Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Ulster
Unit of Assessment: 28B Modern Languages and Linguistics – Modern Languages and Linguistics
Title of case study: From local dialects to global languages: supporting multilingualism in Northern Ireland

1. Summary of the impact

Linguistics at Ulster has:

1) influenced public policy and provision for Ulster Scots through appointment to The Ulster Scots Academy Implementation Group, planning for an Ulster Scots Academy and publication of Ulster Scots language resources
2) impacted on public values and discourse relating to local dialects with consequent effects on educational participation and practice
3) underpinned developments in policy and training in Irish-medium education
4) transformed the perspectives of communities and professionals adapting to the transition of Northern Ireland to a multicultural, multilingual society.
Effectively it has changed how relevant stakeholders engage with issues relating to language, linguistic prejudices and disadvantage.

2. Underpinning research

Research in linguistics at Ulster has a central focus on the application of core linguistic theory to linguistic phenomena of rich local significance. Its impact is underpinned by three main strands of research which together address core questions on the nature of linguistic diversity and multiple grammatical systems. These theoretical questions are shown through this case study to impact on vital social issues such as educational and social disadvantage for speakers of local varieties and multiple languages. Aspects of this research were variously funded by 1) a grant of £104,050.00 from the ESRC (1995-1998), 2) a grant of £15,000.00 from the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (1996-1998) and 3) a grant of £16,666.00 from the European Commission Directorate on Education (CEC-DG-XXII Minority Languages) (1998-1999). The key researchers on this impact were: Alison Henry, Professor of Linguistics, University of Ulster (1981-present); Raffaella Folli, Senior Lecturer, University of Ulster (2005-present); Christina Sevdali, Lecturer, University of Ulster (2009-present).

One focus of research in linguistics at Ulster has been on language structure and use in the local context. Prof. Alison Henry has undertaken extensive research on the structure of Belfast English and other local varieties. In particular, Henry (1995) presents the first serious study of Belfast English. This work, apart from its contribution to linguistic theory, confirms that local varieties are as much rule-governed as standard varieties and that their status should be the same as that of standard varieties. A particular consequence of this result is that the users of local varieties should not be discriminated against in education, employment and other areas.

A second area of research has been the acquisition of Irish in Irish-medium schools (Henry & Tangney 2001; Henry et al. 2002). This has shown that although at certain stages the Irish developed by children in the immersion situation manifests some errors compared to textbook Irish, it is similar to native-speaker Irish, maturing into a mostly native-like variety. Our research thus directly addresses a recurring criticism that children in Irish-medium schools develop a heavily Anglicised 'pidgin' Irish in terms of morphosyntax.

Finally, Folli, Henry and Sevdali have led a three-year longitudinal study of multilingual acquisition (Devlin et al. 2012, 2013). Besides publications, this project has produced an invaluable resource in the form of a corpus of data, now available on the CHILDES database, collected from a trilingual child learning Italian, Scottish Gaelic and English. This study has shown that multilingual acquisition exhibits some features of language transfer. However, contrary to standard assumptions, the impact is not straightforwardly in the direction of the stronger language affecting the weaker language(s). This naturally leads to a reconsideration of traditional views on the relationships between languages in the multilingual mind. The research also shows that even though multilingual acquisition may be somewhat slower than monolingual acquisition, this is no cause for concern for parents, educators and other professionals. Multilingual acquisition may be different from monolingual acquisition, but children benefit from developing skills in more than one language and become competent language users.

3. References to the research

All research outputs in the case study have been published in reputable outlets, including publishers such as OUP and journals such as *English Language and Linguistics*.

[1] Henry, A (1995) *Belfast English and Standard English: dialect variation and parameter setting*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Available from HEI on request)

[2] Henry, A and Tangney, D (2001) The acquisition of functional elements in the early second language acquisition of Irish in Degraff, M (ed) *Language Acquisition and Language Revival* . MIT Press. (Available from HEI on request)

[3] Henry, A , Andrews, A and Ó Cainín, P (2002) *Developing Linguistic Accuracy in Irish Medium Primary Schools* Department of Education for N Ireland. (http://www.deni.gov.uk/rb7_2002.pdf)

[4] Henry, A and Cottell, S (2007) A new approach to transitive expletives: evidence from Belfast English English Language and Linguistics 11, 279-299. (http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1360674307002262)

[5] Devlin, M, Folli, R, Henry, A and Sevdali, C (2012) Clitic right dislocation in absence of clitics: a case study in trilingual acquisition *Proceedings of the 35th Penn Linguistics Colloquium*. (http://repository.upenn.edu/pwpl/vol18/iss1/6)

[6] Devlin, M, Folli, R, Henry, A and Sevdali, C (2013) Vulnerable domains and cross-linguistic influence: the view from trilingual acquisition, in *Advances in Language Acquisition*, Proceedings of GALA, Cambridge Scholars Publishing. (Available from HEI on request)

4. Details of the impact

4.1 Public policy and provision in Ulster Scots
Henry's work on local dialects led to her appointment by the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure to The Ulster Scots Academy Implementation Group (2005–2009) (Source 1). The report published by the Department (2007) (Source 2) formed the basis for the planning of an Ulster Scots Academy and gave rise to the publication of the Glossary and Spelling and Pronunciation Guide for Ulster Scots (Source 3). Henry was a key member of the group who proposed the spelling system in the guide. In May 2013, she was interviewed and subsequently appointed as Expert Advisor to the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure's Ministerial Advisory Group on Ulster Scots (Source 4).

4.2 Contributing to a wider public understanding of the social status of dialect
The Ullans Academy, which supports local language varieties including Ulster (particularly

Dalriada) Irish, Belfast English and Ulster Scots, has regularly consulted Prof. Henry. She is currently working with them on how to improve the educational achievement of working-class youths, especially boys, who are known to be significantly underperforming in the education system. The Academy has recognised the implications of Prof. Henry's research on Belfast English for tackling the stigma attached to the varieties of English used by these youths. Work is ongoing to incorporate these findings into educational evaluations/assessments by formally distinguishing their verbal skills from the grammatical system used (Source 5).

Graduates of the linguistics degree at Ulster who have moved into the teaching profession have consistently testified to the influence on their own teaching practice of Henry's research and teaching on microvariation and the syntax of Belfast English (Source 6). This has led to the development of the "Ulster Dialects" website which provides information on local varieties of English, including information and teaching packs to support teachers. This is important in light of the statutory requirements for Language and Literacy in the Northern Ireland Curriculum which include the ability to "recognise and discuss features of spoken language, including formal and informal language, dialect and colloquial speech" (http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk) (Source 7).

Henry has also been a frequent guest on local and national radio programmes on topics such as local dialect, 'bad' language, and related issues. Most recently she participated in a discussion of whether ministers of religion should use formal standard English or local dialect, including swear words, which generated considerable interest as evidenced by a letter from the programme producer (Source 8). As a result of her public engagement, she also was invited to participate in an Ofcom consultation on the use of local languages in public service broadcasting (2008) (Source 9). Moreoever, those wishing to use and support authentic Belfast English regularly consult Prof. Henry on her research. For example, in October 2011, the singer Van Morrison initiated a meeting with her, through the Chair of the Ullans Academy, to discuss her research, the influence of the Belfast dialect on his song-writing, and his potential contribution to supporting the continued use of the vernacular (Source 5).

4.3 Shaping policy and training in Irish immersion education
Research on the acquisition patterns of Irish in Irish-medium primary schools, funded by DENI, was published in research reports and research summaries circulated widely within the specialism. This research is referenced in the 2009 Joint Policy of the Steering Group on Immersion Education Policy (Source 10 & 12) and was used in the development of an NVQ for early years teachers and other nursery staff, for which Henry acted as an advisor (Source 11 & 12). More recently, a number of invited talks have been delivered under the aegis of UCoM (see below) at conferences run by government bodies supporting Irish-medium education in Northern Ireland (Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta) and the Republic of Ireland (Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta). Feedback from these bodies indicated that these talks have been crucial both in supporting the delivery of Irish-medium education and in transforming classroom practice (Source 13 & 14).

4.4 Supporting professionals in the transition of Northern Ireland into a multilingual society
The linguistics group's research on multilingual acquisition led to the establishment of UCoM (Ulster Centre on Multilingualism), a consultation service for parents, early years practitioners, speech and language therapists and other stakeholders with a role or interest in this area. UCoM services are delivered both in person and through digital communication channels, specifically a website and a Twitter feed (Source 15). A particular focus of the website is trilingual acquisition, about which much less information is available and which draws directly on

the findings of Project S. The site also features information on sequential bilingualism in education drawn from research on acquisition in immersion settings.

Since UCoM's launch, the linguistics team has been invited to give a number of talks and advice to parents, community groups and various professionals. These have included talks to social workers, speech and language therapists, parent and toddler groups, adoptive parents considering adoption of an older child from abroad whose first language is not English, teachers in Irish-medium education and major charities (for a full list of past and future events and initiatives see http://www.socsci.ulster.ac.uk/ucom/events.html). Feedback from these events indicates that they have had a considerable effect in changing both attitudes and practices towards speakers of multiple languages (Source 16). Most notably, in March–June 2013 UCoM collaborated with the charity Barnardo's to establish a programme of linguistic support called *Language made fun!* for multilingual children of refugees and asylum seekers in Northern Ireland. The programme is underpinned by the insights into the relationship between community and family languages that have emerged from Project S (Source 17).

In summary, this case study shows how the work of linguistics at Ulster is transforming attitudes and practices relating to language and the status of dialect among relevant professionals. It also importantly empowers local multilingual families in their institutional interactions.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Letter of appointment to the Ministerial Advisory Group on Ulster Scots
2. 2007 Report of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Ulster Scots (available from HEI)
3. Glossary and Spelling and Pronunciation Guide for Ulster Scots (available from HEI)
4. Letter of appointment as Expert Advisor to renewed Ministerial Advisory Group on Ulster Scots (available from HEI)
5. Chair of the Ullans Academy has provided a testimonial and is available for further corroboration.
6. Letters from current and training teachers (available from HEI)
7. Ulster Dialects website: www.ulster.ac.uk/dialects
8. Letter from producer of Sunday Sequence (available from HEI)
9. Invitation to participate in Ofcom consultation and workshop on Public Service Broadcasting (available from HEI)
10. http://www.irishmediumeducation.ie/assets/polasai-tumoid_bearla.pdf
11. http://www.emagister.co.uk/part_time_certificate_irish_immersion_education_early_years_courses-ec170302319.htm
12. Chair of the Altram is available for further corroboration
13. CEO of Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta has provided a testimonial and is available for corroboration
14. Testimonial from Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (available from HEI)
15. UCoM resources: http://www.socsci.ulster.ac.uk/ucom/ ; twitter @UCoM_Ulster
16. Testimonials from hosts of UCoM events: BAAF; SLT Special Interest Group in Bilingualism; North Belfast Multicultural Breakfast Group; Northern Trust and Southern Trust SLTs (inter alia) (available from HEI)
17. The manager of Barnardo's has provided a testimonial and is available for further corroboration.