of 'the Troubles'.

Alarmed by the rapidly deteriorating situation in Northern Ireland, the British government intervened, sending troops into the region to keep the peace and prevent further violence. Although initially welcomed, relationships between the British troops and Catholic community quickly deteriorated in the face of harassment, intimidation, rough treatment and use of CS gas and rubber bullets. Disproportionally directed at Catholic communities, such action came to be seen as a continued regime of British oppression, and armed resistance began to be organised. The IRA reformed in December 1969, initially for the purposes of community defense and policing, but by July 1970 it had a new aim of undertaking armed resistance to the Northern State and British control over Ireland. Guerrilla warfare aimed at British troops and police and a devastating bombing campaign was met with loyalist violence, and a British military campaign directed at the IRA. This violent three-way conflict between Loyalist paramilitary groups, which had begun to form in

the late 1960s, Republican paramilitary groups, and the British state, resulted in killings, violence and increasing sectarian division and polarisation of communities locked in a cycle of retaliatory attacks and counter-attacks. Internment without trial was introduced in 1971 and was directed overwhelmingly against Catholics/Nationalists, leading to thousands of men being rounded up and interned in poor condition prison camps. Violent interrogation and inhumane treatment of suspects, the Bloody Sunday events of 1972, when army paratroops opened fire on unarmed protesters in Derry killing 13 and injuring many more, the introduction of juryless 'Diplock courts' in 1973, the deaths of 11 Republican hunger strikers in 1981, and collusion with Protestant paramilitaries throughout the conflict added to the growing animosity towards the British state among Catholic communities, even those in more liberal areas not traditionally associated with militant Republicanism, and recruitment to Republican paramilitary groups mushroomed (Bardon 1992, pp. 675-686; see also Burton 1978; Sluka 1989).

The escalating violence, deepening social division and residential segregation, and the hardening of social and political boundaries along ethnic lines had massive implications for the development of articulations and representations of identity and culture. This period saw the emergence of ever more pronounced, and ever more clearly demarcated, cultural forms, displays and practices, for example mural painting, marching bands, music, in sport, and in the use of flags and emblems and so on (Burton 1978; Jarman 1998a, 1998b; Rolston 1991, 1992; Sluka 1995). Although the developing conflict disrupted the Irish language and caused some to be wary of speaking it, the new conditions also engendered a renewed sense of political and cultural consciousness and sense of 'Irishness', and with it a renewed interest in the Irish language, particularly in the prisons, internment camps and nationalist communities. The internment camps proved a fertile ground for the growth of political and cultural development and education, and for Irish language education and the development of Irish language networks and activism. Many of those interned, typically teenagers young

men, had little direct experience of Republican politics, neither did they, prior to internment, necessarily have any particular interest in Irish cultural movements and developments. The cages and internment camps organised themselves to provide various educational opportunities, including Irish language education, which encouraged many to learn the Irish language from a baseline of little or no previous experience or interest. In the cages, and later in the H blocks, prisoners developed Gaeltacht sections, where a strict Irish-only policy was maintained and members gained high levels of fluency as Irish became their primary day-to-day language (Mac Ionnrachtaigh 2013, p. 120-129; Mac Giolla Chríost 2012, pp. 16-7).

The growth of Irish 'on the inside' took place on a scale and level of organisation that was leagues ahead of developments outside the prison. Prisoners actively advertised these developments, and encouraged the wider community to replicate them. As one of Mac Ionntaraigh's participants put it, 'we wanted our families and friends to realise that the language wasn't some abstract, academic thing that was impossible to learn but something practical and relevant and could be learnt if you put the effort in' (Mac Ionnrachtaigh 2013, p. 125). Many prisoners, particularly Bobby Sands, were vocal in encouraging the public to support projects like the Shaw's Road Gaeltacht project. Although many in the wider community had been sympathetic to Irish, and interested in it some degree, the development within the jails led to rising popularity of Irish outside of jail in the wider Nationalist and republican community, and acted as a catalyst which converted sympathy and interest into active participation, learning and language activism (Mac Giolla Chríost 2006, 2012, pp. 110-71).

Republican prisoners and campaigners were vocal in their support of the Shaw's Road Gaeltacht project, and the growth of the Irish language during this period was highly influenced by Republican policies and by the activism of Republican prisoners, yet this was

not the only influence in the changing fortunes of the language. Nor was the movement towards the promotion of the Irish language simply political in the constitutional or anti-Loyalist sense. The Shaw's Road project emerged in the 1960s from a group of young couples who had met at the *Cumman Chluian Ard* centre in west Belfast, which maintained an actively non-political and non-sectarian stance. The project aimed to create an urban Gaeltacht, and focused on creating an environment in which their children could be raised through Irish. Building began in 1968, and was completed in 1969 with the support of the Christian brothers, *Comhaltas Uladh*²⁶ and wider Irish language groups. In 1971 a primary school was founded, and by 1976 there were 11 families living in the new urban Gaeltacht at Shaw's Road. The group had also begun to develop the Anderstown newspaper into a widely-circulating media outlet, with a strong emphasis on featuring Irish language articles and Irish language promotion (Zenker 2013, pp. 104-7; Maguire 1991, pp. 57-83).

The British government's policy of criminalisation, and the break-up of the cages, severely impacted Irish language organisation within the prisons, breaking up the educational structures the prisoners had thus far established. By the late 1970s, however, the H blocks had developed an extensive Irish language teaching programme and Irish-speaking community. The events of the blanket and hunger strikes between 1976 and 1981 had a massive impact on the Republican movement: both inside and outside the jails there was a movement towards a more political strategy, commencing with the election of Bobby Sands as MP in 1981. On the inside there was a movement towards engagement with the formal education opportunities available in the prisons, with the idea that self-education would help the wider struggle and political work on release. The Republican prisoners formally entered the prison education system in 1983, with many prisoners completing formal Irish

²⁶ The Ulster branch of *Conradh na Gaeilge*, founded 1926.

education exams, eighty-six gaining an Irish O-Level in the first year (Mac Ionraigh 2014, p. 133, p. 153; Nig Uidhir 2006).

The movement toward formal education, and the achievement of formal Irish language qualifications, had an important impact on developments outside the prisons, laying the foundations for a new generation of activists and educators. Formal qualifications 'gave a lot of confidence to people who had no qualifications before and motivated them to continue with the cultural struggle on the outside' (Mac Ionraigh 2013, p. 152; also Mac Giolla Chríost 2012, pp. 43-5). Participation in Irish language learning outside the jails also grew in the context of these developments: 'the hunger strike changed everything...before this there was a section of the Nationalist community that was always in favour of the language, but there was another fairly big section that was not interested in it at all ... there was always sympathy for the language but now people wanted to do something about that sympathy' (Mac Ionraigh 2013, p. 157). Prior to the hunger strikes there had been a significant section within the Republican movement who believed that 'the Irish language had nothing to do with the revolution because it was a remnant of old Nationalism or Hibernianism and that 'only stuck up people spoke Irish' (Mac Ionraigh 2013, p. 159).

The revival of interest in Irish on a large scale, the significant increase in number of Irish speakers, and development of Irish language education in the 1970s, thus owed much to Republican politics and the heightened sense of identity and cultural division that emerged during the conflict. Republican politics and identity were not the sole motivating factor in developments or widening participation, as the Shaw's road case highlights, but were nonetheless highly significant and influential in widening participation in Irish language use and education. The 1980s saw renewed attempts to widen the associations of the Irish language away from politics, to bring the Irish language more into the sphere of the

everyday and everyday use and material culture, to bring together the disparate Irish language groups and approaches into a more cohesive movement, and to widen participation and appeal to a broader audience.

While the association with Republican politics and the hunger strikes had had a massive impact on increasing participation and interest in the Irish language, and raising funds for the language, it had also turned some people away from the language, causing tensions within the Irish language movement. A significant section of the language movement was strongly averse to association with the armed struggle, and frustrated that the association with Republican politics made the movement 'less respectable', less inclusive, or less likely to receive government support and funding. The period however saw the different groups working within the Irish language working together in order to realise major developments in Irish language provision. Campaigns such as the introduction of bilingual street signs and establishing Irish medium schools pulled together Republican activists, those interested in the language for its own sake, more middle-class 'respectable' Irish language groups explicitly separate from republicanism, and the Catholic Church (Mac Ionnrachtaigh 2013, pp. 163-69; Kachuck 1994, pp. 141-50).

In 1982, Sinn Féin formally established a cultural wing and cultural strategy, responding to the renewed interest in Irish, both amongst Republican prisoners and activists, and within the wider community. The *Roinn an Chultúir* (Cultural Department) worked to increase the number of Irish classes across Northern Ireland, seeking to make Irish language lessons accessible, particularly in working-class communities, where confidence in education and attendance in existing classes was low. The Cultural Department also began to campaign for the introduction of Irish into everyday place and everyday activities, seeking to remove the 1948 restrictions on Irish language signage and street signs. These developments brought a new vitality to the movement, and while ideological differences persisted in terms of what

the Irish language was about and how it should be taught and used, they brought disparate groups together into a single cause (Mac Ionraigh 2013, pp. 160-161; Holmhill 1988; Kachuck 1994, pp. 138-41).

The 1980s also saw the emergence of Irish-medium education (IME), a development that, as with the development of Irish language street signs, began to bring the Irish language much more into everyday life and usage. The Irish-medium school established in the Shaw's Road Gaeltacht finally received official recognition in 1979, and state funding in 1984, by which point it had 162 pupils. In 1987 a second primary school was opened in west Belfast, and in 1991 the first Irish-medium secondary school was established. In May 1989 a governmental working group began developing IME curriculum proposals, and similarly 'Irish cultural traditions' began to be considered in policy documents and community relations contexts. While support and provision from the government for Irish medium education still remained extremely limited, from 1990, the British government was starting to make 'well-publicised gestures to indicate that it was receptive to political pressure from the Nationalist community on the language question', initiating hopes of much more expansive governmental support for the Irish language (Pritchard 1991, p. 91; see also Zenker 2013, pp. 105-115). These periods saw the funding of a few Irish language projects by the government in an active attempt to promote the Irish language outside of the context of Republican politics, and the legalisation of Irish language street signs in 1995 (Zenker 2013, p. 115; Kachuck 1994, pp. 145-9).

From the 1980s attempts to improve community relations and break down social divisions began to become more prominent as political actors involved in Ireland began to look towards finding a political solution to Northern Ireland's troubles and to begin initiating a process of peace building within wider society. Within this context, there were further active attempts were made to break down perceptions of the Irish language as associated

solely with republicanism or nationalism, or solely as the preserve of the Catholic community. While much of the movement across Northern Ireland towards broadening participation in Irish was focused on the Nationalist community, there was also a movement towards improving cross-community inclusion in the Irish language in the 1980s and 1990s. In the eyes of many Unionists, as indeed in the eyes of some members of the Nationalist community, the association of the Irish language with the Catholic Church, Nationalist politics, the Irish republic, and the IRA and Republican politics, had rendered it as a political tool or weapon, something to be feared (McCoy 2006; Pritchard 2004). A series of projects in which Loyalist ex-prisoners and Unionists learnt Irish throughout the 1980s and 1990s, while not sparking a mass movement, laid the foundations for later developments, most notably the development of Irish language classes in east Belfast in recent years by Linda Irvine (Mac Giolla Chríost 2000; Ferguson 2014).

4.2 The Irish language in contemporary politics and everyday life

The Peace Process negotiations in the 1990s and the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 officially brought an end to the armed conflict, although movement towards stable political structures and the end of social division and tension continues to be the subject of on-going negotiation. Issues around culture, and debates around identity and equality, have been at the fore of these negotiations. In a situation in which culture has become so strongly associated with violence and division, managing cultural forms has proved as troublesome as negotiations around political structures and constitutional futures. Social division, and assumptions about the alignments between social division and culture and identity issues, have to a large degree remained structuring norms. The Good Friday Agreement and subsequent community relations policies have made major contributions to establishing a peaceful and less divided society in Northern Ireland, but the 'political settlement is constructed on the principle of equal but separate, not integration' (McGlynn 2011, p. 70; see also Mitchell 2014). The policy outcomes in many ways sustain and perpetuate the

everyday reality and importance of this divide, creating a 'benign apartheid' in Northern Irish society (Mitchell 2014; Nolan 2013, 2015; Morrow 2015). Despite the general commitment to the idea of a 'shared future', what equality, a 'shared future' or 'parity of esteem' actually mean or look like has yet to be agreed, and the idea of 'integration' is often viewed with suspicion by politicians, groups and individuals, wary of how 'integration' might lead to the loss of 'their' culture or its assimilation to that of 'the other' (Nolan 2013). Politically, debates around culture and resources regularly turn into zero-sum 'them and us' debates. Support or promotion for any 'community' or 'tradition' often prompts calls for a 'matched' or 'equal' application to the 'other community', is seen as infringing on the privileges of the other community, or, at the most extreme, descends into accusations of 'cultural war' (e.g. Hansard 2013a, 2013b, 2014).

The Irish language, at a political level, has remained to a large degree bound up with these assumptions of division, difference and 'cultural warfare', in ways that have made the introduction of policy or action on Irish language development almost impossible to introduce, and have rendered Irish language issues a volatile topic in both regional and local politics. At the outset of the Peace Process negotiations, the Irish language had, despite ongoing attempts to broaden participation and challenge the association of the language as entrenched in republican politics, was associated with nationalism and Republicanism and participation in the learning or use of the language was strongly divided. As explored in earlier chapters, language issues, and particularly the Irish language, and the development of Ulster Scots as its Unionist counterpart, subsequently emerged as a key issue in the creation of a new Northern Ireland and the development of shared politics and society.

The Good Friday Agreement put a commitment to the Irish language in Northern Ireland into law for the first time, although largely in terms of aspirations, goodwill and the suggestion of further policy development, rather than immediate action or policy change. The parties

resolved to 'recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities' (Northern Ireland Office 1998, p. 24). Unable to negotiate more concrete agreement between the parties on linguistic issues, the actual orientation of policy was only vaguely articulated. There was a suggestion that the British government 'in the context of active consideration currently being given to the UK signing the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages' would 'in particular in relation to the Irish language, where appropriate and where people so desire it' 'take resolute action to promote the language' including facilitating the use of Irish in everyday life, removing restrictions to 'the maintenance or development of the language', 'place a statutory duty on the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate Irish medium education' and explore support for expanding the availability of Irish language media (*ibid.* p.24). How these commitments would affect the Assembly however were left undefined – the British Government simply resolved to 'encourage the parties to secure agreement that this commitment will be sustained by a new Assembly in a way which takes account of the desires and sensitivities of the community' (*ibid.*). The UK signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in March 2001. Irish was registered under Parts II and III of the charter, committing the government to providing for the use of Irish in a variety of spheres of public life, and encouraging the availability of Irish language resources, activities, organisations, as well as to support the promotion and protection of the language (Northern Ireland Human rights Commission 2010; Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister 2005).

The St Andrews Agreement in 2006 sought to flesh out the skeletal legislation of the Good Friday Agreement, but again resolution was not found among Northern Ireland political parties on the issue of the Irish language. Instead it fell to the British Government to make concrete promises to act on the issue. The main body of the Agreement signed by all parties

was limited in its legislation on the Irish language issue, simply committing to bringing forward a strategy for Irish and Ulster Scots, without any specifics on what this might involve:

15. Strategies relating to Irish language and Ulster Scots language etc

After section 28C of the 1998 Act insert—

“28D Strategies relating to Irish language and Ulster Scots language etc

(1) The Executive Committee shall adopt a strategy setting out how it proposes to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language.

(2) The Executive Committee shall adopt a strategy setting out how it proposes to enhance and develop the Ulster Scots language, heritage and culture.

(3) The Executive Committee—

(a) must keep under review each of the strategies; and

(b) may from time to time adopt a new strategy or revise a strategy.
(Great Britain, Northern Ireland [St Andrews Agreement] Act 2006, p. 16)

A subsequent section of the Agreement went further, promising an Irish Language act, but only the British government committed to this action:

‘The [British] Government will introduce an Irish Language Act reflecting on the experience of Wales and Ireland and work with the incoming Executive to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language.’ (Quoted in McEvoy 2014, p. 98)

The issue of the Irish language and the Irish Language Act was thus only partially resolved; the Unionist parties maintained, and continue to maintain, that their agreement to the Act did not commit the Assembly to the introduction of an Irish Language Act, to which they remained firmly opposed.

The British government, still at this stage managing Northern Ireland’s affairs in the absence of a sitting Assembly, announced proposals and a consultation on an Irish Language Act during December 2006 (BBC 2006), but the proposals were rejected by all parties and the

Irish language cast once more into the narrative of a culture war. Amid wider tensions and disputes around policing and justice, Sinn Féin declared that the Act was too weak and promised a 'strong Irish language Act' whilst the Democratic Unionist Party maintained that they had not agreed to an Irish language Act, accusing Sinn Féin of using it as a 'political weapon' and clearly stating that they would not support such a proposal in its proposed forms or any such which would 'ram it [the Irish language] down people's throats' (McEvoy 2014, p. 99). The British Government's extension of the consultation period extended the issue past the point of power transfer back to the Assembly, and thus, effectively, put the Irish language issue back in the hands of Assembly and the new Department of Culture and Leisure (BBC 2007a). Despite the largely positive responses to the consultation, Unionists blocked the introduction of any Irish language legislation in the assembly, and subsequent discussion and action on the issue of the Irish language subsequently became increasingly contentious and oppositional. The main Unionist parties proposed to ban the use of Irish within the Assembly, revoked the use of Irish in health promotion, and campaigned against Irish-medium education (They Work For You 2006, 2007a 2007b, 2007c, 2007d, 2007e; Muller 2010, pp. 127-31).

The issue was prominent in the governmental breakdown of June to November 2008, and again in the negotiations of December 2009 to February 2010, which ended in the Hillsborough castle agreement²⁷. While the Irish language was a key part of discussions, no

²⁷ In the breakdown of government initiated by Ian Paisley's intention to step down as first Minister in June 2008, the Irish language was one of the key sticking points in negotiations to resume government; Gerry Adams and Sinn Féin withdrew from meetings of the Executive until issues of 'the transfer of power on policing and justice and *an acht na Gaeilge* (Irish language Act)' might be resolved (BBC 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2008d, 2008e). After 152 days of stalemate through negotiations and talks facilitated by the British government, the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin finally agreed a deal on policing and justice and the transfer of powers in late November 2008, and normal Assembly business once again resumed (BBC 2008f). However, issues regarding the Irish language, in addition to parading and a community relations strategy, as well as further disputes around policing and justice remained unresolved, and by December 2009 Martin McGuinness was warning of 'full blown crisis' (BBC 2010a). New rounds of negotiations and political upheaval continued until a deal on devolution was finally agreed in February 2010 in the form of the Hillsborough Castle agreement (BBC 2010a). While these talks focused primarily on devolution, attention was given to the other

resolution on the issue was achieved and again no legislation or action points on the subject were included within the final published agreement emerging from the talks. Within the context of Northern Ireland politics, the only policy that could be agreed between the Executive partners was that the Executive should, in due course, develop a policy for Irish, Ulster Scots and regional and minority languages, and the British government instead agreed a separate funding package for the Irish language (McEvoy 2014, pp. 98-100; Nolan 2012 p. 118).

In the years directly preceding my fieldwork, and indeed since, debate around the Irish language has remained a constant fault line during moments of political instability and legislative change has been hard to achieve. Debate in the Assembly and the media around the Irish Language Act, language provision in the public sector, the lack of progress on bringing forward a language strategy, and the use of bilingual traffic signs, continued without resolution or a strategy being brought forward until the end of the Assembly term (BBC 2011; They Work For You 2011a; They Work For You 2010b, Belfast Telegraph 2010; They Work For You 2010c).

Various schemes and measures to encourage Irish language use and development were subsequently introduced, including new consultations for an Irish Language Act and the *Liofa* campaign to promote and develop Irish language fluency during Sinn Féin's Carál Ní Chuilín's period as DCAL minister (Belfast Telegraph 2011, They Work For You 2011b, They Work For You 2011c; McDonald 2011). Attempts to introduce more comprehensive legislation however continued to be unsuccessful (They Work For You 2011d, 2012a). Although language issues were less destabilising in 2012 and 2013, and were not a subject discussed

outstanding issues, including parading, executive functioning and outstanding business from the St Andrews agreement. Once again, though, it fell to the British Government to take immediate action on the Irish Language issue in the context of cross-party talks. In the wake of the failure to agree any Irish language legislation, the government instead agreed a separate package of 20 million pounds for Irish language, and some Ulster Scots, development (McEvoy 2014, pp. 98-100).

in the Stormont Crisis and Hass-O'Sullivan talks of 2012 (They Work For You 2014, Hansard 2012, They Work For You 2012b, They Work For You 2012c, 2012d), by 2014 the Irish language and narratives of 'culture war' had returned to the fore of antagonistic debate. In February 2014 the Orange Order publically criticised the Irish language, warning Protestants away from learning the language and claiming that it was part of the 'Republican agenda' (BBC 2014b). In March, the Irish language became a point of political conflict once again, when the Ulster Unionist Party's councillors walked out of a Down district council meeting in protest against the Irish language presentation which was taking place (BBC 2014c).

During the first few months of my fieldwork, the issue exploded into a major political row following Democratic Unionist Party MLA Gregory Campbell's lampooning of the Irish language in November during minsters' questions by beginning his speech to the house with 'Curry my yoghurt can coca cola', a mocking of the Irish language phrase *go raibh maith agat, Ceann Comhairle* (thank you, speaker), which is regularly used in the house by MLAs, usually from the Nationalist benches. The incident resulted in his barring from speaking in the Assembly for a day, yet the Democratic Unionist Party's position on the issue, and the political tension around the Irish language, continued as Campbell again mocked and criticised the Irish language at the Democratic Unionist Party conference later in the month, making clear the Party's opposition to Irish language promotion and particularly to an Irish language Act (BBC 2014d, 2014e, 2014f). In December, as Irish language groups sought to officially protest against the treatment of the Irish language in Northern Ireland in the wake of media and political debate instigated by Gregory Campbell's comments (BBC2014i, BBC2014j), and with DCAL minister Carál Ní Chuilín announcing her intention to bring an Irish Language Bill to the Assembly in January 2015, commentators began to refer to the Irish language as 'the latest touchstone in Northern Ireland's culture war' (O'Leary 2014). Consultation on an Irish Language Act was launched in February 2015, and although the written responses were overwhelmingly positive, with 95 per cent of the 13,000 responses

being supportive of the Act (They Work For You 2015a, BBC 2015a), within the media and political debate the issue remained highly contentious, with the main Unionist parties maintaining their opposition to the introduction of such an Act. In the same month Gregory Campbell accused Sinn Féin of 'stepping up its culture war' in the wake of consultation by the Education Department on a new 'teaching Irish and aspects of shared heritage' initiative in schools (BBC 2015b). The following month Campbell was barred again from the assembly for two days for disrespecting the use of the Irish language (BBC 2015c).

In the course of the Peace Process, during the period of my fieldwork, and in contemporary politics, the Irish language has thus been an issue at the heart of political debate. As argued thus far in this thesis, it is however important to look beyond the political rhetoric and drama, and also consider the situation through the lens of everyday use and everyday experience of the language. While the events, narratives and representations emerging from politics pervade everyday life and experience, they cannot be taken as representative of whole the situation, or of wider perceptions, experiences or indeed, as highlighted by the 1911 census, patterns of use as regards the Irish language.

Turning to look at the world of the Irish language outside of the arena of high politics, two important points must be made. Firstly, there have been successful efforts to break down perceived boundaries and exclusiveness within the Irish language, resulting in significant change in participation in learning and using Irish in some areas of Northern Ireland.

Secondly, the Irish language is an everyday language of communication and everyday tasks for increasing numbers of people in Northern Ireland, its use not wholly reducible to politics, identity enactment or boundary marking.

Turning to the first point, while political debate and rhetoric point to continued antagonism and entrenched ethnic divides with respect to perceptions and use of the Irish language, this is not representative of wider developments taking place 'on the ground'. In recent years,

perceived boundaries around participation in learning and using Irish, and the political or ethnic alignments of the Irish language, have been challenged, and patterns of participation have begun to change. A series of developments, including the growth of the Irish language in Protestant east Belfast (BBC 2012), marked a positive shift in the changing perceptions and role of Irish in everyday life. Since 2012 Irish language classes have taken place in East Belfast, an area normally seen as a 'Protestant' or 'Loyalist' heartland, a development organised by Linda Ervine, wife of the former leader of the Progressive Unionist Party David Ervine, who identifies the Irish language as an important part of Protestant history and heritage. Linda Ervine has become a vocal public figure in challenging dominant ideas not only about the Irish language, but also about the boundaries between Irish and Ulster-Scots and 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' symbols, heritage narratives and culture more generally, regularly taking to social and mainstream media to make statements such as 'I refuse to play the game of those who use language/culture as a tool of conflict. Irish, Scots Gaelic, Ulster Scots are part of my heritage' (Twitter 2014). In 2014, the popularity of Linda Ervine's Irish language classes in East Belfast had become such that a new Irish language centre was opened in the East Belfast Mission to meet the increased demand, marking an important milestone in the widening participation in, and changing perceptions of, the Irish language (BBC 2014a). During the time of my fieldwork, I made a series of trips to the centre, which at the time was hosting daily or twice daily classes catering to a range of learner abilities, as well as offering Irish language singing classes, events and social activities, and organising trips to the Gaeltacht. The classes I observed were well attended with between fifteen and twenty students in each, from a range of backgrounds in terms of community, residential area, political orientation and prior exposure to the language. At the time of writing the centre was offering twelve classes a week including conversation, reading, singing and exam preparation classes. Similar initiatives and attempts to widen participation in Irish have also been undertaken in Derry and with smaller groups across Northern Ireland.

Of course, the opinions expressed by the most vocal Unionist and Loyalist politicians are not representative of the wider protestant population, or indeed even of wider opinions in Unionist politics, just as the opinions expressed by Republican and nationalist politicians are not always representative of the opinions of the wider communities or groups with which they are aligned. Activists within the Progressive Unionist Party, a small unionist party aligned with loyalist and working-class politics, have been vocal in supporting the Irish Language and encouraging Unionist ownership of the language as part of 'their non exclusive yet rich culture' (Meban 2012). Other Unionist politicians, for example MLA Basil McCrea, of the Ulster Unionist and subsequently NI21 party, have also been supportive of Irish language development (Schrank 2013). In both cases these calls for support recognise that Irish has been used for political reasons yet also argue that this is not all there is to be said on the matter, and support the possibility that the associations of the Irish language can develop and change, promoting visions of protestant participation in Irish as both positive and not contrary to a 'protestant identity' or culture. Individual learners of the Irish language from protestant and Unionist backgrounds have sought to explain how their interest in the language is not political or culturally dissonant, but rather about wider interests and factors, such as maps and place-names (Waldie 2017). As prominent unionist language activist and educator Ian Malcolm argues, to learn Irish is also about the connection with Northern Ireland and the everyday life of the region;

'The Irish language is a beautiful thing, which sets us in Northern Ireland apart as a people. Our surnames, our place-names and even the way in which we use English in our own special way differentiate us from our neighbours on these islands without diminishing anyone's Britishness...What really interests my students is what I call "living Irish" - that's the language that's around us all in our everyday lives' (Malcolm 2014).

These statements and explanations arise in the context of actively attempting to counter views of the language as sectarian, from those with a particular interest in the use or learning of the Irish language. Of course, what is less frequently documented, if at all, in media or politics, are the views or everyday narratives of those who are disinterested, apathetic or not particularly engaged in the issue. Anecdotal evidence from my fieldwork suggests that this is not an insignificant proportion of the population, both amongst those identifying as Catholic or Nationalist and those identifying as Protestant or Unionist. While for activists, users, politicians and commentators the language may be a major issue for discussion and negotiation, it must be remembered that there is also a population, both nationalist and unionist, for whom the issue may rarely be a subject of interest, notice or strong emotional response. For others, while there is a level of interest, notice and emotional response, in the cut and thrust of everyday life and managing the multitude of other tasks and challenges, the Irish language is not a pressing or consuming concern.

Contrary to the proclamations of 'culture war' by some unionist politicians, and the fierce debate at Stormont during the time of my fieldwork, everyday conversations with protestants during my fieldwork rarely involved the expression of such volatile emotions and outrage. There were many who were undecided, disinterested or apathetic about Irish or its role in Northern Ireland's future. There were people with no particularly strong objection, but a lack of interest in the language; there were some who disapproved of Unionist politicians' handling of the issue and vacillation on Irish language projects, but did not take the issue any further than passing conversation; there were sometimes expressions of curiosity and interest in the language with no impetus to take action, and so on. Similarly I encountered disinterest, apathy and disconnection from the language among Catholics; some, while not actively against the Irish language, had little interest in it; some expressed that they felt actively disconnected from, or were negative towards, the language and its use;

some that had a mild interest in its use and promotion when asked but felt no particular need to take action on it.

On an everyday level, therefore, the intense conflict and drama around the Irish language in the media and politics can feel a long way away from the everyday interactions, discussions and interests. And this not only applies to those with no particular interest in the language, but also those for whom the Irish language is highly important. As with those other elements of culture and practices that have become bound up with social division and conflict, such as sport, marching bands, and festivals and celebrations, these issues are perhaps most prominently discussed and seen in the domains of party politics, in media discussions of crisis and division, or academic explorations of conflict and post conflict. They are issues that often come to the fore and gain exceptional importance in moments of political conflict and are incorporated into displays and experiences of social division. However, the Irish language, as with wider cultural repertoires, lives in the everyday, is a practice of the everyday, is made and enacted in everyday interaction and routines, in the lives of individuals and groups, and is intertwined with wider everyday life, lived experience, social relationships and domains beyond the Political (with a capital P), or sectarian division. These domains, while undoubtedly permeating and informing experiences 'on the ground' can also feel disconnected and distant from everyday experience and relationships to the language.

Of particular importance to note in this regard is that, as was stressed in the first two chapters, while language is bound up with ideas about groups and social boundaries and national identities, it is also a medium of communication, something not simply used to 'make a point', 'perform' a particular identity, or enact social change as regards Politics or nationhood. The Irish language is no exception; it is used as part of everyday communication and interaction to achieve everyday ends which cannot be reduced to the politics of culture, identity or social division. On one end of the spectrum, while English remains the primary

language in Northern Ireland, a small, but growing population use Irish as their main language at home, at school, and, as the number of Irish medium services grows, in social and work life. Through projects such as the Shaw's road Gaeltacht, and with the growth of Irish medium education, a growing number of people have been, and continue to be, raised primarily in Irish.

The scale and extent of Irish use in the everyday across Northern Ireland is not easily ascertained. While Irish language skills and use are included in both the census and *Continuous Household Survey* in Northern Ireland, responses rely on self-assessment of skills and self-reporting, and are limited by the framing and nature of the questions asked. The statistics thus do not give a nuanced picture of the Irish language in Northern Ireland, although they do provide a broad-brush snapshot of the linguistic landscape. The 2011 census reported that 4,130 people in Northern Ireland (0.24% of the population) considered Irish to be their primary/first language, 184,898 people (10.7% of the population) reported that they had some skills in Irish, and 104,943 people (7% of the population) reported that they could speak Irish (NISRA 2013).

The Continuous Household Survey (CHS), although based on a smaller sample, rather than a total census, asks a series of similar, and more nuanced questions, about Irish use in Northern Ireland, as well as providing a snapshot of change over time and recent developments. The CHS suggests that the population learning or using Irish continues to grow. In 2012-13 the survey reported that 13% of the population had some knowledge of Irish, which had risen to 15% by 2013-2014 and remained at 15% by 2015-16²⁸. The survey includes more information on the extent to which this knowledge of Irish converts into

²⁸ The survey includes more complex questions as regards what 'understand' Irish might mean. In 2013-14 it reported that 1 per cent of the population 'can understand complicated spoken sentences, so could understand programmes in Irish on the radio or television' and 2 per cent 'can understand a conversation in Irish conducted at a simple level so, for example, could understand directions given in the street', 3 per cent 'can understand simple spoken sentences or passages, e.g. 'It's half past three'' and 6 per cent 'can understand single spoken words or simple phrases, e.g. 'Hello' or 'How are you?'. (CHS 2014. P7)

everyday use; in 2013-14 it reported that almost a quarter of those reporting some knowledge of Irish reported they 'use Irish at home at least occasionally', while more than a quarter (27 per cent) 'use Irish socially' (CHS 2015 p. 11). In 2015 the proportion of those with some knowledge of Irish using Irish at home and socially ('to converse with friends or acquaintances') had risen to 28 per cent and 29 per cent respectively (CHS 2016 p. 9). In both 2013-4 and 2015-16 the survey concluded that approximately four per cent of the population as a whole used Irish at home and socially (CHS 2014 p. 11; CHS 2016 p. 9). Thus the survey suggests that there is a small, but not insignificant, proportion of the population for whom the Irish language forms part of everyday interactions and everyday communication.

As the CHS highlights, the Irish language is used in social and recreational settings, more so perhaps than it does in the domestic domain. While a growing number of children are raised in Irish, Northern Ireland remains an English-speaking area, and the vast majority of Irish speakers learn the language as a second language. While some of this learning takes place at home, or in formal education settings such as University, much of it takes place in adult education settings. In this regard the act of learning the language is a recreational, and often social activity, as much a hobby or interest as learning any other skill or second language. Across Northern Ireland many of these educational settings activity also offer a variety of social and recreational activities and resources, whether in organising trips to the Gaeltacht, in organising social nights, gigs, dancing, workshops, and café, food and bar facilities, particularly in the larger centres such as the *Cultúrlann* and *Conradh na Gaeilge* and *Turas* in Belfast, in the *Cultúrlann* in Derry, or in clubs and societies at University level. The act of learning or using a language is as much about having fun, a hobby, about enjoying speaking the language or about socialising, as is about politics or identity, whatever the initial impetus for learning may be. On the reverse side of the coin, it can be noted that for various individuals, the Irish language is the reverse, simply a compulsory chore enforced as part of

the school curriculum in which they found, or indeed find, very little joy or attachment, a mundane necessity rather than an active or intentionally performative activity.

A final point must be made when considering the role of the Irish language in Northern Ireland. The Politics of the language, with an active capital P, are not simply those of green and orange or Stormont division and conflict resolution; the Irish language is also highly bound up in the politics of minority languages. While the politics of minority languages and constitutional and ethnic politics in Northern Ireland are intertwined, the issue of minority language rights is both an important emergent feature of Irish language issues in Northern Ireland and a significant feature in wider international minority language politics and negotiations. Turning first to the international dimension, as touched on above, the Irish language was entered onto the register of EU Minority Languages in 2001, thus committing the United Kingdom government to various steps to protect and promote the language. The failure of the Executive to reach a shared and workable position on the Irish language has subsequently attracted criticism from both EU bodies, and from human rights bodies within the UK.

In May 2010, the Committee of Experts, the EU body responsible for reporting on regional and minority languages, condemned the Assembly for failing to meet its obligations under the EU charter for minority languages, concluding that 'the languages seem to have become hostages to party politics' (Council of Europe 2010, p. 58). The Committee's 2010 monitoring report, which took evidence from a variety of NGOs and conducted on-the-spot checks, declared most of the responsibilities of the Northern Ireland Executive only partially fulfilled, noting that 'many of the positive developments detected in the last monitoring round seem to have been put on hold or even reduced in many areas' (Council of Europe 2010, p. 58). Amid on-going Assembly debate on the issue, in June 2010 the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission also published a highly critical report on the state of

minority language rights in Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission 2009), and in correspondence with the Minister for Culture Arts and Leisure in August 2010 argued that the department's position was non-compliant with human rights legislation (They Work For You 2010b).

The lack of progress on introducing Irish language legislation continued to draw both international and internal criticism, on the basis of human rights, in the years following the first EU report. Both the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the EU Committee of Experts published critical reports in January 2014 (BBC 2014b). In each case, the Executive was criticised for failing to act on the vast majority of recommendations that had been made during the previous monitoring round and for the lack of legislative action or political compromise, both bodies concluding that political stalemate was a serious barrier to progress (Council of Europe 2014, pp. 5, 36).

The narrative and framework of human rights and minority language issues has subsequently become a major element of Irish language campaigns within Northern Ireland. In spring 2016, the Irish language campaign group *Conradh na Gaeilge* (CnG) launched a legal challenge to the Executive for failing to implement the Irish language strategy published in January 2015, and was granted a judicial review on 31 May 2016 (BBC 2016a, 2016b). In July 2016, the decision by the new Democratic Unionist Party Department of Education minister Peter Weir to withdraw funding allocated by the previous minister to Irish-medium nurture units at two schools in June 2016 (BBC 2016c) was overturned on the grounds of human rights violation, after Irish language groups mounted legal challenges (BBC 2016d). In March 2017 a high court judge ruled that the executive's failure to implement an Irish language Act was unlawful (BBC 2017g). Both campaign groups and politicians in favour of the Irish Language Act have frequently drawn upon the framework of 'minority language rights' to support their cause. The campaign group '*An Dream Dearg*'

(the Red Movement) was established in January 2017 to protest against cuts and restrictions on the Irish language, echoing the series of '*Dearg le Fearg*' ('Red with Anger') rallies which had sporadically taken place in previous years to protest about Irish language issues. The group launched a social media campaign, encouraging Facebook users to change their profile picture to *An Dream Dearg* with the status 'I have changed my profile picture to a symbol Gaels have agreed upon to show our opposition and disgust at the Democratic Unionist Party's attack on the Irish language. *Dearg le fearg!*' (Derry Now 2017). By the twelfth of January, more than 12000 users had changed their profile picture accordingly (Irish News 2017). The movement's organisers framed the issue in a rights-based narrative: 'In this case we used a red background to represent anger; anger at what has occurred in recent weeks in regards to funding cuts to Líofoa, and also anger at the ongoing discrimination against Irish speakers here'. Significantly, they emphasised the non-sectarian nature of the issue: 'this anger is shared among all traditions here – not just Nationalists, as we are non-political' (Irish News 2017).

Thus while the Irish language has, in the course of long-term historical developments, and the more recent Peace Process and contemporary politics, become intertwined with social and political division and conflict, this is not the full story of the Irish language. Just as with the wider repertoire of activities and symbols and cultural forms which have become prominent in political debate, the language has come to be perceived, and experienced, as part of a framework of oppositional identities and community division that underpin the political system in Northern Ireland and indeed inform much of the lived experience of everyday life. However, just as in the case of the language's historical relationship with politics, and the case of culture more widely in Northern Ireland, the situation is not as simple and clear-cut as the political, media or indeed academic representation sometimes suggests. The Irish language, while bound up with social division, conflict and political debate, and tending towards community division as regards participation, is not simply just

'about' or 'for' politics, and is not exclusively bound up with community or sectarian division. The language has an everyday life and everyday presence, and is intertwined and concerned with a variety of everyday interactions, activities, and emotions. Indeed, as has already been argued in earlier chapters, what any particular expression or act or cultural form 'means' or 'does', at the level of individual perception and interpretation or in particular social interactions, is not static, a fixed thing, but is complex and fluid and changeable. Learning, using or promoting the Irish language cannot be reduced to simple or singular intentions, or to clear linear chains of intention or result, but is emergent, arising in the course of both individual and on-going social interactions, experiences and representations.

The complexities of Irish, how it is used, experienced, perceived and related to on the everyday level, and its emergent meanings are the focus of this thesis. Using long-term ethnography, interviews, documentary and historical analysis I shall explore how the Irish language permeates everyday life, and use the individual narratives and journeys of speakers in order to offer a contribution to wider understandings of the Irish language, and everyday life in Northern Ireland, by shifting the focus and starting point away from the drama of politics and opposition, to the domain of the everyday.

5. Rationale for research

Published academic work specifically focussing on Irish language in Northern Ireland has been largely situated within social policy and politics-oriented frameworks, and has considered issues of language planning, legal status, political debate, social attitudes, resourcing, education and community development. The social policy literature has focussed on legal and policy issues regarding the status and use of the Irish language, the political debate around the Irish language in Northern Ireland, and language planning and development frameworks. Work in this area tends to support its claims with census data and large-scale surveys, and policy and legal documents relating to the political debate in regional, national and international arenas (Muller 2010; Mac Giolla Chríost 1999, 2001, 2005, 2012a; McMonagle 2010; McMonagle and McDermot 2014 Nic Craith 1999, 2000, 2002; McManus 2016; Mac Corraidh 2006; Misteil 2006; Mac Póilin 2010). Socio-historical works using documentary and other forms of historical data to analyse language development and change are also common (Crowley 2000, 2005; Doyle 2015; Mac Corraid 2006). A number of oral and personal account-based social histories have explored the role of the Irish language during the Troubles, particularly looking at prisoner experiences (Mac Giolla Chríost 2012b; Mac Ionnrachtaigh 2013). A small but growing body of work has focused on the Protestant relationships with the Irish language, through examination of historical sources, and policy analysis of contemporary attitude surveys (see Ó Snodaigh 1995; Pritchard 2004; Malcolm 2009; Blaney 1996; McCoy 2006).

These studies have variously explored complexity and change in the role, the impact and the meaning of the Irish language in everyday life in Northern Ireland. However, they have tended to rely on big data and historical and contemporary documentary sources. Studies based on in-depth qualitative interviews and ethnographic data are more limited, particularly those dealing with contemporary experiences and narratives. Ethnographic

works include O'Reilly's 1999 study of the Irish language revival and contemporary context in Belfast (O'Reilly 1999), Zenker's 2013 study on the same topic (Zenker 2013), and Carden's studies of the Gaeltacht quarter development in Belfast (2011 2012, 2017). Other studies based on more detailed and localised qualitative analysis, including in-depth interviews and observational data, include Maguire's 1986 study of the urban Gaeltacht development movement in 1970s Belfast, McCoy's 1997 research into Protestant experiences of learning and using Irish language in Belfast, and studies of the Gaeltacht quarter development by Walsh (2010) and Armstrong (2012). However, these studies tend to share a focus on 'special cases' - the experiences of prisoners, the Gaeltacht, and Protestant communities. In this chapter, I review the existing academic field around this issue, and argue the need for research that focuses on the ordinary everyday presence and experience of Irish in contemporary Northern Ireland.

5.1 The importance of the everyday

The dominance of policy-oriented approaches based on big data and documentary sources from governmental, broadcasting and education bodies, means that the narratives, representations, perspectives and issues of elite bodies, individuals and groups shape how the Irish language is understood, and the conclusions that are drawn about how it figures in Northern Irish society. While these are of course important for understanding the social and political context of the Irish language, such studies provide little insight into how the Irish language figures in everyday life, and if, how and why everyday experiences and perceptions differ from those in the policy and political sphere. As Mac Giolla Chríost argues in his consideration of the contemporary state of the Irish language and assumptions about its use and symbolic value in Northern Ireland, 'a significant problem arises from an uncritical reading of the significance of the Irish language in the socio-cultural landscape of Northern Ireland and in particular from a failure to move beyond the political rhetoric' (Mac Giolla Chríost 2002, p. 284). He argues that:

‘considering the full range of evidence in its broadest context, it appears to be useful to distinguish between the Irish language movement on the one hand, which is politicised to a considerable degree, and the Irish-speaking community on the other, it being a diverse and complex phenomenon which confounds many traditional preconceptions in the region.’ (Mac Giolla Chríost 2002, p. 285)

As argued throughout the thesis thus far, in addition to the importance of recognising – and not over-simplifying - the complex paths of historical and contemporary change, we need to understand the heterogeneity and multiplicity of everyday life; these are essential to understanding the social world of Northern Ireland just as they are in any other. Individual histories and trajectories mean that not everyone experiences and sees practices, performance symbols and so on in the same way, or participates for the same reasons. The political narrative is not always the most important part of an individual’s own narratives about the role of different practices, symbols or activities in their lives, and for some it may have little relevance at all. While the political narrative might be hugely significant in some contexts, division and conflict is not the only organiser of life: individuals live their everyday lives with reference to a whole array of aims, structures and influences, whether love, laundry, jobs, family, getting the dinner on, the shopping in, watching TV, hanging out with mates and so on. Research in Northern Ireland has often tended to focus on division and conflict, but everyday ‘normal’ life of course goes on, and participation in culture is not necessarily or solely in terms of division, but takes place in the context common cultures and practices seen across much of the euro-American world; music, TV, shopping, literature and so on.

Acknowledging the shortcomings of an over-reliance on political and policy-related material, the solution in the social policy literature has been to turn to census statistics and large-scale attitude surveys in order to understand the everyday use and experience of the Irish

language (Mac Giolla Chríost 1998, 2001). Such data provide a useful gauge of the wider picture and context, highlight the complexities of variables such as age, class, geography, perceptions of ethnicity so on, and allow a consideration of some of the complexities of the issues, such as what self-assessment as 'speaking Irish' actually means in these surveys (Nic Craith 1999, pp. 496–497, Mac Giolla Chríost 2000, p. 54, 2001, p. 298). However, this reliance on survey data prioritises questions, issues and frameworks dictated by policy and political priorities; in so doing, it inevitably simplifies complexity in its isolation from the wider context of everyday life and social interaction. This approach means that the Irish language can become overly identified with policy and political debates, framed in terms of the binary categories of Catholic and Protestant, British and Irish, Unionist and Republican so commonly used in surveys and the presentation of survey results, or over-identified with concepts of 'identity' and 'culture' as fixed, *a priori* or 'natural'. Reliance on these data also supports constructions of the use and status of the language as bounded and static enough to be quantified and simplified into numerical and graphical representations. While such 'big picture' accounts are essential to our understanding, and important in campaigning and support for Irish language development, the relative simplicity of these narratives can also reify relationships with Irish as static, bounded, politicised and ethnicised. The analytical frameworks employed in studies that rely on such data tend to begin with reference to theories of nationalism, ethnicity, identity and community relations, assuming that the Irish language is about these issues *a priori*, rather than rooting their analyses in everyday lives and narratives and then, on the basis of that, attempting to understand what the Irish language does and how it operates.

An emphasis on, or over-identification with, community divides as a means to understanding contemporary society and change is often also seen in historical analysis, at times somewhat anachronistically. McGarry and O'Leary (1993), for example, present Irish as a badge of ethnic identity from the earliest period, and as an inherent part of the 'distinctive material

culture and customary norms' of different and often antagonistically opposed 'ethnic communities' (O'Leary and McGarry 1993, p. 60). Statements such as this, or the argument that from the Plantation onwards, language 'marked and maintained' the 'ethnic boundaries' between the 'planters and Gaels' and ensured the perpetuation of two populations 'divided by their language, dialects and political status' (O'Leary and McGarry 1993 p. 60, p. 103), assume the existence, salience and continuity of ethnically-marked identities. However, as chapter three illustrates, this picture does not even correspond to the complexities of the period in question, and its implication of continuity with the present masks the changing conceptions of language, identity and politics across Irish history.

While studies rooted in more detailed qualitative data do pay attention to non-elite voices, and the relationship between the Irish language and the events and complexities of everyday life, there is still however a tendency to use identity, nationalism and culture as the primary framework *for* analysis, rather than as an outcome *of* analysis; their approach from the point of view of community divide leads to a conception of Irish and its usage as static, fixed and bounded. For example, O'Reilly's (2001) chapter entitled 'Irish language, Irish identity: Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in the European union' acknowledges the complexity of the relationship between the Irish language and constitutional and identity politics, but it opens with the statement that 'since the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1169, Irish has been at odds with the language of the invaders' (O'Reilly 2001, p. 78). It thus glosses over the complexities of the linguistic and social worlds of medieval Ireland, and the shifts in boundaries, interactions and mutual influences and which accompanied social change. As chapters two and three outlined, a view of language that reifies it as a fixed 'thing' operating within clearly delineated social divides - here 'native' and 'foreigner' - is open to question. And as the history outlined in chapter three shows, we cannot assume a static relationship between these two imagined realities.

As noted above, much of the qualitative work focuses on 'special cases' and in so doing invites particular frameworks which impact on the nature of the research narrative.

Pritchard's (2004) study of Protestant attitudes towards the language rightly puts forward an argument for a re-imagining of the narrative of the Irish language that acknowledges its social and historical complexities and the importance of Protestant involvement in language development and revival, both historical and contemporary. However, although this work provides a view of the complexity of history, and a powerful argument for some Protestant identification with the language which resonates with the points made in chapter three, Pritchard's argument is constructed within a framework of nationalism, explicitly Fishman's (1971) model of nationalism and language, and the *a priori* identification of the Irish language, and its use, with nationalism and particularly with the politics of division in contemporary Northern Ireland.²⁹ As chapter three shows, this does not tally with a detailed examination of the history of nationalism.

Even Zenker's study, while explicitly focused on the everyday-ness of Irish, and how 'Irish is all around us' in West Belfast, is likewise strongly rooted in a preconceived understanding of the Irish language as being about identity and culture, perhaps because it takes place in the context of the revival of Irish in Belfast, in which such concepts may perhaps have particular salience. The study is specifically framed as being about 'the culture of ethnic identity', and, as Zenker explains in his first chapter, the study emerged from an interest in understanding 'Irishness', and 'representations of Irishness'; 'for this purpose, the Irish language caught my attention' (Zenker 2013, p. 6). Zenker's study is thus explicitly built around a theoretical framework of 'ethnic identity', in which the Irish language is automatically considered a diagnostic of Irish ethnic identity.

²⁹ Pritchard argues that 'by laying claim to the Irish language as a legitimate, historical, cultural heritage, Unionists might help to depoliticise it. It could probably be transformed into a benign element, vitiating the attempts of political opponents to use it for their own political purposes. Embracing a Protestant Gaelic heritage could help dispel the Catholic or Republican image of Irish' (Pritchard 2004, p503)

Carden's studies, in contrast, look at the Irish language from the perspective of place making, and specifically tourism and urban branding in urban development. Carden explores how the Belfast Gaeltacht quarter has developed, its everyday flows and material culture, how the Irish language figures in these everyday flows, and how 'place branding' effects, and is effected by, the Irish language in everyday life. While acknowledging the political side of the language and its relationship with representations and narratives of ethnicity and identity, Carden's study, in focusing specifically on place and space, avoids using abstract ideological concepts such as 'ethnic identity', 'culture', or 'nationalism' as the starting point for analysis. Instead, Carden builds her understanding of how the Irish language figures in everyday life from an examination of the social interactions, processes of representation and material culture within space or place. Her conclusions consequently present a more complex and nuanced understanding of the Irish language than Zenker's. Thus Carden argues that the Irish language is increasingly not about identity or culture or nationalism as ends or aims in themselves, and that its use can on the contrary be banal, quotidian, unthought, and part of utilitarian economic development. In short, it is part of a much wider repertoire of representations and narratives projecting a variety of different meanings and intentions. However, Carden also argues that the desire of speakers and users of Irish to reimagine Irish as something more than politics or 'an emblem of ethnicity', and new formulations of the Irish language as part of conflict transformation and urban regeneration which can be 'a cultural resource for the whole city' (Carden 2017, pp. 251, 236), are themselves political and cannot be divorced from the struggles and politics of the past. Thus Carden sees the re-narrativisation of Irish as not only personal but political, both in the sense of constitutional and ethnic politics, but also wider economic politics. Recording the mundane use of Irish as 'a conscious effort to reformulate the network of meanings associated with the Irish language' in a new narrative of Irish, as 'modern, urban, wealth creating and legitimate' (Carden 2012, p. 62), Carden locates this as part of the wider shift

from ‘the language of ‘struggle’’ and ‘towards the language of ‘rights’ and ‘economic development’’’ in Northern Ireland politics. The old debates simply find a new arena: ‘the apparent unarguable desirability of urban regeneration based on tourist revenue is a new ground on which the validity of national identities within Northern Ireland are performed’ (Carden 2012, p. 61). Thus Carden formulates an argument that both appreciates and highlights change, difference and individual relationships with the Irish language, but simultaneously acknowledges that the Irish language nonetheless ‘never loses its symbolic significance’ (Carden 2017, p. 251).

While Carden’s approach resonates with my own stance in terms of its prioritisation of the everyday, it nonetheless took place within the context of the role of Irish in the political, both in terms of its symbolism and economics, and equally foregrounds analysis in terms of the ‘performance’ of ‘national identities’. My interest became one of attempting to address the gap in the literature in understanding the Irish language in ordinary situations, as part of everyday life and communication, and as something which should not be *a priori* explained through the concepts of ‘identity’ ‘language’ ‘culture’ or ‘politics’ but through how it emerged in everyday life and in individuals’ daily narratives. As I realised very early on in my academic career, in everyday life the somewhat abstract terms of ‘identity’ or ‘culture’ do not necessarily mean anything to anyone, and indeed, in one of my first interviews at masters level I found the question ‘tell me about your identity’ solicited very little information. Likewise, the word ‘culture’ is so nebulous as to have little specific meaning in the ebb and flow of explaining ones everyday life. In Northern Ireland however, these terms have become a shorthand for sectarianism and for politics, carrying with them the connotations of conflict and social division. Of course there is a much more extensive sociological literature which covers ‘identity’ and ‘culture’ and has added much to our understanding of everyday life and social interactions; they are not useless terms, but in my own research, rather than seeking to start out with these problematic terms and an

assumption that they might be helpful in explaining how Irish is experienced in everyday life, I sought to create a much more inductive programme of research which started with participants' everyday lives and everyday words, their stories about themselves, about the language, and about the world around them.

5.2 The case for researching Derry

Despite being Northern Ireland's second city, Derry has been far less extensively researched in general than Belfast. Furthermore, its thriving Irish language community has not yet been extensively explored by Irish language studies, and as such Derry seems an obvious context for an exploration of the Irish language in everyday life. The lack of research concerned with Derry is surprising considering that, compared to Ireland and Northern Ireland as whole regions, and particularly compared to Belfast, it is a place that is economically, socially, culturally, politically distinctive and important. Within the broader picture of Northern Ireland, and Ireland as a whole, Derry is Northern Ireland's second largest settlement, the 4th largest in the island as a whole³⁰, and the main large settlement in the north west of the island³¹. It has occupied an important, and distinctive, role in the economic, social, political and cultural development of Ireland and Northern Ireland both historically and more recently, and has developed a distinct place in the symbolic and cultural imagination of contemporary Northern Ireland; as argued by Bell in 1990, in many ways Derry represents a 'microcosm of political life' in Northern Ireland (Bell 1990, p. 70), and for both communities it has 'a symbolic value that is more like that of Jerusalem, serving as a touchstone for identity and history in ways that are simultaneously sacred and secular' (Cohen 2007, p. 956).

³⁰ Derry City's 2011 population was 83211, compared to Belfast's 280,211, Dublin's 527,612 and Cork's 119,230.

³¹ Northern Ireland's other larger settlements – Newtownabbey, Craigavon, Castlereagh and Bangor which number between 65000 and 55000 respectively, are concentrated in the east of the region. In Ireland Galway (75529), Limerick (57106) and Waterford (46732) are located along the west and south coasts.

Derry sits in the north west of the region directly on the border with Ireland. Initially a Gaelic town, in the 16th century, it was established as English garrison site and was subsequently granted to the City of London Corporation for plantation in the early 17th century. The corporation significantly expanded the town, building city walls, and establishing a community of Scottish and British Protestant farmers, merchants and ex-soldiers within the city, but did little to clear the surrounding hinterland of the native population. From the 17th century onwards, Derry thus became 'the bulwark of British mercantilist domination within a hinterland still overwhelmingly Gaelic and resistant to English rule' (Bell 1990, p. 70). The city became a refuge for fleeing Protestants during the 1641 rebellion and the Williamite wars of 1698, and was besieged from the end of 1698 to July 1698. These events and the narrative of the thirteen apprentice boys of Derry, who in 1698, contrary to orders, shut the gates in the face of the advancing Jacobite army with cries of 'No Surrender!', have led to Derry's key role in Protestant political mythology. The story of the city, and particularly of the apprentice boys, is seen as representative of a wider situation and sense of Protestants being a beleaguered minority defiantly resisting Catholic attack. 'No surrender' became a key slogan of Loyalist paramilitary groups during the Troubles and continues to be referenced by Unionist and Loyalist groups and individuals to this day (Bell 1990; Cohen 2007; McBride 1997). The growing social tensions, and fear of violence or intimidation, led to many Protestants leaving the city during the Troubles, or moving from mixed to 'safer' communities on the east bank of the city, such that by 1991 the Protestant population on the western city side of the river had declined by 31% (Murtagh *et. al.* 2008). This population shift has been represented in Unionist political narratives as systematic 'ethnic cleansing' perpetrated by Republican and Nationalist groups (Londonderry Sentinel 2009) and, like the Siege of Derry, has become 'symbolic of the whole of the Protestant experience in Ireland' in Unionist/Loyalist political mythology (Cohen 2007 p. 957).

In Catholic/Nationalist narratives, the city is similarly seen to be symbolic of the wider Catholic experience in Northern Ireland, Derry being the location of the worst gerrymandering, discrimination and police violence, the birthplace of the civil rights movement, and the site of one of the worst single acts of British violence during the Troubles - Bloody Sunday (Conway 2007; Dawson 2005). The Apprentice Boys of Derry marches and Bloody Sunday and civil rights commemoration marches annually re-enact and re-inscribe these events in the city (Conway 2007; Cohen 2007).

From an early period, Derry has been a predominately Catholic city, and 75 per cent of residents of the Derry City Council area self-define as Catholic (NISRA 2013). Derry is often represented in media and political discourse as a 'Nationalist stronghold' and the city has the highest rate of 'Irish only' identity in Northern Ireland (51%). 42 per cent of the population prefer to hold an Irish passport rather than a British one (NISRA 2013).

Community relations in Derry are seen to be significantly better than those elsewhere in Ireland, with a series of successful peace and reconciliation projects emerging in the early 1990s and significant improvements in social integration in the past decades (Murtagh *et. al.* 2008; cf. Bell 1990). Derry, and 'the Derry model' of resolving disputed marches, is thus often presented as an example of how dialogue and negotiation can lead to improved community relations (BBC 2010b). A final important demographic feature of Derry is that it is a border city, and there is a high degree of cross-border traffic, with many working in the city living over the border and many crossing the border regularly to socialize, shop, work, visit family and carry out a whole host of everyday activities.

Despite Derry's unique demographic spatial characteristics, its role in key events and its symbolic significance, research focusing specifically on contemporary Derry has been fairly limited, and often limited to relatively short discussions within broader narratives of Northern Ireland. Only a handful of monographs have been published concerning social life

in Derry: Bell's study of Protestant youth culture and sectarianism (Bell 1990), based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the early 1980s; Conway's study of the social memory of Bloody Sunday (Conway 2010), based on interviews, archive work and participant observation in Bloody Sunday commemorations from 2004-2010; and McCafferty's sociolinguistic study of language change in Derry and narratives of ethnicity and sectarianism, based on interview data and ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 1994 and 1995, as well as McCafferty's own experiences as a native inhabitant of the city (McCafferty 2001). In addition to these monographs, several articles have discussed various aspects of Derry, focusing particularly on conflict, commemoration, memory and space and place. These themes and their interrelationship are explored in Conway's and Dawson's discussions of Bloody Sunday commemorations and memory (Conway 2007, Dawson 2005), and McBride's and Cohen's discussions of the commemoration of the siege of Derry and the apprentice boys of Derry marches (McBride 1997; Cohen 2007). Potzche's study of documentary representations of Bloody Sunday similarly focuses on the politics and articulation of memories of Derry's troubled past (Potzche 2011). A growing body of literature looks at community development, urban planning, space and regeneration in the city; Murtagh's and Murtagh, Graham and Shirlow's research considers segregation and Protestant experiences within the city at the issue from the perspective of city planning (Murtagh 2001; Murtagh, Graham and Shirlow 2007), Diez and Haywood investigate the changing configurations of space and communal identity in the context of European integration (Diez and Haywood 2008), and Hocking explores public space and public art in urban spaces and shared space initiatives and community relations in the Diamond war memorial, and also considers Derry's year as city of culture and its impact on spatial use (Hocking 2011, 2015). Greavu and Doak also consider festivalisation and cultural events as part of post-conflict community development through examination of Halloween festivities and the City of Culture year (Greavu 2012; Doak 2015). Economics and gender have also

been a focus for research in Derry; McLaughlin has extensively studied women's roles in the city and social and economic life (McLaughlin 1986, 1989, 1993), Hegarty has studied women's movements in conflict within the city (Hegarty 2005), Heenan and McLaughlin have explored the Credit Union in Derry (Heenan and McLaughlin 2002), and Finlay's unpublished PhD thesis explores the trade union movement in early 20th century Derry with a particular focus on women's roles and the impact of sectarianism on the movement (Finlay 1989). Derry has been the subject of various other unpublished PhD dissertations, which tend to focus on similar themes to the published research: Hayes has focused on memories and narrative traditions of Bloody Sunday (Hayes 2000), McGovern investigated changing commemorations of the siege of Derry (McGovern 1994), and O'Dochartaigh looked at the political conflict and the Troubles (O'Dochartaigh 1993).

As in the literature on language discussed in the first half of this chapter, these studies, with the exception of McLaughlin's work and to some extent McCafferty's studies, have a tendency towards considering issues from the starting point of division, conflict and sectarianism. Indeed, this has been a tendency within research in Northern Ireland more generally; as argued by Jenkins in 1983, the Troubles and sectarian conflict have often dominated the research agenda without consideration of those wider everyday issues (Jenkins 1983, pp. 13-14). In Northern Ireland more generally this is less so the case than it was at the time of Jenkins' comment, but it still holds true of research on Derry. This thesis intends to contribute towards this wider literature by providing a study of the city that explicitly grounds the research in the point of view of understanding everyday life and experiences, and attempts to avoid the restricting lens of an explicit focus on politics and division.

6. Methods and methodology

I first arrived in Derry on a dark and rainy evening on March 12th 2014 after a long journey from Sheffield via Scotland and Belfast. Despite several years of reading about Derry, and believing that I understood the City and was 'well prepared' for my fieldwork, every moment, from my first encounter with Derry's impressive cityscape from the train window, to my most recent visit in November 2015, was a process of discovery. From start to finish, I encountered new situations and environments, new knowledge and ideas, constantly realising how much I didn't know. This chapter explains the context in which the research project was conceived and developed, and the processes that shaped its overall trajectory. It explores my choice of research methods, and the complexities that emerged in the field and in the process of analysis. It considers the caveats, ethical challenges and limitations that must be taken into account in understanding the findings and narratives presented in the subsequent chapters.

6.1 Methods, objectivity and truth

As I have already argued, the boundaries between groups are fluid and blurred, and the identification of groups and the individuals that belong to them is correspondingly complex. Likewise, I have argued that what activities and practices 'mean', how they are performed, by whom, and the social and ideological boundaries attached to them are by no means fixed, uncontested, or independent of context. Our use of boundaries, perspectives, and identifications in making meaning of the world around us involves constant processes of learning and reformulation as we navigate everyday life and social interaction. Exactly the same can be said about methods: while 'methods' can be talked about in abstract in textbooks and theory, in practice and application methods cannot be disentangled from the context, practices and ideologies that inform, influence and shape the research process; 'methods' are not independent, abstract acts but are always 'of', 'about' and 'for' something'. They constitute material-discursive performances of epistemological

frameworks and ontological assumptions and reflect the ongoing situation in which these performances develop (Barad 2003; Mol 1999). This is perhaps particularly obvious in qualitative research in which the data arises from social interaction in a particular context, for example in unstructured interviews and participant observation and ethnography. However, the same may be said of research in general: however detached the research design is from the moment of data collection, all research involves converting the complexity of everyday life into more manageable units for analysis - 'making the cut' (Barad 2003). As John Law argues, 'the making of what we know in-here goes along with the making of what there is out-there' (Law 2003, p. 11). Moreover, 'realities are not flat. They are not consistent, coherent and definite. Our research methods necessarily fail. Aporias are ubiquitous' (Law 2003, p. 4).

As such, the resulting 'data' or 'research narrative' produced in research is always situated, partial and retrospective. It is a construction that artificially reduces the 'myriad contingencies and unfolding patterns of coordination among individuals' (Rosaldo 1993, p. 117) into a single episodic sequence of cause and effect. This process of making data out of reality arises in the interaction between a researcher, with all their ideological and social background and baggage, and whatever aspect of the world is deemed to be 'data'. What questions are asked on a census or survey, what measurements are taken, how the measuring instrument is designed, what is collected or documented, and how the analysis process is undertaken, all emerge in the relationship between researcher and their aims, perspectives and prior understandings, and the world as they experience it in the moment of data collection, and subsequent analysis. How we experience the world is always mediated by language, position and context, and no two people can occupy the same position, and no position or context can be truly repeated. How the researcher 'plugs in' to the world, what questions they ask, what is deemed important, relevant or connected, and what the data

collected is taken to mean, is always a product of the researcher's own life trajectory and how this has shaped their perspectives and understandings.

Such a rejection of a positivist or scientific model of research that claims that data may be simply or purely extracted from the world, and that it can be claimed to be 'unbiased', or separate from value judgments, is neither new nor radical. Writing at the turn of the 19th century against evolutionary models of human culture and the idea of cognitive difference between 'races', Boas argued that it was the variety of human experience, that is, of upbringing, of learnt behaviour and thought patterns, that determined our understanding of the world and patterns of knowledge production. He thus critiqued the assumption that particular approaches and positions to the world were purely 'rational', arguing that the claims presented in this 'scientific' model were in fact underpinned by custom. Thus, 'religion, politics, arts, and the fundamental concepts of science' and the 'thousand activities that constitute our daily life' were all the product of habitual learning, and to greater or lesser extents subject to secondary rationalisation that made them appear as 'truths' (Stocking 1966). Levi-Strauss, in *The Savage Mind*, argued similarly that 'the scientist never carries on a dialogue with nature pure and simple...but rather with a particular relationship between nature and culture definable in terms of his particular period and civilization and the material means at his disposal' (Levi-Strauss 1966, p. 19). Different schools and approaches to sociological enquiry have treated the question of the scientific and positivist standpoint differently; in some, positivism has remained influential as a research approach, but in general it has been progressively challenged from various standpoints. However, the binary representation of positivism vs constructivism, radical vs realist and so on which often arises in methods textbooks is seen by some as lacking utility, simply debating with a straw man rather than appreciating the reality of much more complex epistemological and ontological positions. Thus Steinmetz argues that the debate is limited, whereas grappling with the more specific issues at hand is of greater value:

‘the heterogeneity of each supposed grouping suggests that the dichotomous model masks what is actually a much more complex, multi-dimensional field... To make better sense of our own practical epistemological and ontological views, we need first to break open the two caricatured positions of relativist discursivism versus hard-headed positivism.’ (Steinmetz 1998, p. 170)

Ultimately, the issue is not simply about ‘objectivity’ versus ‘subjectivity’, but *how* we can *aspire* to objectivity; as argued by Jenkins we can aspire to ‘standing back as far as possible...working hard to prevent politics and values getting in the way of finding out as much as we can, as honestly as we can, as systematically as we can’ and not ‘mistaking how we would like the world to be for how it actually is’ or ‘allowing desired outcomes to determine the acceptability or availability of evidence’ (Jenkins 2002, p. 12). The challenge in research however is about how we manage and balance such aspiration, honesty and objectivity with the acceptance of the limitations of research, the multiplicity of possible interpretations and perspectives and the inescapability of prior politics and values.

There have been various different approaches to balancing these competing demands, taking in different critical, post-modern and reflexive approaches. As noted above, anthropology has fore fronted the situated and cultural nature of knowledge production and analysis in research since an early period, and has encouraged the writing of the author into the research in the form of the ethnographic diary and ethnographic tropes of writing. The result was an early rejection of positivist approaches, the scientific model, and ‘objectivity’, and a representation of research as artistic as much as scientific. For example, Evans-Pritchard argued that ‘those who have most strongly urged that social anthropology should model itself on the natural sciences have done neither better research than those who take the opposite view nor a different kind of research’ (Evans-Pritchard 1962, p. 53). He advocated as early as 1951 that anthropological research is ‘best regarded as an art and not

as a social science' (Evans- Pritchard 1951, p. 85). In the mid 1960s 'action anthropology' emerged, arguing that knowledge production was never purely 'scientific' or 'objective', but was culturally-mediated, situated and partial, leading to the need for 'responsiveness, critical awareness, ethical concern, human relevance, a clear connection between what is to be done and the interests of mankind' (Hymes 1969 p. 7; see also Scholte 1966, 1969, 1971).

From the 1970s a post-modern and reflexive turn began to increasingly highlight subjectivity and positionality in interpretation, arguing that the research process 'invented culture', and questioning the power relations within research, representation and analysis (Said 1978; Asad 1973; Geertz 1973; Wagner 1975; Clifford and Marcus 1986). The same movement also saw the development, at times in direct opposition to the assumed position of 'outside' or 'other' taken in traditional ethnography and the 'writing culture' argument, of a more reflective mode of auto-ethnographic research, particularly from feminist and post-colonial perspectives. Such approaches explored the complex relationship of researcher, and all of their individual emotional, political and cultural baggage, with the research process, and the way in which this affected research practice and representation (Abu-Lughod 1991, Behar 1993, Rosaldo 1989). Such approaches have highlighted the extent to which research is 'vulnerable, emotional and embodied' and sought to 'undermine grandiose authorial claims of speaking in a rational, value-free, objective, universalizing voice. From this perspective, the author is a living, contradictory, vulnerable, evolving multiple self, who speaks in a partial, subjective, culture-bound voice' (Foley 2002, p. 474).

While post-modernist and critical approaches have had much in common in the movement towards reflexivity, the issue of relativism and politics formed a major point of debate. Feminist critiques of post-modernism have argued that a commitment to many truths and relativism in interpretation does not necessarily make for more ethical, more effective, or more truthful research, as such approaches risk devaluing the experiences of participants by

reducing them to one among many 'inventions'. Thus writers such as Harstock and Harding instead advocate 'strong objectivity' and empiricism (Harstock 1983; Harding 1995), and 'personal integrity', 'moral judgment' and the prioritisation of some ethical commitments over others in research (Jagger 1989; Intemann 2010).

Bourdieu's writings on 'reflexive sociology' represent a slightly different approach again to the issue of reflexivity and truth, posing a challenge to the auto-ethnographic emphasis on personal narrative and the postmodern focus on relativism and inter-subjective invention. Bourdieu and those following this line of 'epistemic reflexivity' argue that the emphasis of reflexivity should be less on the individual self, the individual emotions and individual vulnerability, but on the field of ideological production within which the researcher operates. The important subject for this form of reflexivity, Bourdieu argues, should be how claims, forms of argument, methods or analysis, become 'truth' within the field of academic and ideological production. In accordance with his wider concept of self, practice and agency, the researcher is a cultural being, and, although holding the capacity to improvise on, reformulate, and break social norms, is also the product of wider structures (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). This version of reflective sociology, while more 'impersonal' and 'objectifying', thus maintains a focus on the field of production, on power relations and structures, more than individual or personal history. For Bourdieu, the 'sociologist works back and forth between field experience and theory, cultivating a theoretical reflexivity that produces a detached, objective, authoritative account of the world being studied' (Foley 2002, p. 476).

The difficulty with managing these competing approaches to reflexivity is that reflexivity is just that - reflective - and at risk of either 'endless loops of meta-theorizing' which 'lose track of the object itself' (Pels 2000), 'hermeneutic narcissism' in which 'knowledge claims shrink into ever-decreasing circles, leading to authors telling us only about themselves, for they

feel unable to tell us anything about anyone else', or 'authorship denial, where the researcher attempts to become a neutral conduit or relay by "giving voice to" the observed' (Maton 2003, p. 55). To omit reflexive discussion however can result in quasi-scientific or dishonestly clean accounts that fail to capture the complexity of the intellectual process.

In explaining the processes of research and methods, while attempting to avoid both 'self-absorption' and 'self-denial', I suggest that methods can be conceived in the framework of the researcher journey as a means of producing the 'critical realist reflexive ethnographies' and 'realist narratives that are much more accessible and reflexive than either scientific realist or surrealist postmodern narratives' advocated by Foley (2002). Rather than presenting methods and methodology outside of the context, events, social interactions, individual trajectories and everyday life in which they arose, we can acknowledge the everyday practicalities of research and the minutiae of context in which the real world is turned, and not turned, into data. We can honestly acknowledge the points of non-reporting, non-participation, and omission, and the factors, both banal and extraordinary, which affected the course of research. We can explore how this conversion happens and what has influenced this conversion. It encourages us to acknowledge, as Law puts it, the 'messiness' of research and of the world itself:

'in practice research needs to be messy and heterogeneous. It needs to be messy and heterogeneous, because that is the way it, research, actually is. And also, and more importantly, it needs to be messy because that is the way the largest part of the world is. Messy, unknowable in a regular and routinised way' (Law 2002, p. 11).

6.2 The research as a journey

My research and 'methods' were inextricably linked with my journeys in and around Northern Ireland and Derry, both literally and figuratively. The methods, approach and topic, while of course largely influenced by past study and interests, emerged in their actualised

form in the course of conversations and informal interviews with different individuals and groups and in my experiences of, and participation in, a range of activities, events and moments of everyday life during my fieldwork. Between March and August 2014, I made five trips to Northern Ireland, four of which were to Derry and the other to Belfast, before moving to Derry to live on September 13th 2014. While I had the vague idea of wanting to look at 'culture' when I made my first trip in March 2014, I left what this actually meant in terms of research topic and approach as open as possible. In those first exploratory months, I simply tried to speak to as many people and attend as many different events as possible, in order to get an understanding of the field, and to find out what people thought about my potential research in Derry and how it might fit in with wider interests and activities in the city. On my arrival in September, my research plans were very loose; building on previous conversations about progress and practice in the city, I still had the idea that I would consider 'culture', and how perceptions and boundaries around culture developed, and the specific organisations and individuals who might be involved. But I was largely arriving with the hope that specifics would be led by events, opportunities and possibilities in the field, rather than according to any specific pre-planned agenda. I had planned, for reasons discussed later in this chapter, to use ethnographic and mixed method approaches, including long term participant observation, visual methods, documentary analysis and interviews, but the specificities of how these approaches would be implemented in practice was likewise still undefined and intended to be led by the opportunities and insights arising from my early fieldwork.

From an early stage in my PhD, I made the decision that my research design and orientation would be, as far as was feasible, participant-led. Of course, all research is shaped to a certain degree by the field and the participants, at a very minimum in their responses to the recruitment process, but also in that all projects are constrained by the limits of feasibility, pragmatics, where access is granted and so on. With my own research however, my

developing interest in the sub-discipline of Critical Heritage Studies during the early stages of the PhD's conceptual development made me acutely aware of the power the researcher exercised in the selection of research topic, what was interesting, what was worth studying and what constituted a 'valuable' topic of enquiry. It made me recognise how the researcher's choices around 'value', and any subsequent production of representations, had profound effects on individuals and groups, in terms of how they perceived themselves and in terms of material consequences (Smith 2006, 2008, 2011; Waterton and Smith 2010; Schofield 2008; Fairclough et al. 2008). As I began to explore Participatory Action Research, Collaborative Ethnography and wider co-production methodologies, I began to orient towards a research design which, while not Participatory Action Research or Collaborative Ethnography in the strictest or strongest sense of total ongoing co-production, was, however, collaborative and participatory in the design and development stages. More particularly I hoped to design my project collaboratively in terms of topic choice and identification of what would be valuable to study, and in what my location in the fieldwork would be. This choice seemed ethically and emotionally more desirable; I wanted to be sensitive to my participants and to the field, and to include their vast experience and knowledge as part of my research. I felt deeply uncomfortable with the idea of turning up and casting judgement on an issue and on a fieldsite and on people whose long experience of living and working in a certain area, and indeed of being themselves, gave them experience, knowledge and insight that was so much deeper and more real than my own would ever be. Such an approach seemed especially important when working in a post-conflict situation in which division, difference and violence remained an ever-present part of everyday life, and in which the participants had experienced events and traumas that I couldn't even begin to imagine. On an emotional level, I was researching an area in which, as will be explained below, I had a personal and emotional investment, and I was thus keen to do something 'useful' and which contributed. This choice had pragmatic advantages as well

as ethical ones; as an inexperienced researcher seeking to conduct fieldwork overseas, away from institutional support, and in an environment which had the potential to be difficult or even hostile to a middle-class English person, I wanted to conduct my research sensitively and unobtrusively and find a welcome place for myself in the field.

Of course, researcher framing and perception, and power structures within the field, did significantly influence the research trajectory at this stage. My approach, prior to this first trip, was to email as many people as possible to set up meetings to talk about the city and my research, with emails being collected by searching websites and directories for contact details of what seemed to be key or relevant culture and heritage organisations, and key political figures and leaders in the city. There were, of course, organisations and individuals that I did not contact as I did not think they would be relevant, and this process of selection inevitably directed my research; in addition, by virtue of the fact that I was using the internet to create my contact database, there was a particular skew towards high-profile individuals and organisation. These tendencies and omissions were rectified in the course of the fieldwork to a certain extent, but this initial entry into the field certainly served to frame how it developed. In this early stage, there was also a process of self-selection among participants, since these were the people who returned my emails and calls and were happy to meet me and to be involved in preliminary research discussions, a factor which again must be considered in understanding the social world my research began to orient towards.

On my arrival in Northern Ireland, the situation began to alter as personal referrals and chance encounters brought me into contact with a much wider range of people. I increasingly sought to operate this snowball approach, which seemed to be more effective than direct communication, with higher response rates, and often a greater sense of rapport and trust in the first meeting. I am still blown away by how friendly and welcoming everyone I encountered was, and how willing people were to help, give advice and guidance or simply

just to chat. My very first contact came in Belfast when, straight off the overnight boat from Scotland, I found myself with an hour to kill before my connection onwards to Derry, and so I decided to use the time browsing the Linen Hall Library. As a result of my enquiries about books about Derry, I was immediately directed to a native of the city who talked to me at length about my research and the city, and gave me a whole raft of contacts, ideas and dates of events that proved incredibly valuable. This experience came to be the norm for the rest of my trip, each meeting and event leading to new contacts, ideas and trajectories.

This first trip served as an important springboard in becoming acquainted with the city, and beginning to explore possibilities for my research project and contacts, finding out what would be more or less welcomed in research, and avenues to pursue further. My meetings with different individuals and organisations generally took a format in which I began by asking about what the individual in question, and/or their organisation, did: what their project was, and their experiences of the City of Culture year. In explaining my own project, I described, in various formulations, that I was doing a PhD at the University of Sheffield, that my background was in Celtic studies and anthropology, and that I was interested in designing a project about culture or heritage, and that I was seeking to find out from people in the city what they thought would be interesting, relevant or useful in a research project. In most cases, they proceeded to talk for about an hour with very little prompting, offering ideas about possible research projects and contacts to talk to. This approach seemed to be very successful in many ways; while research in Derry has been fairly limited, Derry's year as City of Culture had brought with it an influx of researchers and academics conducting various different projects, and many of the individuals with whom I spoke seemed to appreciate that I was taking the time to involve them in the early research stages and ask what they thought might be interesting. Many of the people I spoke to had already been involved in research projects, either recent or more historical, and many had studied at university level and conducted their own research projects and dissertations and were

aware of what research would involve and the sort of information and activities which might be of interest. Just three months after the end of the City of Culture year, there was still a great energy in the city, a confidence, and many expressed that Derry was a city with a new story to tell, and a new vision for the future, and were excited about the prospect of research that might document and explore this new narrative.

In addition to formal and informal interviews, I also spent a lot of time just walking around the city, people-watching and chatting with various people who I met in coffee shops etc. I went along to events being run for St Patrick's day, two performances examining political events of the past (a music/narrative performance about the United Irishmen and 'Over the Wire', a play about the burning of Long Kesh in 1973), a City of Culture Legacy meeting, a Gaelic Football match, and Sunday Mass and St Patrick's day mass at St Eugene's church. I also visited some of the main tourist attractions and exhibitions and went on a tour of the Bogside and City Walls run by Free Derry tours. I came back with a wealth of ideas and possibilities - indeed, the main problem of the approach I had chosen was the wealth of information and ideas I had been given. One over-arching theme was clear across this range of ideas however; the theme of new narratives: the renegotiation of spaces and practices in the city, of the meanings and perceptions of people, places and activities, the emergence of new social, physical and ideological spaces and new visions for the future. Of particular interest here was the breaking down of boundaries between those practices and activities perceived as 'Catholic' and those perceived as 'Protestant', and of the attempts to combat negative perceptions of different practices and re-image them as cultural practices with value and relevance to all members of the city.

My next visit, just over a month later, was oriented towards attending the 43rd Pan-Celtic festival, one of the key events in the Derry City of Culture Legacy programme, and an event which specifically spoke to the idea of new narratives and the renegotiation of boundaries

and perceptions. The Pan-Celtic festival, like the All-Ireland Fleadh the year before, represented in itself the breaking down of boundaries and the emergence of new narratives and spaces, as it was the first time that the festival was held north of the border. I was also interested to consider how culture, heritage and national identities were presented and constructed within the festival, how Irishness and Celtic-ness figured, and how such articulations were managed and perceived within the specific social and political context of Northern Ireland. An additional point of interest was to consider the role of festivals in producing social and economic development and new narratives of culture and of the city, aspects of festivals that had on my previous trip been highlighted as key positive outcomes of the City of Culture designation and events and of the Fleadh. On my previous trip, some of the festival organisers had expressed a hope that, as with the inclusion of Protestant bands in the Fleadh, the festival could be used a space in which bounded and antagonistic identities and perceptions of culture might be challenged and renegotiated, and in which perceptions of ownership and participation in different cultural practices might also be changed. I also used the trip to follow up on suggested contacts active in the Protestant/Unionist-oriented cultural scene.

This trip, still preliminary rather than 'active' research, was my first real opportunity to get involved in a more meaningful way with activities and social life in Derry, and I began the process of becoming established in the city. I was invited to volunteer at the festival, which proved to be an amazing experience in terms of meeting and talking to a whole range of different people, deepening my understanding of social networks and cultural events in the city and developing contacts with those involved in the 'cultural' scene in Derry. As with my previous trip, I was somewhat overwhelmed by how welcoming and eager to help those involved in the local cultural scene and local residents more generally were.

While the trip felt very successful in terms of becoming increasingly comfortable in the city, making contacts and generally settling in, I found it much harder to focus on thinking and acting with a mind to research than on my previous trip. On my first trip, I had been new to the city and still relatively new to Northern Ireland, and I had felt very anxious about identity management and generally quite self-conscious and guarded; I had been primarily engaged with meeting key contacts and gatekeepers and considering all the time the implications for my research project. My experiences on this second trip stood in stark contrast in almost every way, perhaps in large part due to the nature of the festival itself and the fact I was working at it. I felt much more confident and comfortable, both socially and just generally around the city, and was primarily focused on working at the festival or operating in an informal social environment in which consideration of my research project often disappeared to the back of my mind. In addition to the inevitable security that emerges from knowing the geography of a place, and the fact that I already knew people in the city who made an effort to say hello, the friendly buzz of the festival atmosphere, accentuated by the fact it was the school holidays, a funfair was in town and the *Fèis* was taking place, were perhaps significant in my own changing feeling about my own position and identity in Derry. The domination of the city centre by large numbers of Cornish, Welsh, Manx, Breton, Irish and Scottish visitors, who formed my main social environment for most of the week, was also perhaps significant in affecting how I experienced Derry; within the context of a great deal of non-Irish accents, I felt far less self-conscious about my English accent, and in my role both as a festival volunteer, and as a previous visitor to the city confident about locating different venues and services, I was constructed as a knowledgeable semi-resident by the festival visitors, the majority of whom had never been to Derry before. The social element of the festival no doubt also contributed to how I experienced the events; the event operates as a gathering for long-time attendees and also as a space for building new links and friendships. The festival events are composed of large numbers of people travelling to the

city from many different places with the specific aim of meeting new people and having a good time socialising. It was thus an environment in which it was very easy to rapidly build relationships and in which, particularly among the generation of competitors, it was entirely normal to not know many people.

While this was incredibly positive in terms of building networks and feeling confident in the city and less like a cultural or social outsider, from the point of view of considering my research it was perhaps less successful, as I found I quickly lost my grasp on my research project in the whirlwind of experiencing and actually being part of events. This tension between 'doing research' and active participation, embedding in social relationships and being emotionally invested in the city and in various projects in it, was to prove a challenge throughout my whole research. The process of active participation is one that can feel like an information and experiential data overload, and in addition to the difficulties of concentrating on acting as a researcher and actively researching, the process of reflection on my experiences and writing about them afterwards never became comfortable. In many ways, the trip and experience of participation made the research even harder to identify. As I wrote in my notes the trip 'has to certain extent confused me about what the primary focus and aims of the research should be and has also made me question some of the ethics and practicalities of my research design'. It was indeed the issue of 'research design' and 'methods' that this trip most strongly influenced. Having studied anthropology at undergraduate level, and having read so many ethnographic monographs and accounts, the idea of 'anthropological ethnography' and participant observation had become somewhat romanticised and over-simplified in my understandings of it. Despite reading widely around the issue of ethics and relations in the field, and despite having been so often exposed to the narrative of the young ethnographer that it has become a bit of an anthropological trope, none of this prepared me for actually doing ethnography or for the concerns and anxieties that would arise. It was a trip that thus made me radically question my understandings and

approach. Indeed, the introduction to my reflective report from this first trip concluded with

‘I am no longer convinced that it is straightforward to manage the ethics of such research methods. In writing the following report and attempting to convert my ideas and experiences into a research proposal I felt that it was somehow slightly disingenuous or devaluing of me to turn these people, their deeply held interests, perceptions and beliefs into data, or to convert the more intimate relationships and discussions which arise between mates into evidence’.

6.3 The challenges of ethnographic approaches and the development of the research design

This second trip thus made me re-think how I would collect, analyse and present data. My original decision to choose ethnographic methods was rooted in wider epistemological orientations and my understanding of the necessities that the subject of ‘culture’ demanded. It arose from the epistemological position that ‘meaning’, identities and boundaries are not fixed or primordial but dynamic processes that are learnt, constructed and experienced as part of everyday life, and are constantly renegotiated and refigured in the course of everyday social interactions. As I have argued in preceding chapters, the assumption that practices, artefacts, symbols and groups have single, fixed and unambiguous meanings neglects the extent to which perspectives on, and support for, material culture, performance and forms of cultural expression vary considerably within communities (Bryan 1996, 2000; Graham 2004; Jarman 1997; McCormick and Jarman 2005). It also overlooks the ways in which the meanings, ownership and associations of material display change considerably in each annual performance and throughout the year (Bryan 1996; Conway 2007; Jarman 2008), and can encapsulate a variety of different interpretations and understandings in a single moment (Jarman 1997).

Exploring the complexity of dynamic everyday processes brings, however, the challenge of requiring an exploration of the unarticulated, the naturalised and the everyday. To return to Jenkin's (2007) study of the Danish flag, as touched upon at the beginning of this theses, this is not an easy task, since much of cultural practices, objects and behaviours are 'just there, something which one just does. Something one doesn't generally think about. Something one *feels*' (Jenkins 2007, p. 129). As several commentators have pointed out with respect to cultural heritage, the 'meaning' of any product or practice is 'multisensory' (Schofield 2008, p. 18) and 'multivalent' (Mason 2008, p. 100). It is individually constituted 'at the moment of consumption' through an unstable and ever-changing 'coding system' which is based as much on 'the requirements of the consumer' as 'the existence of resources' and 'for which each individual possesses their own personal dictionary which is constantly and rapidly replaced over time' (Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996, pp.8, 15). The 'meaning' of any cultural practice or product must thus be approached as a 'living symbol' (Jenkins 2007, p. 127) and studied through its dynamic 'social life'. This understanding cannot simply focus on the product or practice itself, but must take in the whole social world in which it exists, its relationality to the wider material culture of the surrounding environment, the processes of its production and use, its association with wider practices and ideas, and the meanings, resonances and connotations that a space has accumulated in its social life. Likewise, in understanding how perception develops, the physical trajectory, experiences, knowledge and 'social life' of the perceiver, and the narratives and understandings and perceptions of the world they bring with them to any experience needs to be considered.

In practice, such an epistemological approach requires attention to the 'minutiae of everyday life' (Malinowski 1922), in all its material, practical, social and discursive complexity. As such, long-term ethnographic methods primarily focused on observing, engaging and experiencing 'everyday' life, seemed particularly appropriate. However, as I was beginning to discover through personal experience, such an approach brings many

challenges. One of the main advantages of the ethnographic method of participant observation is that it avoids sole reliance on the contrived and performative space of interviews or focus groups that produce only limited text-based data and are separated from the material culture and activity of everyday interaction. However, ethnography is by no means devoid of issues of performativity, nor is it an unproblematic means of accessing 'real' everyday life. As argued above, a researcher, however much an 'insider' or 'part' of a community, will never be an invisible fly-on-the-wall but will inevitably alter that field of social action, and will only ever access a version of that social world which they are part of and have influenced. As argued by de Cabral:

'Ethnography is an activity that is centrally dependent on intersubjectivity ...The ethnographer imparts information as much as she gathers it... We often presume that the worlds that come into confrontation during the ethnographic encounter are radically separate and will remain so thereafter. This, however, is neither true about the ethnographer nor about her informant ... we tend to think of ethnography in the past as a gesture that left no traces behind, as if the beaches of the Trobriand Islands, the sand tracks of Sudan, or the dirt roads in the Cooper Belt were places frozen in time ...Ethnography is constitutive both at the moment of the encounter and in the echoes that it produces in time... The ethnographer and the informant are not only exchanging information, they are jointly attentive to the world. Being jointly attentive, however, is a gesture that goes beyond communication, as it is formative of the worldview of those involved. The desire to help mutual understanding is part and parcel of the ethnographic process. The ethnographer affects his informants in their future life choices quite as much as their concerns and fascinations affect his work, his personality, and the worldviews of his future students'. (de Cabral 2013, p. 261)

Furthermore, in ethnography and participant observation it is the researcher, as a human, operating within the social world, that constitutes the tool of analysis, but this researcher is also living their everyday life, a life that can never truly be simply or purely research or research oriented.

The ethical difficulties of ethnography became increasingly pronounced as my research developed. While on the one hand, anthropology has been argued to be a more 'ethical' on the grounds that it is a more empathetic and collaborative means of conducting research, claims of achieving 'insider status' and 'going native' (eg. Bell 1993) are, as Vivweswaran argues, simply a 'delusion of alliance' which fails to appreciate the power relations and potential exploitation and intrusion contained within fieldwork (Stacey 1988; Vivweswaran 1997). The idea of 'insider' and 'outsider' is problematic in itself, representing a somewhat over-simplistic view of the modern world, but is particularly problematic in considering 'researcher' positioning (Abu-Llughod 1990; Adler and Adler 1987). Ethically, the practice of ethnography presents a range of challenges less pronounced in more discrete and bounded research such as interviews and focus groups, but in becoming a 'member' or regular fixture in the social world, the researcher's identity as a researcher can be quickly lost and forgotten. While, in theory, the researcher can aspire to continually re-state their role and seek consent continually, in practice this is not always realistic or possible, particularly in large public events. Ethical ethnography thus relies on a good deal of researcher judgment in deciding what does and does not constitute data which can be ethically used, when they have been spoken to in confidence, what practices, conversations and moments can be used as data, and which cannot. This reliance on researcher judgment is arguably made easier by long-term membership or participation in a particular setting, which equips the researcher with a more nuanced understanding of individuals and social worlds and what may or may not be acceptable. However, the same position can also render the actual production of 'data' deeply uncomfortable for the researcher. In my own case, I found the conversion of

my experiences and observations of a social world into data difficult; as I became more emotionally and personally invested in the field and the subject and increasingly involved with different groups, individuals and social worlds, it became harder to maintain analytical distance and focus. Indeed, on my return to Sheffield, I found it difficult to disentangle my personal feelings from the data, and particularly in the first few months, in which I was missing Ireland and the friends and social world I had left behind, I found the ethnographic data difficult and uncomfortable to process.

Whether these different situations and events were 'positive' or 'negative' is open to argument, but ultimately they were events that shaped the research, took it in different directions and influenced the context in which I formed my understandings and perspectives. As a method of data collection, long-term participant observation is very much data from the point a particular personal journey and a particular position and all of the mundane factors which go with it. These experiences, and particularly the second trip in April, to the Pan-Celtic festival, and my first introduction to many of these challenges and issues, gave me food for thought in re-assessing what and how I would collect and analyse data for my research. In addition to the inherent ethical difficulties of ethnography outlined above, Northern Ireland presents an additional problem in that it has a small size and population and very few large towns and cities. These settlements, and indeed parts of settlements, are, however, for reasons of history and division, diverse and distinctive from each other, and within the context of Northern Ireland, immediately obvious from even the briefest of descriptions to anyone with some knowledge of the region. There are only two cities in Northern Ireland, Derry and Belfast, and only one is predominately Catholic, only one is in the north west of the region, only one is on the Irish border, only one is a walled city built on a river. Derry has a specific and important history, and a distinctive social and geographical environment, and it cannot be properly understood without outlining these historical, social and geographical factors. Even if the name and minor details of the city

were to be changed, which settlement was the subject of research would be immediately obvious to anyone from Ireland or working within Irish studies or with a basic knowledge of Northern Irish history. Thus, while some researchers have attempted to mask settlement identities in ethnographies of Northern Ireland - for example, Burton's 'Anro' (Burton 1978) and Kelleher's Ballybogoin (Kelleher 2003) - most researchers, for example Sluka (1989), working in the Divis flats, and Zenker (2013), working in the Irish language scene in west Belfast, have avoided the pretence of anonymisation all together, writing instead with the caution and care that an inability to anonymise demands. Such an approach requires extra care with ethnographic data obtained in contexts and situations that might be more ambiguous, or in which consent has not been explicitly obtained, and a certain amount of self-censorship and selection is needed.

6.4 The development of the research subject: journeys through Irish

Although it contributed towards the development of my methodological approach, my second trip did not at the time seem to bring me any closer to actually honing down my research topic, but with the benefit of hindsight it is clear that it strongly influenced the trajectory of my research and the social world I became involved in. Working at the festival oriented me towards the social networks in and around the 'Irish culture' scene in Derry, and I became particularly engaged with that around the Cultúrlann centre, a centre for Irish language and culture education and events, and the city council. The trip also oriented me to a particular part of the city - the city centre and Cityside, that is the west side of the river Foyle, an areas almost exclusively Catholic in religious composition, with the exception of a small Protestant estate the Fountain. This area is the location of the old city walls, the city centre, and the historically important Bogside and Creggan areas. This trajectory influenced my subsequent trips, which included working at another festival and a trip more focussed on setting up practicalities such as where I would live. Although I sought to speak to as many people as possible, and not to be exclusive in who I engaged with, my research was

influenced by my location and position in the various social networks I was engaged with, and about which topics and in what geographical areas I felt comfortable and confident operating.

On my arrival in Derry in September, I had already committed to a ten month lease on a house. The first few weeks were largely focused on settling in, making friends, reconnecting with previous contacts and finding my feet in the city. Following a period of intense work and the very comfortable and routine-dominated life of the PhD office, arriving without any particular plan, routine, base or strong social network was somewhat daunting, but, of all the places to make this sort of transition, I'm glad it was in Derry, with its culture of helping people out and looking out for people. The biggest difference from England, to my mind, is the pace of life in Derry and how people always seemed to have time for others, time to chat and time to help and share.

A few weeks after arrival I met with the staff at the Cultúrlann centre who I had met on previous trips to discuss research possibilities, during which they had been extremely helpful in discussing their own projects and other potential research opportunities within the city. In my preliminary trips I had presented my research as being concerned with changing perceptions and challenging boundaries around culture and how these processes unfolded, but I was also keen to stress that I wanted to do research that was relevant, useful and wanted by people in the field. They were again helpful and welcoming and very interested in my research, suggesting that it would be useful to understand more about issues around perceptions and boundaries in the cross-community engagement work with the Londonderry Bands Forum at the Cultúrlann, and how the work was progressing. I was invited to shadow and attend events related to this cross-community work, and given access to contacts whereby I could collect information about previous work.

I also was keen to stress that I would be willing to help out or volunteer at the Cultúrlann, both as a means of giving something back, but also with a view to making friends and becoming more settled in the community. I was soon invited to participate as a volunteer in support roles in a few projects, and subsequently, following the discovery that I spoke basic Irish, I was invited to volunteer on the reception desk at the Cultúrlann. Although initially mooted as an occasional position, working on the reception desk quickly became a longer term voluntary role, and was invaluable from the point of view of depth of understanding of the Irish language and culture scene and the issues it faces and how it functions. It extended the range of people I encountered, and helped me to feel part of a community, making friends and gaining access to meetings and events. The staff at the centre were very supportive, interested and helpful in my research, as were the many people who come in and out of the centre for classes, coffee or events, and who often stopped to chat to me about my research, Derry, or their own lives and experiences of Irish.

In these first few months I focused to a large degree on passive research and research design, seeking to get involved and participate in as much as possible and speak to and get advice from as many different people as possible. This included attending the various gigs, sessions, public events, meetings and festivals at the Cultúrlann and in the wider community, going on the Cultúrlann trip to the Gaeltacht, attending Irish classes and attending community politics and Irish language activism events. In addition, I sat in on cross-community planning events and meetings, which enabled me to build relationships with the cultural community outside of the Cultúrlann and engage with people from different social and cultural backgrounds. In building my life in Derry, and working at the Cultúrlann centre, I also became more involved in life in Derry generally, giving me access to conversations, insights and understandings more broadly. This social situation and volunteer role gave me access to the everyday life of an Irish language centre and allowed me to

observe, and be part of, how news and events about the Irish language were discussed and perceived, how the Irish language scene functioned, and the challenges it faced.

In this context, I began to orient my PhD towards the growth of the Irish language in Derry and how it featured in individuals' everyday lives in the context of issues of widening participation and cross-community work, changing perceptions and the renegotiation of boundaries around speaking Irish. It was in these terms that I described and explained my research to other people in the field. On returning to Derry after the Christmas break, I began to access and consider my research and research design more actively, cutting down my hours at the Cultúrlann and seeking to focus my approach. This move towards more active research coincided with the launch of a programme specifically aimed at engaging the Protestant Unionist Loyalist community and members of the Londonderry Bands Forum in the Irish language class. This launch of this initiative included a talk by Linda Ervine, who travelled to Derry from the East Belfast Mission with a group of Protestant Irish language learners who were learning Irish on the Newtonards Road. It was an extremely interesting event, and I began to follow this project, attending classes and interviewing participants. I continued to attend Irish classes, and musical, cross-community, political and activism events at the Cultúrlann and elsewhere in the city, and to work in the planning of future engagement initiatives aimed at challenging perceptions around the Irish language. I also began to make trips to Belfast in order to deepen my understanding of the experience of learning Irish in other locations, particularly amongst individuals from 'non-traditional' backgrounds. I also began to conduct formal interviews with Irish language learners and activists from a variety of backgrounds within Derry, focusing the interviews on narratives of learning Irish in the past and present, and hopes for the future.

While my involvement and role at the Cultúrlann was very positive and useful, I am aware that I sacrificed breadth for depth, and I became strongly associated with a particular

programme and political and cultural standpoint. This was not only in the sense of traditional community divides, but also in the sense of political and social and cultural differences in the Cityside itself. The gains and advantages in terms of access, depth of understanding, and my sense of belonging and acceptance did however, I believe, far outweighed any losses. In a public-facing role in a very friendly city and location, working on reception also meant that I had a daily opportunity to engage with literally hundreds of individuals and visitors from the city and further afield.

I began to withdraw from the field in the summer of 2015. This was for both academic and personal reasons. I felt that my research was beginning to reach a point of saturation and detail in which any further data collection might be more of a hindrance than a help, and I knew that, honestly speaking, I would not be able to write up my research in Derry. I needed distance and perspective to really start seeing my life as 'data', and support in turning this data into a thesis. Pragmatically speaking my term of rent had come to an end and I had begun to wind up my role at the Cultúrlann. Personal factors also played a part; I was very happy in Derry and very sad to leave, but it was also hard living away from home, being an outsider, and being away from the support network of my tight-knit group of friends in Sheffield. I made a few trips in the months after leaving, and continued my habit of carefully following the news and media. As noted above, I found this withdrawal period challenging; I was so emotionally invested in my life there that getting any analytical distance and actually processing the data felt almost impossible for the first months back in Sheffield. I eventually made the decision that I had to draw a line and stop letting my temptation to continue data collection and research get the better of me, and to focus on Derry as I experienced it, take a step back from the news and media and let any further trips to Derry be purely social.

6.5 Limitations of the research: the problem of researcher as tool

As my experience of ethnography developed, so did my awareness of the challenges and limitations it involved. My research involved five months of short, clearly defined trips to

Derry before I moved to Derry to live full time for ten months, and then another five months based in Sheffield but making a number of shorter trips to Derry. As I moved into longer-term ethnography, and as the location of the ethnography moved from living at home, both geographically and socio-culturally, to living overseas, the nature of participation or membership changed, the focus and field of data became wider, and a whole range of challenges become more pronounced or evident. If the focus is on understanding a topic from within the context of the 'minutiae of everyday', that is, if the field of vision is not just one specific activity or institution, but the whole of everyday life and social interaction within a particular location and timeframe, and if, for reasons of geography, time period or nature of participation, the fieldwork becomes deeply intertwined with the researcher's life, or indeed, consumes and becomes their whole life, then how the research develops can be less easily separated from the researcher's own everyday life and circumstances. This was a factor that I had not properly considered prior to the research and which I came to view as 'life, laundry and mice syndrome'; in long-term, away-from-home ethnographic research in which participant observation takes up almost all of life, rather than specific defined times or moments, there are simply factors which have major implications for the nature of the data collected which are outside of the researcher's control.

While everyday life and a range of personal and contextual factors affected the research at all stages, during my ten months living in Derry, the events of my personal life also had far more influence on what and how much I experienced, saw and encountered than I anticipated as a fresh and inexperienced PhD student about to commence fieldwork for the first time. Family illness forced me to go home at unintended times, and thus to miss certain opportunities and events, and an unfortunate case of mouse infestation in my house resulted in an extended bout of sleep deprivation in which my main obsession and focus became the removal of the mice, and mice became the major subject in my interaction with others. And then there was simply the necessity of keeping life going, of doing laundry,

making dinner, cleaning the house, going shopping, socialising and so on. This 'everyday life' factor is both limiting and advantageous; activities like grocery shopping, going to the hairdresser, going to the doctors, recovering from hangovers, and discussing mice all put me in situations in which I encountered different aspects of life and different individuals in ways that arguably contributed to a richer understanding and experience of everyday life. This was particularly important in my own research in developing an understanding of how activities, perspectives, or practices appeared or were talked about in different contexts and different aspects of life, rather than simply looking through the lens of the clearly defined moments or periods in which an activity or practice or idea production took place. In the specific case of understanding language use and attitudes, I was able to build an appreciation of how Irish figured in everyday life, rather than just within specific Irish language classes, events or institutions. However, the 'everyday life factor' also worked in ways to limit the nature or extent of the data I collected. During my ten-month period of living in Derry, I simply could not practically throw myself with the same energy into every single event or opportunity as on my shorter trips, and different 'life factors' such as mice, illness, break ups and so on meant that I did not always engage with particular events or activities, make certain connections or collect documents or resources, which might have been more directly relevant to my research.

'Interviews' and formal moments of data collection are no less part of everyday life. Who responds to any survey, how an interview question is answered, who agrees to participate and so on cannot be separated from the context. How respondents perceive the researcher and the research project, their own interests, understandings and ideas about the research, and the limitations and possibilities that their own daily routine and everyday practices present will influence how and if they participate. While it is possible to talk in clinical terms about 'sampling' methods, this is never akin to a random number generator; participants are always self-selecting, and what constitutes a 'representative sample' is a decision made on

the basis of the researcher's, and their academic discipline's, view of the world and what constitutes 'similar' experience. The nature of researcher-participant interaction is rarely easy to control, and is never 'repeatable'; it is affected by social and environmental factors such as age, gender and cultural differences between researcher and participant, where the research takes place, the extent and nature of prior interactions, and how the researcher and participant are feeling on the day. Power relations and the nature of social interaction between researcher and participant are complex and shifting, and take in wider social structures and norms, as well as specific attributes of the context and of the social interaction and levels of rapport. As with all social relations, social interactions and production of narratives and understandings of the world, self, past and future, the product is always the product of a relational interaction, something that arises in the space between. In my own research for example, while the interview schedule I used was roughly similar for all my interviews, how the interview developed, its length, the nature of the information shared, the tone, and so on, reflected factors that existed outside of the moment of interview. An interview with an individual who occupied an elite position had a different feel from an interview with a friend. An interview that represented just one moment in a series of ongoing discussions and interactions with an individual I knew well was different from an interview with someone with whom I had no previous interaction. Sometimes either myself or the participant, or both, was tired, distracted, hungry, nervous, excitable or in some other emotional state which had implications for how the interview developed. Events leading up to the moment of the interview and previous interactions tended to shape the topics of conversation, whether in terms of national news items, current campaigns in the Irish language world, or social events. What is 'representative' and a 'sample' is thus a complex and problematic idea; there is no 'normal' time or 'normal' relationship between researcher and participant, and while two individuals may be a similar age, gender, class or position,

their relationship with the researcher, with the research moment, or the interview process may vary considerably.

The researcher as the tool of research has a massive impact on the data produced and the data that emerges in a far more general macro sense than the everyday. Of course my orientation in the field was not simply the result of the field; as argued above the researcher does not just arrive in the field as a pure observer, but changes the field, is changed by it, and uncovers the field through their own position as a person with a history and orientation and perspectives, as someone who is positioned and interpreted by actors in the field in a way that determines their course of action. The researcher is the primary tool of research, but as a human, is a tool that therefore comes with idiosyncrasies, interests, perspectives, challenges, baggage, behaviours, habits and so on. Ethnography and interviews are approaches built on social interaction, and thus involve all of the boundaries and limitations which the world of social interaction presents, in terms of the researcher's own ability to successfully interact in different contexts, and how they are seen and understood by others, and what this does or does not allow them to do.

As has been argued by feminist researchers in particular (eg. Whitehead and Conaway 1986; Bell et al. 1993), researchers are positioned in fieldwork and constructed by participants in ways that can affect the possibilities, constraints and nature of the data. Similarly the researcher always constructs and experiences the field through a position of difference and distance (Wagner 1975). While positioning is an issue in all social research, in Northern Ireland, in which awareness of others' ethnicity, politics and 'community allegiance' is often heightened, issues of positioning have the potential to be of a greater magnitude. Burton (1978), Howe (2009), Sluka (1989), Murphy (2006) and Bryan (1996) have all successfully conducted long-term research from the position of 'cultural outsider', and (with the exception of Sluka) from the potentially problematic position of Englishness and/or a

perceived religious background. However, all have highlighted the discomforts of this position, noting how it affected how they were responded to and perceived, and how it played a part in the development of their research (see Murphy 2006 for an in-depth discussion of positioning in ethnographic research in Belfast).

In my own research, my Englishness was without doubt a major factor in how I engaged with the field and was engaged with; it was almost always one of the first things that people brought up in conversation, usually asking why I had ended up in Derry and learning Irish. It was often the subject of comment or friendly ribbing, and it was often one of the ways in which people talked about me or introduced me; my accent was a factor that made me acutely aware of being different and being an outsider. I was made aware quite frequently that being English was not necessarily the norm, and had the potential to be a problem; in chance encounters and chats people would sometimes make comments along the lines that 'it would have been a problem being English in Derry a few years ago. But it's fine now'. This was an observation which I am sure was meant to be re-assuring, but it highlighted my position as an outsider and the potential for my positioning by others to present challenges. People also tended, often rightly, to assume that I had limited knowledge of aspects of Irish language and culture and would explain them to me, a factor that was certainly useful from the point of view of a researcher seeking to learn as much as possible about these issues and how people perceived them. My surname – O'Neill – and my knowledge of Irish history and language, family connections to Northern Ireland, and the fact that I had been born in Wales rather than England, tended however to put a slightly different spin on how I could position myself, and be positioned by others. I was frequently asked if I had family in Ireland or from Ireland and was at times positioned, or could position myself, as not 'properly' English but as more of an insider. In the Northern Ireland context of 'telling' from surnames, O'Neill can be Catholic or Protestant, and although I was open about being from a Catholic family, I maintained a level of ambiguity. Class rarely came up in how I was positioned, with

Englishness seeming to totally eclipse this potential factor. My age and gender were additional factors in how I experienced the field; on a basic level, these impacted to a certain extent on who I hung out with socially, although this was also to a large part determined by where I was based institutionally. As a young, single, female researcher with no family or friends in the city, people seemed keen to help, not only with my research, but also with helping me to get established in the city, and generally look after me as an individual and on a personal level, inviting me into their lives and homes, and seeking to help me set up a life in the city. As I was an outsider, they also took efforts to explain various aspects of life, and particularly historical events, to me.

All of these factors of course also affected how I perceived myself in the field and my own feelings and confidence in different situations. This brings me to the second aspect of the journey which must be considered in this research project, that of me the researcher, in the sense of my life-course and interests. While not wanting to be accused of navel gazing, any sociological account is an account of the social world as experienced by the researcher and whatever claims are made about generalisation or methodological rigour, the construction of data is always the construction by an individual through their own place and sense-making, life-experiences and history. This is even more the case in anthropology, in which the researcher is the 'tool' through which research is conducted, data gathered and so on. In order to situate and honestly frame the research it is thus important to be explicit about the wider framing, including the long-term historical trajectories through which the researcher has approached the field, as well as the shorter trajectories and journeys through which the research proper has developed.

In my own case, I was already invested in the promotion of the Irish language and culture, and in the political developments in the north of Ireland long before the idea of doing a PhD even came to mind. From as early as I can remember I had been brought up being aware

that, and proud that, my Dad's family were Irish and Catholic, and with an uneasy, often negative, view of Britain and Britishness, and British interference in Ireland. The community in which my Dad grew up was, and amongst the older generation still is, predominately first generation Irish immigrants; it maintained a strong connection to various cultural practices such as Irish dancing, Gaelic Games and Irish traditional music, and these practices were an ever-present part of family life with my grandparents and the narrative of our identity as the O'Neill family. The church we grew up visiting with our grandparents was Catholic and Irish-dominated, and although this is now changing, the church still sells just two newspapers, both of which are Irish-oriented (the Irish Post and Irish World) and has various pieces of Gaelic and Celtic art and symbols. Until I was about eleven I stubbornly self-identified as Welsh and a Celt, by virtue of my birth and early years in Wales, and although this identity waned with my growing realisation at how very un-Welsh I was, an identification as Celtic, not-British and part-Irish remained very important to me. I was interested in Celtic mythology, folklore, art, music and history from an early age, and had a specific interest and connection with 'Irish culture'. At primary school I joined a ceilidh band, and have continued an interest in Irish music; from about twelve years old I dabbled with both the Irish and Welsh language in my free time. Between the ages of thirteen and twenty-two, I was a believing, although somewhat poorly practising, Catholic, with a real sense of attachment and interest in the Catholic Church, and I continued to attend mass on a semi-regular basis until I was twenty-five. Family duty continues to compel me to attend mass for special holidays, Easter, Christmas, and for funerals, weddings, birthdays and any weekend when visiting my Grandmother. As I began to look towards university choices around the age of fifteen and sixteen I began to gravitate towards ancient history and languages and Celtic studies, eventually applying to study Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, a course which took in the study of the languages, history and material culture of fifth to fourteenth century Ireland, Britain, Scandinavia and Northern Europe. I specialised in Gaelic history and I

continued to persevere with both modern and old Irish language as an extra-curricular subject, although with extraordinarily limited success. In the first two years of my degree, I became increasingly interested in anthropological theory and the study of culture and language, and in my third year I transferred to Social Anthropology. Although this included exploring a wide range of topics and regions, and focusing particularly on economic theory and socialist and post-socialist societies, the topic of the anthropology of religion brought me back to my interest in Ireland, and I began to explore the history and anthropology of contemporary Ireland, and particularly of Northern Ireland.

This was a subject that, at the time, I felt I had a relatively sound understanding of due to my own upbringing. I realised this assumption was almost entirely inaccurate as my explorations and investigations continued, especially after moving to Derry. The politics and history of Northern Ireland were, to my recollection, simply part of the narratives and interests of the environment in which I grew up, and it is difficult to say exactly when or how I might have first begun to learn about them. I was aware from a young age of religious divisions in the area, of the plantations and the flight of the earls, and of the continued religious discrimination; throughout my teen years I followed Irish history and politics in works of literature and history, in films and music, and in discussions with my Dad and grandparents particularly.

My first visit to Ireland, besides those when I was too young to remember, was not until I was sixteen. Although I was aware of key elements of history and politics in Northern Ireland, and probably had a greater interest in it than many of my contemporaries, it never crossed my mind on our arrival in Larne in 2006 that we were entering a zone in which the British army was still stationed, in which paramilitary groups were still active, in which the IRA had only in the previous year finished decommissioning, and in which the executive assembly hadn't yet successfully completed a full term. I was not aware of any of this. To my

mind, the conflict was over. As it turned out, we landed in Belfast in the height of the marching season and on the 25th anniversary of the hunger strikes. It wasn't an especially bad marching season by general reckoning, and indeed, the Drumcree march for the first year passed off peacefully. It was however, totally unexpected and a total shock to all of us, as we drove first through the patchwork of estates of north Belfast, marked by kerb paintings, bonfires and bunting or large photos of the hunger strikers lining the streets. As we drove around to the Giant's Causeway through the Protestant-dominated towns of the north coast, we encountered streets carefully decked out in bunting, paintings and photos of the queen, and our journey to Donegal via the Greencastle ferry saw us passing by Magilligan prison and across a heavily armed army checkpoint. These startling and unexpected images were to frame my imaginings of Ireland in my subsequent studies, bringing the political situation and division to the forefront of my mind.

While these imaginings have developed and changed, these early experiences and understandings formulated how I came to my studies of Northern Ireland. The journey leading up to my PhD had left me with a naive belief that I had some degree of understanding of the political situation and history and that I understood and had experienced 'Irish culture' and cultural outlooks. The process of preparing for, and conducting, my fieldwork was a journey of discovery of my own ignorance of almost all of these issues. I came to realise that what I understood and what I had experienced was much more representative of the culture of a particular segment of the Irish diaspora in Britain, and that the historical and political narratives that I had learnt were partial, biased and over-simplified. I came to realise just how far I was from understanding contemporary Irish culture, interests and perspectives, and indeed, just how 'English' I really was. Despite these realisations, this was a time in which my emotional connection to Ireland and my love of Irish culture and history became even more pronounced. Becoming more comfortable with my own position as English and as an ill-informed outsider, I also became more

comfortable with, and more involved and more invested than ever in, particular elements and aspects of Northern Ireland's culture and history.

It would, considering this background, be dishonest to pretend that my research was disinterested, or without a particular standpoint. My upbringing and resulting interests, perceptions and views of my own family meant that, from the outset, I was invested in the culture, politics and history aligned with Catholic and Nationalist/Republican positions in Ireland, and throughout my research I always felt more at home and more comfortable in these settings. These developing interests and investments of course shaped the whole orientation of my research; in the preliminary months before commencing fieldwork and during my master's degree I oriented my energy towards understanding and engaging with Catholic and Nationalist/Republican culture and politics. I re-learned modern Irish through the University of Sheffield Modern Languages department, I made various trips to Belfast and researched and wrote about street art, mural-painting and material culture, focussing particularly on West Belfast. While reading widely I took a particular interest in reading ethnographies and research looking at culture, history and contemporary life in Catholic/Republican communities. In designing my research project, while interested in culture generally, it was in 'Irish' culture and Nationalist/Catholic history that I was most interested, and with which I felt more comfortable dealing with, and it was in these areas that I particularly positioned myself. My interests, skills and knowledge-base not only affected where, and in relation to what activities, I felt more comfortable, but also of course affected the spheres in which I could operate within the field, and the settings and activities I could participate in. My ability to speak Irish, although rather mediocre, and desire to learn more, enabled me to participate more easily in Irish language settings that would otherwise been closed to me, although my lack of fluency did also mean that my level of understanding or ability to engage with monolingual settings was limited. My interest in Nationalist and Republican politics took me into such settings, and my involvement with Unionist and

Loyalist culture and politics was much more peripheral. The research is thus very much a view from somewhere; as with my participants it is a view that must be understood from within the context of this journey. The moment of research was neither beginning nor end, but simply part of a much longer process of change and development that took in both continuity and rupture.

6.6 Data use and analysis

By the end of my fieldwork, I had collected data from a whole range of sources and variety of methods. These included:

- reports and pages of notes spanning March 2014 to October 2015;
- ethnographic notes and diary entries from September 2014 to June 2015;
- recordings from 15 formal interviews;
- notes from many more informal chats and interviews;
- several databases of census and secondary quantitative data with quantitative data from the 1880s to the present;
- documents and material culture collected in the field such as brochures, badges, signs etc;
- photos, videos, historical documents, archive data and different historical materials which participants had given me;
- interview transcripts, videos and recordings from research projects or programmes being undertaken by participants in the field;
- statistics collected through emails and face-to-face meetings with organisers and leaders;
- statistics collected from contemporary and modern census analysis;
- an archive of newspaper articles, online posts, and a range of social media material.

I also had my own thoughts and reflections and responses of course - a research diary, and, of course also emails, messages, texts, videos, card and letters to friends and family in the city and at a home. My primary task on my return was to seek to sift through this wealth of quite disparate data and convert it into a form whereby I could start to thematically analyse it. I spent the first few months just reading the data, immersing myself in it, and writing up my interview transcripts. Making sense of all this data was somewhat overwhelming, with frequent days spent sitting on the floor surrounded by a mass of paper that all linked up, but in no way made a clear story or narrative. From this preliminary analysis a variety of themes,

stories and ideas eventually started to emerge, although it became clear that it would not be possible to tell them all, and that not all the data could possibly be included in my final thesis. There was much that had to be omitted, and various complexities and avenues would need to be left for future explorations. As noted earlier, my experience in the field had oriented me towards two related topics - the Irish language in everyday life in Derry's Cityside, and the widening participation in the Irish language with a focus on cross-community inclusion. Ultimately, when it came to writing up, it became clear that it would not be possible to do both of these interests justice in a single thesis and that I would have to leave major focus on one of these topics for another project. While it was a massive wrench, I decided to focus on the role of the Irish language in everyday life, rather than the cross-community initiatives. This decision was taken for pragmatic, political (with a small p) and academic reasons. My data on Irish in everyday life felt fuller and I was more confident with it; I had more interviews with those from 'traditional' Irish than from widening participation backgrounds, and I had lived and socialised on the Cityside all the time of my fieldwork. I felt that I had a better grasp of the everyday world and life in this context than that of participants from elsewhere in the city. The decision was also political and academic; as outlined in earlier chapters, I wanted to tell the story of the Irish language as it appeared in everyday life, without the influence of *a priori* assumptions of politics, identity or culture. I felt that such a study would contribute more towards the wider academic field of Irish studies than one that looked at the issue of sectarianism and community relations within the Irish language world.

In combining data collected from a wide range of methods and sources, rather than relying on interviews, statistics, documentary data or observations alone, I hope to paint as full a picture as possible of the complexity of everyday life. These methods all provided different ways of 'plugging in' to the complexity and reality of everyday life, all offering different modes of representing different positions, moments and contexts in which the act of

representing, or converting the world into data, took place. In seeking to combine methods I hoped to move towards the position of being as 'objective as possible', of avoiding just one point of view or one approach, and mitigating the extent to which the research project was solely explained in terms of how I experienced the field in the course of participant observation.

When coming to write my analysis chapters, I faced the same ethical concerns and dilemmas that I had encountered during the course of fieldwork, of how to handle the data in a way which was sensitive to participants, their privacy, their words and their lives. The solution was to take an approach which foregrounded participants' own words, against a backdrop of material, visual, documentary, historical and ethnographic notes and data. When presenting the words of my participants, I did not seek to analyse and examine in minutiae, or to draw conclusions from particular word uses or grammatical constructions, or say what they 'really thought' or 'meant'. Instead, I aimed to orchestrate, thematically group and organise their accounts, in ways which limited my own voice and let the words of participants do as much talking as possible. While my organisation inevitably involves interpretation and analysis on a basic level at least, I have refrained from commentary in terms of imputing motives or meanings to what participants say. Instead, I have grouped according to references to particular contexts, events, and relationships. I made the decision that any details or statements or information which I was unsure about ethically, whatever situation in which the data was obtained, would be either checked and approved by participants, or omitted completely. While to some degree a loss in terms of richness of data, this approach was based on the belief that an ethic of care towards participants and the field was far more important than any attempt to provide exhaustive details in the name of academic completeness.

The result of this approach was that while the long-term ethnography, observations and participation provide much of the context, background and position from which I came to explain and understand other forms of data, the interviews and ‘public’, ‘front of house’ events and documentary and visual material are more prominent in my analysis than initially anticipated. Extensive detailed ethnographic vignettes, the ethics of which often troubled me, are more limited, with the ethnography and participant observation being more generalised and ‘light’ in style and taking more of a background, supporting role.

This approach however is not totally out-of-keeping with what became my research interest, and indeed of course it shaped my research focus; my interest was in the Irish language in the everyday, and in the public sphere, how it was represented, used, talked about, and experienced. It was about what it did socially. To use Goffman’s terms, it became primarily about the ‘front stage’ rather than concerned with, without going into the other minds debate, what people ‘really thought’.

6.7 The research summarised

The following analysis chapters are thus the result of a complex, ongoing and unfinished journey and relationship with the field site. The process of systematically organising and thematically coding the data was a process which clarified, boxed and cleaned up the data into definable chunks, making the production of a narrative and argument possible.

However, it inevitably imposed an artificial system on a world that isn’t systematic, and isn’t clean. The following chapters, while attempting to include as much complexity, as much texture as possible, are of course not the whole story, and there is more to be told. While I cannot tell the whole story, I hope to tell a story that is good enough, that does justice to the stories of the participants and that is, as much as possible, told in their own worlds and using their own data. Of course, at the end of the day, it is my own voice and narrative that has organised the data, that has carved it up, that has systematised the complex everyday world, a story told from my own perspective. In the following chapters I focus primarily on

three forms of data: Chapter seven looks at the history of the Irish language in Derry, using secondary data, historical resources and documents collected in the course of fieldwork, in addition to ethnographic and interview notes. Chapter eight explores individual perceptions and narratives of the Irish language and what it means to people, primarily using interview data, chapter nine considers how Irish appears in the everyday linguistic environment, using ethnographic, observation, interview, documentary, visual and statistical data and chapter ten looks at how Irish appears in the everyday material environment, primarily using ethnographic and primary and secondary visual data.

7. The development of the Irish language in Derry

Chapters two and three explored the history of the Irish language, and contemporary developments, in terms of the complex interweaving of social, cultural and political movements which positioned the language and its use and symbolism in particular ways over the centuries. I argued that a detailed examination of the history of Irish revealed not only the complexity of change, but also the importance of recognising heterogeneity in the groups and divisions that appeared in the narratives of the 20th century. This chapter focuses on the development of the Irish language in Derry, and particularly the demographics of Irish language speaking over the last two centuries, the emergence of an 'Irish language sector' and the cultivation of an Irish language community or network in the city. I will argue that the early and contemporary demographic contexts of Irish in the everyday suggest a very different picture from the narrative of difference and division. While this local history is of course reflective of wider events and trajectories, and has some similarities to developments in Belfast, how Irish has come to figure in everyday life in Derry is a unique story, one which frames the present.

This chapter draws on a mixture of archive material and historical documents collected in the field, census data and other public records, interview data and ethnographic data, and documents and online sources collected during the course of fieldwork. It should be noted that, within the field itself, the historical narrative is contentious and much debated, and I do not claim to be taking a stance on this highly charged issue, nor is that my intention. As I have argued, the 'grand narrative' of history is, in whatever context, problematic; every individual will have their own history of the language, and their own understanding of cause and effect. The production of a single, clean historical narrative inevitably does violence to the complexity of the everyday, and omits or simplifies important details, and sometimes risks making causal claims that can never do full justice to the minutiae of a situation. There is, of course, more to be said, so I only present the version of history gleaned from those

stories and documents I was able to access during my own time in Derry. There are surely other stories to be told; in this chapter I simply endeavour to capture some of those minutiae, in presenting a history/histories from the point of view of the everyday and personal experience.

7.1 The Irish-speaking demographic in Derry

As a colonial settlement, the urban hub of Derry was a centre of British administration and the English language from its construction in the 17th century onwards. As in the rest of Ireland, the Irish language quickly began to lose ground in these areas in the face of economic, social and political pressures and necessities, and the census summary of 1881 reported only 3662 Irish speakers in county Londonderry, 4.2 per cent of the county's population³². Of these, only five were reported as speaking Irish only, the remainder reporting both Irish and English language skills. In the 'North West liberties of Londonderry' – the urban area from which the modern city has grown - there were 569 speakers, about four per cent of the urban population, one of whom was reported as speaking only Irish. In the rural area east of the city, there had been more substantial planter settlement and influence, and on-going immigration, particularly from Scotland and England planters. Here Irish was in a weaker position still. In the Barony of Tirkeenen, the area east and south of the Derry, only 2.3 per cent of the population spoke Irish.

To the west of the city, however, in the area that now forms the eastern portion of Donegal and where historically there had been less development and immigration since the plantation era, the Irish language remained in a stronger position. This area continued to be Derry's natural hinterland until partition, with heavy and continuous in-migration from the area to Derry city through the 18th and early 19th centuries. Partition had an impact on trade and travel ease, but Derry city, particularly west of the river, has continued to look towards

³² Data in this and the following paragraphs is calculated from the 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911 census reports (Online Historical Population Reports 2007)

Donegal until the present day, both in terms of migration and people movement, and cultural, historical and family links. The Derry Journal in the 19th century reported extensively on happenings in the Letterkenny area in particular, and many people crossed, and continue to cross, the border regularly to participate in cultural activities, to shop, visit family, attend education, take advantage of later pub opening hours and undertake other everyday activities. In Donegal, 18,620 people were reported as speaking only Irish, and 44,506 as speaking Irish and English in 1881. This amounted to 9.1 per cent and 21.7 per cent of the population of the county respectively, such that a total of thirty per cent of the population could be said to be Irish speakers. In Derry's immediate hinterland, the Barony of Inishowen West, just over ten per cent of the population spoke Irish in 1881. In Raphoe North, which bordered Derry to the south-west, about 6.3 per cent of the population were Irish speakers. In the baronies of western Donegal, the Irish speaking population dominated, with over fifty per cent of individuals speaking Irish.

In the 1901 census, in the 'county borough (or city) of Londonderry' - the urban area that became modern Derry city - the number of Irish speakers had doubled to 1256, although this increase was in line with the general population growth, such that Irish-speakers represented just over three per cent of the population. In Donegal county, the percentage of Irish speakers rose slightly to thirty-five per cent of the population. By 1911, the number of Irish speakers in the Derry urban area had risen by another fifty per cent to 1929, a figure that represented 4.7 per cent of the population. In Donegal the percentage remained at thirty-five per cent.

Of course, these numbers reflect the unknowable practices of enumerators and individuals in census reporting; as already noted in chapter three, there is no definition in the census returns or original forms of what 'speaking Irish' entails in terms of level, ability or extent of use, and it is likely that both under- and over-reporting could impact upon the data. The

data does however give insights into how individuals identified and presented themselves, one of the major themes to emerge in my data.

In my fieldwork interviews and conversations, participants quite often told me that they had grandparents who could either speak Irish, or had a fairly extensive knowledge of Irish, but chose not to report it in the censuses for social or political reasons. Furthermore, the issue of what 'counts' as 'speaking Irish' also figures here; a common response to my questions asking about whether there was any Irish in the family or if grandparents had spoken any Irish, was that grandparents had a lot of words that they used in an everyday sense, but which participants had not realised were Irish words until they began to learn Irish themselves. This included words such as *prátaí* (potato), *geansaí* (jumper), *brachán* (porridge), slobbering (talking rubbish), lured (excited/pleased) etc. Often participants noted that this was a feature of the Donegal border dialect, and their responses varied as to whether their grandparents had represented their speaking habits as 'Irish' or not. Given the Gaelic revival and the flourishing interest in Irish in the decades directly before and after the turn of the century, it is also possible that some individuals in the 1881-1911 censuses chose to report 'Irish' skills which were not necessarily fluent or advanced.

Taking these figures at face value, the picture is complex. The number of monolingual Irish speakers reduces, but overall numbers of Irish speakers rises. At the turn of the century this rise was below the rate of population growth, but by 1911 this trend seems to have been reversed. Turning to the documentary evidence, various explanations are presented. On the one hand, this period was one of on-going immigration from Donegal in particular, bringing with it residents from areas in which Irish was far more prevalent as an everyday language. According to my fieldwork participants' accounts of their own family histories, for some of these new migrants, Irish was their first language and their English language skills only developed fully on arrival in the city. The words of one individual I encountered, from a

fiercely Protestant area of the city, summed up a story I heard many times: in the course of a discussion of my research and my enthusiasm about the historical census data that showed the Irish speakers of 1911 to be more mixed as to religion, this individual responded, 'Aye, well, my mother-in-law, she came over from Donegal for work, and whenever she arrived she only spoke Irish, learnt her English here'.

The 1911 census data has already been explored in chapter three in terms of its importance in understanding that the political narrative of the Irish language was not the whole story. In particular, the analysis showed that, in the six counties as a whole, one third of the people who reported that they spoke either Irish or Irish and English were Protestant. In some areas, Protestants formed the majority of Irish speakers, for example in County Down, where sixty-nine per cent of people who reported that they spoke Irish were Protestant. Derry urban area had the highest number of Irish speakers in an urban division outside of Belfast, and accounted for just less than ten per cent of all Irish speakers living in urban areas, and just under five per cent of Irish speakers across the six counties as a whole.

In 1911, although the majority of Irish speakers in the city were from a Catholic background, close inspection of the data reveals that the Irish-speaking world was quite mixed and complex. The map in Figure 7-1 shows the number of Irish speakers on each street, represented by different size circles from small (one-ten people) to large (more than fifty people). It also shows the background of the different speakers on each street: blue circles indicate streets where the Irish language community is mixed Catholic and Protestant, red circles where it is purely Catholic, and black where it is purely Protestant. The plot shows that in many streets all over the city, and particularly those where there a lot of Irish speakers, the Irish-language community is mixed, with both Catholics and Protestants in the street speaking Irish; in seven streets only Protestants spoke Irish.

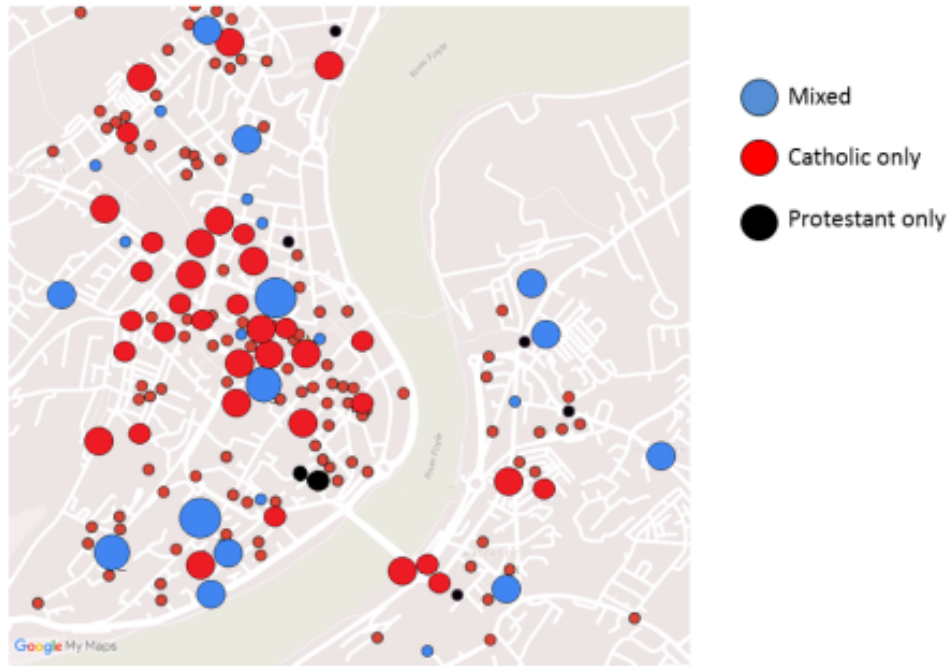


Figure 7.1 Derry 1911: Irish speakers reported in 1911 census, coded for numbers in each street and religious composition

Looking even more closely, we can see that in the area around the Fountain, which both historically and in contemporary Derry has been largely Protestant and strongly perceived to be a 'Protestant area', there was in fact a highly mixed community of Irish speakers in 1911 (Figure 7-2). Twenty-four people reported having Irish language skills in the census (as either Irish or Irish and English), sixteen of whom were Protestant. There were three all-Irish speaking families, the members of which were all Protestant. A more detailed look at individual cases highlights the diversity of those who spoke Irish in 1911 and demonstrates that Irish speaking was not exclusively aligned with one culture or political outlook. The Fulton family are a particularly good example of the complex context of Irish speaking in the city in terms of the diversity of different backgrounds and experiences, and the presence of Irish speakers in all communities and cultural traditions. A Presbyterian family originally from Plumbridge, ten miles south of Dunnamanagh, the Fulton family were living in Wapping Lane in 1911, subsequently moving to Kennedy Street. The census indicates that by 1911,

the father had passed away, the two daughters worked in the shirt factory and the eldest son, John James, was working as a shop boy. The whole family reported that they spoke Irish and English.

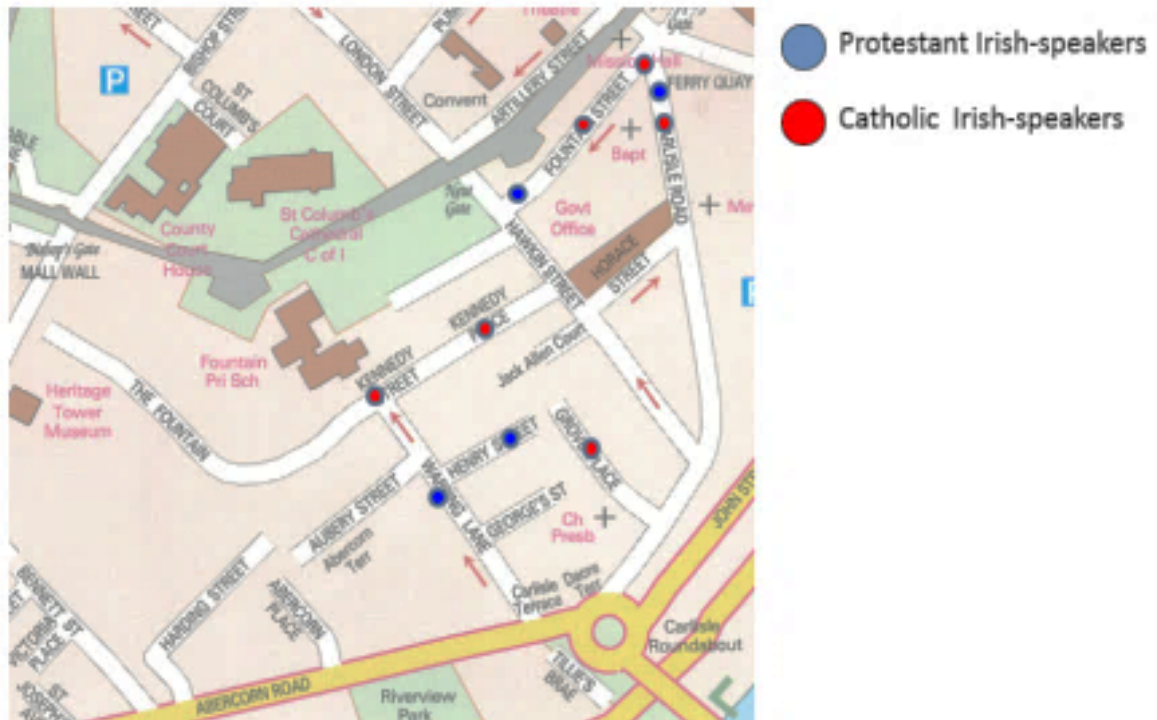


Figure 7.2: Area around the Fountain in 1911, census data reports of Irish Speakers

7.2 The development of an Irish language sector

The Irish language had been largely absent from the national education system until the very end of the nineteenth century; prior to this it was not considered or supported by the Education Commissioners either as a subject or a medium of education. Various Gaelic language societies began to petition for the promotion of the Irish language in schools in the 1870s but it was not until 1879 that financial support was given for the teaching of Irish. At this stage, Gaelic language, listed as 'Celtae' in examination schedules, was only financially supported as an additional out-of-school hours subject, and less than one-hundred schools are recorded as choosing to offer it. In 1883 the Commission allowed instruction in Irish in order to aid the acquisition of English language skills, and only in 1900 was Irish introduced

as an in-hours optional subject (Akenson 1970, pp. 380-81). The Catholic Christian Brothers Schools, initially established in 1820 to provide education to the poor, soon became associated with the promotion of Gaelic history, language and culture, and, being independent from state educational decisions and financial restrictions, taught Irish language as part of the curriculum from a much earlier period. In 1854, Derry became one of the first locations of a Christian Brothers school in Ulster. The Order put new emphasis on Irish from the 1870s in line with growing support and interest nationally (Biancalana 2009, Cooper 2012, p. 52). Irish language education remained a key compulsory subject at the school until its closure in 1976. The Christian Brothers school was frequently recalled by older participants I encountered during my fieldwork, who, reflecting on the wider development of the Irish language in the city, lamented the dry manner in which Irish had been taught; as one alumnus who attended the school in the 1940s reflected, 'It was taught like Latin, like a dead language, all grammar and tables, there was no real emphasis on using it, it made it hard to take on, you know'.

A collection of documents, including newspaper cuttings, local Gaelic League reports, memoirs and oral and written histories collected from participants and activists during the course of my fieldwork provides illuminating detail on the growth of adult Irish language education in the city, showing how the development from a conscious and deliberate fostering of the language to its emergence as part of everyday experience³³. The first branch of *Conradh Na Gaeilge*, the Gaelic League, was established in Derry on 10th February 1894, membership of which included prominent local priests, who appealed to members to learn

³³ This includes an account of the development of Irish in Derry between 1893 and 1921 obtained during the course of fieldwork written by Irish Language enthusiasts using *Conradh na Gaeilge* reports and *Derry Journal* articles, and simply named 'The Gaelic Language In Derry', a written personal account of the early history of *An Craoabh*, one of the branches of the League in the 1940s and 1950s, an Irish Language written account of the Irish Language and its history in Derry *Scéal na Gaeilge: Dréacht Deiridh*, which I translated in portions myself, a 1999 copy of *The Gaelic League Weekly*, again in Irish, containing various historical accounts, and an Irish language written account of the development of the Irish Language in the Rosemount area of the city. The *Derry Journal*, archives for which are available within the British Newspaper Archives, also provide a rich source for the study of the history of the Irish language in the city.

‘our grand old Irish tongue’. In 1900, the Derry branch had 260 members, and held 84 meetings in 1901; by 1906 there were five branches in the city. The focus and purpose of these organisations quickly became much more than language education, however; they also promoted the study of Irish history, place names, literature, dancing and other cultural activities. The Derry branches were involved in on-going campaigns concerning the contemporary state of Irish and its place in everyday life, seeking to promote the everyday use of Irish, campaigning against emigration from the Gaeltacht, and publically criticising the lack of Irish language or activities in local performances, plays, the Derry *Fèis*, and in the United Irish League. The Derry branches also campaigned for the development of Irish language education in local schools, with the effect that by 1912 an estimated 2000 children were learning Irish at schools in the city. In 1915, as the Irish language revival movement began to dwindle in Ulster, the Derry branches sought to re-organise and re-invigorate their own communities, focusing particularly on promoting Irish in schools. In 1916, *Coláiste Dhoire* (Derry College) was established as a teacher training college for Irish language education. This new college shared premises with a new branch of the Gaelic league, which had 200 members and allowed for a programme of daily Irish language classes, debates, music, dancing and history. Derry continued to have an active Irish language and culture scene through the next decade. In January 1922 the Gaelic League began a project of organising separate county committees for each of the 32 counties, the organiser of the project in Ulster choosing Derry city and Council as the primary county in this project, citing the continued use of Irish in the area, and the intention to establish a ‘central hall for language affairs in the city’ (Derry Journal, Friday 20 January 1922, p. 6) . In 1922 nine branches and classes of the Gaelic league were advertised in the city³⁴.

Post-partition saw the emergence of a more hostile environment, with the new Stormont government seeking to introduce a series of measures restricting Irish language education in

³⁴ Dates and figures obtained from ‘The Gaelic Language In Derry’, sections 1-10.

schools and its use in public life. In Derry, the Gaelic league remained active through a series of branches, and continued to campaign for the promotion of language in everyday life, calling on citizens to use Irish during their shopping and everyday activities in order to force shops to employ Irish speaking staff³⁵. The local Derry paper, the *Derry Journal*, which generally catered for the Nationalist population at this time, continued to regularly report on the Irish language revival and development, looking to Donegal especially, and the developments and activities there³⁶. Nevertheless, the vitality of the movement suffered in this period, and activity and participation declined as the decades progressed.

However, the release and return of interned IRA prisoners in the 1940s and 1950s brought a renewed interest and energy to the language movement and adult language education. During their incarceration, a group of these prisoners had learnt Irish and planned Irish language development in the city. On release, they established a new branch of the Gaelic League in the city in association with the local Gaelic Athletic Association branch, and despite the hostile climate, began to attract large numbers of members³⁷. The branch eventually outgrew their premises at Celtic Park and purchased new accommodation off Bishop Street. Numbers expanded such that five weekly Irish language classes were offered, as well as weekly *céilidhs* and classes on mythology and history. In 1951, the Ulster committee of the Gaelic League invited the branch to participate in the 50th anniversary of the League. The club organised an Irish language week, which was opened by the newly re-elected Taoiseach, Eamon de Valera. The event attracted large-scale attention and a swelling of involvement in Irish language and cultural activities in the city, and membership

³⁵ 'The Gaelic Language in Derry' section 10.

³⁶ The number of articles in the *Derry Journal* discussing the 'Irish language' or 'Gaelic Language' between 1910 and 1960 peaks in the decade 1930-39, increasing from 476 in 1910 to 624 1920-29, and peaking in 1930-39 with 1072 articles. After which the number of articles on the issue decline, with just 155 in the decade 1940-49 and 348 1950-59. Search conducted on the British Newspaper Archive 2019 (FindMyPast Newspaper Archive 2019).

³⁷ The growth of Irish stemming from ex-prisoners who had learnt the language in jail in the 1940s occurred across the north, and was particularly central in the Belfast revival (Mac Ionnrachtaigh 2013, p. 86-7. See also Kleinrichert 2001).

continued to grow until 1966. The 1960s also saw the founding of *An Cumann Gaelach*, an Irish language society that met regularly in the centre of the city. This club would be active in later decades in the setting up Derry's first Irish Medium Education unit.³⁸ While there was growth in the movement until the mid-1960s, the Irish language movement in the city was piecemeal with no coherent structure or network to sustain the use or promotion or education of Irish. Some of my participants recalled the impact of this fragmentation on their own efforts to learn Irish. Here Tiarnán recalls his search for a class:

‘Well the Irish language sector when I started learning Irish in the early 70s was almost non-existent, it was difficult to find a class, and I went round trying to find an evening class, and there was one, I remember, there was one on Bishop Street in a community centre but it was a teacher who wasn't a qualified teacher and he was working of an old text book, which would have been a school textbook and there wasn't much structure to it, they were teaching you grammar and stuff, and whatever arrangement there was with it, he drifted off after some weeks. And then we had another teacher who had a different textbook and a different methodology and that folded and then we went to a room in Clarendon Street up on the third floor in a back room and that went on for a while, different teacher, different textbook and we moved then to the bar down the bottom, where Earth is now, and we were upstairs in a lounge there, and again a different group of people, different levels of learning, different textbook, different methodology, it was really, really half-hearted, and I can understand why people would have said they tried it and gave up.’

³⁸ The 1960s was a period in which, across the North, there was a growing optimism and commitment within the Irish language movement, and a move towards developing the language as part of the everyday and away from being a subject of education and intellectual pursuits. In Belfast, a group of young couples began developing the idea of an urban Gaeltacht from 1960, developing Shaw's Road, a street of Irish speakers which by 1965 had a nursery, and by 1971 a primary school (Mac Ionnrachtaigh, 2013, p.90).

The outbreak of the Troubles had a significant effect on the Irish language movement in Derry. As outlined in chapter four, the narrative of the post-partition Northern Ireland state as regards the Irish language was to strongly associate it with Irish nationalism, Republicanism, and narratives of disloyalty. At the outbreak of the Troubles, there was no official cultural wing of Nationalist politics as such, but the existing association of the Irish language with Republicanism led to the targeting of language activists in early governmental attempts to suppress unrest. As the conflict escalated, various key Irish language organisers and activists in Derry were targeted by the police and army, thus exacerbating the perceived position of Irish as both oppositional to the state, and as part of a Republican agenda. At this point, then, Irish speakers were affected by the dominant narrative of division, and among the general public there was a wariness of being seen to speak or use Irish, as described by participant Ava:

‘One of the big issues as well, was that you have to put in, is that I really do believe that in the time of the Troubles it wouldn’t have been seen to be....respectable...? I don’t know what word you want to use, to be learning Irish, and people had a wee fear of learning Irish.... might be seen to be subversive.’

Practically speaking, the Troubles disrupted daily life and massively impacted the character and possibilities of social interaction, movement around the city and everyday activities and routines. In addition to frequent violence, the heavy militarisation of public space, restrictions on movement and the threat of harassment, Derry, like many other major towns in the north, experienced on-going bombing which damaged much of the high street and city centre. One participant recollected that, ‘during all the height of the Troubles, people would have been afraid to leave their homes’; this was echoed by many others, underlining the fact that getting out to go to Irish classes, groups and social events was simply less possible than before.

7.3 The revival and expansion of Irish in the late 20th century: ‘creating an Irish language community’

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was growing confidence and organisation in the Irish language movement in Derry, reflecting the general development of the Irish language sector across Northern Ireland: the development of a cultural wing within nationalism and the armed movement lent organisational and promotional power to the development of the Irish language. In 1983, the first Irish-medium education provision was established in the city, in the Irish Medium Education unit at Steelstown school. The new school, *Bunscoil Cholmcille*, was established with the help of the Bishop of Derry and was the first state-funded IME education project in Northern Ireland. It opened with an intake of twenty-four pupils and one teacher, and by 1993 had grown enough to be established as a stand-alone primary school, with an intake of 183 children and nine teachers. In 1984, a new branch of *Conradh na Gaeilge* was established in Dove House, a community advice and development hub in the Bogside area of the city. This new branch - the *Craobh Colm Chille*- offered Irish language classes to local adults and young people in the city, and expanded rapidly to meet growing demand, moving to new city centre premises in 1988, and expanding again in 1994. As in the rest of the north, developments in the 1980s marked a change in approach to how the Irish language was taught, presented and used, and in ideas about its future role. Echoing the movements in the prisons and the general developing cultural strategy, there was a move to make Irish better organised, more rooted in the everyday life of the community, including working-class communities, and more accessible, particularly to those with little educational background. This aims and orientation of this early development was explained by Tiarnán:

‘For a lot of Irish speakers in this town it was a hobby, it was a serious hobby for many, for some it was an obsession, but they would have spoken Irish to people who couldn’t speak Irish, they would have spoken Irish to people who spoke English,

they were quite elitist. Not all, that's generalised, but a lot, interested in learning Irish and passing it onto their children, but not in creating an Irish language community, or, in my view, seriously reviving the Irish language, and at the time that was seen as pie in the sky to talk about that, and what we've got now what we've created by this stage in 2015, is probably beyond their wildest dreams, even the amount of classes. So we set about teaching teachers, getting standard courses, teaching spoken Irish not grammatical Irish, coz that's how we were taught Latin in grammar schools, and the genesis of that was that we developed and developed and then we decided we needed a strategy, and I was bringing, I suppose, management principles to you know a hobby issue almost, and trying to get funding to have full time people doing it rather than hobbyists who could turn up of a night and not turn up of a night, there was no real obligation coz they were doing voluntary so you couldn't hold them to account.'

In Derry, as across Northern Ireland general in the 1980s, there was development to improve coordination between different groups, and also to broaden involvement to include wider audiences and potential communities and viewpoints. Tiarnán also explained how all groups - including those from Protestant/Unionist backgrounds - were targets for inclusion:

'Out of that strategizing, we decided to identify a target audience in term of marketing and we decided there is a Republican constituency, a Republican Nationalist constituency, who are very keen to learn Irish and are closest to the customer base we wanted, and then we had a Nationalist section which was sort of "nice idea but I haven't the time", err, apathetic in many ways, and then we had the Unionist community who were hostile, so we set about a marketing strategy to engage with all those different sections in a quite systematic approach.'

While much of the promotion of the Irish language was focused on the Nationalist community, this period also saw active attempts to challenge perceptions of the Irish language as culturally exclusive and to raise participation amongst wider groups across the north. In Derry, there was an active attempt by various Irish groups to re-negotiate and re-articulate the Irish language into a more inclusive, less politicised framework, from the late 1980s onwards. In the late 1980s, *Cumann Gaelch Chnoc na Rós* was established in the Rosemount area of the city, operating with an explicitly non-political ethos and getting involved in cross community programmes and engagements in the city. *Craobh Colm Chille*, by this point the largest and most developed Irish language organisation in the city, launched a cross-community engagement project in the early 1990s, facilitated by wider cultural and peace groups in the city. This project, called *An Droichead* (the bridge), was initially aimed at 'just dialogue sessions and discussions, and our objective was to sell them the idea of putting on Irish classes in Protestant areas' (activist in Derry). While important in that this started a process and a discussion, the project met with mixed success and varying interest. Tiarnán describes some of the difficulties faced:

'To this day, is it's too early, we've got some classes going and we've had some hiccups and such, the hostility was such a level that it was hard to break through... The work with the Protestant community has been faltering, sometimes good years, bad years.'

However, the group was successful in working with paramilitaries and the Ulster Volunteer Force through the ex-prisoner group EPIC, working with that group and Protestant speakers of Irish to conduct research into ideas and views of the Irish language in the Protestant and Unionist community. This early work laid the groundwork for future development and widening participant projects in the city; it was felt to be a valuable part of the general

thrust towards greater inclusivity and a rejection of the political grand narrative, as Tiarnán described:

‘Out of that report was a change of attitude, it had moved from hostility, following the peace process, towards curiosity or at least apathy, and we’ve been building on that ever since’.

Tiarnán explained that this attempt to widen participation and inclusion was, and remains, crucial to the aim that Irish can be a community language, a sentiment expressed also by many other activists in the city during the course of my fieldwork:

‘So we’re overcoming issues that they have that are out of our making or control, so that’s the genesis of where we are going, is that we are actually trying to create an Irish language community and you can’t do that without including the Protestant community’.

7.4 Development in post-conflict Derry: widening participation, integration into the everyday and moving towards inclusion

In the last two decades, the Irish language provision and network in the city has mushroomed³⁹. In 1998, *Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir* was established in the Creggan area of the city, and gained official recognition from the Department of Education in 2002. By 2011, it had almost 150 children and 26 children in the 2009 preschool. *Gaelscoil na Daróige* was established in 2005 as a follow-on to a established pre-school *Naíscoil Mhaol íosa*. Attempts to set up secondary Irish Medium Education provision in the city have presented more of a challenge; *Meanscoil Dhoire* (Derry middle-school) was established in 1994 but, as with all Irish language schools, initially operated without state funding. The attempt proved exceedingly ambitious at this early stage; struggling with a lack of facilities, resources and teaching staff, it experienced management difficulties, and low educational outcomes and

³⁹ Information in this sub-chapter is drawn from observations, participation and discussions during fieldwork, as well as documentary sources.

less positive student experiences, such that enrolment and student retention remained low, even amongst the most committed of Derry's Irish language community. Low admissions meant that it continued to fall below the threshold for state funding, and from 1999 negotiations took place for the school to instead become an Irish medium unit within St Brigid's high school. The new unit opened in 2000, but began a phased closure in 2008 due to on-going low admission rates (General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland 2008; They Work For You 1999; Templegrove Action Research Limited 1996). This left the city with no secondary language provision, despite the high number of children attending the three Irish-language primary schools⁴⁰. Attempts to develop secondary education provision in the city continued in subsequent years, finally reaching fruition in 2015 with the opening of a new school in county Derry, Coláiste Dhoire. Located in Dungiven Castle, the new school was located at an optimum distance from the primary schools in Derry city, Strabane and Portglenone, and was also within commutable distance to the wider county areas in Antrim, Derry and Tyrone. It opened with an intake of fourteen in September 2014 with a long-term projected intake of 400. The school has sought to overcome the difficulties generally faced by IME secondary education - poor provision of resources and a shortage of qualified

⁴⁰ Across the north, Irish medium secondary schooling has generally been slower to develop, with the exception of Belfast, where *Coláiste Feirste* was established in 2001 and has grown rapidly, with 600 pupils and 48 teachers in 2015, and coming in the top five per cent of exam results in Northern Ireland since 2010. There are a number of Irish medium streams and units across Northern Ireland however, and in total about 1000 students enrolled in post-primary Irish medium education in 2016. By September 2016, over 5800 children were enrolled in primary and post-primary Irish-medium education, and there were nearly ninety IME providers at Nursery, Primary and Secondary levels. Irish language education development has generally been stifled by the education funding policy in Northern Ireland, which requires new schools to meet minimum numbers of pupils before being state funded and recognized. This generally means that in the early years, when there may be just one or two years' worth of pupils in attendance, there is no or limited funding available. This has meant IME has struggled with resources, facilities and being able to pay teachers and staff. This funding formula differs from that used in the south, which will provide funding on the basis of projected student numbers. John O'Dowd, Sinn Féin Education minister until 2015 took decisions to over-ride this system in a number of cases, and was generally supportive, but since his replacement by Democratic Unionist Party Peter Weir, the IME sector has faced consistent barriers with five out of six IME development proposals being rejected since he took office (Doyle 2016; Department of Education 2016).

teaching staff - by sharing resources with other schools across the North (McKinney 2015; They Work For You 2015b).

Adult education and participation in the city has also undergone rapid development since the peace process. In 2001, *Craobh Cholm Cille* gained funding from the Northern Ireland government, Irish government, European Union and local regeneration funds to build a new million-pound purpose-built Irish language, culture and enterprise centre in heart of the city. The space was to provide facilities for performance, language and training classes, business development and offices and a café, and aimed to develop a cultural and Gaeltacht quarter in the city. It provided a home for wider groups and businesses including Irish language film and TV, music and community development initiatives. The centre, named *An Cultúrlann*, was opened in 2009 by the Irish Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and by 2014 had 126,000 annual users, thirty-six staff, four buildings and was involved in the delivery and development of national and international festivals. The growth of the programmes and users necessitated further expansion, with new buildings and development between 2009 and 2015 (Cultúrlann 2016). The centre delivers the *Leargas* programme, discussed in more detail in the following chapter, which provides Irish language lessons in local primary schools.

Adult education has had to adapt to changing conditions and possibilities, as funding requirements and provision change rapidly; informal discussions with activists in the city explained that in the late 1990s, under New Labour, there was a considerable amount of money available to finance adult education and employment-skills schemes which the Irish language sector could capitalise on. In contrast, they explained, the contemporary economic situation was much harder, with subsidies and funding for adult education being severely cut, such that it was becoming much more difficult to continue providing low-cost or free adult education. The University of Ulster moved its Irish and Celtic Studies Research

Institute to Derry in 2009, and established the School of Irish Language and Literature at Magee College in 2013. The University has been heavily involved in supporting Irish language education and development in the city, and has provided a pathway for Irish language learners to develop their skills through the diploma programme run in Derry and Belfast, which offers a more formal programme with more of a focus on written and grammatical Irish and a chance to progress to BA studies in Irish.

The community has continued with its efforts to widen participation and move away from traditional barriers. During the course of my fieldwork, a series of engagements between the bands forum and the Cultúrlann during the City of Culture made strides towards improving relations between different organisations and groups in the city and in challenging perceptions of boundaries around belonging and participation in different activities and the meaning of those activities. In addition to the warmly welcomed participation of protestant local bands in the *Fleadh*, St Patrick's Day celebrations, the Pan Celtic Festival and Columba day festival across 2014 and 2015, the bands launched a school programme, seeking to educate children about the bands and challenge the perception of the bands as sectarian or territorial. The aim was to highlight instead their role in community building and helping marginalised young people, and to emphasise that they were, as much as anything, simply 'for the love of music', as one activist described. During my fieldwork there were a variety of follow-up initiatives, engagements and partnerships, centred on music, culture and language, which included participants from both communities and from various different organisations and groups. In January 2015, an Irish language class was launched in the Waterside area of Derry with the specific aim of attracting participants from the Protestant/Unionist community. Linda Ervine and a group of Protestant speakers attended the launch event and gave talks about their own experiences, seeking to emphasise that the Irish language was part of all traditions, and how it had contributed positively to their own lives and the community around them. The classes, while small,

successfully attracted individuals from a variety of backgrounds. The Cultúrlann also undertook initiatives to challenge perceptions around the Irish language and provide Irish language education to a variety of different groups and organisations in the city associated with the Protestant/Unionist community in both cross-community and single-community settings.

These initiatives during my fieldwork, while never reaching a grand scale, were nonetheless effective in initiating changing perceptions and new experiences of the Irish language not only amongst participants from the Unionist community, but also those from Catholic/Nationalist backgrounds, who actively expressed their interest in, and enthusiasm for, these developments and working towards greater inclusion. One participant from a Protestant background reflected on their own particular journey in terms of their realisation that they too could be part of the Irish language community, without loss of who they were:

‘I used to feel like Irish language, Irish music, that didn’t belong to me, that doesn’t belong to me and I don’t have a right to it, and that night, just listening to them, I was just like, oh my god, this makes, I just didn’t realise how little I knew about myself until I was listening, you know what I mean, I was like, och that so makes complete sense, why can’t I learn that language, why can’t that be part of my heritage too, just like one of those ‘aha’ moments, why not, you know, and that was quite liberating in a way, and healing because I think it sort of, it’s hard to explain, that’s how it felt, like, oh I can do this, this can be part of me and I can still be who I am, I don’t have to change’.

The desire to move away from the narrative of difference and division is also strong in this account from a participant from a Catholic background, following a cross-community language initiative:

‘I would love it see it loosening the ties where people think that it’s a political language, I would like for it to be accessible to all and for there to be no, essential, hatred, towards it, from a certain part of the community...You know how some people say, ‘Oh, its unfair treatment to give the Protestants it [priority access /funding to Irish language programmes over those who have waited longer or been involved longer]...but I think no, in terms of inclusion and promotion, then there should have been space for all them, and I didn’t see why not, because you look for example there at, over the water, there are certain groups that are underrepresented.’

7.5 Conclusion

The history of the Irish language in Derry reflects in many ways the wider historical development of the Irish language across Northern Ireland. From a position of weakness and decline in the 18th century, the language underwent a revival in which *Conradh na Gaeilge* and the Catholic church were particularly influential. In the 20th century, again in the face of decline, the flourishing of the Irish language owed much to Republican and Nationalist politics and political groups. However, as argued in chapters three and four, the narrative as told from the field is more complex; political groups and the Catholic church have had their part to play in the development of the language, and often the majority of speakers have been Catholic, but this is only part of the story. As the 1911 census highlights, the actual population of Irish speakers was ethnically mixed, and the story of Irish language development in Derry in recent decades has been very much concerned with widening access and inclusion. Recent development has been oriented towards the integration of the Irish language into everyday life and development of sustainable Irish language communities through education, festivals, and widening participation.

The next three chapters explore the Irish language in everyday life in contemporary Derry, beginning with the narratives and experiences of individuals involved in the Irish language

scene in Derry, before proceeding to examine how Irish is used, and not used, in everyday life, both in terms of social interaction and everyday material and linguistic environments. To return to the theoretical framework offered by Lefebvre and Jenkins, these chapters explore in turn how Irish is imagined or perceived, how the Irish language is experienced, and how the Irish language is represented and incorporated into practices of representation. While of course all these elements are intertwined and productive and reproductive, the relationship between these elements is not always neat and tidy, not always a neat linear dialectic, but complex, messy and at times contradictory. It is not only perceptions and the personal imagining of practices that are internally messy and paradoxical; narratives of practices, experience and behaviour, however honest, are sometimes self-contradictory and express a range of complex views, and similarly narratives and representations, however honest, do not always map on to the complexities of practice and experience in everyday life. To return to Law's comments on 'plugging in' discussed in the methodological chapter, these three chapters represent three different ways of 'plugging in' to the everyday life of the Irish language in Derry.

The exploration of the narratives, experiences and practices of representation, informed and framed by historical trajectories, explore both how understandings and perceptions of Irish and its role in everyday life have come to be naturalised or expected, but also how these narratives challenge dominant representations and expectations and experiences change and develop as the social world changes. They explore the affective power of Irish, which is rooted in banal and mundane social interactions, and informed by personal and historical developments that have made both the contemporary 'big picture' and individual trajectories within that picture what they are. The banal and mundane in Northern Ireland, while not reducible to Politics with a capital 'P', cannot be separated from it. The region is highly Politicised in a very basic sense and the effects of historical and contemporary political struggles continue to shape everyday life, and are a feature and discussion point of

everyday life, particularly as regards the Irish language. Returning to the discussion at the beginning of this theses, the Irish language in everyday life in Derry is understandable both in terms of 'hot' and 'banal' nationalism. However, as has been argued throughout this thesis, neither is it reducible to these Political (with a capital P) power struggles, but has wider everyday functions, importance and effects. Nor is the intertwining with Politics a matter of simply being 'about' nationalism or identity politics, but takes in far more complex webs of social interactions, power relations, aspirations and personal experiences.

8. The Irish language in contemporary Derry: its emotional and affective importance in individual narratives

The Irish language has developed rapidly in recent years in Derry, with growing numbers of Irish language learners, and, as will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, growing numbers who use or experience Irish as part of regular everyday interactions. This chapter explores how individuals perceive and narrate their own practice and experiences of, and relationship with, the Irish language, using interview data and some ethnographic data.

Gathered from interviews and conversations during everyday life, the narratives that make up this chapter are rooted in the times and places of their production and in the interactions and social environments in which they were produced. As such, they are part of a wider process of knowledge co-production, communication, social interaction and inter-personal narrative production which is never finished; as human beings, we are always engaged, either actively or passively, in activities in which we acquire new information and ideas, and form new narratives of aspects of our lives, ourselves and about others and the world around us. This is noticeably so in the case of Irish language learners and those working to promote the Irish language, where learning and knowledge production is, by definition, the activity of such individuals. In the world of Irish language activism and promotion, the activity of narrating the past and present, offering new visions and new versions of these narratives, and producing new knowledge about the Irish language, is central to cross-community outreach, widening participation, policy campaigns and language revival and promotion. The presence of a researcher adds an additional layer of complexity in that the process of interviewing creates a further context of narrative production in which participants must explain their experiences and perspectives in a way that perhaps rarely emerges in everyday conversation, and which may also be impacted by the presence of recording devices, consent forms and other research paraphernalia. My own activities in the

field, for example my presence as an English woman learning Irish, my participation in cross-community work and my presentations of my research and the Irish language, were potentially contributory, or even challenging, to the production of narratives of Irish: I was regularly asked why I was learning Irish, and in reply produced my own narratives, as well as engaging with others about this issue.

In this chapter, I attempt to represent individual narratives in a way that does justice to their complexities and contexts whilst also identifying themes, similarities and trends. As much as possible, I have tried to let participants' words tell the story, rather than impose my own versions, while also giving a sense of the narrative progression and wider context in which these words were produced. As with all data, how it is organised in the course of the analysis is rooted in the researcher's perceptions, experience and approach, and I make no claims for the following being the only, or the 'best', story. It is one of many, told from a particular perspective and position, and attempts to do justice to the shape and the complexity of the situation.

As has been explored extensively throughout this thesis so far, over recent centuries the Irish language has become bound up with wider political and social struggles, with cultural and identity movements and divisions. It has become bound up with 'hot' issues around constitutional future, power and control and ideas around freedom, equality and human rights, and has become intertwined with a wider repertoire of emotionally affective cultural and political practices. Individual narratives, while sometimes starting with such politics and identity-based explanations of emotional and affective importance, are rarely limited to such explanations. This chapter argues that although narratives of politics, culture and identity are important themes in individual accounts of the Irish language, these narratives and stories of the Irish language are also intensely personal, local and complex. The narratives speak to the presence and use of Irish language in contexts that are very

everyday, mundane, and to do with social interactions, emotions, relationships and aspirations that cannot be reduced to Politics with a capital P. Additionally, while they display common themes, these individual narratives highlight that the meaning of Irish to people, and its role in everyday life, is multifaceted, complex, and sometimes contradictory.

8.1 Identity, culture and politics

In most academic, political and media discourses, the Irish language and its place in contemporary Northern Ireland is overwhelmingly framed in terms of culture, politics and identity. This framing is captured and enshrined in law by the Good Friday Agreement, which promised that ‘any new political arrangements must be based on full respect for, and protection and expression of, the rights and identities of both traditions in Ireland’ (Northern Ireland Office 1998). Identity and culture are frequently the dominant frame in media discussion and political debate about Irish; it is not uncommon to see headlines such as ‘Northern Ireland people learn Irish language for reasons of identity’ (Carty 2015), while debates in Stormont around the language frequently focus on issues of identity, culture and tradition, usually in terms of cultural difference, division and equality issues. Social research is often similarly framed and shaped in terms of identity in particular, but also draws on the nebulous terms ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’. For example, a recent all-Ireland study (ESRI 2015) opens with the statement that ‘the language we speak is part of our identity and makes us part of our community’ and asked questions such as if participants believed ‘that Ireland would lose its identity without the Irish language’ (Darmody and Daly 2015, pviii, pxi).

Given this dominant discourse, it is not surprising that in my own data references to identity, culture and politics were prominent in individual narratives of the Irish language and its place in everyday life, often as the starting point of participants’ accounts. The following comments are examples of the use of ‘identity’ and ‘culture’ as initial responses to my questions about the importance of Irish or the decision to learn it:

‘For me it was probably part of that sense of being Irish and reclaiming your identity.’ (Tiarnán)

‘It’s important in terms of self-esteem and identity and in cultural terms as well’
(Aodhán)

In some cases, these ideas were, as claimed in certain political and media representations of the Irish language, linked to particular political and social objectives and affiliations:

‘I think, err, part of it, in the north it was the struggle for identity, you know, I think that’s fair to say and you know, you’ve got the symbols play such a strong part in our traditions in the north, and you’ve got the separation of the Union Jack from the Tricolour so then, coming from background if you wore the Tricolour you were Irish.’
(Oisín)

‘Erm, to be honest for me it [learning Irish] was probably, I was an Irish Republican and a Nationalist so for me it was probably part of that sense of being Irish and reclaiming your identity and being. It’s, it made you different, more than your politics, ‘cos there wasn’t a Sinn Féin then, there was a military wing, but there wasn’t much of a cultural aspect, and I just wanted to reclaim my Irishness.’
(Tiarnán)

However, discussions and explanations framed in terms of ‘identity’ and ‘culture’ did not tend to remain the dominant theme or framework away as discussions progressed. Rather, this common starting point would lead to the discussion of a complexity of ideas, and which referenced a variety of different issues, experiences and emotions. As they unfolded, narratives of identity and the relationship with politics and culture gave way to more nuanced and complex accounts than those suggested by the opposition narratives that Sinn Féin and republicans ‘use the language as a weapon’, or a ‘political performance’, which are

often found in political debate and the media. Although complete disassociation of culture, politics and identity in the highly politicised environment of Northern Ireland would be almost impossible, their relationship is variable and open to constant change; in almost all cases participants' stories were more complex than a simple equation with Republican politics or nationalism, or a singular desire to promote a particular constitutional or cultural vision. While some accounts were to a certain degree told through an oppositional narrative of nations and identities, they also sought to explain other facts of the language, and highlight the complexities of, and distance themselves from, particular manifestations of nationalism and performances of identity. Oisín captures the contradictions:

'It's just so contradictory, you'll see people wrap themselves up in the green, white and gold flag and shouting for the Irish national team, you know, "Ireland, you'll never beat the Irish", but you scratch the surface of what it means to be Irish, you know, like, historically it was the impact on the relationship between England that was so overwhelming that dress codes were changed, names were changed, locations were changed, the language was changed, the school system was changed, you know. They changed everything except the bloody religious system, you know. You can debate that 'til the cows come home, whether they should have changed that, but you know, you think about that then that people don't have a view of who we are as a nation outside of that anglicised lens, you know, we're Irish but we'll gladly speak English and have all our pop culture from England, we'll do English games, and I'm not saying you need to be Nationalist to the point of excluding any other culture, but there has to be a better balance. I mean there really has to be balance, and unfortunately, I think sometimes, you don't have capacity to reflect upon the significance of doing and saying things, but as the generation, the research has shown that the Gaeltachts are in danger, and the, and if we're happy to let our Irish identity, that part of us which is Gael, die in us, like, that's so sad you know,

that's let just forget about our identities and call ourselves English or Australian or call ourselves European, we lose too much, we lose too much at that.'

For many others, there was a tension between nationalism and Republicanism, or between being political and any party political or constitutional activism. As Aodhán put it, there is a difference between 'Politics' with a capital 'p' and 'politics' with a little 'p':

'It's just the missing part, and erm, you know, politically with a small p, erm, identity is very important here, it can also be controversial, but it's very important in this part of the country and erm, we took the decision we'd rear them [children] with Irish and try to get as many, erm, sort of facilities as possible. So they went to an Irish-speaking school, an Irish-speaking doctor, an Irish-speaking dentist.'

These distinctions between Politics and politics, Culture and culture, and the differences between culture, politics and military activism, between Irish language activism and politics, and between constitutional or party political activism and politics, were elements in almost all narratives of the Irish language I encountered. An important point stressed by many was that the association with party or constitutional politics did not render their relationship with the language, or commitment to the language, in and of itself, any less. As Tiarnán explained:

'Some would say that we're Provos, Sinn Féin, IRA, and most of us are, political, I mean it's hard for me to avoid that label, so I work on the basis on that I'm a Republican but I'm also a *gaeilgeoir* [Irish speaker] and you have to vie with that.'

This distinction - between political and Political, Irish language activism and Republicanism - is also important in considering the wider political context of contemporary Derry and the context in which the Troubles emerged. This early context was not simply a matter of cultural nationalism, but of a concern with civil rights, equality and left-wing politics in the

1960s, a social movement which, as particularly seen in the student protests, spanned the religious divide. There was also a re-emergence of left-wing and socialist politics in the Republican movement during the 1980s, and in Derry in particular, left-wing and socialist politics played a prominent and important part in the city's political scene, and continues to do so. This element of politics, while generally seeking to transcend cultural division and the cultural Nationalist element of politics is not, however, divorced from the Irish language movement. For some, it was a key element of the politics of the wider movements of the era concerned with social justice, equality, and the project of creating a new, inclusive, non-sectarian, equal Northern Ireland as Caolfhionn explains:

'Yeah, so my parents sent me to an Irish medium pre-school and because of the date of my birth, I spent two years there and my parents were very young and neither of them spoke Irish, me mum was Protestant and my dad was Catholic, and I think that they were quite political in that sense of doing that in that climate at the time in the '80s. There was a lot of inequality, I think they felt that maybe, especially my dad anyway, that he had been denied the chance to speak Irish, so he wanted us to know.'

8.2 Personal and political

While many talked about being denied access to Irish, and touched on the politics of exclusion from Irish, this was not always in an oppositional sense. While for some, such as Oisín above, talked about this issue within a colonial framework, ideas of 'them' and 'us', and the cultural and national differences between the Irish and the British. For many others however this sense of exclusion was not always explicitly political, but more personal and emotional, and concerned with a more general sense of resistance and desire for freedom in expression and participation:

‘But there is an emotional thing for Derry people learning Irish, that this was something that was denied from me, this was an expression of our cultural identity that was never given life or free rein, and it’s almost like, my time is limited now as an older person, so I’m going to take back what I didn’t get. It’s not an anti-English thing, it’s not an anti- anyone thing, it’s almost like cliché that, it is really is a common feature that people talk about. Practically speaking they’ve got time, and also the urging that their years are running out and if they don’t do it now then they’ll never do it, and also they are a generation where it was denied to them, Irish language in any form, so they became aware of how stigmatised the Irish language was. So now when they have this freedom to learn the Irish language and this access to the Irish language, they’re more likely to take up on it.’ (Matthew)

For Liam, the choice to learn Irish was embedded in his family history and a desire to reclaim a lost opportunity:

‘I have a very, very positive view of the Irish language. How it started with me is that my Daddy always, always wanted to speak Irish, like. How it started with me is that there is no Irish background with Irish, but how it started was that it was always something he wanted to learn but he didn’t get the opportunity.’

Many participants talked about the Irish language in relation to the idea of ‘Irishness’ in a more general, vague sense of being or an interest, part of the general zeitgeist and wider cultural trends of their social worlds, rather than active political participation or affiliation. This distinction and separation between national identity as a sense of Irishness, and between national identity activism, came across particularly in the narratives of older learners such as Ava:

‘What I want, what my objective is, is to get the gold *Fáinne*⁴¹, I ain’t leaving until I get it. And so that was my story and I came back to [my teacher] then, and there was no problem, and I’m here, and I’ll be here, and, I’m a very, very busy person, I’m writing a book, this last number of years as well, and I’m doing family history, what’s it called? It’s just going to be for my grandchildren, for my daughter, my grandchildren who are all Irish American, my daughter’s in America, my only child, and my grandsons all live in America, so this about life, about growing up in Derry, and all, and as I write it, I seem to want to go in that direction and that direction, and I’m going to have to stop, and I say I’m working on it, but I’m not really working on it, I don’t get too much time to do that, you know, because I live alone, and I’ve lost my husband, so I have to look after the house and all of that as well.’

Ava expanded on this sense of Irishness and pride in it as part of Derry and family culture, and associated with community and good times, rather than in terms of sectarianism or opposition when asked further about why she wanted so much to achieve her gold *Fáinne*:

‘Och, I think, I think that that was, I think the *Fáinne* was, erm, probably instilled in a lot of our minds when we were teenagers, and when we at Thornhill, you know, and our Irishness and our Irish culture, and then, being in the Derry *Fèis*, which was very Irish, and the fact that my mother and father were born in Ireland, we had no borders, it was one country, and they never seen it as anything other than one country, you know, and probably too, even, when I was a teenager, I knew people

⁴¹ The *Fáinne* is a small badge with various variations corresponding to different levels of Irish language ability. The *Líofa* campaign describes the badge as: ‘Wearing a *Fáinne* symbolizes your link to the Irish language. A *Fáinne* is worn to show that you are able to and are willing to speak Irish. Whether you are a fluent speaker or just starting out as a beginner, you can wear a *Fáinne* - just pick the one that best suits your language ability. The Silver *Fáinne* is suitable for those who have a basic ability in Irish. The Gold *Fáinne* indicates that you are a fluent Irish speaker. The original Seanfháinne (Gold) is also available to those who prefer it. The ‘*Cúpla Focal*’ badge is available to those with a small amount of Irish who are proud of the *cúpla focal* they have’. The *Fáinne* was launched in 1916 by *Conradh Na Gaeilge* as part of efforts to promote the daily use of the Irish language (Líofa 2017).

who were involved in the *craoibh*, and involved in Irish, and erm, they were getting, you know having a silver *Fáinne* and having a gold *Fáinne*, when I was a teenager, it was a massive thing. And some of those gentlemen that are over there in that picture, I would have know them, you know, the guys that founded it, Irish in Derry, so you know, it was something that was special to our culture, you know, us having our St Patrick's Day parade, you know, we don't celebrate our Irishness very much really, but when we do it's nice, yeah.'

Narratives such as Ava's could in one sense be argued to have a political strain, in the association with united Ireland and pre-partition Ireland, of Irish roots and citizenship. However, these are not political narratives with a capital 'p' as such. The narrative of culture and Irishness here is not so much about politics, or culture or identity in any oppositional or activist sense, but is framed more in terms of everyday life, wider social interests and tendencies, wider cultural activities and events in which the over-riding emphasis is on community and family, rather than the oppositional overtones that are sometimes associated with these cultural activities and events.

8.3 Inheritance and emotion

For a majority of participants, whether in interviews or in everyday encounters within the Catholic/ Nationalist community, narratives of the Irish language drew on the idea of Irish being 'natural', the 'native tongue'. The idea that Irish would, or should, be part of people and their lives was often presented as a taken-for-granted fact of life, something to be expected. This sense of zeitgeist and the general cultural trends of everyday life was often a key factor in participants' explanations as to why they chose to learn the Irish language:

'It was a cultural thing that stayed with me, a lack of, the fact that I didn't have Irish always struck me as an oddity.' (Oisín)

‘Obviously there is something that they [adult learners] enjoy about it or they find interesting about it, maybe as well it’s because it’s their native language and so they want to do it for that aspect.’ (Liam)

‘Derry city people are really Donegal Inishowen people, in a sense, and that would be in the backgrounds of many people in the city, that their grandparents, or great grandparents came from the Gaeltacht area, and therefore that have that sort of allegiance to the language...there’s the proximity but there’s also a genetic thing going back as well.’ (Aodhán)

‘To speak your native tongue, I think it makes you a more rounded individual.’
(Caoilfhionn)

These ideas were also visible in Irish language promotion material:

‘Her father’s name, her mother’s eyes, her own tongue.’ (Advert for Irish medium education in the local area)

For many people that I spoke to, this idea - that Irish was ‘natural’, just what should be there, that Irish was ‘our own tongue’ – was a concept through which they explained their emotional connection or gravitation towards the language. For new or lapsed language learners, this sense of the ‘natural’, of what ought to be there, could even be associated with more negative emotions and a sense of guilt, failure or denial. Statements such as the following regularly appear in my fieldnotes: ‘Putting me to shame that I don’t speak my own language’, ‘This is a disgrace, we don’t have our language’, and ‘I ought to know some of my own language’. On the other hand, for those who were well along the learning journey, there was often an immense sense of pride at having learnt Irish. As Oisín put it when explaining his own experiences of learning and speaking Irish, the overwhelming factor was, ‘just the sheer pride and the sheer joy in being able to say what you want to say in Irish’. For

many commencing the learning journey, there was a sense of tapping into something that was already there, a sense of wholeness or feeling of it 'being right', or as Aodhán put it, 'it's just the missing part'.

This sense of a deep emotional connection to the language lay at the core of many people's explanations of their relationship with Irish, and in many narratives was a stronger theme than any ideas about identity, culture or politics, or even of 'naturalness'. This was often something that people found difficult to express. As one learner, Gary, put it, 'It's something deep in your stomach', and as Eoin explained:

'It's hard to put a word on it, but I suppose when something just feels right or clicks with you, you know, that sort of thing, I just enjoyed it, I enjoyed speaking it, the sound of it, you know.'

Indeed, when, as quite commonly happened, participants turned my own questions back to me, I found it quite hard to put into words myself why I was interested in or enjoyed learning the Irish language. My own emotions were expressed well by one participant, who explained her attachment to and experience of the Irish language simply as, 'When I speak Irish or hear Irish, my heart just sings' (Majella).

In seeking to explain and elaborate on their emotional reactions, participants drew on various explanations and narratives. However, it was narratives about inheritance, family, childhood experiences and the past which seemed to appear most prominently and consistently across their different stories. Oisín, for example, argued that Irish is meaningful to people because, 'It is almost appealing to something on another level. Who we were, or who our parents were, or grandparents were'. In many respects this echoed Aodhán's suggestion, quoted above, that 'there's also a genetic thing going back as well'. For Ava, Majella and Aodhán there was a sense that valuing the Irish language was rooted in childhood experiences and family interests:

‘My mother just had a real love of the language, my father no, but she just loved it. I think that passed onto me.’ (Majella)

‘Well, erm, my mother was fond of Irish but didn’t speak that much, but had been to classes when she was younger and would have encouraged us with simple phrases, like *Druid an doras* [shut the door]. And then we had a bread man who came round and spoke Irish so, gradually I got sent to the door, and he would say *Cad é mar atá tú?* [How are you?], so my mother felt she was lost at this stage and I would go then and say *arán bán, arán donn* [white bread, brown bread]. And, err, some people criticise the *cúpla focal* [few words], but they actually can be very important and also have influence on any people, especially young people, as with myself, because I took an interest.’ (Aodhán).

As Caoilfhionn explained, however, this sense of past, childhood, and family, was not to do with empty cultural nationalism or political and cultural identities, but much more personal and individual experiences:

‘The past...Erm, I kinda like what I was just saying there, like the deeper connection, the connection with the past, and I don’t mean some sort of nostalgic, quasi romantic fiddle-dee-dee, you know, ‘We are the Gaels’, kinda thing. I mean, it’s so embedded and connected with my childhood as well, and feeling the privilege.’

Relationships between the emotional connection with Irish and ‘embedded and connected’ childhood experiences emerged in many narratives about the importance and relevance of Irish. These took in a wide range of different experiences and memories, connected to school, family, friends, everyday life, and travel. Gaeltacht trips as a young person were especially important for many people who had been lucky enough to go, or who had heard about trips from friends. While these trips represented a considerable, and often impossible, expense for many families, they were frequently talked about in both the interviews and

everyday conversations. Thus, for example, in the following narrative, Ava begins talking about her relationship with the language in terms of loose ideological explanations, such as 'the language of our country' and 'love of country'. However, she elaborates on this explanation through a narrative of childhood, teenage experiences and the community and everyday life of Derry:

'Well because it's the language of our country, and we do have a love of our country, and we have a lovely history of culture and it's one of the main things with culture, erm, to have your language, or even just to have little of the language is great. There are a lot of people in Derry, a lot of people who have got, who are not coming to classes, once they become an adult, but who have some Irish, and there's a lot of them who have done Irish at school and maybe didn't take an exam in it. But there's an awful lot, I mean, I see a lot of people I went to school with coming through here now who, like me, had their O-level and possibly really enjoyed it and all you know, so you know Derry has always been a location, and Derry has always been a location for teenagers going to the Gaeltacht. When they were at school they went to the Gaeltacht for three weeks, or went to the Gaeltacht for six weeks...lots of people did go down and have lovely holidays and lovely times down there.'

Aodhán echoed the importance of these childhood experiences and the Gaeltacht, in particular:

'Lots of links there, especially at holidays, and again Gaeltacht memories, which can be very, very strong, because they're not only linguistic memories but they're also social memories, at an age when your identity and everything else is formed, you know, from age eleven to seventeen, eighteen. So a very strong link that way as well.'

Eoin, likewise, began his explanation of his relationship with Irish through references to emotional attachment and a sense of affiliation with the language - 'You know, speaking Irish whenever you consider yourself Irish, even at that age, it just felt sort of, why haven't I done this before?' – but, as he elaborated and explained further, the narrative that unfolded was one focused around a narrative about childhood and teenage experiences of good times, of enjoyment, of having fun at the Gaeltacht, and of having fun with friends, new and old and positive childhood memories:

RO: When did you start learning Irish?

Eoin: Erm, well, the very first time that I learnt Irish, we had a substitute teacher in primary seven who was maybe in for like two weeks or something, Mr Gallagher you called him. His brother was our parish priest for a good while as well, from Donegal, so I think perhaps he was, maybe, a speaker of Irish when he was young himself. He introduced us to the colours, you know, just small phrases.

RO: And was that just because he was interested in it?

Eoin: Yeah, coz he didn't have to do the curriculum he could teach the Irish, you see, so he still did do stuff out of the curriculum, he was only there for a week or two, but just for a bit of fun, something different, he did the Irish language. Would have been things just like, I suppose colours, days of the week, and I remember thinking it was just exciting at that age to be introduced to any language. But it is, I, don't know, you know, speaking Irish whenever you consider yourself Irish, even at that age, it just felt sort of, why haven't I done this before?, this is great. And I remember when I went to secondary school, at St Mary's in Limavady, and it was a compulsory subject first year to third year, and French as well, that was the other language you did, but I loved it straight away and it was great. So I suppose that was at secondary school, two years compulsory and two years for GCSE, and it was during third to fifth

year that I went to the summer Gaeltacht, to Magheroarty. For the first year was two weeks, and then the second two times I went, that was the Magheroarty.

RO: So was that like Irish-only rule, having you know, disappearing off to the fields to drink at the middle of the night, that sort of Gaeltacht trip?

Eoin: Well, you know what it was, erm, amazing, because I suppose I didn't live in a town, so where I lived I didn't really have any friends. So you loved seeing your friends at school, so just to be at sort of holiday time with your peers, but also getting to do Irish which I loved doing, but meeting people from all around, it was a holiday. It was spending all summer with your peers, erm, and it was then Irish all at one time, but it wasn't that strict. People said, certain teachers, some of them which were, would have said, yes, you must have spoken Irish, maybe Gaeltachts like Rannafast, from what I heard, much more strict, but I used to try and speak it all the time anyway, I used to become best friends with the *ban a ti* ['the women of the house', the women who hosted children during their Gaeltacht visits].

RO: Ha ha...did you all go and stay with families then?

Eoin: Yeah, is suppose it was, for example, excuse me, depends on the size of the family and how many rooms they had. But I think they basically lived in one room and kept as many bedrooms, I do because, you went in and there would be like three bedrooms with two bunks in each room, so say twelve per house, or that sort of number. And I loved it, it was such great fun. But as I said, I used to speak to the *ban a ti* and the family, and I remember one of the boys, coz I remember one mam took a real liking to me, and she ironed my clothes, ha ha, and there was one, I think the first chip shop opened up in Magheroarty and they sent out for chips and I was brought back into the kitchen with the family for chips.

These narratives of the past and the emotional relationship with Irish, while often focusing on positive childhood experiences connected to the language, also took in less positive memories, and experiences of the lack of Irish, of its absence and senses of loss:

‘Whenever I was growing up, when I was at school, like I said, going on a school trip to France, where you were asked to do a party piece in Irish, and being from Northern Ireland we had nothing, you know, we knew no songs, we knew no poems, we knew stories, you know, and all we had basically was the pop culture coming from England, you know. And I just thought, at a young age, I was about thirteen, fourteen, just that struck me as really embarrassing. So then, as getting older then, it’s something that, erm, when I moved down to the south of Ireland we were aware that we were different, you know, culture was different, the language was different. You were viewed upon as being different, so I suppose and maybe in trying to look for culture, and Irish language and culture, it’s looking almost at commonality between ourselves and everyone else, you know.’ (Oisín)

‘The, err, yeah me father used to sit and say, this is a disgrace, we don’t have our language, So fifty years after I had finished with Irish as a teenager I think I got a wee message from heaven, one day, and he said will you get up and get back to your Irish.’ (Ava)

8.4 Community and the everyday

While often involving stories of childhood, family or other happy memories, explanations and narratives of emotional connections with Irish were also very much rooted in the present, and explained in terms of what the language brings to participants’ everyday lives. Narratives of enjoyment, and the importance of ‘having the *craic*’, were particularly prominent in how people explained their relationship to formally learning the language. As Eoin explained, some learning experiences were ‘like all grammar and all, the old fashioned

way of drumming things in, you know ... people didn't like it, there was no fun, it was like a chore'. However, he liked the current set up at the Cultúrlann, and had continued to learn, because:

'I can go and do a wee bit here, a wee bit there, and it's grand or whatever, and have a laugh and then back to work...Language is so much better with someone there, coz you can have fun with it and joke about and catch up on things, it's so much better. You need a study buddy.' (Eoin)

Local education workers also stressed the importance of enjoyment and fun in student retention:

'The style of teaching, the personality that comes across, the enjoyment they have, is a crucial element in their subject choice, and yet there is nowhere in the specification and the syllabus that says you have to laugh once a day with these pupils, you know. It's not there, but still that connection between the teacher and the class is hugely significant in their subject choice...In languages, we have everything going for us, in terms of enjoyment, I go up to the board, I write the figures, they understand, they repeat it after me, we play games, we embed it, we play bingo, we make it practical in terms of going to rooms, now "*Téigh go dtí an seomra a hocht*" [go to room eight], ask what class you're in, etc. So, you know language. Put it this way, if a young secondary school pupil age eleven, twelve, thirteen, not enjoying a language learning experience, then there is something wrong, in my opinion, with the approach, because language has everything going for it in terms of games, activities.' (Aodhán)

In the course of my fieldwork, I encountered many people who simply stated that they were learning Irish or attending lessons simply 'for the *craic*', as something that they did with friends, as an activity that they enjoyed. As the above quotes touch upon - in the importance

of the 'study buddy', of games and everyday embedding and of relationships with the teacher - these narratives of having fun, of enjoying the language, were often hung around the social aspect of learning and using Irish:

'Why did I keep on and continue? Well I loved the teacher. He's been great, and I wrote that down in the questionnaire, and the people in the class are lovely. I think you meet lovely, lovely people when you're studying Irish, you know, and their personalities, they're really support full of one another, you know. And "I'm not coming back", or "I'm not going on", or "I haven't time to study", the class help you, as well as the teacher, to overcome those problems, that you need, you know...I'm still going to the *céili*, now the *céili* in the AOH [Ancient Order of Hibernians] on a Monday night, and I'm going there about six or seven year. It's an older crowd of women that go, it's good fun, and there are some people there now who would be fluent in Irish, so you're getting, so you try would and use it. So you get a bit of Irish here, there and everywhere.' (Ava)

This social aspect was particularly important for older learners, new arrivals and visitors, for those with young children and for others seeking to meet new people, to get out of the house, and to feel involved in a community. Even some quite advanced learners said that the initial reason to get started was that Irish was the only class available during the day, or that fitted in their schedules when they were looking for something to do. As one organiser explained:

'Older people and what it does for them, social thing, and almost wouldn't matter what language teaching here, people would come for the social thing. It's a one-stop shop for a lot of things: music, the arts, there's a café, bookshop, you know. So you could speak any language, not to detract from Irish language, but more if you create

the right social model, with classes, café, community events, you can create a community around any language.’ (Matthew)

The importance of this community aspect was echoed by older interviewees, such as Ava:

‘You get two hours tuition for a couple of pound a week, you know, and there’s a lovely wee café here, you can have a nice cup of tea, and that there’s a nice theatre in here, you know, so I think a lot of people don’t, and definitely, definitely people don’t realise how many people are learning Irish and how many opportunities there are in all the cafes, and don’t know all the opportunities you have to go down to *Teach Jacks* [Jack’s Hotel] twice a year for a lovely weekend.’

Many learners, articulating their views on the Irish language in the context of the ongoing negotiations around the Irish Language Act and the ‘curry my yoghurt’ fallout, were particularly at pains to emphasise their emotional relationship with the Irish language, the social aspect, and a wider sense of belonging, as the central features of why Irish was important to them. Either implicitly or explicitly, this narrative often involved a critique of the view that learning or using the language was simply political. Many interviewees sought to explain and counter this narrative, Eoin for example told me the following anecdote about taking some friends on a tour of west Belfast, and his feelings and response when the tour guide claimed that speaking Irish was about political reasons:

‘People do it like myself just because of the enjoyment of the language, and I says, anyone I know whose doing it, ain’t doing it for any political reason. And I says, I cannot believe you’re saying that, and I think he may have said something back, and I said nope, you’re wrong, it’s not a political language, I says. Maybe there were some people at the time, a minority, who did it, wasn’t it purely for that reason, but that’s ridiculous to liken the whole language to what everyone wants it there for.’

Eoin's narrative, and those presented throughout this chapter, speaks to the diversity and complexity of how the Irish language is experienced and perceived by individuals, and what it means and represents as both individuals and the wider context develop and change. While for some, such as Tiarnán and Oisín, it is wrapped up in the constitutional politics of Northern Ireland and republicanism and nationalism, for others, such as Caolifhionn, while the language is presented in terms of wider political issues, beyond simply the politics of orange and green or Republicanism, but rather to do with language rights, equality and minority rights. For those for whom experience the language as bound up with politics, they also expressed that this is only part of the meaning and importance of Irish in their lives, to return again to Tiarnán's point; 'I'm a Republican but I'm also a *gaeilgeoir* [Irish speaker]'. For a vast majority of Irish speakers I spoke to and interviewed, the Irish held an important emotional resonance whether in terms of loving the language in and of itself, enjoying the craic and activity and learning of Irish as a social activity, and as something bound up with experience or memories of good times, , a sense of belonging, of community, friendship and family . These wider narratives are broader and more complex than the sectarian divide or oppositional performance, and are bound up with community, family and a more general sense of the everyday and ongoing life experiences.

To return to Jenkins' argument as regards Dannebrog, the Danish flag, perceptions and practices of the Irish language amongst those that use or learn or the Irish language are, of course, intertwined with national identity, and with Politics with a capital P, and are, of course, something that can be understood in terms of everyday and banal nationalism. However, 'as expressions of 'nation-ness or belonging' they don't necessarily have much to do with the grand narratives and designs of the nation state' and can *also* be understood in terms of affective importance, an 'inarticulate speech of the heart' which can be explained by its 'powerful association with good times, good company, pleasure and rewards' (Jenkins 2011, p. 138).

8.5 Narratives and experiences of distance, disengagement and non-participation

It should be remembered at this point that this chapter thus far has been built around the narratives of individuals who formed the primary focus on my research, and with whom, in the course of my fieldwork, I most frequently interacted: those who have chosen to learn or regularly use or engage with the Irish language and individuals for whom Irish was very important. Absent from this account thus far have been those who do not actively learn or engage with the Irish language, or had more ambivalent feelings towards Irish. Although the orientation and practicalities of my fieldwork made such individuals far less prominent in my research, a few key points are worth saying as regards participation and experience of Irish by individuals whose engagement with the Irish language world was more peripheral or whose engagement and relationship to Irish was more ambivalent. The evidence obtained from interactions and interviews with such individuals in many ways echoes and mirrors the points made above about narratives of participation, in that it suggests individuals' relationships with the Irish language can be understood in terms of the affective impact derived from powerful associations that arise from wider experiences of Irish and particularly childhood experiences. It also echoes the argument that affective impact, experiences of the language, and practices of participation are shaped by the complexities of navigating wider social worlds and influenced by how the practice of 'learning Irish' is perceived by, and responded to, by wider social networks, and by feelings of belonging, or not belonging. They suggest that Politics with a capital P of course has an influence on experiences and interactions with Irish, but that perceptions and experiences may not, however, sit neatly with Political orientations or dispositions or identity narratives. They suggest also that political considerations of engagement with the language extend beyond the politics of the sectarian divide or nationalism or nation-ness as such.

The case of Sarah, a community worker from a protestant background, provides an interesting case to explain some of the points above. Sarah began her Irish language journey during the time of my fieldwork as part of a cross-community engagement project. Reflecting on her experiences, Sarah explained how her initial experience of the Irish language world had provoked an unanticipated emotional response, which did not fit with her perceptions of her own political orientations or anticipated emotional response. As she explained:

‘Like, I really surprised myself that night, and I was pouring the tea and somebody spoke in Irish and my first reaction was fear, like, which is so, not like me, cos I you know, I wouldn’t have thought that would be how I reacted...’

As Sarah continued to explain, her emotional reaction to hearing the Irish language surprised her as it did not sit with her own perceptions of herself, as someone who had, in the course of childhood experiences of socialising across the community divide, and in travel and participation in wider social politics, rejected unionist or Protestant culture and identity:

‘I ended up rejecting that whole part of my culture, I didn’t even know what that culture was, that I grew up with, but it was, I remember thinking well, right, that’s not me, so then I just threw that out, you know.’

Her emotional response to Irish was thus surprisingly jarring with her perceptions of her own political orientations or relationship to national identity, which she did not perceive to be ‘hard-line unionist’, or indeed unambivalently unionist or Protestant, nor anti-nationalist or anti-republican or indeed anti-the-Irish-language. In seeking to explain and explore this reaction, Sarah said, ‘I suppose, I think I was quite fearful of the language’. Sarah reflected on her limited previous exposure to the Irish language further through explanations that her prior experience of the language had largely been related to contexts of fear or sense of exclusion:

‘I would probably say that my only experience of Irish was probably to, in my, how I felt, was to exclude, or was to make a political point, you know, almost like a territorial thing.’

Notably, this sense of exclusion was not, however, simply ‘about’ the politics of national identity and the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland, but also about experiences of exclusion in wider social contexts. As Sarah continued;

‘I remember going to an event in Dublin in my last job, with my boss, who was Catholic, and a colleague, and they spoke quite a bit in Irish, and then he was chatting to me in the car, and he was, like, ‘Oh so what did you think of that?’, and I was, like, oh well, I suppose, ‘I don’t understand it, you know’, thought that it wasn’t right because it did exclude, felt like that was inappropriate, you know, because so many people in that room don’t speak it and didn’t understand what they were saying.’

For Sarah the emotional responses and arousal of negative emotions around the Irish language were thus informed by a complex series of past experiences, taking in both sectarian politics and wider social experiences of exclusion or not belonging, the emotional response and social frustrations engendered by not understanding and being able to participate in a social interaction. As she continued to explain in her story about pouring the tea, her response to hearing the Irish language was, she considered partly to do with the feeling ‘I don’t know what they’re saying, you know’.

the case of Wilson, an Irish language learner from a protestant background with a strong identification with Protestant, unionist, loyalist, working class identity, provides a slightly different example. His case highlights the importance of affect and sense of belonging in relationships to Irish, and that the politics of learning Irish is more complex than only being about the politics of nationalism or sectarianism. Wilson began learning Irish as part of a

cross-community, widening participation project, motivated by curiosity, interest, a desire to demonstrate his capacity to learn the language, and a desire show good will in participation in such a project. This participation, part of a larger series of reciprocal gestures of cross-community support and collaboration, was thus in part to do with the politics of peace and reconciliation, and as with Caoilfhionn's parents, above, the politics of social change and equality. Initially enthusiastic and fully involved in the craic of the classes, Wilson faced a series of challenges to his participation. On the one hand, he faced challenges on the grounds of cultural and identity Politics, with his public participation in, and support for, the classes making him the target for such levels of criticism and abuse from elements of the loyalist/Protestant community, both locally and nationally, that he felt unable to continue attending classes. Wilson also encountered more mundane barriers in the cross-community class; although a beginners level class, those from a nationalist/Catholic background, as will be discussed in more detail in later chapters, were in comparison, not true beginners, having been exposed to a certain degree of Irish already, whether through school or community. A feeling of being behind the rest of the class, in the context of his pre-existing low academic confidence, acted as an additional barrier to participation for Wilson, and faced with the hostile response to his participation from within his own community, Wilson soon left the class and ceased to learn Irish. As in the narratives of participation explored in the first half of this chapter, Wilson's case highlights that a wide range of factors were at play in his experience of the Irish language and his participation and non-participation; issues of cultural identity and the politics of division played a factor in both participation and non participation. Motivated by a desire to participate as part of cross-community relations and moving past division were a factor, but similarly external pressure that this was not an appropriate activity for him, as a protestant unionist, to be undertaking, contributed towards his leaning. In this sense belonging was important, and belonging and fitting in with family, friends and community. As well as everyday factors of fun, a sense of belonging and a

sense of achievement, in Wilson's case struggle, and the experience of difference and difficulty, played a significant role.

It was not just individuals from Protestant backgrounds who expressed ambivalent emotional relationships with, and responses to, the Irish language, complexities in their sense of belonging in Irish language settings, or struggles in participation. As in the above two cases such complexities as regards affect and identification took in both mundane and everyday factors and struggles, and factors to do with Northern Ireland's Political environment. An aversion to, sense of distance from, or desire not to be seen to learn or use, the Irish language due to its perceived relationship with republican or Sinn Féin politics, was also expressed by individuals from Catholic backgrounds who did not feel aligned with this political stance. As one older learner explained:

'I always wanted to learn, I was always interested, but I didn't want to be supporting the IRA and those politics and be part of Sinn Féin, so I felt like I couldn't go, like, but now when these other classes started, that were different, I thought I would'.

Although the strength of desire expressed by this individual to completely disassociate himself from republican politics at all costs, was not at all something that I encountered commonly in my fieldwork interactions, although of course that may have been due to my own positionality in the field, a concern that learning Irish was 'not respectable', by virtue of its relationship with the IRA and Sinn Féin, was not infrequent. Other individuals from a Catholic/nationalist background expressed, similar to Sarah, above, negative emotional responses and fear aroused by the Irish language, engendered by a sense of not understanding or feeling excluded from Irish language environments. As one older resident from a Catholic background explained, 'You see those Sinn Féin posters, and they use Irish, and I didn't know what they meant and that didn't sit with me'. Many users of Irish had

stories of the Irish language being faced with hostility for similar reasons of fear, sense of exclusion and issues around academic confidence, for example Caolfhionn described how

‘We used to get dog’s abuse, ‘Youse, are you from the Irish school, what are you on about?’....you know who gave us a lot of grief in the school, we were part of another English-medium school, and we would go to get our lunch and the dinner ladies were hideous to us, ‘Oh, youse Irish school ones’. And I think when I look back on it now, and even when I look at the hostility to the Irish language, it’s fear, its just fear, I think it’s maybe, it’s fear of thinking that maybe because we’ve got two languages and they’ve got one we think they’re stupid, or that we’re being secretive.’

Another quite common narrative about the Irish language, as in the case of Sarah above, placed the root of negative emotional responses to Irish in childhood experiences of Irish, with many from Catholic/nationalist backgrounds explaining a continued aversion to the Irish language based on their negative experiences of Irish at school, of the Irish language being beaten into them, as something that they had struggled with, or as something that had seemed difficult and irrelevant. Such experiences, although sometimes contrasted with positive recent experiences, were often used to explain a residual negative emotional response to Irish, or a reluctance to learn or use Irish in later life.

These narratives and experiences of non-participation, of negative emotional relationships, and of feelings of exclusion or distance from the Irish language in many ways mirror the positive narratives and experiences of participation, good emotional feelings, and a sense of belonging. They demonstrate how the emotional and affective power of the Irish language, whether positive or negative, may be bound up with childhood experiences, with the extent to which learning and using Irish is positively or negatively perceived by wider social networks, family and community, with feelings of belonging or not belonging, and with whether something is fun or not fun. Decisions to learn, and not learn, to use, and not use,

Irish are bound up with intentions and orientations which are very much to do with both Politics, in the sense of Northern Ireland's community and constitutional politics, and also around with the politics, power relations and practicalities of everyday life, whether in terms of promoting cross-community engagement, furthering wider social causes or the politics of inclusion, exclusion and difference within the local community and workplace. They suggest that issues around identity are important, but that this is not just about Political identities, in the sense of republican or nationalist, but also about wider political identities, such as an identity as non-sectarian, and about identity and self-perception in terms of education and in terms of belonging or difference.

The personal stories of relationships with the Irish language show that the Irish language - and individual's relationships with, and perceptions and experiences of, Irish - never simply *is*. It is *made and re-made* in the course of everyday interactions, and in how it is experienced within the lives of individuals. Where and how it is present, where and how it is used, and indeed, where it is not present and not used, amid the complexities and banalities of everyday social interaction, and achieving everyday goals, are all important factors in the production of experience. The next two chapters turn to look at these important factors through examination of the linguistic and material environments in contemporary Derry, moving from considering narratives about Irish to considering how the Irish language was present, absent, used and not used in everyday life and experiences.

9. Irish in everyday life in Derry: linguistic environments

English is, of course, the primary language of the vast majority of residents in Derry, and only a small proportion of the population have a fluent command of the Irish language. In the 2011 census, the number reporting Irish as their main language was very small (less than 0.5 per cent), and the number reporting that they could read, write, understand and speak Irish did not exceed ten per cent, except in one ward. The number reporting that they had some ability in Irish was much higher (fifteen to twenty-five per cent), yet nonetheless a minority (NISRA 2013). However, speaking Irish, hearing Irish, seeing and reading Irish, and interacting in Irish are by no means absent from everyday life, and this incidental occurrence is far from unimportant. The general command of the language might be limited in range and depth but it is present in everyday life, and is a presence in a way that significantly colours people's experience of life. A large proportion of the population of the Cityside, particularly the youngest and oldest generations, have had some exposure to hearing or learning the Irish language, whether in formal education, through visits to the Gaeltacht, through hearing family members use Irish, or through the many different contexts in which words and short phrases of Irish emerge in everyday life. For many, exposure to and use of Irish may not extend past the *'cúpla focal'* (a few words), and while the *'cúpla focal'* is widespread, Irish does permeate everyday life. Indeed, the phrase has become a widely understood and used term in English-speaking contexts, and is often used in an almost comical or jovially deprecatory or self-deprecatory way to refer to having only a limited ability or range of words in Irish. This chapter will discuss how the Irish language figures in the everyday linguistic environment, exploring the different contexts in which it appears and the ways in which it is used. It will also consider when it is not used, where it is omitted,

where it is absent, where the limits of Irish use lie and the practices of self-censorship and linguistic management amongst Irish speakers in different contexts.

9.1 The Irish language in formal education

One of the most obvious contexts in which Irish figures in everyday life is in formal educational contexts, in schools, both Irish-medium and otherwise, and in adult education classes around the city. While the numbers attending adult education are limited, Irish language education at primary and secondary is extensive, although predominately in English-medium settings. Derry has three Irish-medium nursery schools and three Irish-medium primary schools, where all subjects are taught in Irish and Irish is the primary language of social interaction within the school. Numbers attending these schools are small but growing; *Gaelscoil Eadain Mhoir*, established 1998, had twenty-three students admitted to Year Eight in 2015, rising to an intake of thirty-four children by 2017-8. *Gaelscoil na Daróige*, established in 2005, had an intake of seven pupils in 2015, which had risen to ten in 2017. *Bunscoil Cholmcille*, established in 1993, had an intake of twelve pupils in 2015, rising to fourteen in 2017 (Education Authority Northern Ireland 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). Attempts to establish an Irish-medium secondary school in the city in the 1990s proved unsuccessful due to lack of funding, resources and staffing and attainment issues, but Irish-medium education is now catered for at St Brigid's College, which offers an Irish-medium stream. During my fieldwork there was extensive work being undertaken to expand Irish-medium secondary provision, resulting in the establishment of *Gaelcholáiste Dhoire* in Dungiven in September 2015. Other schools in the area offer specific Irish language clubs for students leaving IME, and the Cultúrlann also provides opportunities for secondary students to continue their Irish. Children leaving Irish-medium education also have various opportunities across the city to take GCSEs and A-Levels in Irish early.

Irish is well represented and supported in English-medium educational settings across the city. At primary level, the *Leargas* programme, delivered by the Cultúrlann and funded by

the Department of Culture and Leisure *Líofa* programme, offered local primary schools the opportunity to include Irish language classes over a thirty-week period in the Key Stage 2 curriculum between July 2011-October 2015. The programme administrators informed me that the programme had involved thirteen schools and indicated that 1427 children participated in the first year (2011-12), 1520 children in the second year (2012-13), 1546 children in the third year (2013-4) and 1614 children in the fourth year (2014-15) and up to sixty-five teachers were also involved in each year of the programme. Both formal evaluation by the course leaders and anecdotal evidence from school teachers I spoke to during my fieldwork at suggested that the programme had contributed to the rising popularity of Irish as an optional subject choice at secondary school. Programme coordinators reported that their evaluation of the programme at the three-year stage showed that eighty-four per cent of participating children wanted to take Irish at secondary school. They further reported that their evaluation research demonstrated that the programme was contributing towards rising numbers of children choosing to study Irish at secondary school, with sixty-two per cent of those children in the first year of studying Irish at secondary school having participated in the *Leargas* program, and the number of pupils in the Derry area picking Irish as their language choice in secondary school increasing by nineteen per cent between 2013 and 2014. The scheme entered a second round in 2015, aiming to continue to offer Irish language education to children in the area. Out of school, the *Cultúrlann* offers learning opportunities for children, with forty children aged five to eleven attending weekend classes in 2014-15.

At secondary level, the Irish language also enjoys a good degree of support. Thornhill College has a particularly strong Irish language department, with a long history of academic achievement in Irish language competitions, and had 135 GCSE students and fifty-one A-

Level students studying Irish in 2015.⁴² It provides opportunities for students to take part in Ireland-wide language competitions, Gaeltacht trips and weekly Irish language events and clubs. St Mary's College, St. Columbs' College, St Joseph's, and Lumen Christi College offer secondary level Irish language, as well as wider activities and clubs, and Oakgrove integrated college offers Irish language education, numbers permitting. Lisneal College and Foyle College are the only two schools in the city area not to provide Irish language education. The Cultúrlann also offers classes for secondary-age pupils, including GCSE, A-Level and general classes. These are particularly aimed at children who attended Irish-medium primary schools but are now in English-medium post-primary education, and attracted forty students in 2014-5⁴³.

Adult education takes place in a variety of settings across the city, through the local adult education college, through the Cultúrlann, and at the University, which has a part-time diploma programme which is popular with adults of all ages in the local area, many of whom have never gone to university, as well as BA and MA courses based at the Magee campus. There are also smaller local groups and classes operating through a wide range of different groups in the city. These classes offer a range of levels and styles. Some, such as the diploma, GCSE or A-Level programmes at the Cultúrlann, are more formal and exam-focussed, whereas others are more informal and focus on conversational Irish. There are also regular weekend intensive courses and programmes run throughout the city. I was unable to obtain detailed numbers of adult learners for all the programmes across the city, but those I did manage to obtain, and observations and conversations with activists and educators in the area, were indicative of the popularity of adult Irish language education in the city. At the Cultúrlann, in the 2014-5 academic year, there were 280 adult learners

⁴² Students from Thornhill have been awarded the Ashbourne Shield for most fluent Irish speaker at A level in Northern Ireland 1967, 1969, 1975, 1981, 1986, 1992, 1993, 2003, 2012 and 2016 (Thornhill College 2018)

⁴³ Numbers provided by programme administrators.

attending one of the nineteen weekly classes, plus forty students attending the occasional intensive weekend and week-long courses.⁴⁴

9.2 The impact of formal education in everyday life and interactions

Attending formal classes, or Irish-medium education, is, of course, one of the main ways in which speaking and using Irish becomes part of everyday routines and activities. Indeed, Irish classes can become a fairly important part of a learner's social life and weekly habits. Many students I encountered at the Cultúrlann had been participating in classes for several years, or even decades, and also met to undertake practice or homework in small groups outside class, attended the social events put on for learners at regular intervals throughout the years, and sought to use their Irish in social activities and social interactions with members of their classes outside of class.

The impact of these various educational experiences also extends far beyond the classes and learners themselves, to the wider community. One of the key impacts of formal education on wider social networks and contexts is in the role of educational centres as community hubs where a large number of individuals interact. At primary and secondary school level, parents are involved as cleaners and lunchtime staff, and alumni continue to contribute to the school's everyday life in a variety of ways, as do individuals or groups who use the school grounds for evening classes, activities or events. These people are exposed to the Irish language to varying degrees through interactions with the school environment and activities, particularly in the case of Irish-medium schools, but also in English-medium education. Many parents of children in Irish-medium schools do not speak or actively learn Irish, but Irish is ever present as part of their everyday world as a result of their children speaking Irish at home or to their friends or siblings, helping with homework, exposure to the Irish-medium environment when attending school meetings, children's shows and in school communications, and simply dropping off or picking up their children. In the case of

⁴⁴ Numbers provided by programme administrators.

English-medium education there was, likewise, a permeation of the Irish language beyond the classroom, from students taking home their Irish language homework, which educators told me was often interactive and might involve parental participation, or simply talking about the Irish language at home. During my time working on the front desk at the Cultúrlann, I frequently received requests from parents of children in both Irish- and English-medium education seeking to begin Irish language classes or access Irish language resources who often explained that they would like to be able to engage more thoroughly with their homework and education, and sometimes also expressed a reflected enthusiasm, that the interest and enthusiasm shown by their children had inspired them to want to learn. In wider social encounters I also encountered parents with children learning Irish, both in Irish and English medium education, who, when the subject of Irish language education arose, explained that they had sought to develop their skills as a result of their children's education, whether through learning a few words or phrases, for which Irish Medium Schools and organisations such as the Cultúrlann provided resources, or through attending classes or intensive courses.

The Cultúrlann centre, which continues to expand in size and at the time of writing incorporates several large buildings in the city centre, is more than a location for education; it is a public building that serves as a gig venue, meeting place, café, shop, tourist attraction and general community hub. Many people simply come in to use the café, to chat, to hire out meeting rooms, to ask directions or seek advice, to attend music gigs and other events hosted by the venue, and there is a constant flow of visitors meeting different members of staff on a range of business other than Irish language-related activities. Through such interactions and engagements, many more people than those in formal Irish classes were exposed to Irish as part of their everyday environment. They encountered it in the conversations of learners and speakers of Irish around them, in the interactions of the café or events staff who, although not necessarily fluent in Irish themselves, generally use the

cúpla focal (*go raibh maith agat*, and so on), in the bilingual café menus, and in the use of Irish in music and events programmes.

9.3 The Irish language in extra-ordinary events: celebrations, festivals, politics

In post-conflict Northern Ireland, festivals and cultural events, while extraordinary events, are also, in the context of a nascent and heavily-funded tourist, events and culture industry, very much part of everyday life. During the time of my fieldwork, Derry was in the midst of its year as 'UK City of Culture', and its subsequent legacy plan of 'City of Music', and there was an almost constant stream of festivals, special weeks, days, events and activities.

Likewise, while political events and 'seasons' are of course occasional, in the context of Northern Ireland's turbulent political arena, and in the context of an extremely active campaign culture in Derry and culture of participation in politics, the calendar of political events seems constant.

The Irish language, or a few words of Irish, is a frequent element of this cycle of celebrations, festivals and political events. Celebrations and festivals focused on 'Irish culture' or particular saints, and events such as the *Fleadh*, the *Fèis*, the Pan-Celtic festival, St Columba's Day or St Patrick's Day, while not necessarily 'Irish language events', were prominent examples of occasions on which a few words, and sometimes more than a few words, of Irish were often used. This could be quite extensive, for example the holding of an *Aifreann Gaeilge* (Irish-medium mass), but it could also just be some words of introduction or thanks, or the singing of Irish language songs. At these events, however, particularly musical events, the crowd attending was often broad, and by no means dominated by Irish-speakers those with an interest in Irish. Similarly, some words of Irish are sometimes incorporated into everyday sports contexts, as one local GAA youth coach described:

'They, they, not as much as learning Irish, but they're given the opportunity to simply follow instructions, you know, and it's very easy in err, Irish to learn your

orders, sort of *deanagi, topagi, ridghigi, chuntagi, leamnhgi*, you know, so it becomes part of a game type of thing, you know. So sometimes you do whenever the kids are not there, but you might then say, when I say bark you hit the ground, so what you're doing is working on their thinking skills and their motor skills at the same time, so it's sneaking Irish in, in a way. That's another part of the game, you know.' (Oisín)

Political events, particularly Republican events and meetings, also regularly bring elements of the Irish language into the everyday sphere through the use of words or phrases of Irish in meetings, political debates, campaigning etc, again to an the audience of which are not necessary actively learning or speakers of Irish. During my fieldwork, Sinn Féin's *Ard Fheis* (annual conference) was held in the city, in the Millennium Forum, attracting over 2000 visitors to the city, as well as many local members. The event had a heavy Irish language presence, with specific Irish language events and streams. Most speakers and delegates used at least some Irish, and in some cases only Irish, and live bilingual translations were available.

Mirroring their approach at Stormont, Sinn Féin, in particular, and to a lesser degree the Social Democratic and Labour Party, maintained a policy of incorporating Irish into verbal and written communication. Irish was often used local government meetings, whether in a few words such as *go raibh maith agat* [thank you] and so on, or in more extensive discussion. Irish language activism events and meetings, such as those during my visit around the Irish Language Act and Irish-medium education, of course incorporated extensive use of Irish, again in both verbal and written communication.

9.4 The social use of Irish

Informal Irish language-oriented social events were also key ways in which the Irish language figured in the everyday linguistic world and social context of Derry. *Ciorcal comhrá*

[conversation circles] generally take place at a regular time and place but are usually fairly unstructured in content; they are typically open to anyone who wishes to attend, with members just chatting away in Irish. English might slip in occasionally, but on the whole the groups maintain an Irish-only atmosphere. These groups are firmly rooted in everyday life, taking place in pubs, cafes and public places across the city, and are very much a social event and occasion, a chance to make friends, have a drink, and have some *craic*, rather than a formal learning experience. These groups tend to attract more advanced learners, but I found them to be very welcoming to learners of all levels.

Mirroring the sort of social gatherings that might take place in English-medium interactions, these groups bring Irish into the everyday linguistic and social world of the city, with ramifications beyond the members themselves. In addition to creating environments in which the general public might hear the Irish language being used, the presence of these groups resulted in some local businesses making an effort to use more Irish-language interactions and become more Irish-language friendly. For example, in one bar in Derry that regularly hosted a conversation circle, the bar staff were keen to use their own Irish, and to accept orders from customers in Irish. The largely informal character of these groups at times attracted the interest of other individuals using the facilities, who would get involved in the discussion, or start up new conversations about the Irish language, often reflecting on their own experiences of learning and using it.

While Irish was not automatically the language of choice for the majority of encounters, it was used to some degree in many everyday interactions and engagements. Amongst fellow Irish language speakers this use could be quite extensive. For example, on learning that I had some Irish, or after a previous engagement in Irish, other people, not least those with maybe just a few words, tended to use a little, or sometimes a lot, of Irish in interactions with me outside specific language learning activities. This could be a simple hello and goodbye in

passing on the street, or more extensive. Such interactions were very much part of everyday contexts and activities.

For example, on my penultimate trip to Derry, in the local Tesco's with a friend, an acquaintance whom I had met at an Irish language event 5 months previously hailed me with '*Roíse, Cad ma ata tu*' [Rosie, how are you?], and we proceeded to have a short conversation in Irish until my skill levels failed me and we had to revert to English. Aodhán, who worked in Irish language education likewise talked about the use of Irish outside of the classroom and its impact on wider linguistic environments:

'Yes, with the pupils I would meet, and then with an A-Level you can have a full conversation with them. It's nice because it brings Irish into the community also, and lots of them have part-time jobs, and you can speak Irish to them at the till and hopefully get a wee reduction as well, and err, and that's a very, very important element of the Irish department here, that it also brings the girls to a level of confidence and a level of language that allows them to use it outside of school, and in general the population would be very positive towards that use of language and they buy into that as well.'

As the last two examples suggest, the 'small world' of Derry certainly seemed to facilitate the use of Irish in everyday life. To an outsider it may appear that almost everybody knows everyone else, or is connected in some way, although when I commented on this, often people laughed and said 'Yes, it's a village really', but also pointed out that everybody would say hello and chat anyway. This was, indeed, a common point of comment or joke that was brought up in conversation; that it is impossible to even nip to the shops without running into someone or ending up chatting. This was certainly my experience; people were extraordinarily friendly and keen to chat. The Irish language community was very tight-knit; individuals involved in activism and leadership almost without exception knew each other

and/or had worked together in the past, and amongst the more advanced learners and speakers the social ties were especially strong.

This context facilitates the use of the Irish language on a daily basis. Many Irish speakers are aware of other Irish speakers, and of what levels of language competence they command, and will use a few words or longer sentences accordingly. I encountered this in my own interactions across the city and it was something that learners often talked to me about. For example, Ava described the use of Irish in her social interactions. Asked if she thought there was more Irish being used in the city than in previous times she responded:

‘Oh, I would say so definitely, because when I was leaving this morning this lady came over to me and she started talking to me in Irish. She doesn’t come here, she learned Irish a good few years ago and she had done the diploma in Magee, and she came over and was chatting, and somewhere else there was...Last night, it was *ceilidh* last night, and a couple of us, have the Irish, and are speaking to one another in Irish. Now it wasn’t big long conversations or anything, but just using the words that we’ve got, so it is yeah being used.’

Likewise, Caolfhionn explained:

‘I had a friend visiting me last week, he was from Connemara, we were just walking through town in the evening, and he was surprised at how many people were like, oh, *Cad é mar atá tú Caolfhionn, dia duit*, you know, how many fellow *gaeilgeoirs* I saw on the street, so I suppose there is a bit more of an increase [in the presence of Irish in the street].’

9.5 The everyday use of Irish

The use of Irish was, however, not limited simply to those actively learning Irish. As noted above, reported Irish language skills tended to be relatively low, with between fifteen and

twenty-five per cent of the population reporting 'some ability in Irish' in the Cityside wards in the 2011 Census, and between five and ten per cent reporting that they could read, write, speak and understand Irish. A total of 341 people across the Derry City Council area reported Irish as their main language (NISRA 2013). However, these figures hide a much more complex reality. Many people who did not self-identify as Irish speakers nonetheless had a few words; phrases such as *go raibh maith agat*, *dia diobh*, *pinta dubh* [thank you, hello, pint of Guinness] and so on, were particularly readily understood and used around the city.

Indeed, as many participants in this research study pointed out, it would be almost impossible for anyone to grow up or live in the area without being exposed to Irish in some form, and probably picking up at least few words. What is remarkable about this phenomenon is that many individuals, while not necessarily identifying as 'Irish speakers' have some degree of understanding of the language, and a great degree of goodwill towards it. This phenomenon of speaking/not-speaking is wonderfully illustrated in the following exchange (admittedly with an individual from Poleglass in Belfast):

RO: Do you speak Irish then?

Gerry: Níl [no]

Gerry's joke was echoed often in my fieldwork, similar to the way in which, asked if they spoke any Irish, people would often say 'no, just a *cupla focal*', epitomised the commonplace non-identification as an Irish-speaker, or as a competent or advance Irish-speaker, amongst those who nonetheless clearly did have some level of vocabulary and competence. Indeed, at times, on probing, this level proved quite advanced. There was often a sense that a certain level of competence was a taken-for-granted fact of life, as exemplified in the following conversation with Liam:

RO: So he hadn't done any at school? [talking about Liam's father]

Liam: Absolutely nothing. Obviously he had some from where he comes from, we come from Creggan, so the basics, *maidin mhaith* [good morning] and stuff.

Likewise Ava explained:

‘...a lot of people have, like, a couple of words of it, even if they’re not learning. I would say nearly all Derry people, you know, who came through the Catholic school system...they would all have *cupan tae* or whatever, or some words, you know. I’d say, if you asked, almost anybody from 20 to 70 could give you 20 words in Irish, they may not even realise that those words are Irish words. I suppose things like *prati*. Yeah, *geansi*, and err, what else, there’s quite a few of them you know, the common ones.’

Explaining the general understanding of a few words, participants highlighted not simply the school system, but emphasised in particular the role of inter-generational family transition, as well as the wider material and linguistic environment. As Ciarán explained:

‘Well, yeah, you see, lots of people from around and about like that would have Gaelic, my daddy would say night before last about someone saying *geansi*, because he heard me saying, my nephews hate saying this, like, I would sometimes say a word to him in Irish just to get him to say it back to me, to see if you will, and daddy was saying about *geansi*, and a lot of people from the Gaeltacht area moved up here, would have spoken just naturally using those words, so it fell about their family and friends I suppose, coz like my next door neighbour, her mother, whenever she came here, didn’t have any English, her granny, her, she would use words like that to them, and then they would use it, so the wee tiny words would filter through, you know, aye, coz *geansi* or whatever.’

Oisín made the same point:

‘Yeah, yeah, yeah, its commonality, it’s old sort of phrases and, my wife’s mammy would have been brought up through Irish and, err, as she got older she would have retained little bits and pieces of Irish.’

Sean told a similar story:

‘Again this is what I was talking to this guy yesterday about, and I’ve seen it myself as well, obviously coz, like, if you grow up in Derry, you see Irish around, you know, you see *craic agus ceol* [fun and music], you might have heard *slan*, you might hear *dia duit*, you’ll see the bilingual road signs, so I think when you go into class you have that slight awareness of a few bits.’

Liam, reflecting on his experiences of teaching Irish at primary school, likewise explained that:

‘They were learning from complete scratch, but you kinda find that a lot of the children will know a lot of the things, like they will have heard *maidin mhaith* or *slan* because they’re obviously the very basic things that you can learn. So there was obviously always be somebody in their family, so they already know how to say that or say this here.’

Thus it was not just learners but also those who were not actively involved in learning or promoting Irish who understood and sometimes also used certain expressions and phrases that stuck with them and came out in everyday life. Some individuals, once aware of my interest in the use of Irish, would make a special effort to throw in a few words of Irish in their interactions with me, even though they did not identify as Irish speakers or learners themselves. For many long-term learners, and those working and socialising in Irish language-oriented settings, the use of some words and phrases of Irish over time had

become, or became, habitual and almost automatic, simply part of everyday social interaction and communication patterns rather than a conscious effort.

9.6 The use of Irish at home and in the family

The Irish language also figured in everyday life in the domestic environment and family settings. As noted above, several hundred people in Derry reported Irish as their main language, and several generations on from the establishment of Irish-medium education in the area, and its recent expansion, there are a growing number of families who maintain Irish as their primary language. As in the case of the Shaws Road *Gaeltacht* in Belfast, the establishment of the first Irish-medium education in Derry in the 1990s provided an opportunity for Irish language speakers and activists to raise their children predominately through Irish, and as the Irish-medium sector has expanded in the city, so have the opportunities to create an Irish language home. In some cases, there are now multigenerational Irish language families, with those children who were amongst the first raised through Irish in the city now having had children of their own. While, of course, the English-dominated environment makes it impossible to create an Irish-only environment, some committed Irish language enthusiasts have sought to create Irish language-dominant domestic environments:

‘We took the decision we’d rear them with Irish and try to get as many, erm, sort of facilities as possible. So they went to an Irish-speaking school, an Irish-speaking doctor, an Irish-speaking dentist.’ (Aodhán)

This commitment to creating an Irish language childhood and home environment is, however, not just a facet of the lives of those with for whom Irish is the main language, or whose children attend Irish-medium education. Irish language activists and enthusiasts, with varying degrees of Irish language skills, explained how they sought to create domestic

settings in which the Irish language might develop. Oisín talked about raising children with Irish:

‘Well, no, fortunately my wife was, lived in Galway for the majority of her youth, has a good understanding of Irish, and doesn’t have the confidence to speak a lot of Irish. But, erm, I want , I want to create a context at home that the children can hear Irish, but I don’t want to create a context where they think they have to speak Irish. So they see Irish as part of me, they like to learn Irish, they like to impress me with a word that they’ve learnt, so hopefully it’s a positive environment that will grow Irish with them, ... Owen who is ten, has two or three years left in primary school, you know, he’s into it quite, relatively sophisticated things to say in Irish, you know, so hopefully I’m giving him the opportunity so he can take this stuff and use it at school, so he won’t just see it as a school subject, and he’ll be able to see it eventually as...There’s a lot of work in the Irish language sector in the northwest, you know, so whether it’s broadcasting or writing or research or stuff, you know, and the community is so, erm, opportunities you know. And the, I think, you know, ultimately that is culture and tradition that he will pass on to his children, if it’s done in a way that’s, you know...I can speak Irish to my boys particularly, they’re older, and they’ll understand me, but they speak in English to me, and that’s ok. Erm, an odd time I might push them to, coz they’ll know the answer, but, very unusual, I just let them answer, but as they get older I think they’ll find their Irish voice. It’ll happen you know.’

The intention to create Irish language home environments was not simply part of family domestic settings, but also featured amongst groups of friends and individuals. With the mushrooming of Irish-medium education since the early 1990s, there has been a growing number of Irish speakers, and particularly Irish language-speaking young people, many of

whom remain committed to, or return to, the Irish language several years after leaving school. While of course some fell away from Irish, in my fieldwork I met many whom had attended Irish-medium school and returned to the Irish language later in life. Caolfhionn's journey in and out of the Irish language was not untypical of many of those from an Irish-medium school or Irish university background who I spoke to during my fieldwork. I asked Caolfhionn when she stopped learning Irish and she explained as follows:

'When I left secondary school. When I went to secondary school there was no Irish language provision, there was no school that was purely in Irish but I got extra classes because I wanted to take French and German as well coz I was quite good at languages so they let me stay on for two hours extra a week, just a one-on-one class with Irish so I did my GCSE in my second year then when I was thirteen and then continued with my A level. So I stopped I guess when I was sixteen and started again when I moved back to Derry about five years ago.'

Likewise there are young people graduating from Irish language degrees and masters programmes, with a high level of Irish language skills and enthusiasm for the language. Amongst individuals from both backgrounds there was a common desire to create Irish language settings, both at work and at home. Employment was especially important to those seeking to create Irish-medium environments, as Liam expressed;

'I think it's very important that we build a community and Irish has an importance and we can use it outside, it's not just in the classroom. I think a lot of people are kinda afraid that they'll go and learn Irish for seven years and they won't be able to use it in their working lives.'

While many speakers accepted that job opportunities were not always available, there was a desire to create Irish-medium home environments amongst such individuals, just as there was amongst Irish language enthusiasts seeking to start Irish-medium families. This issue

arose in various forms. One young activist had sought out other Irish speakers to live with after university, and had successfully managed to create, on and off, her own Irish-speaking home. Like Aodhán, she aimed to access as many facilities and services in Irish as possible. Another young activist in the city had similarly created an Irish language home environment that, as part of a wider project, included individuals from a range of levels and abilities of Irish and encouraged its use as much as possible. Other individuals across the spectrum of Irish language ability simply attempted to include more Irish within their everyday domestic settings. This could be as basic as watching Irish language TV, listening to Irish language radio, or using Irish language internet sites at home. In some cases, it involved attempting to maximise the number of daily activities which incorporated Irish, such as reading more in Irish, using more Irish words in everyday home chat, learning Irish language prayers, reading and writing Irish online, or using a few Irish words when chatting to other friends and family.

James, an older learner, born and raised in the Bogside, was a typical example. James, in his 70s and retired, had travelled extensively and lived abroad in his younger years, but had returned to live in Derry for recent decades and, as with many local residents, had been heavily involved, on and off, and, in republican and socialist politics, peace and reconciliation work, and community development over the years. James was self-confessedly cruising somewhat in his Irish language journey, having chosen to stay in intermediate classes for several years, happy to enjoy the experience of learning and attending and the craic, rather than pushing himself to higher educational achievements, as was the case with some other learners. While projecting an identity of not being a massive over-achiever in Irish, James, however, always regularly attended classes and intensive courses, and, was moreover always seeking to include a little more Irish into his everyday, whether in the occasional daily interaction, listening to Irish language radio, or setting himself the challenge of trying to read part of the Irish-language bible everyday. Both the material culture of his home and daily chats, whether in the street or when round for a cup of tea, reflected these small

accumulations of Irish language habits and resources that James sought to introduce to his everyday life.

Interviews and discussions with learners of all levels mentioned similar practices. Liam, from an Irish-medium education background, explained how he was trying to encourage his brother to use his Irish at home, as they had when they had been children:

‘I’m trying to get him to use his Irish a bit more, but back in the house it was very natural for just the two of us would have been speaking Irish and stuff like that.’

Sean, an Irish language learner with intermediate command of the language spoke Irish at home with his young niece, who was learning Irish at school:

‘Like I’ll say, what did you do today Aisling and I’ll then ask her things *as gaeilge*, so I enjoy that, and I’m going to keep that up actually, yeah definitely, coz I think that’s my best way of practicing at the moment.’

Ava explained how she tried to use Irish medium media at home:

‘Regularly, might have on TG4 or might keep the news on in that way, might get it up on the radio sometimes, *Blas* [an Irish language programme] at 7 o’clock at night, with Radio Ulster, but I don’t have it on all the time, but I do listen to it surely, I mean nowadays there are so many resources, so many websites.’

9.7 Limits of everyday use: opportunity and sustainability

In an English-speaking world, however, whatever the level of good will or desire to use Irish in everyday life, there are always limits on the extent to which it can be used. The relative new-ness of the Irish language as an everyday language in the Derry area, the fact that every Irish speaker is bilingual, and the fact that the Irish language remains very much a minority language both in terms of use within the population and in terms of media and cultural production, places structural limits on such attempts, even amongst committed activists.

As the Irish language has aged, however, increasingly it is becoming possible for the Irish language to be the medium of conversation and everyday interaction at home. Observing those families in which the whole family unit could speak Irish easily, whether two, or sometimes three generations, Irish was the 'normal' language of interaction and conversation, an unforced, natural aspect of negotiating life at home, even in the presence of English speakers. Such a situation is, however, by no means common and for families with fewer members or generations speaking Irish, the extent to which Irish can be used is more limited. In many cases the parents of children attending Irish-medium education have only limited Irish, and how and why the Irish language is used at home varies extensively. As Caolfhionn reflected, the extent to which Irish could be the main medium for communication at home was limited by the skill level within the family:

'They [my parents] learnt the basics, kind of *suí!, druid an doras, déan deifir* [sit! shut the door! Hurry up!], but when we got a bit more advanced my sisters and I kinda had a wee secret language, which was great.'

While Derry does have a receptive and active Irish language environment, the difficulty of creating even a bilingual, let alone a monolingual, environment, was a constant point of discussion amongst Irish language organisers and Irish language learners. Irish-medium education faces a constant uphill struggle, against a lack of funding and other resources and, often, a shortage of suitably qualified Irish-speaking staff. While more manageable at primary level, this becomes a particular problem when attempting to create Irish-medium secondary education, with advanced Irish-language level textbooks, resources and teachers in short supply for some subjects. For many parents the decision to send children to Irish-medium education can be challenging, with fears that the quality of the education, resources, opportunities and staffing may be less than that in English-medium schools. This is particularly so in the early years of new schools, which may be operating without state

funding and still developing staff and curricula. For those children who do study through the medium of Irish, it can be difficult to maintain their Irish outside, and after school, and it is easy for children to drop out of the habit of speaking the language as their main everyday language without the institutional structures and support of IME.

Amongst the Irish-medium education alumni I spoke to during my fieldwork, many highlighted that they had friends or siblings who no longer used the language regularly, or explained that had themselves gone through periods with little Irish language use. Indeed, as with Irish speakers from all learning pathways, there was often a narrative of moving in and out of the Irish language across the life course; of times during which it became too difficult to maintain, or lapsed, and other times when it returned to the fore, with many learners returning to learn Irish again in later years, having learnt it at primary or secondary school. Amongst Irish speakers of all abilities and stages, using more advanced Irish in everyday life was often described as challenging. As Sean described, when learning Irish formally, integrating it into everyday home and social life could be challenging:

‘Whenever I was a student, I loved doing Irish but you’d have no one to talk it with, you’d have no one to speak Irish with, which, I think...See at school, if there was an after school club, or if there was like a, erm, an outside of school Irish youth club, erm, what’s that, *club oige* [youth club], see if they had a *club oige*, but the good thing would be that it wouldn’t be for one particular school, it would be for anybody. I think it would have been fantastic, see if there had been a *club oige*, because you would have spoken Irish, you wouldn’t, if you would have studied Irish at school you’d have excelled probably because you’d practice it so much, but, see, that’s the thing. Whenever you come home and you’ve got nobody to speak Irish to, it’s the same as doing it here. It’s the same for adults here too, because everybody has got life commitments and whatever. But I would love, even a year, once a month

or once a fortnight, an evening organised where people could just come along and try and practice or whatever.’

Wider issues of social confidence and social barriers were also cited as factors affecting the confidence to participate more regularly in Irish language-dominated environments. In the case of conversation circles, for example, Oisín cited that the dominance of male and pub-based environments as a barrier to wider participation:

‘There’s a conversation circle here in Derry on Thursday night, and the lads are all great, but firstly it’s all male, and it’s all guys who are, as I say, the earliest, the youngest would be thirties, that’s a hard context from, for a young female to go into. Literally, I have been quite aware of that, and the odd time you’d get a girl to go, but then you’ve got one woman in the context of maybe ten, eleven fellas, and even the optics of that is odd, haha, isn’t it, you know? So it’s hard as to, it’s hard to, how do you make it inclusive of all, in a context that people are comfortable to go to it? Now we moved the Irish conversation circle from a pub to a hotel, which is more, I’d be happy to go and have a cup of tea, which is not alcohol, that sort of scene, going into a dark pub sort of thing, yet still we struggle to attract a wider attendance.’

9.8 Limits in the use of Irish in the everyday: practices of self-censorship

In discussing the use of Irish in everyday life, participants not only cited the practical issues of locating Irish medium settings or Irish speaking interlocutors, but also highlighted the extent to which navigating social politics and social interactions, and simply getting stuff done in the daily routine, at times prevented Irish language use, even in Irish-language contexts. Even amongst those fluent in Irish, and for whom Irish is an everyday or primary language, the use of Irish, within an English-language world, or indeed even in bilingual contexts, has social effects and wider social meaning. Just as much as the use Irish can be

habitual and natural, what language is used in a particular context has consequences, and the everyday use of Irish is as much about moments of active self-censorship as it is about active incorporation or habitual use.

Self-censorship often occurred, not for reasons of political contention or lack of opportunity, but due to issues around confidence, self-presentation and desire to most successfully navigate a social interaction. As Aodhán put it, 'In the north, that's still in a culture of non-Irish speaking', much of which was also about fear of failure:

'It's fear [that is] one of the barriers, it's fear of getting it wrong, nobody wants to look foolish...It's the fear of 'I'm the most stupid person here and everyone else is better than me', and its all these inner voices of struggle'.

Initiatives such as the *fáinne*, and distribution of signs saying as '*Tá gaelige agam*' [I speak Irish] have been introduced within Derry to promote such everyday use, yet these were not widespread and a lack of confidence in using Irish was a major issue for learners and users of Irish at all levels: the confidence to use Irish, to get it wrong, to go to Irish language events or conversation groups, and to trust their own command of Irish without checking with a more advanced learner. Committed Irish language activists tended to be more confident about using what Irish they had as much as possible, and encouraged others to do the same. As one teacher of Irish put it: 'People make fun of the *cúpla focal*, but if everyone used their *cúpla focal* this country which be verging towards bilingual now'. Nonetheless, many learners, some of quite advanced levels, were often far less confident in speaking Irish publically for fear of criticism. In my own experience, this issue of confidence was often a matter of perception rather than reception. My own, often faltering and badly pronounced Irish, generally received a very positive reception, whatever attempts I made. It was, nonetheless, still daunting to use Irish when faced with advanced or native speakers, and often the temptation to slip back into the safety zone of English was overwhelming.

The issue of when and how to use, and not use, Irish also involved the navigation of social worlds and the politics and power relations of everyday life in Northern Ireland. The indexical nature of language, and the ways in which speaking Irish might be perceived by interlocutors, and the extent to which it might associate or disassociate speakers from particular social groups or ideals, issues around managing the politics of social and cultural worlds, and managing the pragmatics and practicalities of successfully negotiating social interactions were significant factors in when Irish was, and was not, used.

On the one hand, the issue of politics, and particularly the association between Irish and republican politics is of course a factor. The Irish language has historically had a strong association with Republican politics, particularly in the early years of its revival in Northern Ireland and continues to do so in popular representation. The use of Irish also, in Northern Ireland's still-divided society, also involved considerations of managing the politics of social division. Various participants reflected on the situation that using Irish in the wrong or mixed social settings might cause friction or cause offence. Stephen, reflecting on the situation as regards Irish language signs lamented that:

‘The problem is, see, it would be like, a drama here, coz like the whole flag thing, it would be like, not here, you’ll not be putting it here, coz people thinks it’s sinister, or some sort of the political agenda’.

This is not, however, all there is to the complexities of Irish language indexing in Northern Ireland. The Irish language revival in the north has flourished in working-class, urban environments, in sharp contrast to the situation in the south of Ireland where the Irish language has been strongly associated with upper and middle class education. While the Irish language is increasingly socially diverse in popular participation, and increasingly detached from its associated with republican politics, there are, nonetheless, some lingering connotations of republicanism, or of not being ‘respectable’. As Ava put it, there was still a

lingering concern among a few that learning Irish ‘might be seen to be, not subversive, but just, you know, so, the Troubles are not over yet’.

The relevance, modernity and ‘cool’ factor of Irish, and the perceived relationship between ‘twiddly dee’ culture and Irish, was another issue, amongst younger generations in particular. While there are serious efforts to change this perception of Irish, learners of all ages talked about the language as having connotations of uninspiring school classes and traditional Irish music and dancing. In recent years there have been concerted efforts to make Irish language products modern and relevant, with Irish language covers of pop songs, Irish language soaps about modern life and comedy and game shows, Irish language translations of popular books, and so on. There is, however, still a tendency for the Irish language media and everyday world to be dominated by those activities and cultural forms associated with ‘traditional’ Irish culture. Irish speakers and learners often expressed their frustration that the content of television, radio and books and events available in Irish was dominated by Irish traditional music, Irish political history, nature, life in the *Gaeltacht*, and old Irish life. As Caoilfhionn put it:

‘We used to be like ‘Eugh’, coz a lot of, the Irish cultural things were kinda forced upon us as children, like *ceilidh* and [traditional music] sessions, and it pains me to say but I just don’t enjoy those. I enjoy a *ceilidh* for a finite period of time, but it’s not something, like where I am living now there’s a session on tonight and stuff and it’s just not me.’

With respect to children attending Irish-medium education, organisers, parents and ex-students all told me that while there was a lot of Irish used outside of school, and pride in the language, at times the desire to be mainstream, to fit in, meant that there was a reluctance to use Irish outside of school in certain settings in everyday life. As Tiarnán

described, there was an issue both in the use of Irish outside of school and in post-education:

‘The big difficulty I’m finding, and I’m talking about three of my children who went through the *bunscoil* system, they, they when they go to university, erm, they don’t really want to be different. So I can nearly see a point when my children when I spoke Irish to them, they looked at you as if to say, ‘Don’t do that in front of my friends, ‘cos they think I’m different or something’. So they go off, they lose it at sixteen or seventeen or eighteen, and they go off and find their own identity, or whatever they want to find.’

The decision not to use Irish could also, in such contexts, be part of the negotiations of wider social power relations of being a young person. As Caoilfhionn explained:

‘We started speaking English as a slight rebellion because at school we really had to speak Irish all the time, and I understand that now because I do youth work with Irish language and young and preteens and because there’s so much of Anglo-American culture in our lives there is a real kinda emphasise on trying to preserve what kinda Irish language we can absorb, so its trying like in school , if you were caught speaking English that was the worst you could be caught doing, so like any children you kinda like to rebel against the establishment.’

Reflecting on the extent to which the ‘image problem’ of Irish effected self-censorship, various activists and users perceived the contemporary situation and negative perceptions were changing. Caoilfhionn, reflecting on this changing culture, explained:

‘It’s actually fashionable to speak Irish. I never ever thought that would be the case... In terms of the culture and Irish changing and things in Derry, I do think, you know, there is more of a drive at the moment for people to speak to Irish and a lot more

people who I would never have thought of have said to me, ‘God, I’d love to learn a bit of Irish’.

Ciarán, likewise, noted that both the political and respectability issues, and the relevancy and ‘cool’ issues with Irish, were on the decline:

‘There is a greater interest in, err, a non-threatening way, and I think the narrative has changed. From the older generation talking about, ‘Oh Irish was beaten into me’, that’s a standard line, whereas it’s now more organic growth, so I think that will change. So whether or not you’ll get the critical mass to keep the language vibrant, to keep it alive, there’s the issue.’

Decisions about how and when to use, and not use, Irish were not exclusively an issue of navigating English-speaking worlds, but also an on-going consideration within Irish language worlds and contexts. In Irish language worlds, the vast majority of Irish speakers have learnt Irish as second-language learners and a large proportion of participants do not have complete mastery of the language. While there is a great deal of good will and desire to create Irish language spaces, opportunities and educational settings, recruitment of sufficient members, and particularly in the case of workplaces and schools, suitably qualified staff members, makes such aspirations almost impossible. Thus even in Irish language settings or activities, speakers have to make decisions about when Irish use is appropriate, as well as decisions about what vocabulary, dialect and extent of extra linguistic cues, translation or code-switching they use. For speakers of all levels, how Irish is used requires a certain degree of navigation of social politics, social pragmatics and Irish language politics.

On the practical side, at times speaking in Irish, or maintaining complete bilingualism, is not conducive to efficiently achieving a task. While an aspiration to create Irish language spaces, and to conduct meetings, work, social events and everyday interactions in Irish might exist, to maintain monolingualism excludes many from complete understanding or participation.

Complete bilingualism, of course, takes double the time and effort, and to attempt to speak Irish for as much of an interaction as possible before returning to English is of course also time-consuming. For speakers themselves, conducting interactions in a second language is mentally challenging, tiring and often frustrating, and is often difficult to maintain for long periods or when tired or under stress. As Tiarnán reflected, ultimately, while the situation is changing as regards the incorporation of Irish into everyday life, in a world dominated by the English language, learning Irish essentially is learning a second language, which brings its own challenges and requires a great deal of dedication:

‘Well I think learning a second language as an adult is a difficult thing, as in any community anywhere. I think people taking time out of schedules and work and family and hobbies and pastimes... So someone who would make a commitment to going to night classes, it’s a big commitment, not everyone can make it. There is an incredible level of good will but translating it into practical action is hard. There’s a big drop out rate. People say it’s a really hard language, particularly when they’ve only got one. Learning a second language is always difficult. It’s a mixture of commitment, determination and a bit of an ear for languages, I think it’s a combination.’

In everyday practice while some committed activists and speakers do make an effort to use as much Irish is possible, often speakers and actors operating in Irish language settings do revert to English.

The issue of monolingualism, bilingualism and insufficient use of English is a key debate within the Irish language world; many activists and users err on the side of bilingualism and making spaces, events and interactions accessible, yet this is often frustrating for more advanced speakers, and unacceptable to committed Irish language activists. The debate has proved particularly challenging as regards education, with some activists favouring complete

bilingualism, even at risk of recruiting less qualified staff members, with others favouring bilingualism and creating Irish medium streams in mainstream schools as the more practical solution. Debate around education methods has been a source of major rupture and contention within the Irish language world and does at times prevent cohesion within the Irish language community. As one activist reflected, 'There just isn't enough unity within the Irish language community in the city to get a way forward and it's one of the tragedies of the Irish language movement in this city'.

Amongst activists and learners, how Irish is used and not used often speaks to this monolingualism-bilingualism debate, and this can be at play in wider social settings, with some committed activists seeking more limited use of English in Irish language settings, insisting on the use of Irish even with non speakers or less fluent speakers, and being highly critical of attempts to do otherwise. Others however see this approach as elitist and excluding, and an approach which damages the development of Irish, and instead prioritise inclusion and regularly stress the importance that Irish speakers are inclusive in interactions and understanding of the challenges faced by less fluent speakers. So, while the Irish language permeates the environment of Derry and the linguistic everyday, there are challenges and complexities within this. Knowing how and when it is, and is not, appropriate to use Irish, and what extent to use it, even within Irish language environments and amongst other Irish language speakers, is complex and requires careful navigation of social worlds and individual relationships; consideration of language abilities of interlocutors, of their approach to language use, negotiating whether monolingualism or bilingualism will be more appropriate, consideration of whether faulty broken Irish or code switching is more appropriate, and the pragmatics of the activity at hand are all factors. In my own daily interactions, for example, deciding how to linguistically manage any basic situation, for example, greeting a member to the centre or answering the telephone, might involve various considerations; I was aware that some of my interlocutors would appreciate more a

slow, stumbling and mistake ridden attempt to achieve a basic interaction in Irish, some might be offended by a perceived lack of attempt to speak as much as Irish as possible, others might not be bothered, others might have a similar level of Irish to myself and appreciate a quicker descent into English, sometimes it was simply not expedient to attempt to achieve a task in English due to time constraints, at times the interlocutor might have no Irish and English was required, at times the pressing issue might be to effectively communicate, even if that involved very broken or ungrammatical Irish, at times it felt that all attempts to be correct and fluent was required. In my discussions with learners and educators, both and outside of class, many expressed similar concerns and worries.

Concerns about the associations of using the Irish language are not, however, just about managing 'community relations'. To learn and use Irish as part of everyday life, thus speaks to a whole host of pragmatics and politics in navigating social interactions and social worlds, and how to best achieve various everyday interactions and tasks. Irish language use and development is, of course, not only a matter of everyday linguistic interactions, but also includes material culture and the environment. The next chapter explores the material and physical world of Irish and the complexities, politics and pragmatics of the use and meaning of Irish in this lived and embodied setting.

10. Irish in the material environment

Previous chapters have discussed the presence of the Irish language in everyday in Derry through examination of the history of Irish in Derry, as seen through the lens of social history records and documents and oral history, through examination of how it is used, and not use, in everyday linguistic environments, and through individual narratives of the place of Irish in everyday life and its importance and meaning to individuals. Drawing on ethnographic, documentary and visual data, and interviews, this chapter now turns to explore this presence of Irish in the everyday material environment, considering how it has been integrated and used in the lived, embodied world, and the complexities of this incorporation, which presents similar challenges and complexities as its use in linguistic interactions. It also considers the extent to which, again similarly to linguistic use, Irish has become part of the everyday, something that that is ‘just there’, perhaps not always noticed, perhaps not always thought about, perhaps not always reflecting a depth of breadth of Irish language ability, but something that nonetheless forms a significant and important part of everyday lived realities. It also considers the politics and pragmatics of this conclusion, and how the presence, and absence, of Irish in the material environment intertwines with the wider social complexities of everyday life in Northern Ireland.

10.1 Material culture research in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland is both a place with a rich material and visual culture and a place in which space, and knowing space, matters. Graffiti, public art, murals, memorials, campaign posters, protests, marches, rallies, flags, kerb painting, placards and tourist signs, as well as commercial advertising, leaflets, brochures and so in, fill the lived environment of urban spaces in a way that can be quite remarkable when first arriving in the region. The density and nature of this material culture varies according to time of year and location, and has a particularly lively presence in Derry and Belfast.

Material culture and the lived environment has been the subject of extensive academic examination, a source of political contention and the focus of a large amount of the social policy and community relations work in Northern Ireland. The impact of generations of conflict and increasing community segregation is that place, space and material culture matter in Northern Ireland. As Burton described in 1978, knowing space is a 'very basic...matter of safety or danger that is reinforced with every outbreak of rioting' (Burton 1978, p. 56). In the context of inter-communal violence, there has been increasing residential separation and by the 'end' of the Troubles, 71 per cent of housing estates were 90 per cent one community (Bell *et al.* 2010, p. 13). Different areas and spaces in cities, or facilities and landmarks such as leisure centres, are often perceived as associated with one or other community. Academic studies of the use and perception of space have highlighted the role of 'social geographies' and 'mental maps of no go areas' (Hughes and Murphy 2009, p. 4), and the way in which individuals use such maps to 'guide and structure their personal routines and practices' (Hamilton *et al.* 2008, p. 5; McAlister *et al.* 2010; Young and Roulston 2011; McKeown *et al.* 2012; Bell *et al.* 2010).

Material culture and the marking of lived environments through kerb painting, murals, graffiti, flags, posters and the transitory marking of spaces in parades, protests, rallies and so on, are of course important aspects of the production of these social geographies of place and perceived ownership. Academic, political and policy scrutiny have accordingly tended to approach material culture and lived environment studies from the point of view of politics, boundary marking and community division. Murals, flags, parades and memorialisation have been examined extensively in documenting the history and development of such practices, or the politics of production of visual markings. Researchers have also explored the culture, perception and social impact of such practices (Bell *et al.* 2010; Bryan 1996, 2000; Bryan *et al.* 2010; Jarman 1997, 2008; McCormick and Jarman 2005; Bryan and Stevenson 2009, Bryan *et al.* 2010; Burton 1978; Jarman 1997, 1998, 2008; Rolston 1991,

1992, 1998; 2003; Sluka 1995, Viggiani 2014). Much of this academic work examining material culture has thus focused on community division, conflict and the history of the Troubles and the Peace Process. In politics, the media and social policy discussions have likewise tended to approach material culture from the point of view of community relations and division, often from a negative light. Material culture has been seen as 'the public representation of community separation' (Independent Research Solutions 2009, p. vii, p. 48) and as 'normally sectarian, antagonistic and offensive', 'territorial markings' (Independent Research Solutions 2009, pp. vi-ii) and 'intended as visible and unambiguous statements of opposition and aggression' (Good Relations Unit 2006, pp. 15-6). In recent years the public management of urban spaces and material environments and the impact of public art programmes and government intervention in local visual practices have also been explored (Rolston 2012; Hocking 2015), as has tourism, festivalisation and the production of place as a cultural product (Hocking 2015; Carden 2011, 2017).

The role of material culture in understanding language has been less extensively explored. Hocking briefly makes passing reference to the presence of Irish language signs and murals in her exploration of public space in Derry (Hocking 2015, pp. 39, 42, 143), but does not go into detailed discussion of the topic or any extensive mapping of the presence of Irish.

Zenker (2008), while examining the Irish language as an everyday phenomenon and considering its role in everyday life, focuses more on the relationship of the language with groups, events and activities, and maps the presence of Irish in material environments only briefly as part of a wider discussion of space and place (Zenker 2013, pp. 18-20). Carden's extensive research into the Gaeltacht quarter in Belfast likewise examines the material environment of Irish but focuses particularly on the politics and management of the production of place, and debates around place branding, funding and space management (Carden 2012). Carden's 2017 essay on Irish language murals does discuss the 'linguistic landscape' in more detail, but is likewise focussed on understanding the politics and impact

of place branding and tourism development and its implications for Irish language activism and politics, rather than exploring the intertwining of the Irish language with the material environment of everyday life in a broader sense.

10.2 The Irish language in the material culture of Derry: history and development

Across the Cityside, the Irish language can be seen in a whole range of settings: in public buildings, in educational establishments, in informational signs, street signs and business names, in public art and street art, in memorials and graves, and in both online and printed documents and environments. My own simple everyday route around the town was one in which Irish figured prominently, and highlights the pervasiveness of the language around the city. My daily routine saw me walking from the residential Rosemount area of the city to the city centre, take a quick lunchtime circuit around the city centre shops, back home to Rosemount again in the late afternoon and then usually further up north to Pennyburn or occasionally to some event or location elsewhere in the city. On this everyday route, the Irish language was visible throughout; it was present in the University campus signs, in the large murals on the side of a local pub, in political posters and graffiti, in Irish language street signs, and in various event and campaign leaflets and posters in windows and fly-posted on walls. On the street on which I worked the Irish language could be seen in the signs of a small corner shop, the bins of the street were label '*bruscar*' (rubbish), and of course, in the Irish language centre in which I worked, the Irish language was everywhere. As I wandered around the city centre shops on my lunch break, I saw Irish street signs, political posters, Irish language shop names and signs, and a plethora of leaflets and documents posted and displayed around the many local cafes promoting Irish language activities, events, education and so on. The council operated a 'trilingual' policy, in which signs were in English, Irish and Ulster Scots; the signs in the Guildhall in the city centre and the city council promotional material and documents prominently displayed around the city

centre were likewise trilingual. Often I wandered up to the south side of the city walls towards Bishops Gate, down to the Long Tower church and sometimes onwards to the Lecky Road, where the Irish language covered murals and art on the side of pubs and social clubs, as well as featuring in street signs, graffiti, murals, posters, monuments and memorials. It appeared in bilingual informational signs and tourist information around the Bogside and in the Áras Cholmcille museum. Heading to the gym or yoga classes took me up the north of the city towards the Pennyburn estate most evenings, a journey which took me past the Irish language signs of St Mary's school, Irish-language adverts and posters for Irish-medium education as well as words of Irish in the graffiti that lined the main roads.

Of course, the distribution and density of visible Irish around the City was not uniform, and neither were the ways in which Irish was visible in the landscape. In the absence of an Irish Language Act, or an Irish Language strategy at governmental level, there was no public policy or statutory duty as regard the presence of Irish in public life. Indeed, until 1995 the use of Irish language signs was *de facto* banned. There is no consistent funding or top-down impetus for the incorporation of the Irish language into the city's environment, excepting the council's internal sign policy, and thus the presence and visibility of Irish varies across the city according to the presence of different organisations and initiatives, different tendencies in interest and enthusiasm, and the resources available.

A significant proportion of the Irish language signs and presence in everyday life in Derry is fairly recent and has developed as part of the Gaeltacht project led by An Gaeláras /An Cultúrlann, or through the work of the City Council. Although Derry City Council has a long history of sympathy towards the Irish language movement⁴⁵, it could not legally erect Irish language signs and street signs until 1995. Irish language activists in the city, some of whom

⁴⁵ In 1986 Derry City Council passed a motion in support of Irish-speaking political prisoners and supporting their calls for rights to use the language in various contexts (Mac Giolla Chríost 2012, p. 89).

were involved in Sinn Féin and republican politics were the first to take steps to incorporate the Irish language into the city's material environment over the last 20 years. They erected signs across Shantallow, the Bogside and the city centre and worked with local businesses, community groups and wider initiatives in the city to bring the Irish language into the public domain. Although led by individuals involved in wider constitutional politics and activism, those activists involved in this early movement explained that much of this work was undertaken with the aim of making Irish more accessible and non-threatening, normalising and mainstreaming the language, taking it out of the sphere of activism or politics and making it part of everyday life. In seeking to integrate the Irish language into everyday life these activists also talked about the project of effecting Irish language sustainability, of building an environment for the development and growth of Irish-language communities both for now and for the future. As one activist described, creating an environment in which the Irish language was present and relevant was seen as the only way to take a structured and holistic approach to truly reviving the Irish language and making the conditions for an Irish language community to develop:

‘We had this holistic view of making a community....in a way it's a two-pronged strategy, you can bring up a generation of young Irish speakers from nursery school and you can take them right through, and you're teaching adults and you're creating an environment where they can feel at home. So you have the school, and youth club, and you change the name of the streets for the Irish name plates you know, you have a place like this where you can order your coffee in Irish, it's about growing that, that the best way to create Irish speakers, is to take them at three years of age, there's no question about that. Retaining that beyond seventeen, eighteen, when they go to university, has been difficult and that's kind of the work we've been involved in.’

More recently, in addition to its use in street signs, (Figure 10.1), the Irish language has been particularly promoted as an element of tourism and cultural product development, with bilingual tourist signs and museum historical information boards being developed.



Figure 10.1 Irish language signs. Top: historical engraving above the modern playhouse. Bottom: Ferryquay Street and Great James Street

From 2009 these efforts have taken place under the umbrella of a developing 'Gaeltacht Quarter' project (*an Cheathrú Ghaeltachta*). Working with the Council, University and wider groups in the city, the project has sought to create an 'Irish language quarter' in the Creggan, Bogside and Brandywell districts of the city, stretching from the Cultúrlann in Great James Street, through the Bogside to *Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir* in the Brandywell and up to Creggan' (Cultúrlann 2010). The aim of this project is stated as follows:

‘The project will seek to encourage, foster and instil pride among residents in the rich history and culture of the neighbourhood by:

- * enhancing the physical environment of the area through the erection of Irish language and bi-lingual signs in partnership with community, business and statutory organisations;

- * developing a unique cultural tourism product in collaboration with Free Derry Tours, Free Derry Museum, TRIAX, Dove House, Bogside & Brandywell Initiative, *Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir*, the People’s Gallery, NITB, Derry City Council, and others.

- * maximising economic opportunities for local residents, businesses and others provided by the cluster of Irish language and cultural groups within the area;

This project will only succeed with the support and active participation of the residents, community organisations and businesses of the Creggan, Bogside and Brandywell areas’. (Cultúrlann 2010).

In recent years, this project has developed into a wider cultural quarter project seeking to promote not only the Irish language, but culture more generally in the city.

Derry City Council (which, since my fieldwork ended, has now merged with Strabane) has been at the forefront of Irish language promotion more generally in the city. It adopted a positive approach to the Irish language earlier than other councils such as Belfast, and from 1996 onwards began to develop policies for the promotion and support of the Irish language through an Irish language local sub-committee (Mac Giolla Chríost 1998, p. 269). In 2001 the council established a language diversity group, and supported projects such *An Droichead*, a cross-community relations programme dealing with the Irish language. From 2003 it provided access to Irish language courses and Irish language awareness training for staff. In the same year, it organised a public consultation on an Irish language street-name policy (Equality Commission for Northern Ireland 2006, 2011; Derry City Council 2004). In 2007, the council successfully bid to *Foras Na Gaeilge* to fund the post of an Irish Language Officer, maintaining this post through *Foras* funding until 2016, after the post was funded by central council funding. Having an Irish Language Officer is not compulsory across Northern Ireland, but an individual council choice, and the role in Derry aims to provide a ‘range of Irish

Language services, programmes and initiatives which have helped the Council to meet its legislative commitments in respect of the Irish language, and to meet the needs of the Irish language community in the Council area’ (Derry City Council 2016b, p. 1; Sweeney 2014)⁴⁶.

In September 2008 a new Council Irish language policy was put forward for consultation, and in April 2009, the Council introduced a policy which required the Council to ‘promote the Irish language as a component part of civic festivals, events, and festivals, and any decision not to include Irish language promotion “must be justified”’. The policy also required the Council to ‘translate and publish at least four publications and four e-zines in English and Irish each financial year and produce 12 press releases in Irish each year’ (Londonderry Sentinel 2009). The new policy also set out policy guidelines for supporting Ulster-Scots, requiring the Council to encourage the inclusion of Ulster-Scots components in festivals and events, so that the public could access services, information and correspondence in Irish or Ulster-scots if requested. As a result of these policy changes and support at the council, both Irish and Ulster Scots have grown in visibility in the city, and the Irish language is particularly well supported, with a full-time Irish language officer working to promote the language and provide Irish language services (Derry City Council 2008, 2016a).

In April 2013 further language policy document was introduced which included, among other changes, a new policy on corporate identity for Derry City Council, illustrated in Figure 10.2:

‘Derry City Council will adopt an official corporate identity which includes the Council name in English, Irish and Ulster-Scots. The trilingual version of the logo will

⁴⁶ Since the introduction of the *Foras* funding scheme for the post, Cookstown Borough Council, Magherafelt District Council, and Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council have employed Irish Language Officers, and since the scheme ended Newry and Mourne District Council and Omagh District Council have self-funded the post. In 2016, Irish Language Officers remained in place in Derry City and Strabane District Council; Mid-Ulster Council; Fermanagh and Omagh District Council; and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.

supersede all previous versions of the logo and will be reinforced through use on all Council correspondence and publications. (Derry City Council 2013, p. 8)



Figure 10.2 Derry City Council trilingual logo

The policy also provided for the introduction of trilingual signs through council property (see Figure 10.3):

‘Upon scheduled replacement, internal and external signs on Derry City Council owned buildings, offices, internal directional signs and vehicles will include Irish (and Ulster-Scots). All of the abovementioned signs will be required to present all three languages in equal size, typesetting and format and will place English, Irish and Ulster-Scots in that order. Draft signage proposals must be approved by the Irish Language Officer and the Equality Officer to ensure compliance with this policy and the Code of Practice on Producing Information’. (Derry City Council 2013, p. 10)

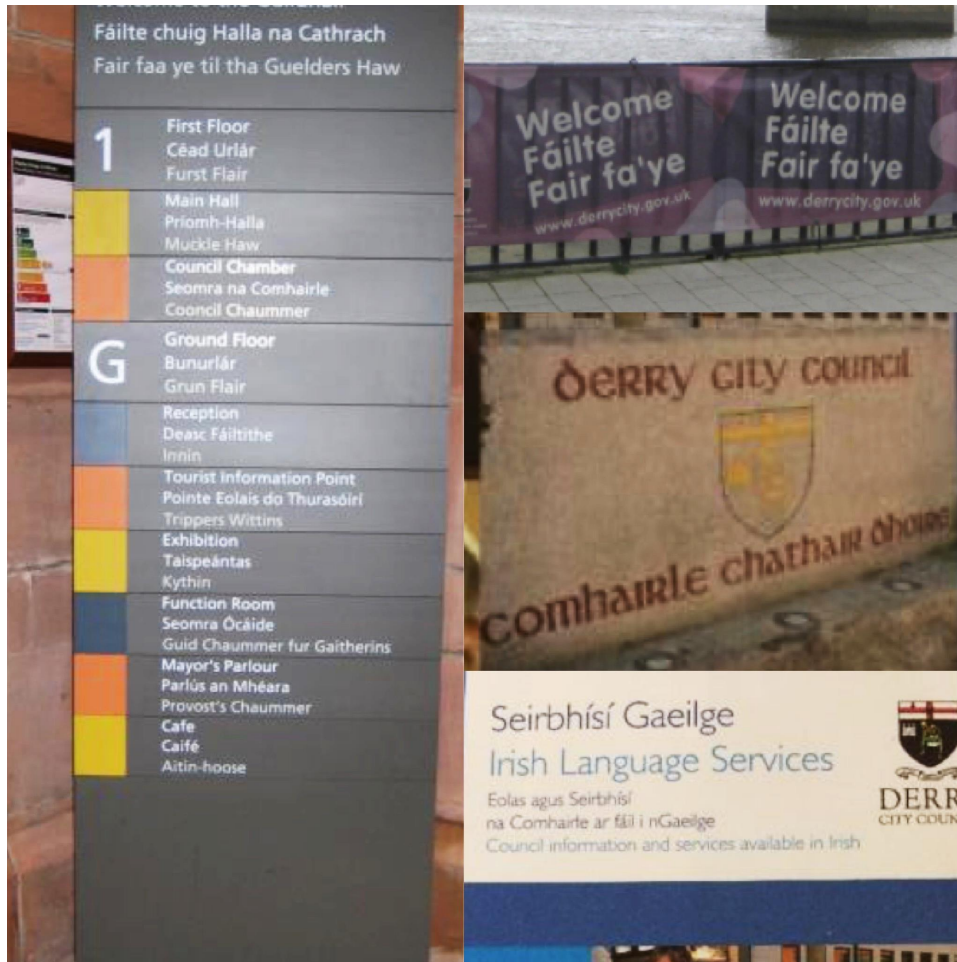


Figure 10.3 Clockwise- Derry City Council Irish language products: Irish language signs in the Guildhall, Irish language in Council promotion material, sign outside Derry City Council building, Derry City Council Irish language services leaflet displayed around the city

Another important feature of the policy included the plan to forefront Irish as part of the city's marketing and external brand:

‘There is an obvious tourism dividend to be maximised through the use of and heightened visibility of the Irish language within the Council area and Council will support the language through the provision of cultural facilities, programmes and events. Promoting the language and its culture using this multi-faceted approach will help Council achieve its aim of enhancing the region’. (Derry City Council 2013, p. 11)

In material culture terms, the result of these Council policy developments since 2001 has thus not only supported the use and learning of Irish but also led to the growing visibility of Irish in everyday material culture and the city environment, with Irish present in signs, documents, promotional material and tourist products. The visible presence of Irish in the City-Council sphere also includes the online environment, which from mid-2013 has included trilingual branding.⁴⁷

10.3 The Irish language in everyday material culture: contemporary Derry

Alongside the active policy moves towards promotion of the Irish language at council level, political, festivals and events have been key arenas and contexts in which the Irish language has been incorporated into the everyday material environment. As with the growth and revival of Irish more generally in the twentieth century, support for, and use of, Irish within republican politics and activism has played an important role in the growing presence of Irish in Derry's material and lived environment. Increasing levels of organisation in the Irish language movement, and growing levels of participation, community support and confidence as the movement grew in the 1970s and 1980s, brought a growth in the visual presence of the language in the city. The Irish language appeared in the context of republican protests and displays, particularly in grave and memorial architecture, and in political graffiti and urban art from the 1980s on (Melaugh 1970; 1972; Rolston 1991 p. 102; Rolston 1992 p. 58). It continues to be part of republican memorials and displays into the present day. The legacy of the early relationship between the Irish language and republican politics can be seen in contemporary Derry in the form of gravestones and memorials from

⁴⁷In 2015-2017, following the end of my own residence and fieldwork in Derry, the merger of Derry City and Strabane District councils resulted in the review and revision of Irish language policies. The council adopted a trilingual corporate identity, with all signs and documents contained English, Irish and Ulster-Scots branding, and in cases such as welcome signs, the use of Irish, English and Ulster-Scots in wider information and text. The new council committed to increasing the range of publications produced in Irish as well as creating an Irish-friendly workplace (Derry City and Strabane District Council 2014, see also Derry City and Strabane Council n.d)

the 1970s which use Irish language inscriptions and personal names, as well as in later memorials.

Organised political parties have been, and continue to be, particularly prominent users of Irish. Sinn Féin has a long history of Irish use, which tends to be extensive and visible, but the Social Democratic and Labour Party likewise features Irish language elements in promotional material. Both EU and Westminster elections took place during my time in Derry, and the use of Irish in party political literature was prominent, in billboards, leaflets, campaign posters and campaign material posted through the letterbox (see Figure 10.4).



Figure 10.1 Political material culture, clockwise: Sinn Féin campaign leaflet, Sinn Féin party conference, Sinn Féin street poster, Social Democratic And Labour Party canvassing booklet.

During my fieldwork, the visibility of Irish in the public sphere ebbed and flowed with the annual cycle of festivals, events and campaigns, as would be expected considering the role

of wider cultural activities such as music and dancing in the presence of Irish. Irish-language specific festivals, cultural and music festivals and political events and campaigns were moments in which the Irish language erupted into the public sphere. During my fieldwork, Irish Language Week, *Seachtain na Gaelige*, which was sponsored by the Cultúrlann and the City Council, and included groups and organisations from around the city, was perhaps the most prominent of these moments in which the Irish language became a highly visible presence in the city. *Seachtain na Gaelige* takes place in annual towns and cities across Ireland the week leading up to St Patrick's day, and includes a wide range of Irish language events, activities and promotion work, as do the St Patrick's day celebrations themselves. Posters, documents and information leaflets could be seen all across the city, in shops, billboards, posters, street signs and so on in the weeks before the event, and during the event Irish was especially visible with various organisations making special attempts to use Irish and with a heavy presence of Irish language events, from music, to shows, to Irish language mass, and learning opportunities, such as courses and special conversation circles, taking place across the city.

In the course of my fieldwork in Derry, various other festivals had a strong and visible Irish-language focus. The Pan-Celtic festival was held in the city in 2014 and 2015, and heavily promoted the use of Irish, as well as Manx, Welsh, Breton and Cornish. It was bilingual Irish and English in its documentation and featured Irish prominently in promotional material. The annual Derry *Fèis* is a long running major social institution in Derry, and the vast majority of children at Catholic schools are prepared for, and participate in, the event, which includes a range of Irish-culture oriented competitions, including dancing, music, singing and Irish language recital and features the Irish language prominently in the documentary representation and promotion of the event. Smaller festivals and events such as neighbourhood *fleadh* (festival in Irish, the name used for small local community festivals of music, family activities, dancing, sports and so on), St Columba's Day, and festivals hosted by

the Cultúrlann likewise were oriented towards the use of the Irish language and featured it in their promotional material and documentation (see Figure 10.5).



Figure 10.2 Irish language in festival contexts, clockwise: St Columba's Day parade, St Patrick's Day event, Pan-Celtic festival certificate, Pan-Celtic festival displays, Saint's Day flag at the Cathedral.

Events and festivals thus had a significant impact on the presence of the Irish language in the public domain across the year, contributing towards a cyclical ebb and flow in the presence of the language. Within this ebb and flow, the language appeared at different times of the year in different formats, locations and settings, and was more or less associated with different groups or activities, as its visual material presence became dominated by different

activities. The two weeks leading up to St Patrick's Day marked the beginning of the festival and *Fèis* season, which spanned spring and summer, a time in which the Irish language became highly visible in the public sphere in the context of music, dance, festivals and cultural activity. In contrast, during the political campaign season the Irish language, again more visibly present on the streets, seemed, in its everyday material presence, to become more strongly associated with politics.

However, while politics and 'cultural events' were prominent moments for the presence of Irish, my fieldwork revealed extensive examples of its presence in a wide range of everyday activities and settings, including education, business and domestic and residential environments. In contrast to the more transient presence of Irish that came with political moments and events and festivals, the presence in these everyday realms was more permanent and more integrated into the material world of everyday routine. Education was a particularly prominent institutional influence on the presence of the Irish language in the material environment. Educational institutions, as discussed in the last chapter, are key employers, form a key part of everyday routines, and act as influential community hubs. Formal Irish language learning settings are of course one of the primary settings in which the Irish language is used and heard, whether in the context of the various Irish-medium education schools and nurseries in the area, in the *Cultúrlann*, in adult and school-age classes around the city, or on the Magee university campus. Schools and educational establishments are accordingly one of the key mechanisms by which the Irish language is visible in the public domain and everyday environment, both in school signs and the external environment of the schools, but also in leaflets and advertising for schools. Irish-medium establishments most obviously feature Irish and Irish language in their signs and adverts, but the Irish language can also be seen in the signs of some other schools in the area (see Figure 10.6).



Figure 10.3 School signs and adverts clockwise: St Brigid's College, St Mary's College and an advertisement for Irish-medium education

Additional institutions prominent in the incorporation of the Irish language into the material environment were the Catholic Church, sporting clubs and groups, and traditional dance and music groups, events and organisations. Although both the social power of the Catholic Church and regular church attendance is on the decline, the vast majority of residents on the Cityside (over 98 per cent in all areas in the 2011 census) identify as 'Catholic', and almost all of the primary schools in this area are Catholic-run. At both Catholic schools and at non-church-managed schools, the vast majority of children are prepared for Catholic first communion and confirmation. Religious education and attendance accordingly form an

important part of education, out-of-school activities and weekly routines. The vast majority of secondary schools likewise are Catholic and continue to include religious education and attendance within their curriculum. Funerals and marriages were predominately Catholic Church-based and the views and writings of local clergy featured in local news reports, as well as in the parish and church newsletters and adverts that appeared regularly through the front door. While not everyone attended or agreed with the Catholic Church on a day-to-day level, and indeed it was often actively rejected, nonetheless, the Catholic Church formed a central element of everyday life and group interaction through the activities of education, raising children, in celebrations such as marriages and funerals, and during those special holidays such as Christmas, St Patrick's day and Easter when even more reluctantly practicing Catholics might make a special effort to attend mass. Although the weekly Irish language mass led by the Sisters of Mercy had ceased to be held regularly during my fieldwork, the Irish language nonetheless had a presence across the city-side churches, in the collection boxes and posters for 'Trocaire' (an Irish aid charity) displayed throughout the year, the use of Irish-language names and labels, and the occasional Irish-language masses which took place at various points throughout the year.

Sporting clubs also form an important part of Derry life, both in the form of the local soccer team and the Gaelic Athletic Association clubs. The GAA has six clubs in Derry, one on the Waterside and five in the Cityside, and the located in the Bogside hosts Celtic Park, the county stadium where senior level matches are played. GAA clubs have historically been, and continue to be, community hubs and locations for a whole range of wider activities. In addition to running sports clubs and teams for children and adults, they host other activities including Irish language classes, dancing classes, functions, music nights and other social events. Since its inception in the context of the Gaelic revival and cultural nationalism, the GAA has had a strong relationship with the Irish language, and it permeates the atmosphere, environment and activities of the clubs. Noticeable are the Irish-language place and personal

names, Irish-language signs, Irish-language versions of the national anthem, ticketing, and the use of Irish words in training activities. The world of traditional dancing and music also plays a central role across the life-course, and is permeated throughout by the Irish language. Promotions and representations of these activities tend to contain elements of Irish in much of their advertising, for example often using the word '*rinne*' (dance in Irish) and '*ceol*' (music).

Individuals, groups and business are also influential in making Irish visible in the material culture of everyday life. Street signs are a particularly prominent way in which Irish may be incorporated into the everyday material world. In Northern Ireland councils have had statutory duties to support Irish language street signs at the request of residents since 1995, although the interpretation of this responsibility is at the discretion of local councils⁴⁸. It is local residents who must initiate council-led consultation proceedings, and subsequently the council consults on the proposition and takes the action deemed to be the majority view. In Derry, this mechanism has supported the erection of a many Irish language street signs across the city, forty-five new signs being erected between 2011 and 2014.

Individuals could also manifest Irish in everyday material culture in other subtle ways. Particularly noticeable during my fieldwork were the use of Irish-language cheque books, Irish-language personal names, adornments outside and inside homes, and memorialisation on grave stones. Individual business owners also influenced the visibility of the Irish language in the material environment. While campaign groups and projects such as the Gaeltacht project actively sought to promote the presence of Irish, individual businesses and

⁴⁸ The Local Government (Northern Ireland) provisions of 1995 allowed local councils to erect street signs in English, and any other language. The legislation was vague as to how exactly this decision would be taken: (4) In deciding whether and, if so, how to exercise its powers under paragraph (1)(b) or (2) in relation to any street, a council shall have regard to any views on the matter expressed by the occupiers of premises in that street'. In practice the result has been that different councils have slightly differing policies on this. In Derry the practice is to survey the street and enact the decision of the majority of respondents. In other councils, it can be the majority of residents (which according to local activists generally tends to result in fewer Irish language street signs, as sometimes response rates are low); other mechanisms are employed as deemed appropriate by the council.

organisations were not subject to any legislation and had free choice in their use of Irish. During my time in Derry a number of groups and businesses had included Irish in their branding and identity. For example, both *An Siopa*, a small corner shop, and *Siopa Ciste*, a cake shop and tearoom, had already adopted Irish language branding (Figure 10.7), and in my everyday chats with various café and shop owners there was often an expression of interest of using more Irish in branding, in signs, on menus and so on.



Figure 10.7 Use of Irish in businesses- *Siopa Ciste*, *Dungloe Bar*, *Linen Room Bar*, *Bishop Gate pub*

Some organisations have taken significant steps towards the creation of a bilingual environments: tourist signs in the Bogside are bilingual and in June 2014, *Áras Cholmille*, the Saint Columba heritage centre, opened on the site of the old Nun’s School next to Long Tower church, with an almost entirely bilingual environment, both in its fixed and interactive museum displays and its retail products and library. The new Eating Disorders serviced launched during the time of my fieldwork used an Irish language name ‘*Cunamh*’ (silence in Irish), and other groups and businesses included Irish in posters and other presentations (Figure 10.8).

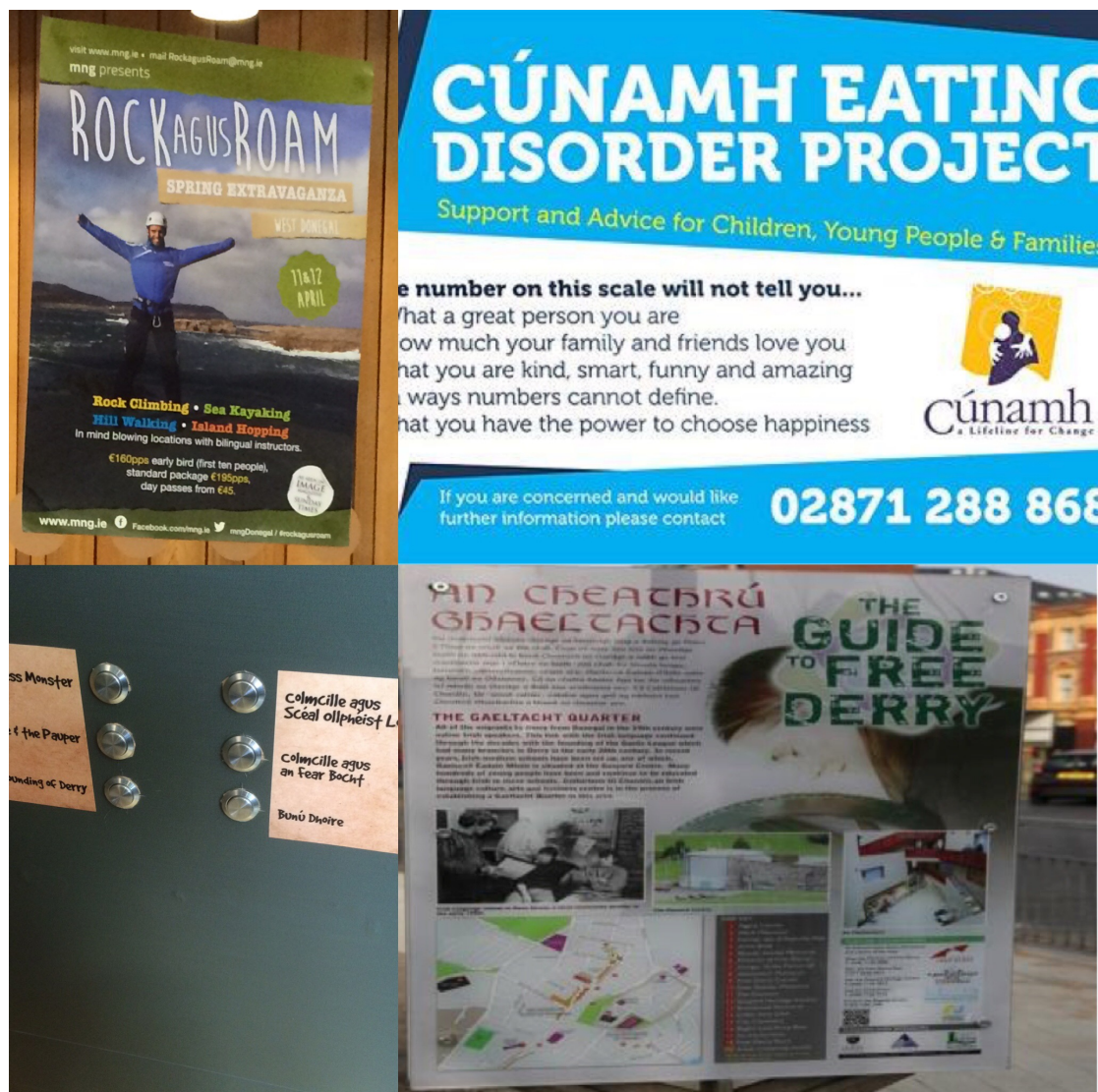


Figure 10.4 Use of Irish in business and promotion: outdoor activities poster, Eating Disorder group, Free Derry bilingual signs, bilingual *Áras Cholmille* museum

10.4 The presence of Irish in contemporary Derry: politics and pragmatics of absence

As these various examples show, the Irish language had a visual presence around the city in numerous formats, whether in quite subtle ways such as the use of the Irish language in church signs or personal effects, or in the bolder presence of Irish language signs, adverts or documents.

However, Irish was notably absent in many contexts and limited in the range of ways in which it was used. On the one hand, politics, of course had a part to play in where Irish was and was not used. In the absence of an Irish Language Act, the distribution, extent and nature of Irish, as with Irish speaking, reflects the distribution, extent and level of support for the language in the city. It reflects politics in the sense of the politics of the community divide, but also wider social politics of identity and respectability, and also the practical and pragmatic issues of levels of use and also funding. The language was almost entirely absent from some areas of the city, notably the Protestant Waterside, where the Irish language receives far less support or interest, and where the use and presence of Irish is seen might be seen as a major political statement. While many activists hoped that the Irish Language Act, in making Irish compulsory everywhere, might depoliticise the Irish language by rendering its presence less indexical of the political and cultural affiliation of residents, there was an acceptance that, as reflected by Sarah earlier, a perception still remained that the use of Irish 'was to make a political point, you know, almost like a territorial thing'.

As with linguistic use however, the use of Irish in the material environment does not just reflect the political divide, but also the social politics of identity management. Notably, the street-naming system in Derry is based around plebiscite; this system gives local residents a large amount of power as regards the presence of the Irish language in their own street, for they must both raise the initial request, and subsequently vote on the outcome in the council led consultation. In Derry, requests are by no means guaranteed success, even in

those areas in which voting patterns or census data might suggest otherwise. During my fieldwork, requests in streets in the Culmore and Rosemount areas were defeated in the street-wide consultations, although the 2011 census reported an 'Irish only' national identity for 67 per cent and 62 per cent of the residents concerned, respectively. These streets were amongst the top ten per cent within Northern Ireland with respect to 'Irish only' self-identification, and seventeen per cent of the population reported some skills in the Irish language (NISRA 2013). In reflecting on these results local activists considered that, in these more affluent areas, the 'respectability' issue around Irish, as noted by Ava in the last chapter, had been a major factor in the rejection of Irish signs in the areas.

Practical issues were also a factor in the extent and type of Irish language presence in the city. Both business owners and activists cited costs and resourcing as a major barrier to development. While in many quarters of the city there was goodwill towards the Irish language, the lack of public funding available to support the new production of signs and so on was often a barrier to small businesses. The erection of Irish language signs and production of Irish language products not only had implications in terms of material cost, but also faced barriers as regards manpower; not all business owners have the skills or resources to undertake such Irish language translation and production themselves, thus placing a heavy workload burden on groups such the Gaeltacht project, which undertakes considerably translation work and works extensively with local businesses but, of course, does not have inexhaustible staffing or time available.

The issues of language skills and levels of understanding and ability were also an influence in levels of Irish seen in material environments. In Derry, the range of Irish used and the settings in which Irish was used was quite limited, particularly in comparison to neighbouring Buncrana, ten minutes up the road in Donegal, or the more developed Gaeltacht project in west Belfast. Outside of street signs and municipal and educational

settings, the use of Irish tended to be quite limited in terms of the words used - it was largely present in the form of single words or short phrases, rather than more complex or diverse sentences. There is occasional use of place names and personal names in Irish, or words such '*ceol*', '*craic*', '*failte*', '*rinc*', '*fleadh*' and '*Fèis*', or in the word of politics, '*vótiál*'. More complex use of Irish, as in the informational tourist signs of the Bogside or in *the Áras Cholmcille* museum, was concentrated those areas of the city those areas included in the Gaeltacht project in which levels of residents with greater fluency was higher.

Nonetheless, the Irish language thus has a definite and growing presence in Derry. In subtle ways it is part of the everyday material world in Derry, even if only through the presence of the '*cúpla focal*' [few words] which permeates Derry's linguistic environment. While obviously *recognised* by residents, this presence is not always *noticed*, it is something that has become part of what is just there, unremarkable, part of everyday lived experience. In a couple of memorable cases I observed groups, for various reasons, attempting to remember where Irish was used and visible in the city. The task proved challenging for these long term residents of the city; on the spot, individuals could not always recall where exactly Irish was or how it was used, it had simply become part of the background.

The deficit of the language, both in volume of use, in geographical extent and use, and in the level of Irish used, was however in many ways the *more* recognised and talked about aspect of the lived material world of Irish in debate and discussion amongst learners and activists, rather than its presents. Many supporters of the language perceived this deficit to be a potential barrier to greater use and easier acquisition of the language, as well a potential contributor to the perceived politicisation of the language. As Liam reflected, although the Irish language being wider spread might contribute towards greater cohesion, the journey towards this would be a political struggle:

‘I would love to see it where you have bilingual street signs, bilingual road signs, erm, I think its good for tourism, I think it gives a place a real identity, a shared identity, erm, I know there’s a long way to go for that, but I would like it to be that.’

This deficit of Irish in the everyday material world, and debate over the incorporation of Irish into the everyday material and linguistic world of Northern Ireland, was, in the context of the ongoing Irish Language Act debate, a pressing concern both in the politics of Stormont and local Irish language activism during the time of my fieldwork. This context highlighted the extent to which, in Derry, as in Northern Ireland more extensively, the Irish language, although in many ways part of everyday interactions and everyday material environments in a way that is un-thought, un-noticed, habitual, and ‘to do’ with a whole range of social interactions, goals, orientations and activities beyond the politics of Northern Ireland’s political divide, is also still a deeply political matter. The journey towards the Irish language becoming part of the everyday material environment has involved political struggle, and continues to do so. While on an everyday level using, learning and interacting in Irish is thus not always about Politics with a capital P, the material presence of the Irish language tends still to be dominated by association with particular political and cultural forms and the politics of the community divide, and issues around the perceived respectability of Irish stemming from its association with republicanism continue to be major limiting factors in the presence of Irish in everyday material worlds. The presence and absence of the Irish in the material realm and lived environment thus highlights the extent to which the everydayness and banality of Irish takes place in a context which continues to be deeply intertwined with political debates and division.

11. Conclusion: “When something just feels right or clicks with you, you know”

This thesis has sought to understand the Irish language from the point of view of how it is intertwined in everyday practices, social interactions, events and environments, and through the voices of learners, educators, activists and local residents in the city of Derry. Northern Ireland is a region in which the political drama can easily dominate and obscure individual voices and the mundane interactions and patterns of everyday life, eclipsing the local, the complex and the nuances of change and development. Thus my focus has been on the everyday, the individual, the local and the emotional, in order to present a foil to grand narratives of history which can produce over-simplified linear accounts of cause and effect, production, power and performance which do violence to the lived realities and experiences of citizens.

As explored in the first half of this thesis, the Irish language is and has been an important element in historical and contemporary politics and struggle in Northern Ireland. It has become intertwined with national identity and ethnicity, and with wider cultural repertoires associated with divided cultures and identities. However, to see the Irish language solely in such terms, and within such a framework, is problematic. As I argued in chapter two, a model of language as a ‘bounded’ concrete entity, which is ‘used’ or ‘performed’, misses its fundamentally relational quality, its existence as a facet of social interaction, everyday communication and everyday linguistic and material environments. The boundaries around a language, just as the boundaries around groups, identities, ethnicities or cultures, and what ‘counts’ as ‘speaking or ‘using’ a language, are socially produced, as is the relationship between a language and particular groups, cultures or ethnicities. How these boundaries are drawn, and how relationships between different groups, and linguistic forms emerge, is the

result of ongoing social interactions and events in everyday life. These processes are, however, often dominated by the categorisations and representations of elites, in ways that have significant implications for language use, and how it is perceived and experienced in everyday life. The bounding and categorising of language and its relation to narratives about groups, ethnicities and identities has had significant implications in Northern Ireland, not only in the politics of participation and engagement with the Irish language, but also in the production of the linguistic category of 'Ulster-Scots' as a linguistic form separate from Hiberno-English or Irish, and in the (re)production of the Irish/Ulster-Scots::Catholic/Protestant binary that has proved so problematic in recent politics.

Recent political events and the role of language within contemporary debate and division are further discussed in chapter four, which explores how the Irish language has become over-identified with political division and narratives of culture and identity in political, media and academic representations of Northern Ireland. I argue that these alignments and identifications should not be seen as 'natural', unchanging or inevitable. As with the assumed boundaries around languages, groups and ethnicities the world over, they must be understood through examination of the processes of production of those boundaries, and critical consideration of whether these boundaries and narratives truly reflect everyday lived experience and interactions. Examination of both historical events and contemporary everyday life in Northern Ireland highlights that to understand social life through a dyadic 'two-community' lens, and to interpret divisions in participation, perception and representation of culture, heritage, identity, and language as natural or static is problematic. Such a view misses the complexity, multiplicity and heterogeneity of groups, and fails to appreciate the nature of change. I argue in chapter three and four that historically the alignment of the Irish language with nationalism is a relatively recent development, and, furthermore, that it has never been a black-and-white situation. Analysis shows that the alignments of groups, politics and cultures have been fluid across history, and only in the

late nineteenth century did the Irish language become strongly associated with nationalist politics and the binary representations of 'two communities' and 'planters and Gaels' which emerged in Irish politics during that period. However, while the dominance of this divided, politicised and ethnicised narrative of language may be traced to the late nineteenth century, examination of historical sources such as the Census suggests that these political and media representations and narratives did not necessarily reflect the whole picture of the everyday use of language and experiences 'on the ground'. In the same period that ethnicised narratives of the Irish language were becoming dominant, census data however reveals that Protestants still formed a significant proportion of those reporting Irish language skills.

While participation in, and support for, the Irish language did become increasingly 'ethnic' in post-partition Northern Ireland, and the revival and rapid expansion of the Irish language in the 1970s and 1980s was strongly associated with republican politics and influence, this is not the only story which can be told. Growth in this period owed much to committed activists who were not associated with republicanism, and since the 1980s there have been significant attempts to expand participation in the language to include wider social groups and political backgrounds. This has continued to be the case since the Peace Process began, and participation in the Irish language continues to become broader, with initiatives such as Linda Ervine's language classes in east Belfast bringing Irish to a much wider audience. The growth of Irish-medium education and community projects since the 1970s and 80s has increased the introduction of Irish into everyday life routines and interactions. While the Irish language is still framed in some political debate in terms of a 'culture war', and in policy in terms of divided cultures, I argue that instead of taking these narratives and representations as a starting point, it is necessary to look at the everyday in order to understand the extent to which these narratives may or may not reflect the perceptions and experiences of Irish speakers and learners.

Chapter five thus turns to exploring in more detail the rationale for my research, arguing that the predominant starting points and analytic lenses in previous research about the Irish language in Northern Ireland have been culture, identity and politics. Although this research has contributed to our understanding of the role of Irish in everyday life, it also has the potential to entrench the over-identification of language with particular groups, identities, cultures and political standpoints that I criticised in the first half of this thesis. I thus argue for an approach to understanding the Irish language in Northern Ireland which takes a more inductive position, beginning with participants' accounts of their everyday lives, and considering how Irish figures in such stories, and in everyday contexts and interactions. It thus attempts to avoid reliance on *a priori* assumptions about what the Irish language means to people, and its role in contemporary Northern Ireland.

Chapter six explores the difficulties and complexities of undertaking such research, and the experiences and challenges I faced while conducting this research project. It notes in particular the practical and ethical issues that arose in attempting to study the everyday. Ethnography and more participatory approaches had many advantages, and afforded in some ways greater sensitivity as regards research design and approach, but such a method also led to ethical concerns and challenges. I became acutely aware of how data gathered in research is strongly affected by the researcher, both as an individual with historical, personal and ideological baggage, and as a human subject to the whims of illness, life events and the ebb and flow of everyday life. The resultant data included a broad range of subjects and types, and lent itself to various narrative threads, but ultimately I made the decision to focus on the Irish language as an aspect of everyday life, foregrounding individual narratives and letting respondents' words, as well as visual, documentary and material culture evidence, 'do the talking', rather than seeking to impose a constraining theoretical framework or undertake detailed discourse analysis on the data. The analysis became, for academic, theoretical and ethical reasons, an attempt to give a voice to those who were less

often heard, and to provide a space for their untold stories. I aimed to shine light on the everyday, and to avoid, as much as possible, the imposition of *a priori* assumptions about meaning or cause and effect on the data. While it is of course the case that this thesis is told from a perspective, a standpoint and a position, my aim was to tell a story of the Irish language in Derry that is rooted in everyday life, everyday material cultures, everyday interactions and everyday stories.

The analysis in chapters seven to ten thus seeks to tell this everyday story, looking both at historical and contemporary Derry and using a variety of data. I argue that although politics, culture and identity do figure as elements of the stories told, an analysis which focuses on the everyday, and everyday the interactions and contexts in which the Irish language appears shows that this is never the whole story, and it may not be some people's story at all. As chapter seven highlights, the Irish language in Derry was not ethnically or politically exclusive in the early 20th century, and this was also the case in Donegal, Derry's hinterland and the origin of many of the new arrivals into the city in the late nineteenth century. The Irish language continued to be spoken by individuals from a variety of different political, cultural and religious backgrounds, as shown by Census data and detailed examination of families such as the Fultons. The Irish language had a lively everyday presence during the early part of the twentieth century, with the growing inclusion of Irish within educational curricula and the activities of local language groups which sought to take Irish out of the classroom and incorporate it into various realms and activities of everyday life, in cultural activities such as dancing and sport, but also in everyday activities and tasks such as shopping. As in Northern Ireland more generally, the vitality of the movement waned in the hostile environment of post-partition Northern Ireland, emerging once again as a result of the 1970s revival in which republican politics loomed large. However, the 1980s saw the beginning of attempts to widen participation beyond a republican or Catholic base, as well as the re-establishment of a more cohesive Irish language 'sector' and the integration of

Irish language into everyday life through schooling as well as adult education and events. Both widening participation and integration into everyday life have grown significantly since the peace process, with various initiatives bringing Irish beyond the traditional base in the city. These developments have changed perceptions of Irish as associated with a single community, as well as achieving massive strides in the integration of Irish into everyday life and the production of more Irish language bilingual activities and spaces and environments.

Chapter eight considers how individual stories and narratives about the Irish language in Derry. It explores why Irish is important to people, how they perceive it, and what it means to them in their everyday lives, and also considers the narratives of absence and exclusion from Irish. While identity, politics and culture are often starting points in these narratives, both of the importance of Irish, and exclusion from it, the stories told are more complex and quickly turn to a much wider range of issues around the Irish language, including ideas about family, the past, inheritance, belonging, community, and the *craic* that the Irish language affords. The themes that emerge are about emotional resonance, whether joy or fun or sense of fulfilment, or indeed at times more negative emotions about exclusion or lack of belonging, which individuals explain in various different narratives of causality and personal history.

The presence, and absence, of the Irish language in the material and linguistic environments is the subject of chapters nine and ten, which explore the recent initiatives which have brought Irish into increasing prominence in the city. The growth of Irish-medium education, adult Irish language education, the incorporation of Irish into festivals, cultural activities and events, use by the Catholic Church and political groups in meetings and campaigns, and the promotion of the Irish language in tourism have been key ways in which the Irish language has become more present in the everyday environment. The Irish language is also brought into the public realm through the actions and interactions of individuals and various diverse

groups: in the erection of Irish language signs, in its use in everyday interactions and chats, in businesses, in personal effects, and so on. Indeed, in some contexts and interactions, the Irish language has become expected or habitual, for example in greetings and goodbyes and in the '*Craic Agus Ceol*' signs so often seen in bars. In both material and linguistic environments, however, the English language continues to dominate, and Irish at present tends to be quite limited in range and complexity, tending more towards the '*cúpla focal*' of stock phrases or basic interactions and language use, rather than an extensive or fluent presence.

Significant challenges remain for Irish language speakers to integrate the Irish language more fully into everyday life. Particularly in the material realm however, the political associations and debates at Stormont about the place of Irish in everyday life continue to be major limiting factors to further use and incorporation of Irish into everyday life. There are, however, challenges and limiting factors beyond the obvious issues stemming from political disagreement at Stormont, such as lack of support or fear of the perception of the use of the Irish language, although these do figure. Additional challenges are far more mundane: these are not about identity, conflict or cultural issues, but, rather, funding, the universal issues of participation and interaction in any activity (such as age, gender, cost, and childcare), and the challenge of learning a difficult second language in itself.

Thus, as discussed throughout this thesis, the Irish language *is of course* bound up with identity, culture and politics (Politics with a capital P). However, this is never the whole story, the main story, or necessarily the most important story. Every individual's narrative takes in a much more complex set of ideas, associations and meanings, rooted in the context of their personal histories and contemporary interactions with the wider social and ideological environment. As illustrated in chapter eight, participants' explanations of how they understood and related to the Irish language were strongly bound up with its role in

social relations and networks both across the life course and in their contemporary everyday life. Furthermore, they frequently touched on ideas of inheritance and naturalness: Irish was 'already there' or was an underlying or missing part of self that should be there. This everyday-ness, expected-ness, taken-for-granted-ness, this sense that Irish is an important part of social relations, and is, or should be, something natural, something that is already there, can to a certain degree be explained by the ideological environment of Northern Ireland, and dominant ideas and expectations about culture and identity.

Understanding the role of Irish in contemporary Northern Ireland thus cannot be reduced solely to politics, identity or culture, but must also be rooted in understanding the everyday-ness of Irish, its intertwining with everyday social interactions and activities, its role in social relationships, in understanding how it is habitual and emotional. Neither can its emotional resonance for people be explained away through simple ideas about 'culture', 'identity' or political aspirations. Indeed, to return to Billig's concept of banal nationalism discussed in chapter two, the capacity for an issue to become so politically explosive, to become part of narratives of national identity and narratives of nation-ness, an element of 'hot' nationalism, as indeed has been the case with the Irish language at various points over history and as continues to be part of the contemporary Irish language situation, 'depends on existing ideological foundations' (Billig 1995, p. 5), foundations rooted in everyday moments, habits and social interactions. Therefore, understanding how it has become such an emotional issue, and one which has become so hot, requires looking to the everyday, the banal, how it interweaves with everyday life and the whole host of emotions, activities, practices, everyday power struggles and ambitions that everyday life involves, as explanatory devices, rather than the abstract concepts of culture, identity or nationalism as a priori concepts. While power relations, politics, and issues of nation-ness, identity, and culture are of course heavily bound up with the Irish language, and of course inform, shape and part of everyday

experiences and narratives of the Irish language, these 'national identities are forms of social life rather than internal psychological states' (Billig 1995, p. 24).

The forms of social life are not simply 'about', 'for', politics or identity, but also about the everyday, getting on with everyday activities and aims. When considering the Irish language, narratives from learners highlight that family, fun, belonging, community and joy are just as important as issues of identity and culture. Indeed, it cannot be overlooked that learning Irish as a second language as an adult is a group activity, a hobby, and the joy in that does not need to be explained away. It is sometimes this element of the experience and use of Irish in Northern Ireland that is overlooked, and this element that I wish to highlight in this thesis. Amidst all the other factors, all of the complexities, sometimes, as in the case for example with Eoin, 'It's something deep in your stomach'. To return to Jenkins, we should not overlook or devalue the 'inarticulate speech of the heart' (Jenkins 2011, p. 138) when considering such issues. Such strong emotions can be hard to explain or justify, and sometimes to attempt to do so does violence to the fullness of the experience. As Liam expresses so well:

'It's hard to put a word on it, but I suppose when something just feels right or clicks with you, you know, that sort of thing, I just enjoyed it, I enjoyed speaking it, the sound of it, you know.'

11.1 Suggestions for further research

Like any other, this thesis has not covered everything; necessarily breadth has been sacrificed for depth, and there are many more stories to be told and elements to be explored in greater detail. This research was undertaken primarily within one particular physical and social location within Derry. There was a wide range of groups that I did not talk to or spend as much time with as I might have liked. Future research might particularly explore different educational settings, including different Irish-medium education settings

and the experiences of students, parents and teachers involved in them: adult education at the University, and the wider range of different Irish language groups and classes around the city. Different settings obviously operate with different frameworks, orientations and targets, and attract different groups; accordingly it seems likely that the narratives told by, for example, those undertaking degrees in the Irish language might be different from the narratives of those undertaking their first Irish classes in a community setting in the Waterside. Domestic settings and particularly the experiences of Irish-speaking families and children in Irish-medium education would likewise be interesting to explore in more detail. As touched upon in this thesis, these are settings in which the Irish language is strongly part of the everyday, and are elements of individual narratives that often feature within explanations of emotional resonance and sense of attachment to the language.

On a related issue, in seeking to explore the Irish language through the lens of the everyday and everyday narratives, this thesis has given less systematic attention to issues such as gender, age, educational status, occupational background, family background, wider interest areas, political affiliation and so on. Generational difference, in particular, would be important to study further; the situation as regards access to Irish language and its availability, support and promotion has changed massively over the course of the last fifty years, as has the political and social situation. The extent to which generational difference impacts upon relationship with the past and contemporary political situation was made clear to me on my very first night in Derry. I was being given a lift home by a fellow attendee at a cultural legacy planning event, and as we drove through the Bogside, my companion turned to me and said: 'Things have changed so much, I was driving through here with my son the other day, he's only ten, and he said, "Daddy, is this where the war happened?" It's a completely different relationship they have with it'. For the generation attending school shortly after partition, the Irish language seems to have been more readily available in the education syllabus and within normal social interaction and events. In contrast, during the

Troubles, and for the generation growing up at that time, there was a different relationship with the Irish language: while there was a movement towards making Irish everyday in projects such as the Shaws Road Gaeltacht project in Belfast, learning and using the language was more strongly seen to be associated with republican politics, and its growth owed much to groups and individuals involved in the armed struggle. For the generation growing up since the Peace Process, the situation has been different again, with much more widely-available Irish language education in both mainstream and Irish medium settings. Since 1998, there has been official recognition of the Irish language and a growing presence and sponsorship in the public domain, together with emergence of Irish language centres, groups and strategies on a wider scale. The extent to which these different contexts of development and the changing presence of Irish in everyday life across time have impacted on perceptions and experiences would be interesting to explore further.

Likewise, as issues around street signs and the plebiscites around the erection of Irish language signs demonstrated, there was often a perception amongst participants that class and occupation influenced how the Irish language was seen in terms of how, where and why individuals participated in and used the Irish language and the extent to which it was seen as 'respectable'. Obviously, some occupations and organisations lent themselves more easily to Irish language exposure, use or participation. For example, those working for the Council or in education had easy access and sponsorship to Irish-language education, but this was not the case in other sectors. Family was touched upon repeatedly as a feature of Irish language narratives and likewise it would be interesting to study how different levels of family participation impacted upon individual narratives and upon participation rates.

One key group that has not been written about extensively in this thesis is Protestant learners, for the reasons outlined in chapter six. However, as the story of the Fulton family and those interviews I conducted with contemporary Protestants highlighted, there are

fascinating stories to be explored, both historically and in contemporary Derry about the experiences, motivations and narratives of Protestant learners.

As noted at the beginning of this thesis, the Irish language continues, at the time of writing, to be part of the political stalemate in Northern Ireland, and narratives of the Irish language as part of a divided, political and negative cultural and identity conflict continue to be propagated by powerful voices in Northern Irish politics. In early February 2018, for example, Democratic Unionist Party First Minister Arlene Foster continued to identify attempts to promote the Irish language in the form of an Irish Language Act as aiming for 'cultural and language supremacy' (Davenport 2018). As touched upon in chapters nine and ten, the lack of legislative support, continued political debate and the propagation of such negative narratives is a barrier to wider use and participation in the Irish language and frustrates the attempts of those attempting to incorporate the Irish language into their everyday life. I hope that in this thesis that I have shown such arguments and positions do not do justice to the reality of the living language and its emotional resonance and everyday importance to people. The Irish language cannot be dismissed as purely a political project, or as part of divided and divisive cultures or identities. It has lived, everyday, and non-political emotional importance. As the history of the Irish language in the early twentieth century, and the slow growth of Irish amongst Protestants in recent years, particularly in Belfast, both suggest, Irish is not solely the property of, or part of everyday life in, one 'community'.

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