

Linguistic imperialism: still a valid construct in relation to language policy for Irish Sign Language

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Abstract Linguistic imperialism—a term used to conceptualize the dominance of one language over others—has been debated in language policy for more than two decades. Spolsky (Language policy, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004), for example, has questioned whether the spread of English was a result of language planning, or was incidental to colonialism and globalization. Phillipson (Lang Policy 6(3):377–383, 2007) contests this view, arguing that linguistic imperialism is not based on ‘conspiracy’, and is underpinned by evidence of explicit or implicit language policy that aims to intentionally advantage some languages at the expense of others. This paper analyses Irish Sign Language policy, or lack thereof, in terms of linguistic imperialism. It does this by presenting evidence within a conceptual framework of linguistic imperialism to explore how discrimination and inequality occurs in relation to Irish Sign Language users in Ireland. The findings highlight many policies and practices that fit the linguistic imperialism paradigm including linguisticism, audism, and the denial of linguistic rights. The paper, therefore, challenges some views in language policy that linguistic imperialism lacks credibility by highlighting a current case of minority language (ISL) users under imperialistic-like control of policy geared towards a dominant language (English).

Keywords Linguistic imperialism · Sign language · Ireland · Irish Sign Language

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Introduction

This paper aims to apply the notions of linguistic imperialism—a term that has been used to criticize English-speaking nations’ oppression of other languages—to the treatment of Irish Sign Language (ISL). In recent years the very notion of linguistic imperialism has been challenged in language policy literature (see Spolsky 2004; Ferguson 2006), which favours a less sinister retelling of colonial history. It also seems to have fallen out of favour with researchers who examine the spread of English as a global language, where some argue that spread is occurring as a bottom-up movement, driven by its speakers rather than policy. Nevertheless, Phillipson (2012a) recently argued that linguistic imperialism is ‘alive and kicking’. This comment attracted criticism from organisations such as The British Council, which responded by stating that “Phillipson quotes his experiences from before 1992—the reality in 2012 is different” (Knagg 2012: paragraph 4).

We, however, concur with Phillipson’s assessment that linguistic imperialism is still highly relevant today, which we will illustrate via an examination of the treatment of ISL in the Republic of Ireland. We argue that in their dismissal of linguistic imperialism, researchers have focused too heavily on the role of English in relation to languages that have national or regional recognition. When the construct is investigated in relation to sign languages that lack visibility, and thereby fall under the radar of most linguistic research, the case for linguistic imperialism is much stronger—even in 2017.

A background to linguistic imperialism

Linguistic imperialism is a term used to describe the exploitation of the ideological, cultural and elitist power of English for the economic and political advantage by dominant English speaking cultures. This exploitation can be seen in two main examples in history, first by the UK during colonial times, and later by English speaking nations during the era of globalization. In addition to describing the policies of nations, linguistic imperialism has also been used to describe actions of organizations (such as the British Council) and multinational corporations, both of which may purposely promote the use of English to advantage its speakers.

Linguistic imperialism has been described as a form of ‘linguicism’, a term originally coined by Skutnabb-Kangas (1988). Linguicism refers to “the ideologies, structures, and practices that are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources between groups defined on the basis of language” (Skutnabb-Kangas 2016a: 583). A further definition is “discrimination based on language that unfairly treats certain linguistic communities, or unfairly advantages some languages over others” (Galloway and Rose 2015: 255). In severe cases of inequality, linguicism has been identified as leading to linguicide, a term used to describe linguistic genocide. In conceptualizing linguicide, Skutnabb-Kangas (2015, 2016a, b) draws on definitions of genocide in the United Nations 1948 International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of

Genocide, to argue that “When speakers shift to another language and their own language disappears, the sociological, psychological, educational, and linguistic damage can be seen as linguistic genocide” (2016a: 584). Skutnabb-Kangas (2016a, b) has also suggested that the education of Deaf children, who are a linguistic minority, via other dominant languages constitutes a form of linguistic imperialism, especially when education is via submersion (sink-or-swim) practices. However, when making a case that it is a form of linguistic imperialism, one needs to prove linguistic imperialism is linked to imperialist, exploitative, and unjust structural forces.

Phillipson, whose concepts we adopt in this paper, wrote on linguistic imperialism in a number of influential publications in the 1990s and 2000s (see, for example Phillipson 1992, 1997, 1998, 2003, 2008). Phillipson argued that linguistic imperialism was mainly driven by political and economic interests, and clear examples can be found with the spread of English (although linguistic imperialism can be found with other languages in imperialist positions). With the spread of English speaking nations into non-English-speaking regions, ideologies were enforced in policies, which purposely advantaged English speakers, and disadvantaged speakers of other languages. Nowadays, English attracts the label of a global ‘lingua franca’, which portrays a positive connotation for communication purposes. However, Phillipson (2008) stresses that when English takes on a role that results in linguistic imperialism it is more appropriately referred to as a ‘lingua frankensteinia’. While Phillipson (2009) does not campaign against the learning and use of English, he does advocate against its spread at the expense of other languages.

It is easy to argue the existence of linguistic imperialism from an ideological point of view, but much harder to prove that these advantages and disadvantages were the result of intentional political actions. In order to examine that nature of these advantages, it is first important to establish the defining characteristics of linguistic imperialism to establish a framework within which to situate evidence. In one of Phillipson’s (2012b: 214) more recent updates of his original theory, he notes the defining factors of linguistic imperialism as the following:

1. As a form of linguistic imperialism, which manifests in favoring the dominant language over another along similar lines as racism and sexism.
2. As a structurally manifested concept, where more resources and infrastructure are given to the dominant language.
3. As being ideological, in that it encourages beliefs that the dominant language form is superior to others, and thus more prestigious. He also argues that such ideas are hegemonic and internalized and naturalized as being ‘normal’.
4. As intertwined with the same structure as imperialism in culture, education, the media and politics.
5. As having an exploitative essence, which causes injustice and inequality between those who use the dominant language and those who do not.
6. As having a subtractive influence on other languages, in that learning the dominant language is at the expense of others.
7. As being contested and resisted, because of these factors

Few scholars would deny that national or regional language policies (or a lack there of) can influence the provision of resources for, or prestige placed on, a minority language. However, Spolsky (2004) and Ferguson (2006) have argued that Phillipson's construct of linguistic imperialism takes a largely top-down perspective—a point Phillipson (2009) refutes. Spolsky (2004: 90) claims that, if such intent existed, it would be one of the most successful examples of language policy management the world had ever seen, and thus it is simply not the case. Spolsky (2004) and Ferguson (2006) take a bottom-up perspective, seeing that the advantages afforded to English speakers were not part of organized language policy, but were a consequence of the spread of British and American power, through colonization and globalization. However, such dichotomization of top down and bottom up forces are simplifications of the complex processes in shaping language attitudes in society; as Phillipson (2009: 18–19) notes, there are “supply and demand, push and pull factors”, manifested in both the structures and ideologies of societies and nations. Thus, linguistic imperialism is often achieved through manipulation of numerous forces and factors, and not just explicit language policy decisions.

In the context of Ireland, however, we see the existence of linguistic imperialism as being far less disputable, which we aim to show through the historical and current treatment of ISL in comparison to the more dominant language of English. We also aim to show intent along similar lines to Skutnabb-Kangas (2016a, b) and Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar (2010), who argue intent can be proven in the continuation of policies and practices despite an awareness of their sociolinguistic, sociological, psychological, political, and educational harm to linguistic communities.

Irish Sign Language and the context of Ireland

Ireland has been the subject of intense study into language revitalisation. It is important to understand this context in order to examine the position of ISL in the language hierarchy in Ireland. For centuries the Irish language suffered under English rule, and by the time of independence, the use of Irish as a first language was mostly relegated to the Gaeltacht, along the western coastline. Although Irish is constitutionally considered the first language of the Republic of Ireland and has been an official working language of the European Union since 2007, it is considered a minoritised language (Walsh and McLeod 2008). In the early stages of independence, there were policy moves to try to maintain Irish as the daily-used language of the Gaeltacht, and to try to re-introduce Irish as the main language in other areas, making the study of Irish compulsory in all schools (Coady and Laoire 2002). By 1965, however, bilingualisation replaced re-Gaelicisation as the national policy, and the focus on Irish education began to wane (Walsh and McLeod 2008).

The Official Languages Act was signed into law in July 2003, and granted rights to Irish as an official language, placing statutory and regulatory obligations on public bodies to provide services and correspondence in Irish, affecting advertising, signage, announcements, public reports, and a number of related language schemes (see Walsh and McLeod 2008 for details). Nevertheless, despite such efforts, English remains the primary language of Ireland. As Romaine (2006: 456) notes

“Schools in Ireland have achieved most of what can be expected from formal language education, namely, knowledge of Irish as a second language acquired in late adolescence. They have not led to its spoken use in everyday life, nor its intergenerational transmission”. Census statistics show that only 21,631 people (0.47% of the population) use Irish language daily outside of the educational system (Central Statistics Office 2011). If those who use the Irish language within the education system are included, the number climbs to 38,480 people—a little over 1 per cent of the population.

Regardless of the outcomes of historic and recent policy, there has clearly been considerable political attention placed on the revitalisation of Irish, resulting in a large amount of state resources devoted to it. In contrast, the other indigenous language of Ireland, Irish Sign Language, has been excluded from such national and international attention. The low profile of ISL relates to the low recognition of sign languages in general, which is enforced by linguistic barriers between signing and non-signing communities. Sign language researchers in many European countries need to publish in English in order to extend their range of readership to hearing audiences. This reduces researchers’ potential to reach local sign language communities (Kyle and Allsop 1997; Leeson et al. 2015), and can also be a substantial barrier for Deaf researchers in disseminating their ideas.

While the origins of ISL are often linked to the establishment of the first school for Deaf children in Ireland in the early nineteenth century, several commentators (McDonnell 1992; Leeson and Saeed 2012) note there is sufficient evidence that signing existed in Ireland in the eighteenth century, and there is further piecemeal evidence that it existed before this time. In fact, as sign languages are natural languages, they have been shown to exist in one form or another wherever there are Deaf communities living (Bauman 2008).

According to the national census of 2011, which excludes the population of Northern Ireland, there are 3502 users of ISL in Ireland, of which the slender majority are hearing users (Central Statistics Office 2011: 12). However, the Irish Deaf Society disputes this figure, believing the number of users in the census to be severely underreported. Evidence for this scepticism can be found in the examination of Scottish and New Zealand censuses, which are based on nations of similar characteristics and of similar population compositions to the Republic of Ireland. Both countries have populations of between 4.5 and 5.5 million; Scotland is similar in geography and size; and New Zealand has a strong rural presence. On a similar census question, Scotland and New Zealand reported 12,533 and 20,817 sign language users respectively. Unlike its New Zealand and Scottish counterparts, the current status of ISL is not officially recognised in the Republic of Ireland (Leeson and Saeed 2012; Mullane et al. 2011).

Evidence of linguistic imperialism in the treatment of ISL

This paper examines whether the treatment of ISL in the Republic of Ireland is an example of modern day linguistic imperialism. It does this by applying the linguistic imperialism framework to available data and documents in the Irish context,

searching for evidence that could support or refute each of Phillipson's criteria. As there is little language policy in place for ISL, this article seeks to explore linguistic imperialism as manifested in many of the structural and ideological factors noted by Phillipson (2009). While we accept the irony of discussing a lack of language policy in a journal called *Language Policy*, this is an unfortunate norm for the exploration of many minority languages used by disenfranchised communities. However, our wider view of language policy is in keeping with other work in the context of Ireland, such as Walsh (2012), who argues that a wider and more dynamic conceptual framework facilitates an examination of the inter-relationships between language practices, language beliefs and language management, and recognises that language policy is influenced by a multi-faceted, multilayered process of governance. This view is also in keeping with Shohamy's (2006) views on implicitly-derived language policy, which needs to be examined via a variety of de facto practices. She states that, "In these situations language policy is more difficult to detect as it is subtle and hidden from the public eye" (Shohamy 2006: 50).

As Phillipson (2009: 8) asserts, "The global language map and the geopolitics of language are never static, so there is a constant need to fine-tune how linguistic imperialism can be approached, and evidence for and against it analysed". In this paper, evidence is presented according to six of Phillipson's (2012b) seven criteria. Some criteria for measuring intent from Skutnabb-Kangas (2015, 2016b) are also considered. For methodological reasons, this paper does not separately address the final criteria that linguistic imperialism is "being contested and resisted, because of these factors" (Phillipson 2012b: 214), but rather chooses to showcase evidence of resistance under each of the six factors.

Criterion 1: is the treatment of ISL a form of linguisticism, which manifests in favouring a dominant language over ISL, along similar lines as racism and sexism?

The dominance of spoken languages in Ireland is illustrated by the prevalent practices of teaching in and of the dominant national languages in educational institutions for Deaf children (Crean 1997; Leeson and Saeed 2012). These practices are also seen in past and present educational policies in North America and Europe in general (Reagan 2006, 2010). The most obvious evidence for linguisticism is the implementation of oralist philosophy in schools for Deaf children. Oralism refers to a system of teaching, where Deaf people are encouraged to communicate via the use of speech and lip-reading, rather than sign language. This philosophy was imported to Ireland from continental Europe, and was manifested in a range of measures within Irish schools from the methods of instruction in classrooms to the counseling of parents of Deaf children. A common practice of oralism was a blanket ban on children, who were deemed to have oral language potential, from using sign language in any context, and a deep intolerance for such children caught using ISL in school settings. The rationale behind the ban was an erroneous belief that using sign languages would hinder a child's ability to learn listening and speech skills. However no research to date has supported this rationale (Humphries et al. 2017).

To the contrary, Marschark and Spencer (2009) argue that early access to sign language (or accessible spoken language) gives Deaf children an advantage.

Skutnabb-Kangas (2015) notes that if an educational system is organized so that teaching occurs through the medium of only the dominant language and the teachers are monolingual in this dominant language, the system's structure reflects linguisticism. In another paper (Skutnabb-Kangas 2016a: 584) she further explains that sign languages become in danger of subordination through enforced oralism, especially if the sign languages "have no place in the curriculum or only a minor one".

Many of the atrocities of oralist traditions in Ireland were not widely reported in the public sphere until 2009, when the Ryan report investigated the abuse of Deaf children in Ireland as part of the the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (CICA). Findings of this landmark report included the following:

Most allegations of abuse referred to the harshness with which the policy of oralism was imposed on children who were deaf and who instinctively used sign language as well. Whilst the wisdom of imposing oralism was a separate matter and one which the Committee could not comment on, the methods of enforcing it were at times too severe. (CICA 2009: 6)

A worse situation was found in the Commission's investigation of St Joseph's School for the Deaf, where documents showed that physical punishment of the residential Deaf boys at the school continued at least until the 1990s, and that the school had failed to keep records of punishments as required by law.

This physical abuse was also coupled with "disturbing levels of sexual abuse" (CICA 2009: 5) which further highlighted the mistreatment of Deaf children and of language being used as a barrier to access rights:

Another disturbing problem of poor communication was the high number of staff members, including those at management level, who did not have sign language. The report commented 'it seems incredible that so few members of staff can use the language of their clients. There ought to be an in-service training programme for staff'. Even senior management did not have training in sign language and needed to use interpreters. (CICA 2009: 570).

The report concludes that the enforcement of English over ISL in the school had a detrimental effect on not only the educational development of these children, but also their ability to communicate with teachers, counsellors, and in many cases, their own families. Such practices clearly fulfil the criteria of linguisticism in terms of the sociological, psychological, educational, and linguistic damage caused by intentional practices. These practices, which were entrenched in the education system for more than a century and accepted despite evidence of harm (see Department of Education 1972), provide policy-based evidence of linguisticism.

In examining policy on ISL, we were unable to locate any evidence to refute this criterion; there was a dearth of policy that favoured ISL over the dominant language of English. In more recent years, policy of mainstreaming children with disabilities to ordinary schools has resulted in a shift away from traditional policies that sought to separate Deaf children in educational structures. However, the mainstreaming of

Deaf students has resulted in a new form of linguistic oppression, as the practice removes Deaf students from some opportunities to learn through ISL—a notion explored later in this paper. Also, in recent times, the National Council on Special Education published a document on Deaf education and it contains a number of policy proposals concerning ISL competencies (NCSE 2012) but none have yet been implemented. Leeson and Lynch (2009) also report on positive moves in the establishment of interpreter training programs in Ireland, made initially possible through European Union funding. The first graduates of this program emerged in 1994, but the researchers warn that Ireland is significantly behind many other European nations: while Sweden boasts 1 interpreter per 25 Deaf people, in Ireland the ratio is 1:100 (Leeson and Lynch 2009).

Criterion 2: is this treatment a structurally manifested concept, where more resources and infrastructure are provided to dominant languages over ISL?

The dominance of English and Irish can be seen most clearly at the political level, where the two official languages of Ireland are afforded more resources and attention in government infrastructure. Recently, a bill on recognizing ISL was proposed by an opposition senator in the Irish upper house of parliament (Seanad Eireann), which was rejected by the government in January, 2014. Kathleen Lynch, then Minister of State at the Department of Health, gave her reasons for rejecting this bill by saying: “We do not want to see scarce *resources*, particularly at this time of extremely scarce *resources*, used without the service being put in place. We need to put the service in place before we put the legislation in place” (Seanad Debates, January 22, 2014, emphasis our own). The rationale provided by the Seanad was that it would be inadvisable to make ISL an official language without the ability to put services in place to offer ISL in government bodies, education systems, and the media. This argument however, seems somewhat circular in that without any official status placed on ISL, these ‘scarce resources’ would unlikely be spent on increasing services to accommodate ISL in wider Irish society. Moreover, the same argument was not made when making Irish an official language via the Official Languages Act of 2003, despite questionable ability to put services in place (see Walsh and McLeod 2008).

In addition to direct decisions to withhold resources and infrastructure from ISL, there is a general reluctance among governmental bodies to have their respective websites translated into ISL. This reluctance stems from the perceived high translation costs, coupled with a lack of a legal obligation to do so. In order to examine the current situation, we examined the main websites of the Irish government, and explored all pages that were ‘one click’ from the main page, as these would be representative of the most important information the government communicates to its citizens. The main website was offered in English and Irish; all clickable departments were also offered in only English and Irish, including the department of justice and equality. The ‘Citizens Information’ page, which was predominantly featured on the main government website, was offered in English and

Irish, but also offered documents in Polish, Romanian, and French (Citizens Information 2017). This further highlights a reluctance to devote resources to ISL, even when compared to other unofficial languages.

In terms of locating resources devoted to ISL, we did find evidence of an ISL home-tuition scheme which enables families with Deaf children to hire ISL teachers to teach ISL to families. The scheme is fully funded by the Department of Education and Skills, offering evidence that some infrastructure and resources are offered to support ISL. On further examination, the initiative is rationalized as a disability service, further cementing the notion that sign language users are disadvantaged. One notable issue is the rate of pay for ISL teachers, which is much lower than other teaching positions. The discrepancy is a result of a lack of minimum competence expected from ISL teachers. While teachers delivering other language education for the Department of Education and Skills must have a Level 8 qualification, there is no such stipulation for ISL education. Because of the low pay, many teachers are reluctant to take on jobs in remote locations.

Furthermore, the scheme is not widely advertised, which is unusual for similar schemes that are funded by the Department. As an illustration, ISL tuition schemes have not been reported in the annual reports of the Department of Education, while its sister schemes are (Department of Education and Skills website, accessed 11 February 2016). In 2004, there were records of some sixty families having availed of this service (Mathews 2007). Despite this number rising to an estimated one hundred families by 2007, many parents still reported not knowing of the service (Leeson 2007). It has also been noted that an Advisory Committee on Deaf Education has heard problems met by parents of Deaf children due to a lack of information and financial support (Leeson and Saeed 2012: 55)

Criterion 3: is there an internalized belief that the dominant language is superior to ISL, and thus more prestigious?

Oralism is a prime example of the belief that spoken language is superior to sign language, which we have already observed as manifested in educational policy where signing was explicitly forbidden due to the fear that it would hinder the progress of Deaf children's speech skills (McDonnell and Saunders 1993; Crean 1997). In some cases, sign languages were only tolerated on the condition that they were a compensatory tool for children who were deemed to be unable to acquire speech skills (Department of Education 1972; Conama 2010). Rather than being seen as a language worth teaching, and teaching in, ISL was viewed as a 'hindrance' to development and a 'compensatory tool' or *crutch* that only served the limited purpose of mastering the dominant language of English. Such ideologies seem parallel to Phillipson's (1992) five fallacies of English education, that: English is best taught monolingually, by native speakers, as early as possible, as much as possible, and without the use of other languages lest the standards of its use be negatively affected.

In education today, there is still considerable evidence that ISL is viewed as inferior to English. There are three general educational pathways for Deaf children:

mainstream schools, special classes in mainstream schools, and special schools for Deaf children. In all three pathways, Deaf children are automatically exempt or allowed to be exempted from learning Irish, but not English (Department of Education and Skills, 2016), which provides evidence that English is the prestige language of Ireland. During hours allocated to Irish language in these schools, the children are often reassigned to remedial classes where there is a theoretical option to learn ISL. However due to a lack of resources and teachers (see criterion two), this time is most often used to study English in more depth. In mainstream education for Deaf children, Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are often assigned to care for Deaf children, but they often take on an interpreting role, where other countries would employ qualified interpreters to do similar tasks. This adds to the evidence of an internalized belief in the Irish mainstream education system that English will be of most benefit to Deaf children, as it is clearly positioned as the prestige language.

The belief that English was the dominant language is notable considering the constitution in Ireland dictates that Irish—not English—is the *first* official language of Ireland. However, even though policy elevates Irish's importance, practice showcases English's prestige. Neither policy nor practice positioned ISL as a prestige language in any of the evidence we consulted, thus this criteria of linguistic imperialism was unrefuted.

Criterion 4: is a belief that ISL is inferior spread and reinforced in culture, education, the media and politics?

Schiffman (2006) argues that you cannot research language policy planning without any regard to 'linguistic culture', stating that the two are deeply interwoven. He defines linguistic culture as the "totality of ideas, values, beliefs, attitudes, prejudices, myths, religious strictures, and all the other cultural 'baggage' that speakers bring to their dealings with language from their culture" (p. 112). He advises us not to regard language policy planning as explicit, written, overt, de jure, official and top-down decision-making only, as it also involves their opposites.

There is an ongoing debate within Deaf communities, especially in the United States regarding how to label the collectivist experiences of Deaf people being oppressed or marginalized in the hearing world. Many scholars have referred to this oppression as audism—a term coined in 1975 by Humphries, who was a US-based Deaf academic. However, it is important to note that oppression of Deaf people was pervasive before this term emerged, as Bauman (2004: 239) notes: "What audism refers to—the discrimination of Deaf people—is nothing new. The word to describe it, however, is". Audism can be defined as the following:

It is the bias and prejudice of hearing people against deaf people. It is the bias and prejudice of some deaf people against other deaf people. It is manifested in many ways. It appears in my own life in the form of people who continually judge deaf people's intelligence and success on the basis of their ability in the language of the hearing culture. It appears when the assumption is made that the deaf person's happiness depends on acquiring fluency in the language of

the hearing culture. It appears when deaf people actively participate in the oppression of other deaf people by demanding of them the same set of standards, behavior, and values that they demand of hearing people. It appears in the class structure of the deaf culture when those at the top are those whose language is that of the hearing culture or closest to it. It appears when deaf people in positions of power keep that power by oppressing other deaf people. (Humphries 2001: paragraph 5)

Humphries' assessment of audism certainly appears to fit Phillipson's criterion of the inferior positioning of a linguistic community, intertwined in culture and other facets of society.

In terms of audism being interwoven with education and politics, we have already explored manifestations of audism-like practices in the education system in Ireland, which enforced oralism for the better part of the twentieth century. It is important to note, however, that audism permeates further into education as it is manifested in societal beliefs. Boston psychologist Harlan Lane makes the following observation:

The corporate institution for dealing with deaf people, dealing with them by making statements about them, authorizing views of them, describing them, teaching about them, governing where they go to school and, in some cases, where they live; in short, audism is the hearing way of dominating, restructuring, and exercising authority over the deaf community. It includes such professional people as administrators of schools for deaf children and of training programs for deaf adults, interpreters, and some audiologists, speech therapists, otologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, librarians, researchers, social workers, and hearing aid specialists. (Lane 1992: 43)

While Humphries originally applied audism to individual attitudes and practices, Lane and others have broadened its scope to include institutional and group attitudes, practices, and oppressions of Deaf persons. Bauman (2004) later developed the concept of audism in order to describe metaphysical facets of the construct. He argues that audism has deep structures, therefore influencing the unconscious mind. He used the concept of 'phonocentric', as first defined by French philosopher Jacques Derrida, to denote the view of the world that only recognises a hearing way of knowing. This concept further exemplifies the ingrained nature of the oppression of Deaf people, and by default their language.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of the perceived inferiority of ISL within the Irish context is the standing of modern languages in the national Irish school curriculum. Irish is mandatory (with exceptions), and English is required for matriculation; there are 10 other languages offered in the curriculum, and a further 16 non-curricula languages (taken in special circumstances)—none of which are sign languages. While English and Irish are positioned as the higher-level options of the Leaving Certificate, ISL is limited to the vocationally orientated Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). Moreover, on inspection, its curriculum is quite simplified compared to that of other modern languages. To further exemplify its inferior standing, the successful completion of the LCA would not be recognized by

universities in Ireland as a necessary requirement for entrance. The Centre for Deaf Studies at Trinity College Dublin is the only centre in Ireland that offers a Bachelor in Deaf Studies program, which trains interpreters and ISL teachers. Despite its heavy emphasis on ISL, due to the lack of higher-level ISL in the school curriculum, the university cannot set a required standard of ISL before entering the degree; yet it uses higher level English as one of the prerequisites. Thus, evidence in Ireland, and from the treatment of sign language users in general, display a clear positioning of ISL as an inferior language, which is intertwined in culture, education and politics. Important to note is that the Department of Education is currently piloting a ‘Junior Cycle ISL Short Course’, which offers some evidence of positive change in this area.

Criterion 5: is there an exploitative essence as a result of policy, which causes injustice and inequality between those who use the dominant language and those who use ISL?

Gertz (2008) suggests that one of the main implications arising from audism is the development of dysconscious audism. She draws upon the existing concept of dysconscious racism by King (1991 cited in Gertz 2008: 219). King (1991) used the term to describe her students, who despite being made aware of racial issues, racial inequity and racial prejudice, were not sufficiently aware of their ethical inability to judge or analyse the underlying effects and influences from racial ideology. Thus, King developed the concept of dysconscious racism to increase the level of awareness and knowledge that underpins a person’s beliefs. Gertz (2008) suggests a parallel to audism, and outlines the following effects of dysconscious audism, which emerged from data in her ethnographic research:

- Disempowers Deaf people from becoming liberated
- Disables Deaf people from expressing Deaf cultural pride
- Intimidates Deaf people and limits their promotion of Deaf perspective
- Hinders Deaf people from quality education
- Denies Deaf people full acceptance of ASL (American Sign Language)
- Weakens Deaf people’s sense of identity (Gertz 2008: 230–231)

Thus, evidence from Gertz certainly suggests injustice and inequality for sign language users in general—a concept that we further explore in the Irish context.

Compelling evidence on implicit policy can be found in one report published by the Higher Education Equality Unit, which notes that the Deaf community “experiences high levels of discrimination and inequality in the education system” (Conama and McDonnell 2001: paragraph 12). They report:

In our educational system, inequality and access problems for deaf pupils begin at primary level and continue right through the system into third level. Deaf children still do not have access to Irish Sign Language in the school. And because they do not have access to Irish Sign Language they do not have access to a full curriculum; they do not reach satisfactory levels of

achievement; their progress does not reflect their real potential. These unsatisfactory levels of achievement continue into second level schooling and reduce their opportunities to enter or participate in further education programmes (Conama and McDonnell 2001: paragraph 15)

Crean (1997) also demonstrates that the chronological development of the education for Deaf children in Ireland has excluded the Deaf community from participating in the school activities, and also in decision-making procedures. This exclusion of the Deaf community in matters surrounding education of members of their own linguistic community is clear evidence of an inequality between English speakers and ISL users.

We have already shown evidence that the Department of Education's historic policy of oralism preferred English over signing as a method of communication, which automatically positioned English speakers in a more powerful gatekeeping role. The dominance of English users over ISL users is further seen in educational policy, even in the post-oralism era. Conama and McDonnell (2001) note that:

Typically, deaf people are excluded from policy-making and administrative structures which otherwise might provide an 'insider' perspective on deafness. Deaf people are also largely excluded from teaching services and educational guidance programmes. Therefore, there are few opportunities for deaf people to contribute to the educational services they themselves will receive.

Thus, the treatment of ISL and its users from a policy perspective in education, both current and historical, show clear evidence of continued inequality and injustice.

Because of the unofficial status of ISL, this injustice extends beyond education to other realms of society. For example, the Deaf community are often excluded from participating in social and political events, and are prevented from accessing essential information afforded to English-speaking citizens. One of many recent examples is the denial of an ISL interpreter on the floor of the *Dáil* (the Irish lower house of parliament) to translate to 100 members of the Deaf community, who were expected to watch the questioning of Ireland's leader on the topic of funding cuts to the Irish Deaf Society. In an Interview with a newspaper, politician Mark Daly, unambiguously stated "this is discrimination" (The Journal, 2014: paragraph 3). While this was a high profile event that captured media attention, the denial of ISL interpreters for public events is a common practice in Ireland. Even when public or political bodies do provide interpreters, it seems to be a check-box exercise, confirming that they have thought about access; however, the efficacy of access is not addressed. For instance, during live screening of political Ard Fheis (annual meetings) by a national broadcaster, RTE, during the leader's keynote speech, the ISL interpreter is rarely visible on television, therefore rendering the speaker's message inaccessible to television audiences.

In terms of policies that provide evidence of support for Deaf people, some protections are offered through the Equal Status Act and the Disability Act. These acts, however, aim to protect the rights of people living with a disability—a label with which Deaf people are regularly assigned. Thus, rather than protecting the rights of ISL users, the act deals with individual cases. There is no widespread

knowledge of these acts, and, as the above example shows, the lack of provision of interpreters is frequently excused on financial grounds, or unavailability of human resources.

Criterion 6: does the use of the dominant language have a subtractive influence on use of ISL, in that learning the dominant language is at the expense of ISL?

Although schools have moved on from oralist policies to a focus on communication-oriented policies, the legacy of oralism remains in Ireland today. Many ISL users who experienced oral education report that they were prohibited from using sign language (see, for example, Crean 1997; Conama and Grehan 2002; Leeson and Saeed 2012; Mullane et al. 2011; The Oireachtas Committee on Justice and Equality 2016). More seriously, many within this group are regarded as very vulnerable, and face a life time of struggles (Mathews 2015). The most obvious evidence of this is Deaf adults who rely on lipreading skills to convey their messages, with a single ‘fingerspelling letter’ accompaniment. For instance, those who experienced oralism, may sign September as an ‘S’ and convey the word in full by mouthing the word. Despite recent trends that aim to establish sign languages as legitimate mediums of education, these oralist practices are still pervasive in other sectors of Irish society, exemplified by the fact that parents of newly identified Deaf children are still often advised not to learn sign language by medical and teaching professionals (Crean 1997; Leeson and Saeed 2012; The Oireachtas Committee on Justice and Equality 2016). Evidence of this continued practice in Ireland can be found on the Sound Advice (2016) organization website (discussed further below), which explicitly advises parents of Deaf children with cochlear implants against the learning of sign language in favour of English language development. In these cases, the dominant use of, and teaching of, English as a preferred language has clearly been at the expense of the development of ISL.

Furthermore, English has had a subtractive influence on the linguistic structures of ISL, which has taken the Deaf community in Ireland great efforts to undo. For years, many Deaf children in Ireland were taught a form of manually coded English, which unlike ISL was a signed version of an oral language. Manually coded English, like most manually coded languages (MCLs) was the result of an attempt to teach literacy to Deaf pupils in school through the use of signs based on the grammatical structure of English. MCL is influenced by a linguistic belief, especially among educational professionals (often non-native and hearing users) that the organic forms of ISL are not regarded as language features in their own right. MCLs are based on a belief that sign languages can only be derived from spoken languages in order to function properly, which is a pervasive belief that goes back centuries. Conama and McDonnell (2001) point out that MCLs cannot be naturally acquired, therefore they cannot be a primary language for Deaf children.

However, due to the use of MCLs in the education system, Deaf people themselves, especially older members, have internalized this belief and insist that the MCL variety is a formal language. Reagan (2006: 331) points out that these

MCLs are “not language in and of themselves”, and are often seen as slow, awkward and confusing to fluent signers. Padden and Humphries (1998) argue that efforts to create MCLs were genuine but they were based on a belief that sign languages were inferior to spoken language. Similar beliefs are evident in Ireland, adding further evidence to criteria three and four.

Issues with measuring linguistic imperialism

The methodology used in this paper creates some limitations, which we would like to discuss. By searching for evidence to fit the criterion of Phillipson’s linguistic imperialism framework, we realize we have exposed this paper to being critiqued for ‘cherry picking’ evidence. This practice was at the core of Phillipson’s (2007) critique of Spolsky’s (2004) dismissal of linguistic imperialism, where he argued Spolsky concluded causal factors after “presenting evidence from a selective range of contexts” (Phillipson 2007: 379). Thus, in this paper, we could be accused of wedding ourselves to the very methods that we ought to be trying to escape. However, in the search for data to assess each criterion, we encountered very little evidence that could be used to refute the claims. We have, to the best of our abilities, displayed evidence fairly, including the reporting of ISL-positive policy such as the ISL teaching scheme (although poorly funded), and movements away from oralist traditions. It should also be noted that Leeson and Saeed (2012) state there is an increased openness to the use of ISL in several contexts, which indicates recent change in perceptions of ISL in the Republic of Ireland. However, Mullane et al. (2011) argue that substantive legislative developments are still required to address many social justice issues for the Deaf community. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that searching for evidence to support the linguistic imperialism framework may have produced skewed data. However, as the purpose of the paper was to show the suppression of ISL, we believe we have been open and honest regarding the intentions of this paper, and invite other scholars to refute the evidence based on data of their own.

Will official status put an end to linguistic imperialism?

It should be noted that recognition of ISL might not result in the end of discrimination towards ISL users. One of the largest modern-day challenges to sign language education is the resurgence in a medical model of deafness due to innovations in cochlear implants (Ladd 2003). De Meulder (2017) reports that 80% of deaf children in Northern Europe are receiving cochlear implants, and we can confirm similar figures across Western Europe (Braem and Rathmann, 2010). We note that in 2016, the medical model of deafness continues to prevail in Europe, with the Ear Foundation in the UK stating that the majority of Deaf children in the UK have implants (Ear Foundation 2016). The same trends are occurring in Ireland where the number of Deaf children receiving implants has risen (Mathews 2011; Cradden 2014). Moreover, groups such as Sound Advice in Ireland, not only support

the use of implants by listing the benefits of acquiring a spoken language, but actively discourage the learning of sign language. The website argues that “Children with a cochlear implant who learn spoken language only, may progress faster than others with implants who also learn sign language”, further exacerbating the notion that the spoken language (English) is to be learned at the expense of the sign language (ISL).

Despite considerable evidence of the lifelong harm that results from denying sign language education to receivers of cochlear implants (see Humphries et al. 2017), the rhetoric above is quite typical of the advice given to parents of Deaf children internationally. Humphries et al. (2012) state that parents do not receive appropriate advice and information from an educational perspective on bilingualism practices and the benefits of having their children learn a sign language. In an assessment of sign languages in Finland, De Meulder (2017: 190) notes:

Sign bilingual education is losing ground; the majority of deaf children are being individually mainstreamed and often do not have contact with deaf peers; and in most European countries deaf schools are steadily being closed down, with a subsequent loss of contexts in which sign languages can emerge and/or be transmitted.

De Meulder’s assessment is especially striking, seeing as it is made in light of positive policy trends to recognise sign language in Finland, and to support sign language users. Thus, even with increased recognition of sign languages, and legislative provisions made for sign languages, the linguistic communities where these sign languages are used, and the educational setting where these sign languages are taught, are rapidly diminishing. With the mainstreaming of the majority of Deaf children in Ireland, and an increase in a focus on English language learning in schools, we can expect a similar reduction in opportunities for Deaf children to learn and use a sign language. This, coupled with the increase in cochlear implants in parallel with rhetoric suggesting that ‘one language is best’ may see further suppression of ISL, even if more legislative recognition is achieved.

Conclusion

The above evidence indicates that linguistic imperialism is indeed ‘alive and kicking’ in the Republic of Ireland, contrary to the British Council’s claims that it is no longer relevant to today’s practices (Knagg 2012). Reagan (2010) states that language planning as an applied sociolinguistic activity can act as a tool of liberation or empowerment. Without such planning, the position of ISL will continue to be subjected to an imperialistic relationship imposed by English and Irish-speaking authorities. All educational provisions from preschool years to secondary schools are in control by authorities outside the Deaf community. Branson and Miller (1998) regard this type of majority-group control of minority-group language planning as an example of linguistic imperialism, fitting also within Skuttnabb-Kangas’s views of linguistic imperialism within educational structures (2016a). For

Branson and Miller (1998), the act of linguistic imperialism is not just a denial of linguistic identity or the denial of a right to use language but the final colonial possession, enforcing one language to comply with the dominant language, which is English in the case of Ireland.

Linguistic imperialism, as a form of linguistic imperialism, is certainly hard to prove, especially in terms of proving the requirement of 'intent' in article 2 of the Genocide Convention. As Skutnabb-Kangas (2016b: 597) notes, educational and political authorities do not usually explicitly express intent to destroy a group or their language, however "the intention can be inferred in other ways, by analyzing those structural and ideological factors and those practices that cause the destruction, harm, or transfer". One way Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar (2010) have analysed intent is to compare current practices with older, more unconcealed ways of forced assimilation. They argue that authorities which continue educational policy and practices despite being aware of the negative results of such policy, provides strong evidence of intention. In similar ways, the framework of linguistic imperialism has revealed strong evidence of intention in the state's unwillingness to address the linguistic needs of sign language users in Ireland, despite an awareness that the Deaf community requires these resources to be successful in education, work and other facets of society.

Therefore, we see compelling evidence in Ireland of what could be viewed as discriminatory practices against its users, which is manifested in policy and practice, as well as the ideological beliefs that underpin them in society. Political decisions such as the denial of official status of ISL due to resource constraints are in contrast to policy trends in comparable nations. Government inquiries have shown that the treatment of ISL and ISL users in the education system has a dark history, with a legacy that lingers. Nevertheless, the mainstreaming of Deaf children into schools that lack infrastructure to teach ISL has allowed the oppression of ISL to continue under a different set of policies. This paper has shown that discrimination permeates through society, with an ingrained belief that ISL is not a 'real' language, and that Deaf people would be more advantaged to learn the dominant language of English. Thus, we conclude political practices that fit the framework of linguistic imperialism can be found in the treatment of ISL in Ireland. Moreover, considering the case of Finland (De Meulder 2017), which shows continued inequality in light of positive policy decisions for sign languages, we also conclude that drastic policy changes and a massive change in public awareness of ISL would be needed to undo the long history of oppression.

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